

PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES OF
STUDENTS FROM SMALL RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS
IN PURSUING BACHELOR'S DEGREES

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The United States has a discrepancy between those students who enter college and those who leave with a bachelor's degree. Sixty-seven percent of graduating high school seniors enter college the fall following high school graduation; however, only 31% of individuals between 25 and 29 have bachelor's degrees or higher (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009a). The insistence on better graduation rates, as well as the goal of more college graduates in the United States, continues to be newsworthy. In "Measuring Up 2008", part of *The National Report Card on Higher Education*, Callan (2008) stated,

For students who enroll in college, rates of completion of certificate, associate, and baccalaureate programs are poor and have improved only slightly. These low college completion rates—as with the declining rates of high school completion—are depriving the nation of college-educated and trained workers needed to keep the American workforce competitive globally. (p. 5)

In response to the problem of low college-completion, President Obama called for the United States to lead the world in college graduation rates by 2020. In a speech to the House and Senate on February 24, Obama outlined a new emphasis on education:

In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite. Right now, three-quarters of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma. And yet, just over half of our citizens have that level of education. We have one of the highest high school dropout rates of any industrialized nation. And half of the students who begin college never finish....That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. (Obama, 2009, ¶ 61)

Universities across the nation calculate first-year retention rates. In 2008, the following retention rates were reported by some universities in the Midwest: University of Kansas, 77.7%; Oklahoma State University, 78.7%; Kansas State University, 78.82%; Oklahoma University, 82.4%; University of Missouri, 85.3% (Allen, 2011). Sternberg, provost for Oklahoma State University, would like to see his university's retention rates at about 90%, although he admitted improving to this rate will take several years. Sternberg said that the university is committed to its students in their efforts to graduate. "When we admit them, we're committed to them" (Allen, p. A3). The university is in the process of creating a center that will support the needs of students who are at risk of dropping out before graduation (Allen).

According to Tinto (2006-2007), researchers have studied student persistence along with programs to increase student retention for decades with little gain in the percentage of students who are earning degrees. Increasing first-year retention rates in an effort to increase graduation rates is a problem that continues to be newsworthy. Because

of the continued scrutiny on first-year retention rates and subsequent graduation rates, this qualitative study examines the perceptions and preferences of students from small rural high schools in pursuing bachelor's degrees using the lens of the grid and group typology (Douglas, 1982).

Statement of the Problem

Enrollment in colleges and universities continues to increase with more high school graduates enrolling as college freshmen than at any other time in history. From 2000 to 2007 there was a 25% increase in undergraduate enrollment in four-year institutions. The number of high school students who immediately enrolled in a two or four-year institution from 1972 to 1980 was 50% of that total population. The college-going rate increased to 67% in 1997 before declining between the years 1997 and 2001 to 62%. In 2007, the number had again climbed to 67% (NCES, 2009a).

Global statistics show that within the 30 countries represented in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the number of people who enrolled in some kind of post-compulsory education had risen by 4.5% each year since 1998. Several countries in this group had seen increases of 7% or more (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2009). The United States ranked 7th in the percentage of young adults between 18 and 24 enrolled in college in OECD countries (The National Report Card on Higher Education, 2008).

In 2005, Oklahoma ranked 23rd out of the 50 states in the number of its population enrolled in higher education with 5.89% enrolled. For the time period from 2004-2005 to 2006-2007, 57.6% of Oklahoma's high school graduates enrolled the fall semester after graduating from high school in a public or private college (Oklahoma State Regents for

Higher Education, 2009). Oklahoma experienced a record first-time freshman enrollment for the spring semester of 2010. Oklahoma State Regent for Higher Education Chancellor Johnson stated,

These increased enrollment numbers are a leading indicator of the value placed on earning a college degree by students and parents in our state. It is widely recognized that a college degree is essential to a student's financial and career success, and it remains the driving force behind our state's economic recovery. (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2010, ¶ 4)

Despite increasing enrollment, many students do not persist to earn bachelor's degrees. On a national level, in 2008, the percentage of 25 to 29-year-olds who had earned bachelor's degrees or higher was 31% of that population. This rate increased only slightly since 2000 when it was 29%, but was up significantly from 1971 when the percentage of 25 to 29-year-olds earning bachelor's degrees was 17% (NCES, 2009a). Oklahoma ranks 42nd of the fifty states in percent of population over 25 with bachelor's degrees or higher with only 22.8% earning at least bachelor's degrees (Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, 2008). Globally, in countries belonging to the OECD organization, the number of people holding university-level degrees doubled from 1995 to 2007 from 18% to 36%. Within the countries in OECD, the United States was ranked 2nd in 1995 of people holding bachelor's degrees but in 2007 fell to 14th (OECD, 2009).

Because student persistence is a major concern, programs specifically designed to retain students through graduation exist on many campuses. In an ASHE-ERIC Higher Education report, Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) described nine programs

considered exemplary. These programs were evaluated using three principles as defined by Tinto's (1993) retention theory:

1. Institutions are committed to the students they serve. The welfare of the student is primary.
2. Individuals at the institution are committed to the education of all students (not just some).
3. Individuals at the institution are committed to the development of supportive social and academic communities in which all students are integrated as full members. It is the institution's obligation (through its programs) to provide ways for students to integrate into community. (pp. 146-147)

All but one of the nine programs described exhibited the above principles. Four of the nine programs had a racial or ethnic minority focus. Some of these programs targeted commuter students while others focused on residential students. Support services ranged from peer and faculty counseling and tutoring to a dean who specifically read each student's admission request and personally called them during the academic year. All programs followed Tinto's three principles designing programs that fit their students' needs (Braxton et al., 2004).

The focus on student retention and student persistence is intense. The emphasis is how the United States will address the problem of students not persisting in college in order to regain its position of having the highest number of college graduates in the world. Thus, the discrepancy between those students who enter college and those who leave with bachelor's degrees is cause for continued research.

One reason for the discrepancy in the number of students entering postsecondary education and the number earning bachelor's degrees is that some students' perceptions of university environments and their preferred social environments are not congruent. Harris (2005) posits the key to improving school settings lies in understanding school cultures. To comprehend an educational institution's "interconnected roles, rules and relationships requires a framework that considers and explains the pressures and dynamics of culture" (Harris, p. 33). Mary Douglas's (1982) theory of grid and group "offers a typology that enables educators to meet the conceptual and methodological challenges inherent in cultural inquiry and educational practice" (Harris, p. 33).

Douglas proposed four social environments. Embedded within these environments are the concepts of grid and group. Grid characteristics range from strong grid which exhibits centralized power and authority to weak grid which exhibits decentralized power and authority. The intersecting axis of Douglas's theory is group. In strong group, the group's interests are prioritized over the individual's. Weak group is characterized by the individual's interests prioritized over the group's interests. The four environments of Douglas's typology are bureaucratic, corporate, individualist, and collectivist. The typology was further developed by other researchers including Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky, (1990), Lingenfelter, (1996, 1998), and Harris, (2005) who emphasized the corresponding social games or prevailing mind-sets for each environment: authoritarianism, hierarchy, individualism, and egalitarianism respectively.

Douglas (1982) suggested that each individual has a preference that has been shaped by time and experience for one of the four environments. Thus, in some cases, a

student's preference for a specific social environment may not match the social environment of the university.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the perceptions and preferences of students from small rural high schools in pursuing bachelor's degrees in a university setting.

Research Questions

1. What are the students' perceptions of the university environment?
2. What are the students' preferred work values, mind-sets, and cultural biases (social game)?
3. What is the relationship between the students' perceptions of a specific university environment and the students' preferred work values, mind-sets, and cultural biases (social game)?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this study is Mary Douglas's grid and group theory (1982). Douglas stated the following:

Having divided experience into social context and cosmology, the next step is to get a full array of possible social structures. A start for this will be to construct (yes, I mean construct, fabricate, think up, invent) two dimensions. One clue to finding a relevant pair of dimensions is to follow the polarizing of sociological thought between individualism and group behavior. Instead of plumping for one or the other, as has been the usual form, the procedure I am advocating is to show

both, always present as possibilities. I use “grid” for a dimension of individuation, and “group” for a dimension of social incorporation. (p. 190)

Douglas defines social settings as four environments: bureaucratic, corporate, individualist, and collectivist. Individuals who prefer each of these environments use social games: authoritarianism, hierarchy, individualism, and egalitarianism (Harris, 2005; Lingenfelter, 1996, 1998; Thompson et al. 1990).

Although four environments and only four environments exist in the grid and group framework, school settings are not static. More than one setting can be operating at once, causing conflict within the school. Even though conflict in school settings does not have to be negative, the pressure of grid and group attributes is powerful on individuals. This pressure does not demand particular action. Individuals still are able to respond to conflict as they choose (Harris, 2005). However, peer pressure causes small communities to move toward one environment and social game. As the community increases in size, the influence of peer pressure decreases; thus, each of the four environments thrives in the larger setting such as a large university. Understanding students’ preferred social environments juxtaposed to a view of their perceptions of the environments in which they find themselves may lead to a better understanding of their performances in educational settings.

Theories of retention abound in the literature. Tinto’s model includes the areas of academic integration and social integration as being important in the study of student persistence. Lack of congruence between the individual and the university in both the academic and social areas contributes to students dropping out of college (Tinto, 1975). Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee and Morris (2002) and Benet-Martinez and Haritatos, (2005)

researched biculturalism and frame-switching when competing environments offer different cues. They suggested that biculturalism is attributed not only to ethnic identities but also to gender, religion, occupation and political affiliation attributes. This theory stated that there is a continuum of biculturalism, ranging from individuals who sense compatibility between two cultures to individuals who see the two cultures as oppositional. They proposed that one's ability to engage in frame-switching, navigating between two cultures based on situational cues, is influenced by an individual's sensing compatibility or opposition in the competing settings.

Douglas (1982) provides a framework through which the researcher can describe the perceptions and preferences of individuals, analyzing their choices within the four specific environments and accompanying social games of grid and group theory. This study will research students who persist and earn bachelor's degrees and students who begin postsecondary education but who have not completed bachelor's degrees. This study will identify students' preferred social environments and analyze how their preferred environments with accompanying social games interact with students' perceptions of the university's social environment.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive case study. Qualitative research uses an emerging design that signals a holistic approach to the research. The researcher interprets the data inductively while being sensitive to his/her personal assumptions, insights, and experiences brought to the research environment (Creswell, 2003). Rubin and Rubin (1995) explained that qualitative research is research that "requires in-depth understanding that is best communicated through detailed examples and rich narratives"

(p. 51). Creswell stated that case studies are those “in which the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals” (p. 15).

This study used the case study method.

Participants

Eight individuals were interviewed for this study. All participants graduated from high school between 2002 and 2006. Six of the participants recently earned their bachelor’s degrees or would earn their degrees within a semester, and two of the participants started their postsecondary education but have not completed it. All participants were graduates of small, rural high schools defined by the average daily membership of their high school (9th through 12th grades) being less than 400 (Oklahoma Secondary School Athletic Association, 2010-2011). All the participants’ high schools were within 60 miles of the four-year institution the participants attended.

Naturalistic Inquiry

Naturalistic inquiry was the methodology for this study. Naturalistic inquiry allows researchers to gather and analyze data while not excluding themselves from the study. As important as it is to keep researchers’ biases in check, it is more important that they are not insulated from the data gathering process (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Erlandson et al. (1993) stated,

The naturalistic paradigm affirms the mutual influence that researcher and respondents have on each other. Nor are the dangers of reactivity ignored.

However, never can formal methods be allowed to separate the researcher from the human interaction that is the heart of the research. To get to the relevant matters of human activity, the researcher must be involved in that activity. The

dangers of bias and reactivity are great; the dangers of being insulated from relevant data are greater. (p. 15)

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is used in naturalistic inquiry. This type of sampling allows the researcher to select those participants who will best advance the research. The number of participants in this study was determined by the research itself. Naturalistic inquiry generates a detailed, rich narrative. According to Erlandson et al. (1993), whether this happens with one participant or several will depend on the outcomes of specific interactions with the participants.

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured and guided by specific questions but allowed for the free flow of information. Erlandson et al. (1993) suggested the researcher may change the order of the questions or change the questions themselves depending on the participants' responses. This researcher specifically asked the participants to use metaphor as a tool in the description of their experiences. Erlandson et al. stated, "These metaphors caught in an uncanny way the constructed realities that the respondents had been unable to describe directly" (p. 116). The informal interviews guided by some specific questions and metaphor provided the thick description necessary for naturalistic inquiry.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved three stages. Unitizing data involved an analysis that broke down information into the smallest units that could stand alone. Emergent category designation involved an analysis that sorted information into specific categories. Using

negative case analysis, the researcher looked for parts of the research information that did not fit, thus suggesting alternate explanations of the material (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Triangulation

Triangulation occurred by examining the analysis of the participant interviews with the results from two diagnostic tools, field notes and documents. The two diagnostic tools were: Social Game Assessment Tool and Grid and Group Assessment Tool. The first was used to determine the participant's preferred social game, and the second was used to assess the setting in which the participant operated (Harris, 2005). More detail on both the interview process and the use of the diagnostic tools will be given in chapter three.

Researcher Bias

I worked in the public school setting during my educational career, first as a teacher, then as an administrator. I taught in both the junior high and high school settings and was an administrator at the secondary level. I believe being involved in secondary administration molded my personality to fit that environment. As principal, I interacted with students on several levels including their curricular goals, their behavioral goals, and their extra-curricular goals. I believe I had a shared leadership role with the faculty on curricular issues. Policy issues at the district level were the responsibility of the administrative team with faculty input.

The Social Game Assessment Tool (Harris, 2005) indicated that my preferred social game is hierarchist. The unit of analysis for the Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Harris) was the public high school where I was principal. The assessment indicated my perception of the school is corporate and is congruent with my preferred social game. In

the corporate environment, roles are hierarchical and the power rests in the roles at the top of the ladder. Because the members are part of the hierarchical system, they understand that what is good for the system is good for the individual. “Central-office administration, site administration, teachers, students, and parents work in a cohesive, integrated system for the benefit of all involved. All share in the opportunities, risks, and future of the school” (Harris, p. 42). I think this is an adequate description of the high school in which I worked.

As a researcher in a naturalistic inquiry case study, I guarded against allowing my propensity for organizational structure and rules and regulations to color what the respondents had to say. I had to thoughtfully listen, hearing what they were saying from their perspectives. I read extensively concerning the application of naturalistic inquiry and Douglas’s grid and group theory. Even though I am a novice qualitative researcher, I know my biases will have some influence on my research, but by being aware of them, I can strive to allow my biases to have as minimal influence as possible.

Definition of Terms

Following is a list of terms used in this study with accompanying definitions:

- Grid: In Douglas’s (1982) theory, grid is the degree of constraint on an individual’s choices within a social system imposed by role expectations, rules and procedures. Grid exists on a continuum from strong to weak.
- Group: In Douglas’s (1982) theory, group is the degree to which an individual values a collective relationship and the degree he/she is committed to the larger social unit. Group exists on a continuum from strong to weak.

- **Naturalistic Inquiry:** Naturalistic inquiry is an approach to research that supports the idea that the researcher and respondent influence each other. Naturalistic inquiry as a term is interchangeable for the term constructivist. Because the researcher uses intuitive processes in looking at data, he or she will be the most important instrument in naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry assumes there are multiple realities rather than one objective reality as assumed by the strict scientific method (Erlandson et al., 1993).
- **Persistence:** In this study, persistence indicates an individual's ongoing enrollment in some form of post-secondary education.
- **Social Game:** The prevailing mind-set of the way things are done in a particular setting exhibited in dominant thought and behavior (Harris, 2005).
- **Student Success:** In this study, student success indicates that the student has persisted and earned a bachelor's degree.

Summary

Everyday, children across the nation and even the globe think about what they want to do when they “grow up.” Adults witness the enthusiasm children have as they move through the educational system toward a moment when paths are chosen. The majority of students who graduate from high school have some postsecondary goals with 71% of graduating high school students aspiring to complete a bachelor's degree (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). As students graduate from high school, they will take steps moving toward their goals, or they will decide the time is not right; the finances are not right; the preparation for further academic work is not right, and they step away from their goals. Many students, 67%, do take that first step toward their goal,

but a significant number stop along the way; only 31% of 25 to 29 year olds have bachelor's degrees (NCES, 2009a).

This study describes the perceptions and preferences of students from small, rural high schools in their postsecondary educational pursuits. Naturalistic inquiry allowed the researcher to become involved in the study and allowed the use of thick description of the respondents' experiences (Erlandson et al., 1993). Douglas's (1982) grid and group theory provided the framework necessary to conceptualize students' preferences for their social environments and their perceptions of their university environment. Naturalistic inquiry and grid and group theory provided powerful tools for this study on students' perceptions and preferences during their pursuit of bachelor's degrees.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this case study is to describe the perceptions and preferences of students from small rural high schools in pursuing bachelor's degrees in a university setting. Even though more high school students are entering colleges or universities than at any time in history, the rate of students earning bachelor's degrees has not significantly improved over the last decade (NCES, 2009a). This study proposes that one reason for the discrepancy in the number of students entering postsecondary education and the number earning bachelor's degrees is that some students' perceptions of university environments and their preferred social environments are not congruent. Therefore, this literature review is divided into three parts: (1) A historical look at student enrollment in post-secondary institutions as well as a view of the current perspective of high school students matriculating to post-secondary institutions, (2) A review of persistence theories in higher education as well as a look at processes and programs secondary schools, colleges, and universities have in place to address student persistence, and (3) A review of Mary Douglas's grid and group theory (1982).

A Historical Look at Student Enrollment in Postsecondary Institutions

1636 to 1900

From the beginning of the nation's history, higher education has been argued as the great stalwart of maintaining an educated populace and a democratic form of government. Harvard College chartered in 1636, Yale (originally named Collegiate School of Connecticut) in 1701, and the University of Georgia in 1785 were all supported by the colonial or state governments (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998).

Thomas Jefferson supported the idea that general access to education would benefit the nation's democratic ideals, stating that education would have an equalizing effect on the new nation, creating an intelligent population that could self-govern. The idea of the importance of an educated populace continued with the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862, which established the first land-grant institutions, and later with the Second Morrill Act of 1890, which created more revenue for these institutions through the sale of federal lands. The Second Morrill Act also provided federal support for the establishment of institutions to educate black students (Institute for Higher Education, 1998).

Horace Mann, appointed as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education in 1837, advanced the idea of public education. In the publication of his *Fifth Annual Report*, Mann made the case that people who were educated received higher wages than those who were not and that educated workers were more likely to discover increasingly efficient ways to do their jobs (Vinovskis, 1989). At the beginning of the 20th century, John Dewey advocated for public education in *Democracy and Education*, published in 1916, arguing that education supported a nation's moral well being (Institute for Higher Education, 1998).

Elementary and secondary school enrollment rates increased from 1870 to 1900 from 68.9 per thousand to 78.3 per thousand. The number of high school graduates increased from 16,000 to 95,000 in the same time period and continued to increase to 156,000 in 1910. In 1870, 2% of 17-year-olds were high school graduates compared to 6.3% in 1900 and 8.6% in 1910. In 1860, 1.1% of the 18-24 age group entered college. By 1900, 2.3% entered college (Edirisooriya, 2009).

1947 to 1964

In 1947, the Truman Commission advanced the idea of community colleges that would create access to higher education for the majority of its citizenry. The commission's thinking was that the greater involvement of the citizenry in higher education the greater support for democracy. The commission stated, "Education is the foundation of democratic liberties ... without an educated citizenry, alert to preserve and extend freedoms, democracy would not long endure" (as cited in Fonte, 2009, p. 45). Community colleges across the country have succeeded in the idea of access supported by the Truman Commission in the number of colleges founded since 1947 (NCES, 2008).

College and university student recruitment efforts were and continue to be a major force in the expansion of enrollment in higher education. Beginning in the 1800s, colleges recruited students from nearby cities and towns. Recruitment trips often included the president of the college as well as faculty members. Delaware College urged their president to travel widely giving lectures on the value of a college education (Edirisooriya, 2009). In the current era, recruitment has changed with colleges and universities hiring an arsenal of recruiters for their schools who help pay their salaries with the recruitment of out-of-state students. As an example, recruiters for a university in

the southeastern United States recruit out-of-state students to help balance the lower cost of in-state students. Recruiters emphasize to potential students that their institutions offer exceptional academic programs with personal attention for student success. They showcase honors programs, up-to-date residence halls, and expansive campus activities to students who are deciding which college or university to attend (Holley & Harris, 2010).

President Lyndon Johnson proposed his War on Poverty in 1964. The Higher Education Act of 1965 was part of this initiative. This act extended need-based financial assistance to the general public as the GI Bill of 1944 extended assistance to veterans of World War II (Brock, 2010; Macy, 2000). In a speech at Brown University in 1964 Johnson said, “The answer for all our national problems, the answer for all the problems of the world, comes down, when you really analyze it, to one single word—education” (as cited in Macy, 2000, p. 12). The Higher Education Act of 1965 also created the Guaranteed Student Loan program and the Educational Opportunity Grants. Federal spending for higher education expanded from \$655 million in 1956 to \$3.5 billion in 1966 (Brock, 2010; Macy, 2000).

This legislation combined with other legislation such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination based on race in school, public places, and employment, began opening the doors of higher education to a more diverse population. Symbolic of this period of time is the 1970 decision of the City University of New York to allow all high school graduates to enroll in their university regardless of their academic preparation. Nationally, fall enrollment for two- and four-year degree-granting institutions in 1963 was 5.9 million. In 2005, the enrollment was 17.5 million (Brock, 2010).

Financial Aid

In 1972, Senator Claiborne Pell, a Democrat from Rhode Island, chaired the subcommittee that created the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant, renamed the Pell Grant in 1980. Pell was concerned about the lack of commitment to the Great Society legislation of the 1960s and the college participation gaps that existed along income, race, and region lines (Macy, 2000). Currently, Pell Grants provide most of the federal funding for and serve the most students (Brock, 2010). More than 30 million students have received Pell Grants since 1972 when the program was started (Macy, 2000). Recently, the Obama administration increased the value of the Pell Grant from \$4,731 to \$5,350. Currently, the federal government spends 18.6 billion a year on grant aid, an additional 70 billion on student loans, and two billion on work/study programs (Brock, 2010).

In 2007-08, 66% of all undergraduates received some type of financial aid with an average amount received of \$9,100.

- 52% received grants.
- 38% took out student loans.
- 7% worked in the work study program.
- 2% received veterans' benefits.
- 27% of all undergraduates received Pell Grants averaging \$2,600

(NCES, 2009b).

More federal programs have been implemented in the form of TRIO programs. Upward Bound, the largest of the federal TRIO programs, has shown that students who participate are more likely to enroll in college and apply for financial aid. These programs are

designed to impact low-income, first-generation students, and students with disabilities (Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, 2009).

Women in Higher Education

Historically, the number of male to female graduates was somewhat equal between 1900 and 1930. The number of bachelor's degrees earned tilted in the favor of men following World War II partially because of their participation in the GI Bill. Since 1947, however, the number of women graduates has been increasing. The number of women going to college increased by 29 % between 1959 and 2002. Women earned more bachelor's degrees than men in 2001 (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007).

One of the reasons for this increase is that girls outnumber their male counterparts in high school graduation rates. Second, women need more education to compete in the existing labor market (Doyle, 2010). Females also perform better on college predictor areas such as high school grades, test scores, and college-prep coursework (Kuh et al., 2007). Women enrolling in tertiary programs is a global trend as well, with women outnumbering men in most OECD countries with 54 % of the tertiary enrollment (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009; Doyle, 2010).

Impact of Community Colleges

Community colleges also play a significant role in the number of high school students matriculating to postsecondary education. In 2006-2007, there were 1,045 community colleges with 6.2 million students or 35% of all postsecondary students enrolled in that school year. This group included a diverse range of students with a larger percentage of low income and minority students than four-year colleges and universities. Students who attend community colleges do so for various reasons:

- To earn an associate's degree, 57 percent.
- To transfer to a four-year school, 48 percent.
- To obtain or upgrade job-related skills, 41 percent.
- To seek self-improvement and personal enjoyment, 40 percent.
- To change careers, 30 percent.
- To complete a certificate program, 29 percent. (Kuh et al., 2007, p. 7)

However, of the seniors who enrolled in community colleges in 2004, two thirds reported a goal of earning a bachelor's degree (NCES, 2008).

Students from Small, Rural High Schools and College Proximity

In an effort to become more financially efficient, the state of Nebraska uses consolidation efforts by school districts as part of the state formula for funding schools. Using the premise that larger schools are not necessarily better schools, Funk and Bailey (1999) studied Nebraska rates of completion and found students from small high schools in Nebraska outperform students from larger schools when focusing on high school completion and postsecondary enrollment rates. They suggest the state funding formula should be reconsidered using student outcomes as one of the variables in the formula. The study indicates that outcomes of higher high school graduation rates, matriculation to college rates, and college completion rates far outweigh the costs associated with smaller high schools. However, Ancess (2008) stated that small is not necessarily better. Concerns of a panel of recent high school graduates illuminated holes in the educational fabric of some small high schools, including lack of writing analytical papers and studying problems from multiple perspectives. In order to improve, schools should establish caring relationships between students and teachers, present a unified school community, provide a connection of services

between administration, counselors, and teachers; and provide intellectually transformative experiences. All four tasks are more easily accomplished in smaller high schools; however, small does not mean success is inevitable. In order for these tasks to have sustained success, they must be incorporated into the culture of the school (Ancess).

Attending rural schools rather than urban schools also has consequences. In a longitudinal study, rural students in Pennsylvania were found to have lower college completion rates than urban and suburban students. Even though both rural and urban students attend school longer than in the past, the gap between college completion rates for suburban students and rural and urban students continues to widen (Yan, 2002). However, a 2005 study found that more students in rural Pennsylvania were planning to attend college than their counterparts of a decade earlier. Students whose parents had a high school education were more likely to choose college as an option after high school graduation as well as students whose parents had some postsecondary educational experience. The findings suggest that education is viewed as a vehicle for upward social mobility (Legutko, 2008).

Living close to postsecondary institutions also had consequences. Students choosing to attend community colleges cited price and location as reasons for their choice (Somers, 2006). Higher income parents were more likely to send their students away from home during college. While most parents wanted their children to earn a four-year college degree, the majority of parents only considered schools located close to home (Turley, 2006). Turley (2009) stated that the “college-choice model” that does not consider the geographic location of the college is not looking at the whole picture. She cited that students are more likely to apply to an institution if they live near it. Low SES students particularly looked at

colleges close to home because of the financial benefits of living close to home or at home.

Expansion and Benefits of Higher Education

More and more students are enrolling in college. Data for 2006 indicated that 41 % of college-aged white students were enrolled in college, 32% of college-aged African-Americans, and 24% of Hispanics. Even though these statistics for the minority populations are an improvement over the last quarter of the 20th century, minority college enrollment still trails that of white students. Tertiary-system enrollment is also expanding globally from an estimated 51,160,000 students in 1980 to 139,395,000 in 2006 (Altbach et al., 2009). Not surprisingly, the intent to enter college is also high; nine out of every ten high school completers plan to enroll in post-secondary education with 71 % aspiring to earn a bachelor's degree (Kuh et al., 2007).

The benefits to students who earn a bachelor's degree were statistically significant in several areas. Benefits included higher lifetime wages, more fulfilling employment, better health, and lower probability of unemployment. Some studies also indicated that persons who earn a bachelor's degree or higher had lower smoking rates, lower incarceration rates, and higher activity rates in their communities exhibited by voting in elections and being involved in volunteer work. Leisure activities such as reading books and attending plays or concerts also increased with educational attainment (Perna, 2005).

Interestingly, high school graduates with no postsecondary education had higher percentage rates of daily exercise than those who earned bachelor's degrees. Also, the former had lower alcohol consumption rates than their more educated counterparts (Perna, 2005). However, in Perna's study on the benefits of higher education, high school graduates within the studied population who earned an associate's, bachelor's, or advanced degree, received

virtually no public assistance in the form of food stamps, welfare, housing assistance, or other similar programs. High school graduates who did not attend any postsecondary education or who did not complete the program they began used these services at the rate of 4% and 3% (Perna). The expansion of higher education not only in the United States but globally (Altbach et al., 2009) creates substantial challenges for postsecondary institutions in honoring their commitments to their students.

A Review of Persistence Theories and Practices in Higher Education

Altbach et al., (2009) stated,

In the age of growing accountability, institutions will be measured by their success at supporting students through to completion, not by simply getting more students through the door. This new perspective implies changes-not only in how academic institutions measure success-but will undoubtedly affect reputations and budgetary allocations as well. (p.167)

Sixty-seven percent of graduating high school seniors enter college, but only 31% of individuals between 25 and 29 have earned bachelor's degrees or higher (NCES, 2009a). Interest in attending some form of postsecondary education is high among high school seniors, with nine out of ten high school graduates planning to continue their education. Seventy-one percent of these students say they plan to complete bachelor's degrees (Kuh et al., 2007). According to Kuh et al., the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education reported in the April, 2004 edition that only 60 of every 100 ninth graders graduated from high school, with 40 of those high school graduates entering college after high school. Only 27 enrolled their sophomore year and only 18 completed any kind of postsecondary education within six years of graduating from high school.

Theories and Characteristics of Change

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) posited that there are two families of student development theories. The first are the developmental theories or models, and the second are college impact models: “These college impact models emphasize change associated with the characteristics of the institutions students attend (between-college effects) or with the experiences students have while enrolled (within-college effects)” (p. 18).

Tinto’s theory of persistence is a college impact theory.

Tinto (1975) suggested those students who are more socially involved with their peers and faculty members were more likely to persist. In addressing Tinto’s theory of student departure, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated,

The academic and social communities within an institution are seen as nested inside an external environment of family, friends, and other commitments that places its demands on students in ways largely beyond the students’ institutional worlds....Rewarding encounters with the formal and informal academic and social systems of the institution presumably lead to greater student integration in these systems and thus to persistence. (p. 54)

According to Tinto’s theory, as integration increases, student commitment to the institution and to their personal goals strengthen. Negative interactions decrease commitments and personal goals and lead to student withdrawal (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Astin’s I-E-O model, as reported by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), stated three characteristics “input, environment, and outcome” support student change in the school environment. Inputs are the demographic characteristics such as family background and

the academic and social experiences that a student brings with him to higher education. Environment encompasses “the full range of people, programs, policies, cultures, and experiences that students encounter in college, whether on or off campus” (p. 53).

Outcomes are student characteristics as they exist after college.

Pascarella’s model for assessing change (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) has a set of five variables. Student growth is a function of these five sets:

1. Students’ background and precollege characteristics.
2. Structural and organizational features of the institution.
3. Institution’s environment which is a product of the first two sets of variables.
4. Students’ interactions with faculty and students which is a product of the first three sets of variables.
5. Quality of student effort shaped by the four previous sets of variables. (pp. 56-57)

Student change, then, is a function of student background, characteristics of the institution, involvement with faculty and peers, and student effort.

Wolf-Wendel, Ward, and Kinzie (2009) examined the construct’s involvement, engagement, and integration as these ideas are presented in the literature of persistence by many researchers. Their analysis follows:

Involvement is the responsibility of the individual student, though the environment plays a role. The unit of analysis for involvement is the student and his or her energy; it is the student who becomes involved. Integration (or what Tinto might now call “sense of belonging”) involves a reciprocal relationship

between the student and the campus. To become integrated, to feel like you belong, a student must learn and adopt the norms of the campus culture, but the institution is also transformed by that merger. The focus on engagement is on creating campus environments that are ripe with opportunities for students to be engaged. (p. 425)

Because of the wide use of these three terms in educational literature, their definitions sometimes have come to mean more than their original intent. In current studies, the researcher must be careful to tease out the nuanced meanings of the terms when applying them to current research and re-evaluate exactly what is meant by each term used. This is particularly important when these terms are used to describe the behaviors of a diverse student body. The terms may not be applicable in the same way for all groups of students in a diverse population (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009).

Risk Factors

According to Kuh et al. (2007), eight risk factors threaten persistence and graduation from college:

- Being academically underprepared for college-level work.
- Not entering college directly after high school.
- Attending college part-time.
- Being a single parent.
- Being financially independent (students who rely on their own income or savings and whose parents are not sources of income for meeting college costs).
- Caring for children at home.
- Working more than thirty hours per week.

- Being a first-generation college student. (p. 40)

Kuh et al. (2007) emphasized that the availability and type of financial aid affects college attendance and persistence. The number of students attending college with unmet financial need (college cost minus family contribution and financial aid) increased significantly since 1990 primarily because of the increase in tuition and fees. More than 80% of low-income students had unmet financial need on average of \$4,915. Their family's projected contribution was approximately two-thirds less than this amount. Kuh et al. posited that this unmet financial need may explain why qualified lower SES students were more interested in attending a community college close to home than a four-year institution that was more expensive (2007).

While being a student from a low-income family may increase the burden of college attendance, Berger and Milem (1999) found that being female and being from a family with higher income positively affected students' peer relationships and institutional commitment. High school grade point average had a positive effect on early involvement and institutional commitment. Interestingly, high school grade-point-average had a negative effect on student-faculty involvement in students' first semesters. This suggested students will initially interact with faculty only if they are having academic difficulty. The most troubling finding was that while African-Americans entered the institution with strong institutional commitment, they did not perceive the institution as being supportive and were less likely to persist (Berger & Milem).

Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) studied first-generation college students and found that these students are at a disadvantage when compared to their peers. "Not only do first-generation students confront all the anxieties, dislocations,

and difficulties of any college student, their experiences often involve substantial cultural as well as social and academic transitions” (p. 250). First-generation students had a more difficult transition from high school to college, and they were more likely to leave college without a degree. First-generation students entered less-selective colleges and earned fewer credit hours than their peers.

In order to affect the rate of student persistence at colleges and universities, new services are needed along with a revised pedagogy, enhanced financial aid packages, and career advising (Albach et al., 2009). In looking at future trends, Albach et al. stated, “Higher education now sits at the crossroad of tradition and new possibilities” (p.165). Higher education does not exist in a vacuum but must address solutions to student persistence by evaluating the complex economic and social problems that are some students’ primary environment.

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) surveyed college students to determine how involved students were in educational activities that related to learning and personal development. In three years, 285,000 students in 600 four-year colleges and universities participated in the surveys (Kuh, 2003). The NSSE survey also addressed the difficulty transfer students had in becoming engaged with their new institutions. Non-transfer students engaged in educational activities at a greater rate than transfer students. Kuh suggested this may be because transfer students were trying to navigate a new system. Transfer students missed many of the opportunities designed to engage first-year students. Of the 600 schools surveyed, few were found where transfer students performed as well as non-transfer students.

Faculty Involvement

Faculty involvement early in students' postsecondary careers had a positive effect on institutional support and institutional commitment to students. Students who did not have early involvement with faculty typically did not become involved during their first year of college; hence, they were less likely to see the faculty or institution as supportive and were less likely to persist. Positive levels of peer and faculty support led to lower levels of noninvolvement in both the fall and spring semesters of students' first years which led to higher levels of student persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999).

This pattern of involvement suggests that faculty may play a very important role in the student persistence process, particularly for those students who are not fitting in socially. This assertion is supported by the fact that involvement with faculty, in both the fall and spring, has a positive total effect on persistence As expected, academic and social integration are important predictors of subsequent institutional commitment Given the importance of social integration in this model, it may be that faculty involvement is helping a number of students to persist who may not otherwise. (Berger & Milem, 2009, p. 659)

Intervening early with those students who are not involved with their peers or with faculty is an important part of the integration process (Berger & Milen).

Incoming freshmen realized the importance of faculty/student interaction with 94% responding they thought they would occasionally ask for faculty support, although only two-thirds of students actually asked for faculty help. Further, 77% indicated they thought they would occasionally ask faculty for information about the course or its assignments, but only 41% actually did so. "In the final analysis, student-faculty

interaction is important because it encourages students to devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities. Both the nature and the frequency of the contacts matter” (Kuh et al., 2007, p. 57). Student-faculty contact was most important when the contact encouraged student effort in educational activities (Kuh et al.).

Kuh (2003) stated one of the most important steps colleges and universities could take is to find students who were not educationally engaged early in their postsecondary career and try to engage them in purposeful educational activities. According to Tinto (1975), students’ interactions with both peers and faculty is essential to student persistence. Astin (1996) asserted that student interactions with faculty and peers were potent positive forms of involvement, while noninvolvement had a potent negative effect on student persistence.

Kuh et al. (2007) concluded,

Student engagement is related to a host of positive outcomes, including persistence, grades, and satisfaction. Student-faculty interaction matters most to learning when it encourages students to devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities. (p. 66)

Peer-group and faculty interactions are important variables in Tinto’s theory of persistence (1975). Based on the premise of academic and social integration, involvement with peer-groups and faculty is considered to be positive behavior in the student persistence theory.

Promoting Success

Macy (2000) synthesized ideas for success into six key threads in her collection of articles detailing the experiences of students who received significant financial aid to go to college:

- Early awareness of higher education and financial aid.
- The ability to break from family patterns.
- The importance of peers.
- The critical role of mentors and college outreach.
- The desire for personal growth and enhanced self-esteem.
- The importance of early college success and goal setting. (p. 10)

Macy's six threads suggested that to affect student persistence, educators should take a holistic approach in working with students from junior high to postsecondary. Macy emphasized both information and involvement.

Fifteen western states have entered into a consortium called Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). WICHE focuses on five areas: finance, access and success, workforce and social issues, technology and innovation, and accountability. Their 2010 workplan focuses on "how we can ensure that *all* students not only have access to higher education but are well-equipped to succeed at college and able to pay for it" (WICHE, 2009, p. 2). Keeping costs manageable for both the member institutions and students is one of the missions of three Student Exchange Programs: The Western Undergraduate Exchange (WUE), Professional Student Exchange Program, and Western Regional Graduate Program. These three programs allow students to enroll

regionally without paying the full out-of-state tuition cost. In 2008-2009 more than 23,600 students accessed programs through WUE saving \$151 million in tuition costs. Over 140 campuses in the region have students who are involved in this program. Participating colleges and universities can tailor their programs to fit the needs of this broader admission base as they fill their existing programs with needed students (WICHE, 2009).

WICHE's State Scholars Initiative (SSI) encourages students in their region to take a more rigorous high school curriculum. Since the beginning of the initiative, the number of students taking more math, science, and language classes has increased. WICHE members are involved with the Pathways to College Network which includes researchers, policy analysts, educators, K-12 administrators, and representatives from government and business. WICHE works with this group to help determine its focus and policies (WICHE, 2009).

The policy analysis section of WICHE manages the College Access Challenge Grant Consortium and Network. This group works to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enroll and be successful in college. They are also involved with groups who study the transfer policies of different states and different institutions that affect students moving from two-year to four-year schools (WICHE, 2009).

Existing WICHE programs and services include the following:

- State Scholars Initiative (programs in 19 states).
- Western Academic Leadership Forum.
- WICHE ICE (Internet Course Exchange).
- Western rural healthcare initiatives.

- Western Consortium for Rural Social Work.
- Master Property Program (insurance and risk management consortium).
- Communications activities: NewsCap, factsheets, website, annual reports, state briefings, commission agenda books, WICHE annual workplan.
- Workforce briefs (by state and profession).
- Bridges to Professoriate.
- Collaborative purchasing (Xerox products). (WICHE, 2009, p.2)

This regional consortium benefits students by providing information, access and financial assistance in a wide range of programs and student support activities.

Connecting secondary and postsecondary curriculum is an important part of the discussion of students entering college and students persisting in college. Kuh et al. (2007) agreed students' pathways for their educational experiences were set well before high school graduation. Later interventions had only a minimal effect on students who did not perform on grade level, or who did not do well in core courses in high school including English, math, and science.

As mentioned in the study by Venezia (2006), the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education outlined four recommendations. First, the content of high school courses should be aligned with college entrance exams and assessments. For example, college writing instructors considered grammar and usage important skills for their entering students; but according to a recent ACT survey, high school teachers considered these skills least important. Second, state budget systems should be evaluated to see if additional incentives for students to graduate from high school and enroll in a postsecondary institution could be funded. Oregon Business Council is an example of a

transparent financial model that assessed where state educational dollars were spent. The council found community colleges received the least state aid, and special education in K-12 received the most. To gain effectiveness and transparency, they changed their system to a per student cost per service for every educational level and service. Third, data systems need to be in place to track K-16 practices, problems, and information that can be shared to benefit the whole system. Student tracking systems that can bridge K-16 levels can track achievement and student progress throughout the system and help identify barriers to student success. Fourth, accountability programs must span the K-16 systems. Graduation rates of secondary students are essential, but tracking students' educational progress through the higher education system would focus more attention on postsecondary attendance and persistence rates. Transparency must be in place to understand student trends in both secondary and higher education systems (Venezia, 2006).

In 2007, the leaders of almost two dozen public higher education systems began the Access to Success (A2S) initiative. A2S is comprised of 24 public higher education systems that represent 378 two- and four-year schools with a total enrollment of more than 3 million students: "With support from The Education Trust, the system heads asserted two ambitious and essential goals: to increase the number of college graduates in their states and ensure that those graduates are more broadly representative of their states' high school graduates" (Engle & Lynch, 2009, p. 3). Even before President Obama's initiative for the United States to regain its place as having the most educated population in the world, A2S had set the goal that by 2015 they would halve the gaps in college-attendance and college success rates of African-American, Latino, and American-Indian

students when compared to white and Asian-American students and that of low-income students when compared to affluent students (Engle & Lynch, 2009).

Engle and Lynch (2009) reported that Latino and African-American populations in the United States are growing faster than the white population: 27% to 9% to 2% during the course of the A2S initiative. Unless the nation's colleges and universities address enrollment and persistence gaps in these populations, the American educational level will decline over the next decade:

The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) estimates that just closing these access and success gaps will create more than half of the degrees necessary to raise America to first in the world in college-degree attainment. But increasing education levels and closing longstanding gaps between groups isn't just important to our economic competitiveness. It also contributes to other things we hold dear as a nation, including democratic participation, social cohesion, strong families, and healthy behavior. (p. 5)

Data collection for the A2S system includes different information than some data bases. For example, A2S data systems include success rates for all students within a system, including transfer students and part-time students. Each system is measured in proportion to its state's population. Finally, each system has a simultaneous focus on access and success for its students.

To reach significant goals like those of the A2S initiative and those of the Obama administration, public higher education "will have to increase enrollments, narrow their access and success gaps, and improve success rates for all of their students" (Engle & Lynch, 2009, p. 13). Increasing the number of college graduates in order for the

American workforce to compete globally and regain the nation's position of having the highest proportion of college graduates is a mandate from national leaders (Obama, 2009).

A Review of Mary Douglas's Grid and Group Theory

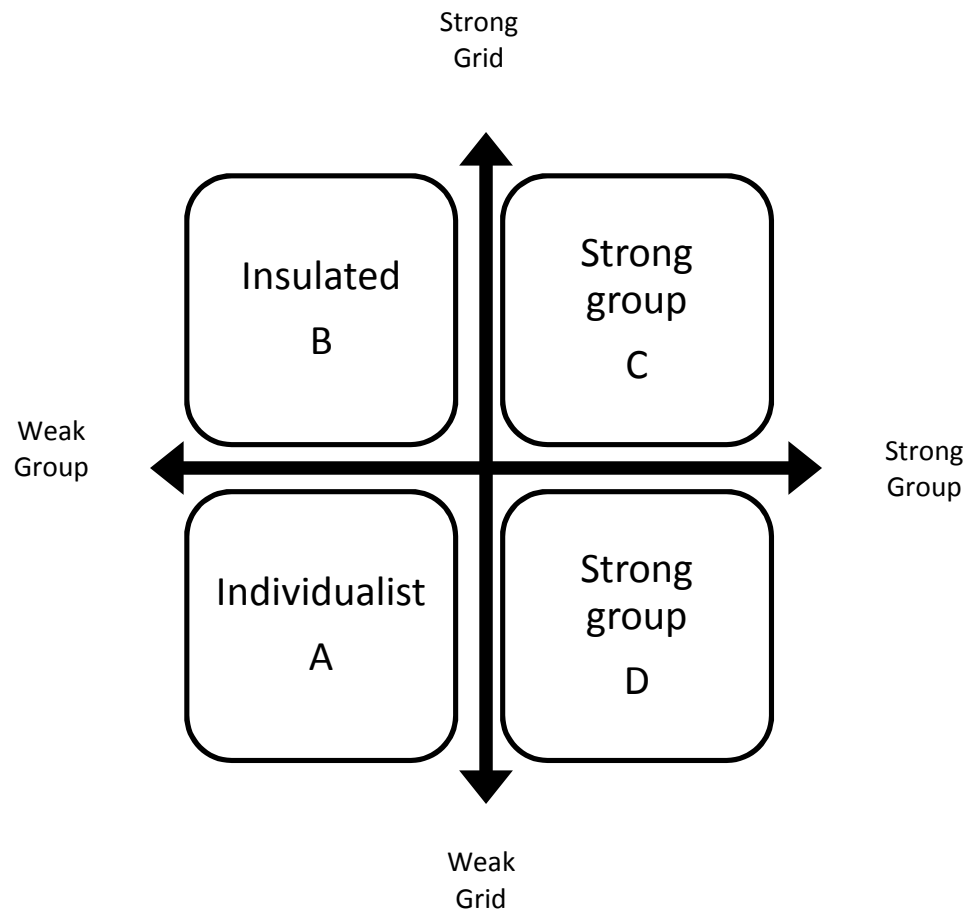
Mary Douglas's (1982) grid and group theory is the theoretical perspective used in this qualitative case study. In her search for anthropological relevance, Douglas looked to the concept of culture as one construct that the study of anthropology had to accept as its own. According to Douglas, human beings are the only living beings who actively create their own environment through the choices they make. Yet, culture is not totally pliable. There are limits in the negotiation of culture by individuals.

Douglas (1982) divided experience into social context and cosmology. Social context has both permitting and constraining effects on an individual's behavior. It consists of past decisions that influence current behavior and acknowledges a collective consciousness. Douglas defined cosmology as the principles individuals find that help guide them in decisions to behave in sanctioned ways and that can be used to judge others and justify themselves to others.

Douglas chose to show two dimensions: individualism and group behavior, both always present as possible choices within social structures. Douglas uses 'grid' for the dimension of individualism and 'group' for the dimension of social incorporation. Using grid and group as dimensions going from low to high, or weak to strong, Douglas categorized four types of social environments as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

FOUR TYPES OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT



(Douglas, 1982, p. 191)

The group itself is defined in terms of the claims it makes over its constituent members, the boundary it draws around them, the rights it confers on them to use its name and other protections, and the levies and constraints it applies The term grid suggests the cross-hatch of rules to which individuals are subject in the course of their interaction At the strong end there are visible rules about space

and time related to social roles; at the other end, near zero, the formal classifications fade, and finally vanish. (Douglas, 1982, pp.191-192)

Douglas (1982) asserted one of the benefits of the grid and group theory is that it is not a class sensitive theory. The theory is based on the action and decisions of individuals and is a system that allows for social change or for individual dissent. Douglas stated, “What I claim to be stable and determined is not their individual positions but the range of cosmological possibilities in which they can possibly land themselves by choosing to deal with their social problems in one way or another” (p. 200).

Douglas (1982) designed the dimensions so they could apply to any social context. Low group begins with the individual as the center of his own network with indefinite possibilities. As he becomes involved with associations that have some identifying structure and rules that influence his actions, he moves up the group dimension. Strong grid is that social environment that classifies individuals leaving little room for individual choice. The fewer rules imposed, the lower down the individual is in the grid dimension.

Douglas (1982) defined the characteristics of the four extremes of the intersection of the social dimensions of grid and group. They are listed in part:

Square D (strong group, weak grid)

1. The social experience of the individual is constrained by the boundary maintained by the group against outsiders.
2. Members gain their whole life support from the group.
3. Individual behavior is subject to the control of the group.

4. Relationships between individuals will be ambiguous.
5. Instruments for resolving conflict will be inadequate.
6. A need to control admission and to strengthen the boundaries against outsiders will be obvious to members of the group who do not want the group to dissolve.
7. Because of the weaknesses of the organization the group will tend to be small and because of fissures within the group, short-lived.

Square C (Strong group, strong grid)

1. The social experience of the individual is constrained by the boundary maintained by the group against outsiders.
2. Members gain their whole life support from the group.
3. Individual behavior is subject to the control of the group.
4. It is organized internally and has specialized roles and may distribute resources unequally.
5. It has many solutions to internal conflicts.
6. The group can be larger than groups in D.
7. The group can exist longer than D.
8. It can make levies on its members for the continued prosperity of the group.

Square B (High grid) The social context dominated by insulation.

1. The individual has no scope for individual transactions.
2. Individual autonomy is minimal.
3. Individual behavior is defined by the organization.
4. There is no upward movement, no rewards except to fulfill the allotted station.
5. The power of the group to control its members is impersonal and remote.

Square A (Low grid) A social context dominated by strongly competitive conditions, control over other people, and individual autonomy.

1. The social experience of the individual is not constrained by any boundaries.
2. The social experience of the individual is not constrained by ascribed status.
3. Relations between individuals will be ambiguous, obligations implicit.
4. Individuals can transact freely.
5. Economies of scale are worth creating.
6. Any possibility of controlling the market depends on the individual's allies.
7. No one can expect anyone else to support him if failure occurs.
8. Success is recognized by size. (pp. 205-208)

The hermit's voice appears off the social map; however, the more he speaks out about his way of life, the more he comes to exist in one of the social environments. According to Douglas (1982), Henry Thoreau is a good example of an individual in the hermit category, a man who lived the way he believed in a society that did not value nonconformity of its citizens.

In his analysis of grid and group, Lingenfelter (1998) related a story of a group playing a game of ball in the Caroline Islands in the western Pacific. The success of the game was determined by how long the group could keep the ball in the air. In the United States, the comparable game is volleyball, the strategy also being for the group to keep the ball in the air. In the Caroline Islands, cooperation is the cultural bias needed for success. In the United States, competition is needed for success. Lingenfelter continued:

The structure of play in our cultures follows closely the structure of the more serious social games by which we order our public and private lives....Carolinian

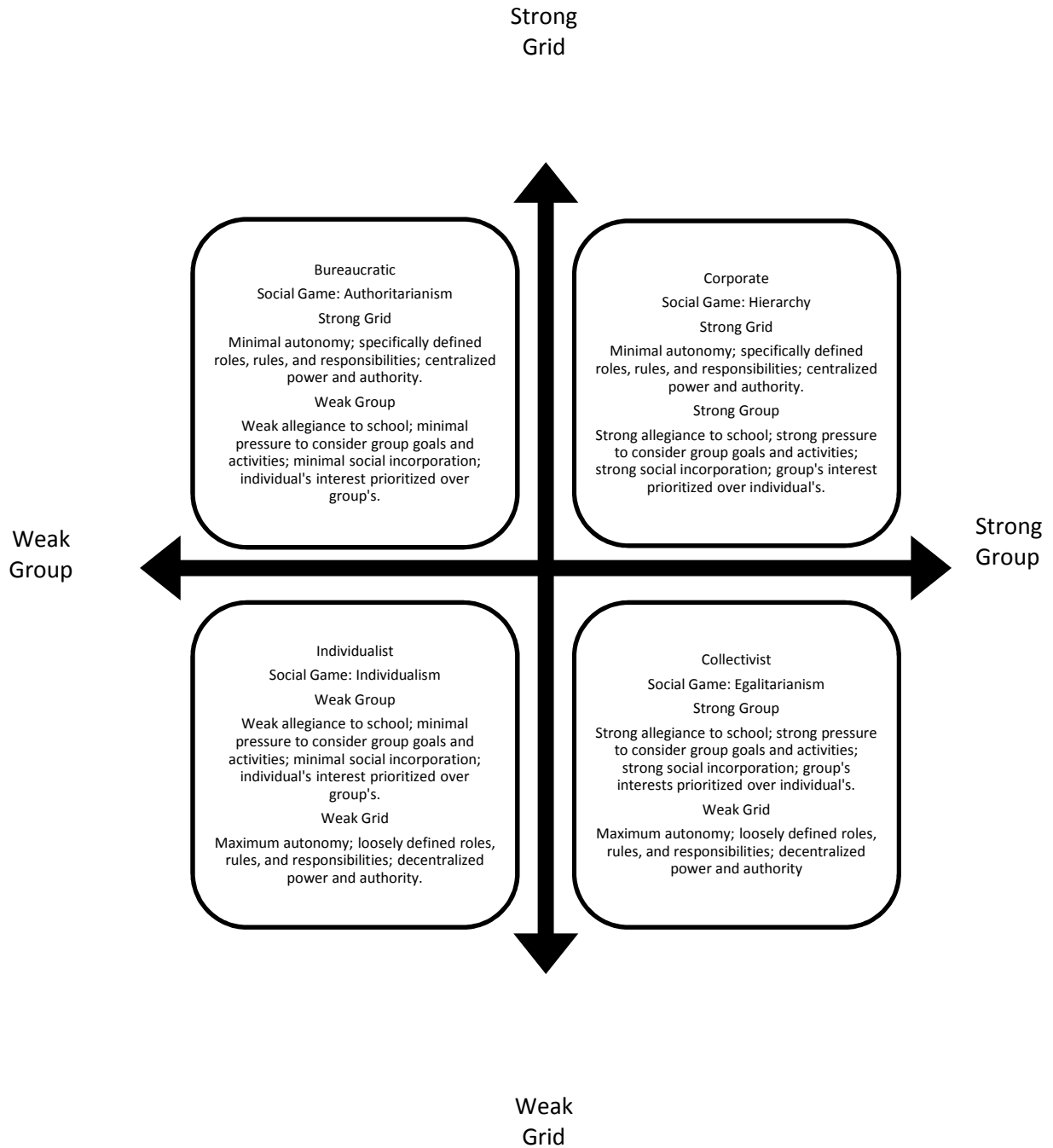
individuals must submit to group goals and restrain their personal performance so that others in their communities do not lose honor or respect. American individuals measure their personal performance, as well as their team performance, and they prize winning on both fronts. (p. 25)

The four social environments have their own cultural biases preferred by those individuals who behave within the criteria of each environment. Interaction between those within an environment as well as interaction between those individuals in different environments describes the dynamics of social situations.

Harris (2005) adapted Douglas's theory to the school setting. He developed two assessment tools to be used in the school environment. The Social Game Assessment Tool "is designed to assess an individual's cultural preference and work values" (p. 66). The Grid and Group Assessment Tool is designed to assess "which of the four prototypes is most similar to the values, rules, and structure of a particular school setting, group, or other unit of analysis" (p. 72). The four types of social environments, their corresponding social games, and characteristics of each school type are shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

TYPES OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTS AND THEIR SOCIAL GAMES



(Harris, 2005, p. 41; 2006, pp. 132-133)

Other Applications of the Grid and Group Theory

Theorists argue that for a cultural theory to be viable, it should apply to many levels of social environments from the national and international levels to corporate and individual levels. Douglas's (1982) grid and group theory has such applications. Jayne (2003) used Douglas's typology to study economic development strategies in a working-class town in England. Through interviews and questionnaires, the town was placed in the strong grid/weak group or fatalistic quadrant. Attitudes in this quadrant tend toward self-orientation and lack altruism. The group as a whole was pessimistic and did not expect attempts at improvement to succeed. Jayne (2003) suggested the following:

Urban politics is not only defined in terms of shifts in city government, but also in terms of a whole range of changes in the way cities operate and are physically and symbolically constructed. This is felt at the level of perception and experience as new urban policies represent, mediate, and reflect the way people in cities see themselves and others. (p. 973)

Grid and group theory provides a way to look at choices individuals make and how those choices help protect their way of life. Douglas proposed that because of the choices individuals make, social environments are in constant flux. Jayne (2003) stated that when cities and towns move from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, they move from a hierarchical or fatalist perspective to egalitarian or individualistic environments. This movement is more difficult and complex for some than others. Stability occurs when individuals and their social and interest group are congruent. Jayne (2003) stated that one of the problems with the grid and group typology is that the systems it describes are sometimes too complex for all elements to fit easily; however, he stated the typology

provides a valuable way to “link multiple public and institutional discourses via a consideration of causal relationships between the economic, political, social, and cultural settings” (p. 976).

Spitzer and Stansberry (2004) researched how instructional technology was used in classrooms in two public schools and how the grid and group typology was reflected in these schools. The researchers invited the participants in each of the schools to take an on-line survey designed to assess the grid/group orientation of their particular school. One school was identified as being in the individualist quadrant (weak group/weak grid), and one was identified as being in the corporate quadrant (strong grid/strong group).

Neither school mandated the use of technology in classrooms above the minimal level for attendance and grades. The school in the individualist quadrant had access to the technology they required. The school in the corporate quadrant had only minimal access. Although the teachers and administrators at the individualistic school spoke of the importance of technology use, continual training and attention to technology requirements were needed for continued support of this environment. The school in the corporate environment had the system in place to support technology in the classrooms but did not have the hardware and software in place to facilitate this movement toward using more technology (Spitzer & Stansberry, 2004). By studying the cultural influences of the teachers within these environments, their preferences could be defined. An identification of the cultural preferences of the teachers through Douglas’s (1982) grid and group typology facilitated the effect of placing technology in schools and having that technology used by teachers.

In a study on developing consensus in the argument over gun control, Braman, Kahan, and Grimmelmann (2005) used Douglas's grid and group theory as one of the models. They proposed that empirical evidence will not change minds if this evidence is not framed within the cultural views of the population. The researchers used computer simulations to prove their point. In the cultural cognition model, the researchers used Douglas's (1982) grid and group typology, suggesting that individuals in both the hierarchical and individualist quadrants oppose gun control because of characteristics of individuals in these quadrants. Individuals in the egalitarian quadrant oppose gun control because of connotations of "racism and patriarchy" (p. 289). The tendency of individuals to "trust only those who share their orientation makes the belief-generative power of culture feed on itself" (p. 290). The researchers premised that culture determines factual belief is confirmed by the computer simulation.

Lockhart (1999) studied Douglas's (1982) grid and group theory as it applies to political change. In Lockhart's view, Douglas's theory makes a significant contribution to the study of political change and institutional form. Grid and group theorists propose that all four environments created by the axis of grid and group are present in different proportions in all societies, and each of the four environments provide a service to the others:

For grid-group theorists *societal* viability is an unintended byproduct of the activities of adherents of distinctive ways of life. In contrast to many other political culturalists, they argue that the 'system' that cultural adherents strive to maintain is their own way of life rather than multicultural society. Individualists seek to implant their favored institutions more thoroughly throughout society, and

the adherents of other cultures have similar objectives. The inevitable result of this intercultural, but intrasocietal, conflict is social change as issues raised by historical contingencies favor one culture and then another....The adherents of each culture, then, strive perpetually to reshape society more thoroughly in their own image. (Lockhart, 1999, p. 869)

Lockhart (1999) concluded that there is at least a symbiosis between political institutions and culture: "Political institutions clearly help to transmit and sustain cultures, but culture shapes and legitimates institutions as well" (p. 884). Grid and group theory provides a framework to define why individuals have specific cultural preferences.

Swedlow (2002) used Douglas's (1982) theory as expanded by Aaron Wildavsky to conceptualize culture to study policy analysis and planning. Swedlow initially stated that if implementing policy depends on an understanding of environments and those individuals within that environment, Douglas's theory will help because it gives an analysis of the behavior exhibited within specific quadrants. Second, policy implementation would be more efficient if opportunities of implementation could be assessed, as well as how best to frame the debate based on cultural environments. Third, if proposed policy requires a change in institution, it would be helpful to know what kind of institution to change to, as well as what kind of institutional change is possible. Douglas's typology defines four environments through the construction of grid and group in which to analyze the foregoing statements:

By specifying the political values that help rationalize particular patterns of social relations, cultural theory can provide much more helpful, concrete guidance to policy analysts than merely telling them to "consider the general values" that give

rise to a policy problem before proposing solutions. With cultural theory, analysts know what values to consider. Moreover, they know that these values are tied to particular patterns of social relation, and that they will be tied to particular views of the economy and environment. (Swedlow, p. 271)

Swedlow concluded that as promising as cultural theory is, more research needs to be done on how individuals interact with an institution and how and why they change to new ones.

The implementation of technology in a college of veterinary medicine in a Midwestern university was studied using Douglas's grid and group typology (Stansberry & Harris, 2005). Through analysis of a questionnaire and interviews, the college was determined to be in the collectivist environment. Characteristics that placed the college in this quadrant were as follows:

- Centralized control over property, resources, communication, finances, and hiring.
- Centralized IT services.
- Shared mission to mold a good veterinarian within a pervasive IT environment.
- Individual faculty assignments percentage-based on members' talents.
- RPT (Reappointment, promotion, and tenure) decisions based on individual assignments.
- Faculty teach in teams.
- Administrators serve in the trenches.
- Students play an integral role. (p. 34)

Douglas's grid and group theory suggests that looking at instructional technology use in schools should focus on the cultural perspectives of individuals using or being asked to use the technology. Using this cultural lens to look at the issue of who uses technology and why gives instructional leaders a fundamental view of why individual choices are made and a better opportunity of impacting the situation positively.

Douglas's cultural theory (1982) was used by Patel and Patel (2008) to show that not only are there four different cultural environments in firms, but also that these different environments can be most useful at specific times in the learning and innovative process. In order for a cultural theory to be viable, it must work on many levels: national, international, individual, and corporate. Douglas's theory is applicable to many systems at various levels. The four cultures or environments created by Douglas's grid and group theory provide a framework to examine the problem of sustained learning and innovation specifically at firms. Patel and Patel theorized that three of the four quadrants were learning quadrants, excluding the fatalist quadrant (high grid-low group); therefore, emphasis in their study was on the remaining three: hierarchical (high grid-high group), competitive (low grid-low group), and egalitarian (low grid-high group).

Patel and Patel (2008) gave specific examples of groups in the different learning environments within a firm. Administrative units in companies adhere to rules and regulations and would typically be in the hierarchical quadrant. Marketing and sales departments are required to get results quickly and are open to the ideas of others; therefore, they are in the competitive quadrant. Research and development teams are cohesive units that carefully protect information and share information with only specific individuals within the group; therefore, they are in the egalitarian quadrant. Individuals

who must change positions against their will or those who do not function at their earlier levels may well be in the fatalist quadrant and do not have a voice in the process of innovation or learning unless their numbers are sufficient to disrupt the process.

Patel and Patel (2008) theorized that firms who support the learning and innovative process via a specific sequence of emphasis of the different quadrants will be most successful long-term. The radical phase of learning and innovation is characterized by market uncertainty within a firm. The hierarchical quadrant or learning culture is most suited to deal with this phase because they will turn to rules and procedures to get through the process. During the incremental phase, a dominant design emerges, and much of the uncertainty is gone. The competitive quadrant would move quickly during this phase networking with other firms, creating alliances. The competitive quadrant or learning culture would be the most effective during the incremental phase. During the transition period between the radical and incremental phase, the egalitarian quadrant or learning culture plays a critical role in encouraging discussion and dialogue between the hierarchical and the competitive quadrants. Without the benefit of their ability to facilitate this discussion, the learning and innovation process might not be successful. Managerial teams who pay attention to the four distinct quadrants or learning cultures of their firms and understand which group to emphasize at which time during the learning and innovation process can create long-term, sustained learning and innovation.

The Douglasian Cultural Theory (CT) can be used in many social systems including corporations, nations, and individuals (Patel & Schaefer, 2009). Patel and Schaefer's article focused on business contexts in the Indian culture, approaching it from a CT angle rather than an ethnic angle. Rather than using national stereotyping when

studying business cultures, Patel and Schaefer suggested using CT because of its dynamic approach to culture and its independence from social scale. They also proposed that the framework would work equally well in any country specifically because it is not limited by social scale. By using the grid and group typology, Patel and Schaefer argued “that four predominant types of ethical behaviors coexist in every social system, linked to the dynamic coexistence of the four solidarities or cultural patterns identified by CT” (p. 183). This allows researchers to see behavior not linked to national origin and national culture but to a dynamic cultural pattern that can be addressed in every social system using the same CT framework. Rather than advocating that business managers give up on setting standards for ethics in global business practices, Patel and Schaefer suggested that business practices be allowed to evolve while being aware of the cultural sensitivities that make up the social group in which they reside.

Summary

From the time the United States was formed, the founding fathers reflected on the importance of an educated and informed citizenry. At the onset of the industrial revolution, education became not only important for an educated democracy but also for a more productive workforce. In the modern era, the creation of an expansive community college system and the provision of the GI Bill for soldiers returning from World War II opened the floodgates to higher education. The march of federal legislation has continued with the intent to create equity and access. The current emphasis on Pell Grants and student loans is the modern day answer to the earlier GI Bill.

Access does not necessarily mean success. Student enrollment continues to increase; however, graduation rates are stagnant. Students see the benefits of a higher

education. The majority of students in junior high school say that earning at least a bachelor's degree is their goal; however, only 31% of individuals between the ages of 25 and 29 have earned bachelor's degrees. This represents a major disconnect in the educational system, and the solutions are fractious at best.

No one thread binds all problems. Tinto theorized that as integration in the academic and social system increases, student commitment to the institution increases. Social integration includes important peer group interaction, and academic integration includes integration with faculty in academic settings. Funding for college is a major hurdle for many students. While more funding is available, some students still cannot see their way through the system of Pell grants and student loans. Many begin the process but cannot stay the course because of the overload of cost to attend. Academic preparation, demographics, choice of institution, and first-generation or minority status all influence student success in college.

In reviewing the educational literature of student persistence, it is apparent that using Douglas's grid and group theory as a tool in understanding this phenomenon is appropriate. Analyzing social content and cosmology of individual students through this lens will add to the picture of why students persist. Douglas's theory creates an axis revolving on strong to weak grid and strong to weak group providing a framework to analyze social systems. A powerful tool is included when instruments that provide insight into an individual's prevailing mindset or social game and their perception of the environment in which they work or go to school are provided for the research picture. Douglas's theory is a holistic theory that is not class sensitive. The framework allows the researcher to look at behavior and at individual choices in a way that provides a

vernacular to analyze and reflect on the research problem. Douglas's theory, in effect, eliminates some of the knots in the thread of student persistence and student success by focusing on behavior and choices and how these happen in four distinct social environments.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study was qualitative in design. A qualitative approach assumes the multiple realities lived and understood by each individual (Crotty, 1998). Naturalistic inquiry as defined by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) supports the idea that the researcher and respondent influence each other. The researcher cannot be insulated from the setting. Further, the interaction between the two is important in order for the researcher to understand the reality of the respondent. Although the researcher must guard against undue influence on the study, it is important that the researcher become part of the setting to fully understand the respondent's reality.

The researcher using intuitive processes in looking at the data would be the most important research instrument. Rather than reducing information to narrow pieces of a whole, the researcher must look holistically at the setting. Erlandson et al. (1993) stated, "The processes involved in gathering data in naturalistic research allow the researcher to rediscover the joys and adventures of intuitive learning" (p. 109). As the novice researcher learned after studying the fish for three days using only his ability to see what was in front of him, the more he looked unaided by any device, the more he saw. He took to heart the challenge of his mentor: "Look, look, look" (p. 4).

In this study, naturalistic inquiry was used as an interchangeable term for constructivist theory. In defining constructionism, Crotty (1998) stated,

There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. (p. 8-9)

A case study was the most appropriate venue for this research because the case study approach allows direct observation of events and interviews of persons involved in the events studied. Case studies are appropriate in research when questions include “how” or “why” and when complex social phenomena are being described and behavioral events cannot be controlled (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) described case studies as follows:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 13-14)

Thick description provides the vehicle in describing the phenomenon and the real-life context. Thick description helps the reader understand the respondent’s constructed realities (Erlandson et al., 1993). Erlandson et al. discussed thick description:

Low-level abstractions that provide descriptions—not of aggregated data, but of specific experiences—are used in abundance to keep descriptions as close as possible to the actual setting. It is thick description that will bring the reader vicariously into the setting the researcher is describing and thereby pave the way for shared constructions. (p. 24)

This researcher listened closely, noting nuance and detail. This qualitative case study is noteworthy because of the use of thick description in describing the data.

Mary Douglas's (1982) grid and group theory was the theoretical lens used in the case study. Both grid and group occur on a continuum ranging from weak to strong. This combination allows for four distinct environments. Within each environment, prevailing mindsets become predominant. Understanding these different mindsets or social games helps identify relationships in a school setting. Grid and group theory identifies how the relationships are structured and allows an interpretation of how and why members of the school engage in educational activities (Harris, 2005, 2006). Choosing to use Douglas's grid and group theory in a qualitative case study is appropriate because even though this theory provides some direction, it is not prescriptive and linear; thus, it does not go against the basic ideas of natural inquiry being non-directional with multiple realities.

Harris (2006) developed strategies in studying the culture of schools through the grid and group theory, understanding that no one theoretical framework will explain all data. Some data may fall outside the framework of the theory while other data fits inside the framework. Nonetheless, the grid and group theory helps answer questions relating to school improvement because it describes the culture in which the school and the participants in the school operate. Douglas's theory "does provide a helpful lens through

which to view human dynamics as well as vernacular to understand, compare, and explain different school cultures” (p. 144). The theory allows comparison of an individual’s social game to the school’s environment, providing a tool for analysis.

My goal in this study was to provide a well-written case study that allowed the reader to see the constructed realities of the participants with respect to their experiences at the college level. Looking through the lens of Douglas’s grid and group theory, I investigated what helped them in this process, as well as what hindered them.

Data Collection Procedures

Participants

A central characteristic of natural inquiry is purposive sampling. Participants are specifically selected for the purpose of providing the most information about the study (Erlandson et al., 1993). Selection of participants progresses with input from each participant suggesting another individual who can add something new or add more depth to the study. The final number of participants in this study was eight. Erlandson et al. suggest there are no rules for sample size in this type of research. The researcher is looking for rich detail, not quantity of detail.

Purposive sampling was used in this study with initial participants found via superintendents, principals, or teachers. I planned to include 12 participants in this study: six participants who finished their education with a bachelor’s degree and six participants who started but did not finish with a bachelor’s degree. Locating six students who had graduated from Heartland University within the defined parameters of the study was relatively easy. The participants suggested by school personnel were contacted by phone and interviews were set up at the convenience of the participant. Each participant was

asked to suggest other people who could add to the study, specifically those students who started at Heartland University but who had not earned bachelor's degrees. Even though several names were suggested, the follow-up phone calls only produced one additional participant. School personnel were again contacted, including the superintendents, principals, and teachers who were contacted earlier. In addition to these individuals, school administrators, counselors, and teachers who had not been contacted before were called. Committee members were asked for ideas and several names were submitted as possibilities. All of these possibilities were followed, but no additional participants were located.

Ultimately, eight participants were part of this study; six earned bachelor's degrees from Heartland University, and two who attended Heartland University but who had not yet earned bachelor's degrees. All of the participants graduated between 2002 and 2006 from high schools located within 60 miles of Heartland University. All participants were graduates of small, rural high schools defined by the average daily membership of their high school (9th through 12th grades) being less than 400 (Oklahoma Secondary School Athletic Association, 2010-2011). Five of the participants were male, and three were female. One student was 22; four were 23; two were 24, and one was 25. All of the participants entered Heartland University directly after graduating from high school. Five participants had college credit before entering Heartland University as new freshmen. One was a transfer student from the local community college. Of the six students who earned bachelor's degrees, five were continuously enrolled, and one was not. Three earned degrees in the education college, two in the arts and sciences college,

and one in the business college. At least one of the participants took remediation courses during college. Pseudonyms are used in references to all participants in this study.

Assessment Tools

Each participant completed two diagnostic assessments: Social Game Assessment Tool (Appendix A) and Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Appendix B). The Social Game Assessment Tool “is designed to assess an individual’s cultural preference and work values” (Harris, 2005, p. 66). The Grid and Group Assessment Tool is designed to assess “which of the four prototypes is most similar to the values, rules, and structure of a particular school setting, group, or other unit of analysis” (Harris, p. 72). In this study, the unit of analysis was the eight participants and their perceptions and preferences of their university environment.

I scored and plotted the assessments on the Grid and Group Graph (Appendix C). In each assessment, 12 questions assessed grid strength, and 12 questions assessed group strength. For each assessment tool, I averaged the two sets of questions. I placed the intersection of the averages of the two types of questions on the Grid and Group Graph identifying the results of the assessment (Harris, 2005). This scoring procedure was completed for both assessments identifying (1) which quadrant represented the participant’s preferred cultural preference and work values and (2) which quadrant represented the participant’s perception of which of the four environments is typical of Heartland University. Also, each participant completed a brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix D)

Interviews

The setting for the interviews was a meeting place on campus that was convenient for the respondents. During our meeting, I established trust by putting the participant at ease sharing with him/her the reason for the study, how the data would be collected and analyzed, and an assurance of participant anonymity. I emphasized that each participant would be treated with respect and that the data they would give is the important part of the research, not my ideas or pre-conceived prejudices. They were considered the experts on their own experiences and opinions (Erlandson et al., 1993). I agree with Rubin and Rubin (1995) who stated, "In qualitative research, the author does not impress the reader with his or her credentials; it is the experiences of the interviewees that give legitimacy to the argument" (p. 91). Rubin and Rubin described the interviewer listening intently to the conversation, picking up on connotative meanings of words as well as the tone of the interview. "Qualitative interviewers develop listening skills that point out what ideas, themes, or issues to pursue in later questioning. In qualitative interviews you listen so as to *hear the meaning* of what is being said" (p. 7). I made every effort to attentively listen to the participants allowing them to influence the direction of the interview as much as possible.

During the interviews, I took notes and used a tape-recorder. The disadvantage of using a tape recorder is that it may inhibit the participant from conversing freely and being open in answering the interviewer's questions. The advantage is that after the interview, the information can be transcribed verbatim for analysis. Data collection is paramount, so if the tape recorder inhibited any of the interviews, I would have used

notes exclusively (Erlandson et al., 1993). The tape-recorder was not considered intrusive by the participants and did not appear to inhibit the interviews.

Although I developed a set of questions (Appendix E) , the interviews were conversational in tone. The sequence of questions was guided by the dialogue of the interview itself rather than a prescribed list of questions. In naturalistic inquiry, data emerges as part of a conversation in the natural course of open-ended questions. Follow-up questions were used for clarification or to expand on a point referred to in the dialogue of the interview (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Sometimes the use of metaphor allows participants to find descriptions that they have been unable to communicate through questions and dialogue. I used metaphor as a tool in the interviews to help bring out characteristics of the participants themselves or of their environments that lead to additional levels of conversation and hence data.

(Erlandson et al., 1993). Rubin and Rubin (1995) discussed an interview that used metaphor: “She had asked a fire chief to describe how his department viewed the budget office. The chief replied, ‘We view them as suits, and they view us as unable to see the whole picture’ ” (p. 8). In following interviews, the word “suits” was used connotatively with various meanings. Listening to the nuanced meanings of the word “suit” allowed Rubin to see into the world of her interviewees. Through writing and reflection on details of the interview, the interviewer can focus on what was discovered and what needs to be revisited (Erlandson et al., 1993). After each interview, I reflected on the conversation, remembering the details of the setting, the tone of the interview, and the content of the communication.

Documents

Documents were an additional source of data in this qualitative study. Documents included a range of data including websites, brochures, and catalogs. I used Heartland University's website information and specific webpages from the colleges within the university as a means for further triangulation. I also studied Heartland University's student profile from the fall semester of 2010. I triangulated this data to determine if it supported the information provided by the participants in their two assessments and their interviews.

Data Analysis

In naturalistic inquiry, data gathering and data analysis are not separated into two specific time frames. Both data gathering and data analysis are ongoing during a natural inquiry study. Erlandson et al. (1993) stated, "Data analysis does not occur in a vacuum. It must be in the forefront of the researcher's mind that data analysis occurs during data collection as well as after data analysis" (p. 113).

The analysis involved unitizing the data, looking for emergent categories, and analyzing negative case data. Unitizing the data means disaggregating the data into the smallest pieces that can stand alone without additional information. Emergent category designation means putting the units of data into different categories as they emerge. Negative case analysis means considering alternative interpretations of data that may disagree with the researcher's reconstruction of data (Erlandson et al., 1993).

In this study, I recorded the interviews and took field notes. I transcribed the interview notes verbatim, and I also transcribed the field notes. I analyzed the notes and categorized segments of the data into themes and dominant patterns. I compared the

themes and patterns in the data using constant comparison methodology. Using Harris's (2005) characteristics of strong and weak group schools and strong and weak grid schools as well as Douglas's (1982) characteristics of the four quadrants, I analyzed the data from the interviews, field notes, documents and assessments. Harris stated,

I found many practical advantages to using Douglas's (1982) theoretical framework. For instance, grid and group theory offers four finite categories of reference, terminology to express behavioral forms, and a graphic structure to understand inter- and intra-organizational behavior. Once a category is known, with some degree of assurance, forms of behavior within each prototype can be anticipated, variance in intra-organizational actions will be reduced, and intercultural comparisons can be made. Various school cultures can be seen as corresponding to a range of ideal types, which is why grid and group theory is useful in broad analyses of school organizations. (pp. 143-144)

Grid and group theory is not a cause and effect theory. It does not predict behavior; however, it does provide a holistic view of social systems. Further, even though it attempts to view a social system from a specific period in time, it does not diminish the fact that social systems are dynamic and constantly changing. The Douglas (1982) typology provided a framework to analyze the themes that emerged from the data, "combining authentic emergent design with the functional structure of preexisting patterns" (Harris, 2006, p. 140). The typology was useful in providing classifications of school contexts. It allowed the researcher to look at the interrelationships of individual members within the total school environment (Harris). Grid and group theory provided a

framework for reflective analysis of a social system and the members within that social system.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is an important part of any study. Erlandson et al. (1993) stated the following:

If intellectual inquiry is to have an impact on human knowledge, either by adding to an overall body of knowledge or by solving a particular problem, it must guarantee some measure of credibility about what it has inquired, must communicate in a manner that will enable application by its intended audience, and must enable its audience to check on its findings and the inquiry process by which the findings were obtained. (p. 28)

In naturalistic inquiry, trustworthiness is established according to the methods listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1

ESTABLISHING TRUSTWORTHINESS

Credibility	Prolonged engagement
	Persistent observation
	Triangulation
	Referential adequacy
	Peer debriefing
	Member checks
	Reflexive journal
Transferability	Thick description

	Purposive sampling
	Reflexive journal
Dependability	Dependability audit
	Reflexive journal
Confirmability	Confirmability audit
	Reflexive journal

(Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 133)

Trustworthiness criteria with the accompanying trustworthiness activities are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

TRUSTWORTHINESS CRITERIA AND ACTIVITIES

Trustworthiness Criteria	Trustworthiness Activity
Prolonged engagement	I was on the university campus numerous times over the last ten years, in the library or in the central area of campus several times each month.
Persistent observation	I observed students in and around the library before and after each scheduled interview.
Triangulation	I used multiple sources: field notes, interviews, assessments, websites, and brochures.
Referential adequacy	I reviewed websites, catalogs, newspapers, and brochures.
Peer debriefing	Peer debriefing occurred with a group of my colleagues who discussed the data as the themes occurred.
Member checks	Member checking occurred at the end of each interview. I summarized the interview and allowed the participant to make corrections in what I thought I had heard if necessary. Member checks occurred during the last phase of the writing by contacting the participants by phone and e-mail.

Reflexive journal	I kept a reflexive journal for about a year, during the planning phase, research phase, and writing phase of my dissertation.
Thick description	I used thick description in writing about the students and their perceptions and preferences concerning their experiences at the university.
Purposive sampling	I used purposive sampling by asking the interviewees to suggest other individuals whose experiences might add to the study.
Dependability audit	I have kept the following materials that establish a dependability audit: interview questions, field notes and verbatim interview transcriptions; data reduction sheets; peer debriefing notes; and journal notes.
Confirmability audit	The findings are cross-referenced with field notes, interviews transcriptions, and assessments.

Summary

I approached this study with a “posture of humility and willingness to learn what was never imagined to be learnable” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 20). If an individual is willing to trust a researcher to basically tell his or her story, the researcher has a responsibility to listen intently to those individuals and write an analysis that is complete and accurate looking at each individual’s constructed reality (Erlandson et al.). Every person has a story. My goal was to meet the expectations of the individuals involved in this study by carefully and accurately telling theirs. Reflecting on the challenges each overcame and the support that came from different groups during the years they pursued their education gave me a holistic picture of their journeys.

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION

The purpose of the study was to describe the perceptions and preferences of students from small, rural high schools in pursuing bachelor's degrees in a university environment. The study explored the students' perceptions of the university, the students' preferences in work values, mind-sets, and cultural biases, and the relationship between the students' perceptions of the university environment and the students' preferred work values, mind-sets and cultural biases or social game. Data collection included assessments, interviews, field notes, university websites, and the student profile of the university.

Heartland University

General Information

Founded in 1890, Heartland University is located in the north central area of a Midwestern state in a city of approximately 45,000 residents. This city, considered one of the best small cities in America and ranked in the top 20 small cities for quality of life, is within about an hour's driving distance of two metropolitan areas. Numerous small communities circle Heartland University, several within a 25 mile radius. The home campus maintains 27 on-campus residence halls and is considered the safest campus in its conference. The university offers more than 200 majors and degree options, including bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees, within its six undergraduate colleges, an Honors College, the Center for Health Sciences, and the Center for Veterinary Health

Sciences. The university boasts more than 400 student organizations, 40 nationally-affiliated fraternities and sororities, and has a network of more than 200,000 alumni worldwide. The university's academic services include free tutoring, a writing lab, and a mathematics learning resource center. The campus networking system includes computer laboratories, high speed inter-laboratory connectivity, and seamless interface to the Internet.

This comprehensive land-grant university has five campuses with more than 62% of students on the main campus. Undergraduate enrollment includes 81% of students from the home state, 17% from other states, and 2% from foreign countries. Of undergraduate students 52% are men and 48% are women. The graduation rate of full-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students is 60%. The university is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission which is a Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

The 840-acre campus is beautifully maintained. The centerpiece of the university is the six-floor library that sits in front of a large green space and the 611,000 square foot student union that is currently under renovation. The university's Georgian architecture is incorporated into old and new buildings alike. Campus buildings include newly renovated athletic facilities, a performing arts center, an art gallery, and a fitness center. In 2006, the university launched a campus master plan that includes more than \$850 million of improvements in facilities in four areas: academics, student life, infrastructure and athletics. Brochures from the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and the online 2010-2011 University Catalog provided the above information about the university.

Heartland University Website

The university has an extensive website that is sophisticated in its presentation with links to all aspects of campus life including academics, student life, faculty/staff, information about the university, and future students. Links under each of these categories take the on-line user in many directions. Each college within the university has their own specific website linked under academics. The college websites are linked to information in their specific areas. All are presented at a level usable for the online visitor; however, some of the college websites are more intricate than others. Most links have massive amounts of information with video-links and photographs. One of the colleges has their alumni magazine attached to its website in e-book form. Other links lead to the student information system, the online library, e-learning programs and courses, and software downloads. The link about the university itself takes the online visitors to the campus calendar, the social media page, the academic ledger of the university, and the university radio station which can be streamed to the visitor's computer. Even though the links from the initial website are massive, the links are intuitive. While the visitor may get "lost" within the website, it appears easy to go to the initial webpage and re-search for information. The university's website was the source of the above information.

Enrollment

Heartland University's 2010 fall semester enrollment was 20,915 students on the home campus. Of the total number enrolled, 18,197 are undergraduates with a gender breakdown of 51.43% male and 48.57% female. The number of transfer students at Heartland University increased to 3,005 students, a 5.4% increase over 2009.

New freshmen are students who are degree-seeking undergraduate students who have earned fewer than seven hours of college credit before their first semester of enrollment at Heartland University. College credit earned through high school Advanced Placement or concurrent enrollment is not counted as part of the seven-hour limit. All references to freshmen in the following paragraphs refer to new freshmen as defined above. Over the last two decades, freshmen enrollment has increased. The lowest freshmen enrollment year was 1993 with 3,161 students. The number of freshmen enrolling in the fall of 2010 was 4,289.

Heartland University's freshmen come from very small high schools, fewer than 25 students, to large high schools, more than 900 students. Sixty-one percent of freshmen in the 2010 fall semester graduated from high schools of less than 400 students. Thirty-nine percent of freshmen in the 2010 fall semester came from high schools that had 400 plus students.

The average age of full-time undergraduate students at Heartland University's home campus is 21.5 years. Slightly less than a year's age difference separates male from female undergraduate students with the average age of males at 21.3 and the average age of females at 20.8. The number of students who are 18 and under has increased between 2005 and 2010 by 17.1% from 1,737 students to 2,034 students.

Financial Aid

Financial aid programs, including grants, tuition and fee waivers, scholarships, employment, and loans increased from \$202,209,585 in 2005-2006 to \$242,495,497 during the 2009-2010 school year. During the same period of time, loans increased by \$3,464,771, and non-debt financial aid increased by \$36,821,141. The number of students

taking out student loans ranged from 9,703 to a high of 11,094. The total unduplicated headcount for students receiving funds from financial aid programs, non-debt programs as well as student loans, ranged from 19,595 students to a high of 20,000 students.

Academic Characteristics of New Freshmen

The average composite ACT score of freshmen enrolled at Heartland University in the fall of 2010 was 25.2, an increase of almost two points from a decade ago. Of the four ACT testing areas, reading scores were consistently the highest and math consistently the lowest. The university offers several options of criteria for admission to new freshmen. One option includes an ACT score of 21; another includes an ACT of 24. Of new freshmen enrolled at Heartland University the fall semester of 2010, 87.98% had an ACT composite score of 21 or higher and 65.50% had a score of 24 or higher. Heartland University accepted 81.4% of applications received for the fall 2010 school term with 50.2% of that number who actually enrolled. An additional option for admission includes a GPA of 3.0 and being in the top third of the student's high school graduating class. During this same time period, 71.91% of new freshmen at Heartland were ranked in the top 30% of their high school graduating class or higher. More than 90% of this group had a GPA of 3.0 or better. In the last ten years, the range of ACT test takers among high school students living in the state where Heartland University is located was a low of 68.8% to the current high of 73.6%.

Student Retention and Projected Enrollment

At Heartland University, retention is defined as the percent of enrolled students of a fall semester who return for the following fall semester. From 2000 to 2009, the range of returning new freshmen was a high of 81.7% in 2000 with a low of 77.1% in 2007.

The retention rate for the number of new freshmen returning in the fall of 2009 was 78.3%. The six-year graduation rate for those students who enrolled in the fall of 2000 was 59.8%. For the students who enrolled in the fall of 2004, the same rate was slightly lower at 59.2%.

Heartland University projects an increase of 221 students in their new freshman enrollment between 2010 and 2015 increasing the total new freshman enrollment to 3,775 students. University enrollment projections for all students show an increase of 1,818 students from 2010 to 2015 bringing the total number of students to 25,340. The above data were prepared by the Institutional Research and Information Management office of Heartland University.

Interviews and Field Notes

The centerpiece of Heartland University is a six-floor library, complete with belfry and steeple, that sits in front of a large green space. The library is centrally located on campus with large open areas stretching north and south. Students enter the south entrance by walking through an expansive area complete with a large fountain and benches. The lawn sprawls in front of the fountain creating a play space for students, a display area for projects, and a gathering area for events. The lawn extends to sidewalks and formal gardens in front of the west entrance to the student union. An open area with benches and beautiful landscaping extends north of the library to the university's research center. The library is surrounded by engineering, science, and mathematics buildings. A large student union, currently under renovation, a newly renovated gymnasium arena, a state-of-the-art football stadium, and performing arts center complete the cornerstones of

the central campus area. Georgian architecture is incorporated in both old and new buildings.

As I watched the students move about the library, it was obvious they were comfortable there and exhibited ownership of the library. Several students brought in food and drinks during their evening group study sessions. Several times all the computer terminals on the first floor were full and students were waiting for an empty terminal. Students were equally at home in the area in front of the library. It was normal to see different groups using the area in front of the library on different days. Right before Christmas, several vendors had set up tables in this area selling tie-dyed T-shirts and jewelry. Another day, a group of students was playing bongo drums for the entertainment of others. Another day a small orange pick-up was parked in front of the library with rap music blasting from its speakers to the apparent enjoyment of the students who were passing by. Dogs, frisbees, and skate boards were often seen in this area.

Participants

Eight participants were part of this study. Six earned bachelor's degrees from Heartland University. Two attended Heartland University but have not yet earned bachelor's degrees. All of the participants graduated between 2002 and 2006 from high schools located within 60 miles of Heartland University. All participants were graduates of small, rural high schools defined by the average daily membership of their high school (9th through 12th grades) being less than 400 (Oklahoma Secondary School Athletic Association, 2010-2011). Five of the participants were male, and three were female. One student was 22; four were 23; two were 24, and one was 25. All of the participants entered Heartland University directly after graduating from high school. Five

participants had college credit before entering Heartland University as new freshmen. One was a transfer student from the local community college. Of the six students who earned bachelor's degrees, five were continuously enrolled, and one was not. Three earned degrees in the education college, two in the arts and sciences college, and one in the business college. At least one of the participants took remediation courses during college. Pseudonyms are used in references to all participants in this study.

Table 3 shows the above information about each participant.

TABLE 3
PARTICIPANT DATA

Name	Gender	Age	High School Graduation Date	Date Entered Post-Secondary School	College Credit from High School	Transfer Student	Continuously Enrolled	Remediation Courses	Degree in which college
John	male	25	2004	2004	no	no	yes	no	Education
Allen	male	24	2005	2005	yes	no	no	no	Arts and Sciences
Frank	male	23	2006	2006	yes	no	yes	no	Business
Betty	female	23	2006	2006	yes	yes	yes	no	Education
Joanne	female	22	2006	2006	yes	no	yes	no	Arts and Sciences
Mary	female	23	2006	2006	yes	no	yes	no	Education
Michael	male	24	2005	2005	no	no	no	no	None Earned
Edward	male	23	2006	2006	no	no	no	yes	None Earned

John, like all the participants, entered Heartland University directly after high school. Although he graduated with a degree in secondary education, he is considering going back to school to earn a business degree. Since his graduation from college, John

has worked on campus in one of the offices that supports the athletic programs at the university. His office was housed in the basketball arena that was renovated in 1999. John's office was on the first floor, one of four offices located off an attractive lobby that was filled with athletic memorabilia. The interview was held in one of the offices. Walls, furniture, and desk-top supplies were appropriately done in Heartland University's school colors. John described his experience at [HU] as "a good experience"... that "got me prepared for life." He commented, "The experience overall was great, after ... I figured it out."

Allen dropped out of college after a rocky second semester. He came back the following fall semester, ultimately changed majors and finished his degree. The interview with Allen was held in a renovated building that provided space for classrooms, lab centers, and offices for faculty and graduate students. The attractive building had a sloping walkway that led to the basement area. Like the rest of the campus, the building was professionally landscaped. The basement entrance led into a large foyer, with offices to the right and left of the foyer area. Walking down a hallway, going north, the hallway led to double doors that accessed offices for graduate students and some faculty. The offices were located on one side of the hallway. Several large bulletin boards hung on the opposite wall above the green wainscoting. Small message boards were attached to each office door with the names of the occupants and room for messages. The office in which the interview took place housed two graduate students and showed a comfortable and efficient use of space with two desks, chairs, and file cabinets. The office was not cluttered but had pictures of family or friends that each office-mate placed on her desk.

Allen believed that although Heartland University did a good job of providing a structure that gave students plenty of opportunities, he would have enjoyed more thoughtful discussions in his freshman and sophomore level classes: “I had some pre-conceived notions, you know, that there were going to be some big classes, ... but at some point I figured you would also be able to have some intelligent discussion.” When Allen moved into his major, his classes became more interesting to him because of “really good professors ... who really wanted to work hard and work as a group who really teach us. It wasn’t just here’s a book, read it. I’m going to test you four times and you’re done. Let’s stop taking tests; let’s discuss, and I enjoyed that.” Even though discussion can be divisive, Allen commented, “Talk it out. Don’t just pick a side and stick with it. Talk it out.” He believes opportunities for real learning are wasted because of the lack of students’ and professors’ abilities to nurture discourse:

We have an international demographic on campus. You would have somebody from Japan. You would have somebody from Korea, somebody from India, the U.K., South America, Canada, and the United States, all in one classroom. Let’s get this going. But it would turn into one person yelling at another person, so you could just see the arms cross and everybody deflate. It could have been such a great discussion.

He felt that part of the problem was that universities have become more like factories because of increasing enrollment: “They are trying to pump them out as fast as they can.”

Frank completed his business degree in four and a half years, earning the last credits through an on-line course. He does not intend to use his degree directly after graduation. He has interests outside of the business world and wants to pursue those first.

Frank thinks he can always fall back on his college degree if his other interests do not work out. I interviewed Frank during finals week, right before the winter break. Students were in every available space on all five floors of the library studying by themselves or in groups. The computer terminals on the first floor were full with students waiting for their turn at using the university computer system. We found a couple of desks next to the north windows on the fifth floor for the interview. Frank said he had a positive experience at Heartland University but now was certainly ready to move on.

Betty graduated with a degree in the education area in four years. She is employed as a teacher's assistant in an area elementary school while she works on passing her teacher certification tests. She commented on her experience at the university saying it "was really good for me because ... I have student disability services, and their service is very good, and the teachers are really willing to work with you ... They did a really good job." She continued, "I can actually say I loved coming here, and I hope I get to come back. I mean it was a nice experience. I hope everybody gets an experience like that." The spring semester had just started, so the library was once more full of students. We found a table in the group study section on the second floor. Renovation was ongoing next to this area, and plastic sheeting separated the construction from the study area. Nothing was happening in the construction area, so noise was not a problem during the interview.

Joanne, whose interview took place in the same venue as Allen's, earned her degree in four years in the College of Arts and Sciences. An excellent student, Joanne has a 4.0 for her college work. She has been admitted into a graduate program and is working on an advanced degree. Joanne thought Heartland U was a great place for her: "The

program I was in was very ... structured in a way that you knew what you had to do to get where you wanted to go, and I really liked that.”

Mary, who graduated with a degree in education in four and a half years, met with me at the library during the university’s winter break. Few students came to the library during the break, so finding a place to talk was not difficult. We sat down in one of the large formal rooms set aside for quiet study on the second floor. The room was furnished with formal chairs and couches, coffee tables, and round marble-topped study tables. Mary agreed Heartland University was a good fit for her: “For the most part, it was a really positive experience,” she said. She is substitute teaching at area elementary schools while she looks for a teaching position.

Michael entered the university without the financial support he needed and decided to join the military rather than stay in school. He said, “I went to college one semester and realized that I was going to [have to] figure out some way to pay for this stuff.” Since returning home, Michael has been attending Heartland University with the financial aid of the GI Bill. At the time of the interview, he was enrolled at Heartland and had enough credits to be a first semester junior. He enjoyed the university, saying the experience has been “good you know, the professors are generally pretty good; the TA’s are great.” Michael’s interview was in the library in January, one of those unusually warm days for winter. We found an empty table on the fourth floor in the library. Michael was gracious and willing to discuss his educational experiences at HU. He said he was determined to finish. He commented, “Yeah, it’s taking awhile to get here. I have changed my major nine, about to be ten times, I think.”

Edward attended Heartland University for two years, enrolling directly after graduating from high school. He enjoyed the university, commenting, “Generally, it was a fairly good experience. I liked the atmosphere of it It didn’t feel like you were in high school anymore. I didn’t know very many people coming up here, and it was nice to meet new people. The experience was life-changing.” After two years, Edward pursued EMT certification at a technical school. Looking back on this decision, Edward said, “I wish I would have stuck through it longer ... I wish I would have kept going.” Edward met me in the library for the interview. The library was full of students, but we did find an empty table in one of the group study areas. He is working in the law enforcement area and plans to go back to school to finish his bachelor’s in criminal justice. He is considering all his options, including an on-line university.

Home Is Where the Heart Is

All of the students in the study were graduates from small high schools within 60 miles of the university. The center of the students’ home communities is the public school. Athletic events, concerts, and livestock shows provide frequent opportunities for the local community to get together. Many of the people working in the local schools, teachers, administrators, and staff, live in or around their small communities. Owners of businesses in these communities also traditionally live in their communities.

The towns, while having a vibrant community life, have limited shopping and restaurants. The city where Heartland University is located is considered a shopping hub for the surrounding smaller towns with two large grocery stores, two Wal-Mart stores, a downtown area, a strip mall, and several other small shopping areas. The city also has an

area of bars and clubs located close to campus. Apartment complexes, renovated small houses, and university residential centers provide housing for university students.

Most of the students thought it was an advantage for them to go to college close to home. John lived at home with his mom the first semester and moved into an apartment the next semester. He thought he would have been homesick if he had moved farther away from home while he was in college. Frank explained, "I can go home and see my family whenever I want to I have a lot of friends that went to this school there is always somebody to hang out with or talk to or anything." He felt that the support of his family and friends and the fact that he was close to home was part of the reason he was successful in college.

Allen had mixed emotions about staying close to home. He enjoyed seeing his friends and family often; however, his initial college experience became an extension of high school: "You have to weigh that really fine line between keeping up with high school and keeping up with college." Allen said during his first two semesters, he tried to keep up with his friends from high school and the activities they all enjoyed while they were in high school. Of the six high school friends with whom he started college, only two have finished their degrees: "We were all more concerned with partying and having a good time, and I'm enjoying the college experience, and it failed miserably." He said his biggest regret in coming out of college was he had not made as many connections as he felt he should have, "but it was easier to call the people I knew."

Joanne had no regrets about staying close to home: "I'm a big family person, so I enjoyed being able to, you know, see my family. I mean, yeah, I didn't have the typical college experience of ... mom and dad dropping you off at school and never seeing you

until the breaks. I didn't have that, but I enjoyed what I had." If she had moved away from home to go to college, she said, "I would have probably gotten involved in more social groups because you have to make some sort of connections elsewhere than with your family group." Mary said she did not want to move far away from her family. She commented, "I've always wondered, though, what it would have been like if I had gone to a different school farther away. I think I would have succeeded no matter where I went, but it was good to be close to home."

"My high school was great, but..."

While most of the students felt their high school preparation for college was adequate, they also felt there were holes in their education. John was an athlete in high school, and sports were a big part of his life. He admitted that in high school, "All I cared about was taking enough classes to do sports. I thought more of sports than I did of education back then." He said it wasn't necessarily that the coaches put pressure on him. John said, "It's your life style at that point, and all your friends' life style, and ... that's all you think about is 'I want to play sports'." Baseball was John's main sport. He described some intense pressure he put on himself to play:

Baseball was my big thing. We had maybe 20 people go out for the team, and 9 people played at a time, so you're always fighting for a position, and you're told work on this non-stop. I mean you'll have the opportunity to play or start, and that's all you hear. And I had that opportunity. And community wise, small community, ... sports ran the community. If you're part of sports, you're part of the in crowd You have these couple of hundred people cheering for you and yelling your name. You can't have a big pep rally for a big test next week.

John compared his high school experience with that of his girlfriend who graduated from a large high school in Texas: “She graduated with 650 people and not everybody played sports. Hardly anybody played sports; unless you were really, really athletic, you didn’t play sports. You didn’t even try because you knew you weren’t going to play.” John thought finding the balance between participating in athletics and keeping focused on your classes was more difficult in a small school.

Frank said his science coursework was lacking because of the ineffectiveness of his high school lab work. He said in his high school, students were not required to write up lab experiments: “We just hadn’t ever done anything like it. The planning forms and everything were just a lot more difficult than I thought they were going to be.” Frank said they dissected a fetal pig in high school, “but I don’t remember learning anything about it. It was just like everybody was excited about getting to cut something open in lab.”

Allen commented that on his transition to college “my freshman year, starting my sophomore year, I didn’t feel as prepared as I should have. Part of it was my own fault You know, if I didn’t want to take trig, I didn’t have to take trig. You know, I hated math.” Joanne thought she had a lot of good writing experience in high school:

That’s something that my professors and people in my graduate program really commend me on, my writing skills I’m a strong writer, and I got a lot of that from some high school classes I wish they’d do more [research papers] because that’s all you do in comp, you know, English comp, that’s all you do, and people who don’t know how to do that, you get bombarded once you get to college.

Mary said, “I felt I was fully prepared for it [college]. So I don’t think coming from a small school hindered me in any way.... I think I had a really good education.” She continued saying that some of her classmates didn’t attempt college because “maybe it deals with the academic performance of them in high school. I feel like the ones who didn’t go to college were not as successful as I was in high school.”

Betty, however, did not feel like she was prepared well in high school, partially because she was not mainstreamed into regular classes until her sophomore year in high school. “I wrote one essay my entire high school career, and then my first semester up here I had to write like ten.” At the university, Betty said she found extra help: “I went to the writing center, too, so it was another good thing that I had.”

Michael said, “I felt pretty prepared High school’s just not hard.” Edward agreed. “I mean once I got into [HU] I had to study. In high school, I didn’t have to study. I didn’t have to do my homework every night. In high school, it came easier to me. When you get to college, it’s a lot different. You really have to apply yourself.” He said he had a good high school education, but more emphasis on research projects in high school and junior high would have been helpful:

Once you get into college and you have all that, if you’ve never done any of it, you’re stuck at the bottom while everybody else is way in front of you. That was one thing, we just started getting hard into it my junior and senior year [of high school]. If we had started earlier, I think it might have been a little bit easier.

Concurrent enrollment is a partnership between higher education institutions and high schools. Students enrolled in concurrent courses experience a course with the rigor of a college course that is taught by personnel who have qualifications to teach courses in

higher education. Students who are concurrently enrolled must prove themselves ready for college-level work (Oklahoma State Department of Education). Frank, Allen, Betty, Joanne, and Mary came into Heartland University with college credit through the concurrent enrollment program. Of the remaining three participants, John and Edward said they should have taken advantage of the program. Frank was glad he went into college with some college credit; however, he did not think his concurrent classes were representative of the type of class he had as a college freshman. Allen regretted not taking more than the one class he finished in the concurrent enrollment program: “Had I thought about it, take your two as a junior, take these, when you run out of school classes through the [distance learning program], get the waiver and go sit on campus I could have been a sophomore when I started.” Joanne agreed the concurrent classes were helpful in transitioning to college:

It kind of gave you a taste of college without having to be completely immersed. You got a little experience of what the coursework was like, you know, deadlines, and you know, not being so flexible like in high school. I wish I would have been encouraged to take more of those classes I mean, not to say that the home ecs and the yearbooks and stuff like that are not important, but once you look long-term, the college credits were where you need to focus.

When talking about taking concurrent courses in high school, Michael simply said, “I didn’t. I wish I had.”

The Freshman Year: Description, Problems, Suggestions

The number of students on the campus of Heartland University along with the number of students in some of their freshman classes proved challenging for most of the

participants. The increase in size from their high schools that were fewer than 400 students to a campus of more than 20,000 students was an adjustment. Size as well as their freshman schedule of classes was a significant transition.

“I would say the beginning stage was not so great The first two years were very hard; the last two years were excellent,” said John. His sentiment about his freshman and sophomore years was shared by four of the participants in the study. He continued:

My first two years it is almost like, I’m here because I have to be. The last two years, you’re there because you want to be, and that’s what you want to do. The first two years were not great; I mean, there was a lot of learning from it. My first semester I finished with a 1.2 GPA. You know, from then on, it was a constant struggle to get your GPA up to graduate.

The size of the Heartland University itself, with over 20,000 students on the home campus, and the size of some of their freshman classes was a factor for several of the participants, all of whom graduated from small high schools. John said, “My very first class when I started was 170 people.” John was used to being involved with his teachers, what he considered a “one-on-one aspect.” He said not being able to sit down and talk to his teachers was a difficult adjustment for him. Mary agreed. “Some of the classes were a shock, because I graduated with 30 in my class, and then coming to [Heartland University], I would be in classes with 300 It was strange for me to be in such a large group coming from such a small school.” Michael said he did not think the university could make any changes that would make the transition easier from a small high school to a large university setting: “I don’t think you can really, can’t baby someone into that. There’s not really a way to do it. There’s just a bunch of people here.” Betty, however,

felt like she found a way to help her transition from small to large by beginning at the community college that feeds into Heartland University: “I was told there were going to be smaller classes, and it was a little bit cheaper to go over there, too.”

Heartland University schedules general education courses as the beginning coursework for freshmen. The students agreed scheduling all general education classes first before classes of more interest to the students made their transition from high school to college difficult. Joanne, who considered herself intrinsically motivated and a self-starter, said, “That’s not really what you’re interested in.” John suggested advisors should enroll students in at least one course in which the student is really interested during the time they are taking their general education courses: “Had I not had biology, chemistry and two maths my first and second semesters but mixed them up with something that I did like to do, then I think it might have been a little bit easier, a little bit better.” Allen agreed with this idea. He said, “I almost wish they would have a pre-designed first semester where it was, where you know, you might have to take your algebra and your comp, but you’re also going to take an upper level, so this becomes like a 3000 level philosophy or sociology.”

All the students took some kind of freshman orientation class required by Heartland University, either over a day or two or a full semester. All but one agreed that the freshman orientation class was not worth their time or effort. Mary said she liked the class: “I think it helped me to be prepared, what to expect from [HU].” Other students were not so kind. “It doesn’t really do anything for ya,” Frank said. John echoed that it “honestly was a joke.” Allen, who wanted more discussion and diversity, said it was “the most lock-step class I took. You sat there and you learn stuff that was pointless.” The

self-motivated Joanne said, “The only thing in there I learned how to do was calculate my GPA, but I never needed to do that either.” Joanne was a 4.0 student. Slightly shy Betty said, “Honestly, I hated it. It was awful.” Edward agreed with Betty saying, “I didn’t like it at all. It was more games; go find all your buildings and that’s it.” But Michael seemed to sum it up for the group saying, “Yeah, that was ridiculous. There was no need for that.”

Freshman orientation classes at Heartland University are designed by the individual colleges. Orientation classes are one or two hours credit, depending on the number of hours of class required. According to the Director of Student Orientation who taught a section of freshman orientation, the comments of the eight participants were common. She said while the students don’t like the course itself, some of the individual activities within freshman orientation earn positive comments. The above information about freshman orientation was obtained in an interview with the Director of Student Orientation.

Even though the students did not appreciate their freshman orientation, they did not think the class should be dropped from the schedule but should be more effective by insisting on student participation in events, inclusion of students from different colleges in the same orientation class, and interaction with faculty members. John suggested that students be asked to go to functions across campus as they did in junior and senior level courses. Allen said rather than students attending a freshmen orientation offered by their college, the course should have students from all colleges in the same classroom:

I have a kid sitting in there from Chicago talking about how they are going to make millions. But then I go over to the Ag School, and you have kids that say I

just want to go to school, so I can learn and then go back to the farm. There is such a difference, and if you could figure out how to bring them all together.

Edward thought freshman orientation could provide a class where students could interact with faculty:

I think that would help kids a lot more. And especially, a lot of kids who come to [HU] are from around here, from small schools, and they have always had that interaction, and then being thrown into a mix where they don't have; it's a big change.

The freshman year on a university campus is one to be survived. Between 2000 and 2009, an average of 20.6% of new freshmen dropped out of college at Heartland University between their freshman and sophomore years, a rate that has increased instead of decreased over the last decade. The average ACT score for new freshmen in the fall of 2010 was 25.2 with 87.98% of new freshmen having an ACT of 21 or higher, and 71.9% ranked in the top 30% of their high school graduation class. 92.56% of new freshmen had a grade point average of 3.0 or above (University Student Profile, Fall Semester 2010). Allen, who left college during the second semester and came back the next fall, exemplifies the thinking of many of the students: "I think that getting over the hump as a freshman, that was the biggest barrier."

Students' Perceptions of Faculty: The Good, the Bad, and the Just OK

The transition from being in small K-12 school systems where "everyone knows your name" to Heartland University where students are one of many is a freshman-year event for many students. Coming from a small school, John was used to interacting with teachers and everyone knowing who he was: "Here, they might know your last name just

because it's on a roll sheet So it was getting used to not having that one-on-one that you can just sit down and talk." Edward commented that while the professors at [HU] are basically good instructors, he would have benefited from more faculty/student interaction:

There were a lot of instructors ... that I was kind of scared to go talk to. It's kind of an intimidation factor. A lot of that is because I've never seen that kind of authority as far as education. They were way up there high on their education status, and their communication processes, some of the words they would [use], I would be like, I don't even know what that means [A close student/teacher relationship] was a big deal with me. I always had that in high school, and then I came to college, and I didn't have that anymore. There were a few instructors that ... helped me out going through. But there were several instructors that I probably said two words to the whole time, and that was odd to me. It was a big change And especially, a lot of kids who come to [HU] are from around here, from small schools, and they have always had that interaction, and then being thrown into a mix where they don't have it. It's a big change.

Joanne said there was a stigma among freshmen about talking to the instructors of their classes. It was just something not done. Others, like Edward, wanted more communication with his instructors but did not know how to approach them. All of the students in the study thought more student/faculty interaction during their freshman year would have been beneficial to them. Mary said during her freshman year, "I just went to class and I had a teacher. That was pretty much it." And, like the rest of the students, she thought the instructors in her major area were better instructors and much more involved

with their students. Allen also felt the coursework suffered because of a lack of enthusiasm by the instructors of these classes:

It was so much, here's the deal. The class is worth a thousand points. We have 16 weeks, 4 tests, 10 quizzes. You're going to sit there. I'm going to give you the notes. We're going to take the test, single file, and we'll go out the door....The professors would do the obvious. Do you have any questions? Are there any questions? But I even had professors that didn't even ask that. They just kept cycling through the end of class.

Joanne described the professors in her classes as "really helpful and very nice" with the exception of some of the instructors in her general education courses. Even though she considered herself intrinsically motivated and a self-starter, she agreed with Allen:

That's [general education courses] not really what you're interested in. Yeah, you'll find some interesting things, but part of it was kind of frustrating because the professor wouldn't really care, so to speak, because, I don't know, they knew you were just there to check the box on the degree sheet, so they really, in my point of view, didn't care as much as some of the students didn't care to be there.

Betty decidedly said she did not talk to her instructors when she first started college because, she said, "Most of them scared me." She thought it would have been helpful to have more interaction: "They give you your papers back, but they really don't have time to go over them and tell you what you did wrong ... That might have been a little bit helpful."

Several of the students said once they got into their majors, the student/faculty interaction improved. John mentioned one faculty member who sent out e-mails, asking his students who were doing their student teaching to come in and talk to some of his classes. John said the students who were the recipients of this type of program responded positively to upper-classmen speaking to them.

Allen enjoyed classes that included class participation as part of a student's grade. He mentioned several instructors whose classes he enjoyed, like a composition class designed around discussion and research: "Kind of how I envisioned college." He enjoyed a math class because "my teacher was almost obsessed with math in a good way, and that helped me." A media law class challenged him because of the professor's expectations: "Read your stuff the night before. Come to class for our [discussion]. I don't want to see a book cracked. I want you to have it in your head."

Mary was not involved with her instructors until she began the classes in her major. She said the professors in her major area "were amazing." She said she would have finished her degree whether she had good instructors or not, but "it was a much more pleasant and awesome experience having faculty that are involved and care, you know, you can come in and talk to them at any time I really felt like part of a community then."

According to Michael, the professors at [HU] reminded him of his teachers at his small high school, in that they knew you by name and were approachable. He felt that the professors in his classes were openly supportive of their students: "So if you had questions, you could e-mail them, or talk to them in the hallway or whatever."

A large number of students who attend Heartland University graduated from small high schools. In the fall semester of 2010, 61% of new freshmen came from high schools that had fewer than 400 students (University Student Profile, Fall Semester, 2010). The students in this study said that the transition between graduating from a small high school and attending classes at a large university was challenging. While it was difficult for instructors to interact with students on a personal level when freshman level classes were large, the students said creating an atmosphere conducive to communication was important.

Paying for School

Student loans, federal programs, scholarships, part-time and full-time jobs, and parental financial help provided the financial support for the participants. Even though they knew college was expensive, they felt most students found a balance between these sources of income. Frank knew he was fortunate in not needing student loans. In referencing some students who did not finish college, he said, "I think some of them did have financial issues. I think that is going to be the biggest, most common one." Frank had a part-time job during college and had to learn to juggle his school schedule and his work schedule.

John took out student loans while he was going to school without a lot of thought about how long it would take to pay back his loans after he finished his degree. He said, "There's plenty of "I can pay for it for you, but you have to pay for it later." Personally, I thought, "Pay back later, I don't care," but now I'm paying for it." John doesn't think most students quit because of their financial situation. He said, "I don't think it's money oriented at all actually. I think it's they are ready to start their life and don't want to finish

.... They just want to go and make actual money ... rather than making these \$200 a month paychecks from student jobs.”

Allen worked 40 hours a week at an off-campus job. While he was proud of the fact that he could work and go to school at the same time, he knew he missed out on many of the extra-curricular activities his college offered, and he missed out on making connections with his peers:

I wasn't able to be involved in a lot of the extra-curriculars and I regret that but, I was blessed to have the opportunity to have jobs that would allow me to work a significant amount and plus the ability to focus on my school work. I didn't go to bed till 1:00 every night, but I made it. I found the coffee pot was my best friend. [If] you don't have to work, if you're able to come and enjoy college, take every opportunity you can to get out and do that. I say that for anybody because I think it would really help them.

Joanne paid for school through scholarships, an off-campus job, and parental financial support. She also felt fortunate to have a job that allowed her to work and go to school:

I had an easy work environment to help me get through school. They would let me off, you know, whenever I needed to go to a group project Not a lot of people I went to school with worked very many hours, and I, for the most part, my freshman year I worked 20 to 25 hours a week, but from then on, I was working 30 and my senior year, I was working 35, 40 hours a week. So my social experiences were not much at all compared to what most people's are, because I would work and go to school during the day and study at night. I had a couple of

clubs I was in for academic purposes, groups, you know, that were within my major. Other than that, I didn't have a lot of different social outlets I was a part of.

Edward felt the strain of paying for school because the economic downturn caused his parents to have less money to help him while he was in school. His solution was increased student loans. His advice to high school students is "bust down and keep that high GPA so you can get scholarships."

The Road to Completion

Even though Frank didn't feel like he had significant barriers in his completion of his bachelor's degree at Heartland University, he said there were times "when I thought maybe I didn't want to keep going to school, but I did anyway." Frank said people should have a goal in mind before going to college:

I mean college isn't for everybody. I really believe that. But, the thing is like nowadays, when you are in high school, everyone just assumes you're going to college I think a lot of people would be so much happier if they spent a semester or full year between high school and college to figure out what they wanted to do People get here and they ... take these classes, but they don't really know why because they really don't have a goal in mind. They're just going to college because that's what everybody told them to do.

John, who finished with a degree in the college of education, regretted that he did not finish with the degree that he wanted:

By the time I realized I didn't want to do this major, I was going to be in school for two more years. Looking at it now, would it have been that big a deal to go

back for two years and get the major that I wanted? Probably not, actually I probably would have preferred it.

John's advice to college freshmen is to pay attention to who your friends are: "I think it's who you surround yourself with." He enjoyed hanging out with his friends from high school, but if they were not in school, "they don't have anything to do the next day. They just go to work, but you have class or you have a test, or you need to study." John also believed getting involved on campus is important: "If I could talk to freshmen, I would say no matter what, go to [activities on campus]. It's an hour out of your night. Give up that party you're going to. It's just one hour, and trust me, you'll graduate quicker." One of the most difficult times for John was his student teaching experience: "I can't count the times I would go home and tell my mom, I'm done. I'm not going back. I don't want to teach anymore." John thinks persistence is not giving in to negative thoughts about not finishing: "I think it really is pushing through that barrier of I don't even want to try anymore."

Allen struggled the second semester of his freshman year:

Spring was a real rough go. I wasn't in I think ... for about a month and I cratered out every class, and I withdrew. I got out. I didn't finish the spring semester.

Debated not going back at all. Had the summer to think about it. That whole spring. Worked that whole spring. Debated staying in the work force and not coming back. I was really doing the here and now. School sucks. It's hard. I don't do math. I want out.

In trying to figure out what he wanted to do, Allen realized he was in the wrong major. He started in the business college, but he didn't think it was a good fit for him.

When he came back, he said he “changed my major for the fourth time, went to the [new program], and worked like a man possessed. I had a new lease on it. I wish I started over there.” Allen said the biggest problem for him was “finding the right niche...and I think that was the biggest barrier, was finding that place. But once you find it, smooth sailing.”

Joanne always knew she would go to college and graduate. She admitted, “I didn’t really have any barriers. I had nothing that was stopping me from succeeding.” Joanne thought that it was difficult for some students to finish school because they get burned out:

You’ve gone so long. You’ve gone through a couple semesters and you just aren’t interested anymore. You’re not in it for the learning as you are for what is expected of you maybe. Because a lot of the times, it’s expected for kids.

Graduate from high school and then go to college and graduate college. But a lot of the times *you graduate college* isn’t emphasized as much as *go to college* for a lot of people that I knew. Yeah, we’re going to college, but they all kind of fade out as the time goes by.

Even though Mary was a first-generation college student, she always knew college was in her future:

Well, I mean, college was always just going to happen for me. So I don’t know. I think a lot of it had to be, I’m the first person in my family to graduate. Actually, go to college and finish. So I think that had a lot to do with it. Just the pride of finishing, starting something and finishing.

Mary said, “The only thing hard for me was trying to find what I wanted to do with my life.”

Betty expressed the same idea as Mary. She said, “Nothing was terrible, I don’t think Like there’s a few times where homework was an overload, but I mean you just had to make yourself do it.” Betty thought some students quit because “It’s too hard. They are too busy partying and don’t want to study.” Knowing what she wanted to do helped Betty:

That’s the thing. Some people don’t know what they want to do, and they are hoping they find something that catches their eye, I guess, because if you are set like this is what I want to do, then they are more determined ... If you have a goal coming in, you are better off.

Michael also said it was always his plan to go to college even though “it’s taken a while to get here.” He said, “I’m making a choice, and I’m in a good position to say what I want to do with the rest of my life. Right out of high school, you can’t make those decisions.”

Edward did not think he had any barriers to being successful in college, and he was confident he would finish his degree:

I’m going to get it. But if I had said, you know what, I’m going to buckle down these four years and do it, I would already have been done and I would have graduated ... and started with my career I have the want to and the will to do it Yeah, it’s just the doing.

College Success: Who or What Helped

The students talked about several groups of people who influenced them during their college experiences. They credited individuals in their family for helping them with finances and with advice, both needed as they went through school. Some gave credit to

roommates and to girlfriends for being the support they needed, and also to instructors who helped along the way. The Office of Student Disabilities along with the Math and Writing labs were credited as significant support. The students said their expectations that they would go to college were important. And finally, they talked about their determination and their will to succeed as a strong factor in their persistence in college or in their determination to finish their degrees.

Frank's freshman-year roommate showed him around the campus at Heartland University the day before classes began. Frank explained, "He showed me where my classes were going to be so I wouldn't be stumbling around ... being late and stuff ... that was really helpful." Frank also mentioned a teaching assistant in a science lab who helped him out. He said, "We just hadn't ever done anything like it. The planning forms and everything were just a lot more difficult than I thought they were going to be A couple of teachers along the way ... made a big difference in my outlook on college education."

John admitted that if he had not met his girlfriend, he probably would not have graduated. She helped him "get into the right college crowd." She became a one-person support group for him:

We joke back and forth all the time now. If you hadn't helped me with this study guide or if you hadn't made me go to class this day, I wouldn't have passed.

There were a couple of times she called me on her way to class and I was in bed. It's kind of a support group--honestly. You have somebody that's going to class and helps you. That helps a lot.

Allen listened to his father's advice about returning to school after he dropped out his second semester. Allen said his dad was honest with him: "I can't make your decision for you Don't think that you're taking the easy way out and realize later in life you regret the decision you make." Allen said he thought about what his father said: "I really sat there and debated with myself. Is this something I'm going to be OK with? Am I going to regret not doing this three years down the road, five years down the road, then years down the road?" Allen also listened to his girlfriend. She told him, "I'm going to school. I have a plan. Do you have a plan?"

Joanne said that her parents always supported her, but they did not push her. She described herself as "good at managing my time and prioritizing things ... I know what I want and what I have to do to get there." She enjoyed learning and reaching the goals she set for herself:

There wasn't anything like, man, if this person wouldn't have told me this or this wouldn't have happened, I would have gone a separate way. I don't think that was ever the case for me ... I came in knowing what I was going to do and I did it. So I never changed my major like most people do. I just kind of knew.

Mary always remembers planning to go to college. She said her parents would have supported her in whatever she chose to do, but she always had an interest in going to college. She thought a college degree would improve her career options. She said, "College just seemed to be the only option for me."

Betty said going to college was always her goal. Her determination, the support of her mother, and the help of the Office of Student Disabilities on campus helped her

succeed. She was often in contact with the student disability office during her first semester:

If I didn't talk to them within two weeks, they would usually call me and [ask] do you need help? How are your classes? Are they working with you? They also told me about the writing center ... I went to the writing center, too. It was another good thing that I had The student disability service, if they didn't have that, I probably wouldn't have made it.

Betty said she needed their support particularly through her first semester. After that, she said she "got the flow of things."

Michael admired his grandfather who encouraged him to go to school. Michael said, "You know, my grandpa said you have to do that, so now I'm doing it. He was a smart guy. He was pretty on top of his stuff." Michael thought furthering his education was a necessity to ensure success later in life. He thought about going into the medical field. He said, "I have some experience in it. I enjoy it. I'm pretty good at it."

Conclusion

All of the students in this study ultimately enjoyed their stay at Heartland University. The beginnings of their experiences at college were a little rocky for some and challenging for all of the students. For most, working through the problems of their first few semesters and getting the feel of the way things were at HU was an avenue for their success.

Although these students shared many characteristics, their stories are unique. Whether they appeared to sail right through college at Heartland University or had detours along the way, each portrait allowed a view into the students' worlds.

Frank compared some of the stressful days during college to moments that could perhaps be seen in a more humorous light in the years to come: “I think some of the times when you’re really stressed out, it’s like one of those really bad days that you have, you know, two years later you’re talking to your friend about it, and you’re laughing about it kind of wishing you could experience that all again.”

Joanne said, “It’s like an uphill battle. It really is, I mean it goes by very quickly, at least in my case it did, but you just go semester after semester after semester, and it just seems like the days drag, the weeks fly and the semesters fly, but you keep looking at how much more you have to get to reach, you know, the end goal. Sometimes it can seem overwhelming.”

Betty said, “It’s a whole new experience.”

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions and preferences of students from small, rural high schools in pursuing bachelor's degrees at Heartland University. Enrollment in colleges and universities continues to increase with more high school graduates enrolling as college freshmen than at any other time in history. Despite increasing enrollment, many students do not persist to earn a bachelor's degree. One reason for the discrepancy in the number of students entering postsecondary education and the number earning bachelor's degrees is that some students' perceptions of university environments and their preferred social environments are not congruent.

Mary Douglas's (1982) Grid and Group theory was the theoretical lens used in the case study. Both grid and group occur on a continuum ranging from weak to strong. This combination allows for four distinct environments. Within each environment, prevailing mindsets become predominant. Understanding the preferences and perceptions of the participants in this study helps identify relationships in a school setting. Grid and group theory identifies how the relationships are structured and allows an interpretation of how and why members of the school engage in educational activities (Harris, 2005, 2006). Douglas's theory provided some direction, but it is not prescriptive or linear; thus, it did not go against the basic ideas of natural inquiry being non-

directional with multiple realities.

This chapter includes an analysis of the assessments and of the themes that emerged during the interviews. Supporting evidence found in the field notes, websites, brochures, and catalogs will be discussed.

Analysis of the Assessments

Each participant completed two diagnostic assessments: Social Game Assessment Tool (Appendix A) and Grid and Group Assessment Tool (Appendix B). The Social Game Assessment Tool “is designed to assess an individual’s cultural preference and work values” (Harris, 2005, p. 66). The Grid and Group Assessment Tool is designed to assess “which of the four prototypes is most similar to the values, rules, and structure of a particular school setting, group, or other unit of analysis” (Harris, p. 72). In this study, the unit of analysis was the eight participants’ perceptions and preferences of the university environment.

The assessments were scored and plotted on the Grid and Group Graph (Appendix C). In each assessment, 12 questions assessed grid strength, and 12 questions assessed group strength. For each assessment tool, the two sets of questions were averaged. The intersection of the averages of the two types of questions was placed on the Grid and Group Graph identifying the results of the assessment (Harris, 2005). This scoring procedure was completed for both assessments identifying (1) which quadrant represented each participant’s preferred cultural preference and work values and (2) which quadrant represented each participant’s perception of the values, rules, and structure typical of Heartland University. The participants’ responses placed them in the following quadrants as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 4
ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Participant	Social Game Assessment	Grid and Group Assessment
Frank	Corporate	Corporate
John	Collectivist	Bureaucratic
Allen	Collectivist	Corporate
Betty	Corporate	Corporate/Collectivist
Joanne	Collectivist	Corporate
Mary	Collectivist	Corporate
Michael	Corporate	Corporate
Edward	Corporate	Corporate

Participants answered the questions of the assessments on a continuum of one through eight. One through three indicated an answer in the weak range, four and five indicated an answer in the middle range, and six through eight indicated an answer in the strong range.

Grid Questions

Of the questions in the grid category, 81 answers were in the strong grid range, 39 were in the middle range, and 72 were in the weak grid range. Of the 24 questions in the grid category, 2 questions on the Grid and Group Assessment Tool were answered in the strong grid range by all the participants.

- 1 Authority structures are:

decentralized/
Nonhierarchical

**centralized/
hierarchical**

10 Hiring decisions are:

decentralized/
controlled by
Teachers

**centralized/
controlled by
administrator(s)**

Of the same 24 questions in the grid category, one question on the Social Game Assessment Tool was answered in the weak grid range by all participants.

6 I prefer a teaching and learning atmosphere where students are:

**encouraged to
participate in/
take ownership
of their education**

discouraged from
participating in/
taking ownership
of their education

Group Questions

Of the questions in the group category, 110 answers were in the strong group range, 40 answers were in the middle range, and 42 answers were in the weak group range. Of the 24 questions in the group category, 3 questions were answered in the strong group range on the Social Game Assessment Tool by all participants.

10 I prefer a work atmosphere where educators and students have:

no allegiance/loyalty
to the school

**much allegiance/
loyalty to the school**

11 I prefer a work atmosphere where responsibilities of teachers and administrators are:

ambiguous/
fragmented with
no accountability

**clear/communal
with much
accountability**

12 I prefer a work atmosphere
where most decisions are made:

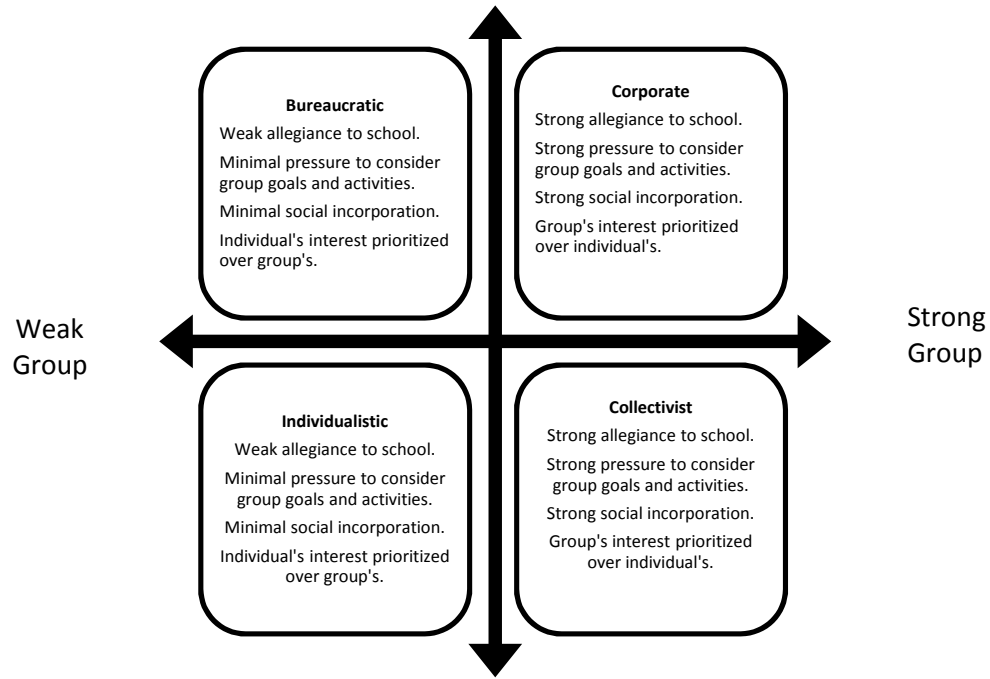
privately by factions or
independent
Verdict

**corporately by
consensus or
group approval**

All questions and responses are located in Appendix F.

According to the Social Game Assessment Tool, all the participants preferred the collectivist or corporate quadrants. Both of these quadrants have strong group characteristics. According to the Grid and Group Assessment Tool, seven of the eight participants perceived Heartland University as a corporate environment. Again, the corporate environment is a one of the two quadrants with strong group characteristics. Figure 3 shows the characteristics of strong group and weak group.

FIGURE 3
 CHARACTERISTICS OF STRONG AND WEAK GROUP

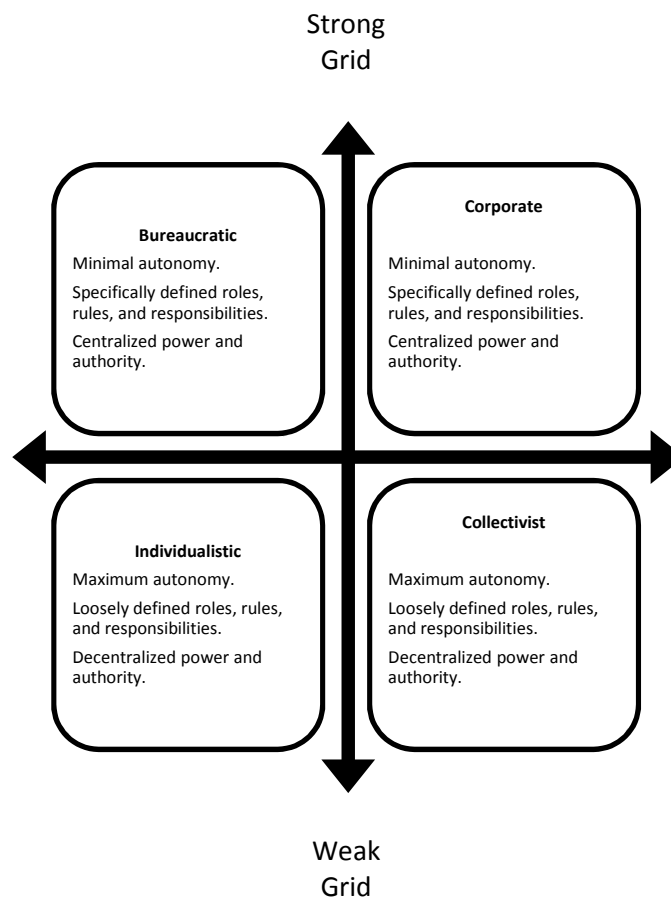


(Harris, 2005, p. 39)

Frank, Michael, and Edward preferred a corporate environment and perceived HU as a corporate environment. Betty can be included in this group as well. She preferred a corporate environment, and her perception of HU was on the line between the corporate and collectivist quadrants. These four participants preferred environments and perceived environments were congruent according to the assessments. Frank and Betty completed their bachelor's degrees. Though Michael and Edward had not completed their degrees, Michael was currently enrolled at HU and Edward was weighing his options for completing his degree.

Allen, Joanne, and Mary all preferred a collectivist environment, which has strong group characteristics, but weak grid characteristics. However, they all perceived HU as having a corporate environment, strong group and grid characteristics. Figure 4 shows the characteristics of strong and weak grid.

FIGURE 4
CHARACTERISTICS OF STRONG AND WEAK GRID



(Harris, 2005, p. 37)

Allen, Joanne, and Mary completed their bachelor's degrees even though the environments they preferred were not congruent with how they perceived the

environment at HU. John, who was employed by Heartland University after he earned his bachelor's degree, was the only participant who did not perceive the environment at HU as corporate. He said his status as an employee of HU may have contributed to his view of the university as being bureaucratic, one with strong rules and regulations but weak group characteristics. John also completed his degree at HU even though his preference and perception were not congruent.

Analysis of the assessments revealed that four of the eight participants' preferences and perceptions for a university environment were congruent. Two of these four participants, Frank and Betty, earned bachelor's degrees. While both Michael and Edward had plans to finish bachelor's degrees, at the time of this study, they had not completed them. The four remaining participants, John, Allen, Joanne, and Mary, had earned their bachelor's degrees, although their perceptions and preferences for a university environment were not congruent. The criterion for success for this study was the participants persisting and earning bachelor's degrees. Only two of the participants who earned bachelor's degrees showed congruency in their preferences and perceptions for a university environment. The other four who earned bachelor's degrees did not show congruency in their preferences and perceptions for a university environment; thus, the study did not support the idea that one of the reasons for students not persisting is the lack of congruency between what they prefer their school environment and what they perceive their school environment to be.

Analysis of the Themes

Using the constant comparison method as described by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) four themes emerged:

- Freshman year concerns.
- Preparation for college.
- Paying for school.
- College success: who or what helped.

Participants discussed their freshman years specifically talking about size of classes, instruction, interaction with faculty, and the social life of freshman-year students. Second, participants discussed their preparation for college, focusing on the scope and difficulty of their high school curriculum and the importance of the concurrent enrollment program. Third, participants discussed paying for school, both non-debt and debt accumulating financial help. Fourth, participants discussed college success by focusing on proximity to their homes as well as who in their lives helped them succeed and what programs offered them assistance. An analysis of the themes occurred with the purpose of the study in mind. That is to say, the researcher looked at the participants' comments through the focus of the participants' preferences for their college experience and their perceptions of their college experiences.

The four themes that emerged are supported by the literature. Tinto (1998) emphasized the importance of the freshman year of college noting the number of students who do not return the fall following their freshman year. Almost half of the students who drop out do so before the beginning of their sophomore year. Heartland University's retention rate for freshman students returning the following fall after their freshman year is 78.3% (Student Profile, Fall Semester 2010). Tinto says the increase in the number of freshman programs designed to promote persistence is a reaction to the number of freshman who do not persist (1998).

Academic and social integration is important for student persistence (Berger & Milem, 1999; Tinto, 1975, 1998, 2006-2007). Early integration with faculty has a positive effect and early integration is particularly important for those students who do not fit in socially (Astin, 1996; Berger & Milem; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2007).

All of the participants had positive comments about their instructors in their major areas, but most of the participants did not have positive interactions with instructors in their freshman-level courses. Overall, the participants had a close relationship with their high school teachers. Talking to them in the hallways or coming in after class to “sit and talk” was comfortable for them. During their freshman year at college, their relationships with their instructors was completely different: “There’s kind of a stigma when you’re a freshman. You don’t want to approach the person who’s teaching the class.”

Losing the close relationships the participants had with their high school teachers was a difficult transition. Participants said that their high school teachers wanted to make sure their students were successful. The shift in college instruction was an emphasis on the students being in charge of their own success or lack of it.

The participants preferred close student/teacher relationships. Strong social incorporation and prioritizing the group’s interests over the individuals’ interests are characteristics of the strong group dimension. Weak group characteristics are the opposite with little effort at social incorporation, and the individual’s interest are more important than the interests of the group. The participants preferred a strong group environment indicated by their placement in the collectivist and corporate quadrants; however, they perceived that teachers were not involved with their students, at least in freshmen level,

The following questions on the two assessments showed a lack of congruency between what the participants preferred in instruction and what they perceived was the instruction strategy at HU. Congruency was defined as the participants' responses to the question in both assessments being in the same range: weak (1-3), middle (4-5), or strong (6-8).

On the Social Game Assessment, six students responded that they preferred individualized instruction that was personalized for each student.

Social Game Assessment:

- 8 I prefer a teaching and learning atmosphere where instruction is:

**individualized/
personalized for
each student**

not individualized/
personalized for
each student

On the Grid and Group Assessment, seven of the participants responded that their perception of HU was that instruction was not individualized or personalized for each student.

Grid and Group Assessment:

- 8 Instruction is:

individualized/
personalized for
each student

**not individualized
personalized for
each student**

Frank, Allen, Joanne, Mary, Betty, and Michael's preferences and perceptions for instruction were not congruent for type of instruction. John and Edward's preferences and perceptions were congruent. Since six of the eight participants completed their bachelor's

degrees, the importance of congruency in type of instruction cannot be supported in this study.

The participants' concern about preparation for college is supported in the literature. While a high school grade point average has a positive effect on a student's early involvement and commitment to school (Berger & Milem, 1999), being underprepared for college work is a risk factor for persistence in college (Kuh et al., 2007). According to Pascarella and Terenzia (2005), students' background and precollege experiences affect student growth which contributes to persistence.

All but one of the participants said their high school preparation was at least adequate and in some areas excellent; however, the participants offered suggestions concerning needed emphasis in the areas of science, math, and research. Also, five of the participants earned college credits while still in high school and thought more emphasis should be placed on the concurrent enrollment program. Most of the participants agreed that high school is not difficult. Michael said, "High school's just not hard." On the difficulty of college, Allen said, "I came in thinking it was going to be easier than it was."

Paying for school and the effect of working while in school is researched in the literature. Kuh et al. (2007) found that students who attend college and are financially independent, that is, no help from their parents, are at risk of not persisting. Also, working more than 30 hours a week is a risk factor. In this study, five of the eight students worked while going to school. Allen and Joanne both worked 40 hours a week during their senior year. While they both finished with bachelor's degrees, both mentioned not being able to take advantage of all the college experience had to offer because of their heavy work schedule. Joanne said she went to school, did her homework,

and went to work. Allen regrets not being able to join extra-curricular organizations in his major area and making new contacts.

The literature suggests that college choice models should include geographic location of postsecondary institutions and their proximity to the student's home. Many students chose to attend a school close to home for financial reasons (Somers, 2006). While many parents want a four-year degree for their children, they may only consider schools that are close to home (Turley, 2006). She cited that students are more likely to apply to an institution if they live near it (Turley, 2009). All the participants preferred either the corporate or collectivist environments. Both of these quadrants have strong group characteristics. Participants' choice to stay close to family and friends is congruent with their preferred environment.

Faculty involvement is an important part of student success according to the literature (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1998, 2007). Faculty involvement supports student growth according to Pascarella and Terenzini. Tinto more specifically stated, "The actions of the faculty, especially in the classroom, are key to institutional efforts to enhance student retention" (p. 5). He continued, "We know that successful student retention is at its root a reflection of successful student education. That is the job of the faculty" (p. 9).

Participants preferred a supportive faculty which is a characteristic of strong group with strong social incorporation and pressure to consider group goals and activities over individuals' goals and activities. Although the participants said the faculty was supportive and "awesome" in their major area, the participants did not perceive the

faculty as supportive during their freshman year, a characteristic of weak group: minimal social incorporation and minimal pressure to consider group goals over individual goals.

Table 4 indicates the preferences and perceptions of the participants for close student/teacher relationships and faculty support, and whether their preferences and perceptions exhibited characteristics of strong or weak grid or strong or weak group.

TABLE 5
GRID AND GROUP CONSIDERATIONS

	Preferences for College Experiences	Perceptions of College Experiences
Freshman year	1. Close student/teacher relationships: Strong Group	Teachers not involved with students: Weak Group
College Success	2. Faculty will be supportive: Strong Group	Faculty generally were not supportive until students were in their major areas: Weak Group

Some of the participants' preferences and perceptions cannot be identified as strong or weak grid or strong or weak group without additional information. However, the trend is clear in examining the details of the themes relevant to the freshman year and college success. What the participants' preferred for their college experiences was not congruent with what the participants perceived of their college experience. Six of the eight participants in the study graduated with bachelor's degrees, the definition of success for this study. The remaining two participants have plans in place to finish their degrees. The participants' preferences and perceptions for their freshman year experiences were

not congruent; however, six of the eight ultimately earned bachelor's degrees. Thus the importance of congruency of perceptions and preferences for students' success in earning bachelor's degrees is not supported in this study.

Websites, Brochures, Catalogs, and Student Profile Information

Information about Heartland University is readily available to students, parents, and anyone interested in perusing their website. The publications, both on-line and printed, are professional, available, and numerous. This indicates a hierarchy in place with centralized power and authority to manage the amount of information and the quality of information available from HU. All the participants perceive Heartland University as one with a strong grid environment.

The website and brochures from the university information office located in the student union exhibited a strong allegiance to the university. The Student Orientation and Enrollment office, also located in the student union, provides applicants with multiple brochures with information about admission for new freshmen, transfer students, concurrently enrolled high school students, and parents. These brochures direct the user to on-line sites as well. The Heartland University websites direct requests to a webmaster for inclusion of materials or questions about the website. The participants also said their use of the on-line material provided by individual colleges was easily accessible. Although the information occasionally was not accessible because of technical problems, the students usually accessed needed on-line information without difficulty.

Summary of the Data Analysis

Many more students enter college than leave with bachelor's degrees. National leaders have called on public school systems, colleges, and universities to address the

problem of student retention in the United States. Student retention rates have been the focus of numerous studies for decades. The current emphasis on competing in a global economy and increasing the number of people earning bachelor's degrees emphasizes the importance of research on student persistence and retention rates. The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions and preferences of eight students from small rural high schools in pursuing bachelor's degrees in a university setting.

The participants in this study were eight students from small, rural high schools who attended a university within 60 miles of their homes. The study was a descriptive case study using the methodology of natural inquiry. The data included field notes and interviews, assessments, websites, and brochures. Triangulation occurred by using the above sources along with peer debriefing and member checking. Participants were contacted through school sources and by purposive sampling. I reported the data in thick description to allow the reader to vicariously experience the data.

I analyzed the data a posteriori using Douglas's (1982) grid and group theory. Participants completed two assessments. One assessed their preferences for a school environment and one assessed their perceptions of their school environment. Using Douglas's theory, the participants' responses placed them in one of four quadrants, exhibiting characteristics of grid and group. Harris (2005, 2006) applied Douglas's theory to school cultures, resulting in characteristics of schools being described for each of the four quadrants. Using Douglas's framework and Harris's characteristics of school culture provided a vehicle for analysis of the data.

The four themes that emerged through an analysis of the interview notes and the field notes provided a look into the world of these participants as they were attending

college. Analyzing the four themes alongside an analysis of the participants' preferences for their school experiences and their perceptions of their school experience was an important part of this study. Table 5 illustrates the participants' preferences and perceptions in the four thematic areas.

TABLE 6
PREFERENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGE EXPERIENCES

	Preferences for College Experiences	Perceptions of College Experiences
Freshman year	<p>Close student/teacher relationships.</p> <p>Effective/interesting instruction.</p> <p>Autonomy in selecting freshman level courses.</p> <p>Achieve balance between social life and academics.</p>	<p>Teachers not involved with students.</p> <p>Large class sizes prohibited effective/interesting instruction.</p> <p>A schedule of only gen ed courses was difficult.</p> <p>Achieving balance between social life and academics was difficult with high school friends and new-found freedoms.</p>
Preparation	<p>Sufficient foundation in science, math, and research.</p> <p>Begin freshman year with college credit through concurrent enrollment.</p>	<p>College courses were more difficult than anticipated. Better preparation in science, math, and research was needed.</p> <p>Concurrent enrollment was available, but more emphasis on availability and benefits needed.</p>
Paying for School	<p>Attending college is expensive; however, financial support is available.</p>	<p>Attending college was expensive; however, financial support was available.</p>

College Success: Who or what helped.	Stay close to home and take advantage of what the university offers. Have family and friend support as it is needed. Faculty will be supportive	Staying close to home was beneficial Family and friends were supportive. Faculty generally were not supportive until students were in their major areas.
Personal goals	Having a goal to finish school is important.	Having a goal to finish school was important.

Separating the characteristics, grid and group, more congruency appears. Eight participants preferred a strong group environment and seven perceived the environment at Heartland University as one exhibiting characteristics of strong group. Although the participants' preferences and perceptions of faculty interaction and support were not congruent for their freshman year, the participants' perception of their overall experience was congruent with strong group. This is supported by the assessments and by the interviews. John said, "It was a good experience. It got me prepared for life The experience overall was great." Frank said, "It was positive." Allen was encouraged by the opportunities presented by Heartland University. He said, "They do a really good job up here of trying to structure and give people enough opportunities." Joanne, who admits to preferring structure, said, "I thought it was good The program I was in was very, you know, structured in a way that you knew what you had to do to get where you wanted to go." Mary said, "For the most part, it was a really positive experience." Betty said the Office of Student Disabilities were "very good." Michael said his experience was overall positive, and Edward said, "Very positive, very, very positive."

Although overall congruency between the participants' preference and perception cannot be established, the study did show the participants' were congruent in their preference and perception of strong group characteristics. One can suggest that strong group characteristics of loyalty to the school, pressure to consider group goals and activities, strong social incorporation, and prioritizing the group's interests over the individual's interest were characteristics the participants preferred. They also perceived the university as having these characteristics. Further study is required to analyze the effect of strong group characteristics without the congruency of strong or weak grid.

CHAPTER VI
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, BENEFITS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND
COMMENTS

Summary of the Study

A discrepancy exists between those students who enter college and those who earn a bachelor's degree (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009a). Research on student retention and student persistence has been ongoing for decades with little improvement in the college completion rate (Tinto, 2006-2007). The goal of increasing the number of individuals earning bachelor's degrees in the United States continues to be newsworthy with an emphasis on college retention rates and college persistence rates (Allen, 2011). The Obama administration stated its goal as having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020 (Obama, 2009, ¶ 61).

In seeking to understand the relationship between students' preferences and perceptions regarding their college experiences, I examined the problem of student retention and persistence from the students' viewpoint. The study included eight participants who had graduated from small, rural high schools that were located within a 60 mile radius of Heartland University. The students all graduated from high school between 2002 and 2006 and entered HU the fall after their high school graduation. Six of the participants have earned their bachelor's degrees from HU, and two are still pursuing their bachelor's degrees.

Data for the study included participant interviews, demographics, assessments, and field notes. I also studied brochures, websites, catalogs, and the student profile of the university. I analyzed the data using the natural inquiry method of data analysis and data collection occurring simultaneously. I analyzed the data using the emergent data method, continuing until no additional themes emerged. I accomplished triangulation through comparing the interviews and field notes, the assessments, and the brochures, websites, catalogs, and student profile information. Immediately after the interviews, I verbally summarized what I heard the participants say about their experiences, asking them if I was paraphrasing their information accurately. I also used phone calls and e-mail as vehicles for member checking. Peer review was ongoing with a group of colleagues.

Mary Douglas's (1982) grid and group typology provided the theoretical lens for the study. Two dimensions affect individual choices in Douglas's theory: individual and group behavior. Douglas uses "grid" for the dimension of individualism and "group" for the dimension of social incorporation. Using grid and group as dimensions going from weak to strong, four environments provide the framework of the grid and group theory: bureaucratic, corporate, individualist, and collectivist. The theory was applied a posteriori, that is, the theory was applied after data analysis and the themes had emerged.

The study was guided by three research questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the university environment?
2. What are the students' preferred work values, mind-sets, and cultural biases (social game)?

3. What is the relationship between the students' perceptions of a specific university environment and the students' preferred work values, mind-sets, and cultural biases (social game)?

Summary of the Findings

By triangulating the data, I assessed the student's preferred work values, mind-sets, and cultural biases as they related to the school environment. The data showed that the participants preferred a strong group environment. The participants were evenly split on their preference for an environment with little autonomy and many rules and specific roles dominating the environment, or an environment with a great deal of autonomy with few rules and roles in the environment. The data also showed that the majority of the participants perceived Heartland University in the corporate quadrant, which is an environment that has minimal autonomy with specifically defined rules and roles, but that also had strong allegiance to school, group goals and activities, and prioritized group interest over individual interest.

In analyzing the themes that emerged from the data and looking at the themes through the grid and group lens, the congruency and lack of congruency of the participants' preferences and perceptions could be evaluated. The participants' preferences were not congruent with their perceptions for close student/teacher relationships or faculty support. Although the participants were either successful in earning their bachelor's degrees or had a plan to do so, some of the participants had challenges in persisting and overcoming barriers.

The participants responded to two assessments which placed them in one of four quadrants in the Douglas (1982) grid and group typology. According to the Social Game

Assessment Tool, four of the participants preferred the characteristics of the corporate quadrant and four preferred the characteristics of the collectivist quadrant. Although the corporate quadrant exhibits strong grid characteristics and the collectivist quadrant exhibits weak grid characteristics, both corporate and collectivist quadrants exhibit strong group characteristics. According to the Grid and Group Assessment, seven of the eight participants perceived Heartland University as a corporate environment, one with strong grid and also strong group characteristics.

Four of the participants' preferences for a school environment and their perceptions of school environments were congruent, preferring a corporate environment and perceiving HU as a corporate environment. However, only two of these four persisted in earning bachelor's degrees. In the group category, seven participants preferred a school environment that had strong group characteristics and perceived HU as a school environment that had strong group characteristics. Of these seven participants, five persisted and earned bachelor's degrees.

Data gathering and data analysis of the interviews and field notes produced four themes. I further analyzed the participants' preferences for their school experiences and their perceptions of their school experiences using the theoretical lens of the grid and group theory. The four themes with the sub-themes of each follow:

The freshman year.

Student/teacher relationships.

Effectiveness of instruction.

The freshman schedule.

Balancing social life and academics.

Preparation for college.

Sufficient foundation in science, math, and research skills.

Bringing in college credit through concurrent enrollment.

Paying for school.

Financial cost of college.

College Success: who or what helped.

Proximity to home.

Family and friend support.

Faculty support.

Personal goals.

The participants' preferences and perceptions for a school environment were not congruent for student/teacher relationships, and faculty support. The eight participants preferred an environment with strong group characteristics including social incorporation and pressure to consider group goals and activities; however, they perceived the instructors as exhibiting characteristics of weak group including minimal social incorporation and minimal pressure to consider group goals and activities in both student/teacher relationships and faculty support.

Conclusions

The research questions that guided this study are discussed below:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the university environment?

According to the participants' responses on the Grid and Group Assessment Tool, six participants perceived Heartland University as a corporate environment, one participant perceived HU as a bureaucratic environment, and one participant, Betty,

perceived HU as being on the line between the corporate and collectivist environments.

Betty answered in the strong grid range on two questions that defined strong grid characteristics as follows:

1 Authority structures are:

decentralized/
nonhierarchical

**centralized/
hierarchical**

2 Roles are:

nonspecialized/
no explicit job
Descriptions

**specialized/
explicit job
descriptions**

These answers indicate strong grid; even though Betty's overall responses placed her on the line between the corporate and collectivist quadrants, her answers to these two questions indicate a placement in the corporate quadrant, which has strong grid characteristics.

The corporate environment exhibits strong group characteristics: strong allegiance to school, strong pressure to consider group goals and activities, strong social incorporation, and the group's interest prioritized over the individuals' interest. The corporate culture also exhibits strong grid characteristics: minimal autonomy, specifically defined roles, rules, and responsibilities, and centralized power and authority. One can conclude from the interviews that the majority of the participants perceived the environment of Heartland University as corporate as the assessments indicated.

Field notes taken before and after the interviews support this perception. The library, which has undergone a recent renovation, is sophisticated in its appearance. A coffee shop, group study areas, reference desks, and numerous computers make up the

first floor. Interactive smart screens have been added to this area to further enhance the students' access to current technology. The second floor also has group study areas as well as two large rooms specifically designed for quiet study. The third and fourth floors have book stacks as well as group and individual study areas.

The ongoing professional maintenance of the library and the surrounding area exhibited a characteristic of strong grid. Centralized power and authority would be necessary to coordinate the maintenance of the area, as well as defined roles and responsibilities. The social incorporation shown by the students in their use of the library and its surrounding areas indicates strong group.

Strong grid characteristics were also evident in new student services with offerings of camps, orientations, and a week of welcoming activities the first week of classes. The university also exhibits strong grid characteristics in instituting one day a week, before home football games, as a day that everyone on campus should wear school colors.

Four themes emerged in analyzing the interviews: Freshman year concerns, preparation for college, paying for school, and college success: who or what helped. Within each of the themes, sub-themes were noted.

Although all the participants enjoyed their overall experience at HU, some details of their freshman year were not positive. The participants thought the relationship between freshman students and instructors was weak. They also saw the large class sizes as being a deterrent to effective instruction and interesting classes. Several of the participants thought the freshman schedule that was full of general education classes was

difficult. The participants commented on the difficulty of managing the freedom of being a freshman in college and the responsibility of their classes.

The participants found college coursework more difficult than their high school coursework and more difficult than they had expected. Four mentioned that math and science courses were more difficult than they thought they would be. They did not feel prepared for some of these courses. Although most thought they were prepared for their freshman composition classes, they thought more emphasis on research skills at the high school level would have been helpful to them. The participants said more emphasis on the concurrent enrollment program available to high school students was needed.

Most of the participants found college expensive; however, they all found ways to pay for school through debt and non-debt sources. The participants thought that financial help was available if students searched for it. The participants did not suggest financing a college education was easy, but they did think it was accessible at Heartland University for those students who wanted to search for financial sources.

The participants wanted to stay close to home when they were going to college. They thought the support of their family was particularly helpful. The close proximity of HU helped them make the decision to stay close to home. Staying in the same area as high school friends had some benefits and some disadvantages. Always having someone to “hang out with” was an advantage; however, if their friends were not in school, it at times proved to be a disadvantage to the participants’ success in school. The participants also thought the instructors of the courses in their major area of study to be “awesome.” They said they felt like part of a community. And finally, the participants thought that personal goals to finish school were important.

While the participants perceived Heartland University as an environment with central authority and a hierarchy of rules and specific roles embedded within the hierarchy, they also saw the university as one that valued strong loyalty to school, social incorporation, and advancing group goals. Overall, the participants enjoyed their time at HU, despite perceiving details of their freshman year as not fully satisfactory.

2. What are the students' preferred work values, mind-sets, and cultural biases (social game)?

According to the Social Game Assessment, four of the participants preferred a corporate environment and four preferred a collectivist environment. Both quadrants exhibit strong group characteristics including a strong allegiance to school and strong social incorporation. The two quadrants are opposite of each other in the grid category. The corporate quadrant exhibits characteristics of strong grid and the collectivist quadrant exhibits characteristics of weak grid. High grid characteristics include minimal autonomy, specifically defined roles, rules, and responsibilities, and centralized power and authority. Weak grid characteristics exhibit the opposite: maximum autonomy, loosely defined roles, rules, and responsibilities, and decentralized power and authority.

The interviews support the assessment results with the participants' preferences for strong group activities. All eight of the participants preferred an atmosphere of much allegiance and loyalty to the school. All of the participants had a good experience at HU and several made statements about HU being a good place to be. The participants preferred a close student/teacher relationship and strong faculty support. Both of these preferences exhibit social incorporation, a characteristic of strong group.

The participants also preferred some autonomy in selecting their courses during their freshman year and preferred effective and interesting instruction. Both of these preferences exhibit weak grid, allowing students more control over their schedules and instructors more control over selecting curricula, texts, and instructional methods.

The participants preferred a stronger high school foundation in some of the core areas of their high school coursework, specifically, science, math, and research. They also were strong advocates of earning some college credit before entering college through the concurrent enrollment program. The participants preferred staying close to home and enjoyed the support of their families and friends.

All of the participants preferred an environment with strong group characteristics that incorporated individuals into the group culture. The participants preferred to be in a setting that valued loyalty to the school, group activities and interests. They showed a dislike for some strong grid characteristics when these characteristics interfered with the participants' taking ownership of their education and discouraged effective instruction in their courses; however, the participants enjoyed the result of a strong grid system in the services that the university could provide for its students.

3. What is the relationship between the students' perceptions of a specific university environment and the students' preferred work values, mind-sets, and cultural biases (social game)?

According to the two assessments, four of the participants who perceived Heartland University as a corporate environment also preferred a corporate environment. Of these four participants, two had finished their bachelor's degrees and two had not yet finished their degrees. Three of the remaining four participants preferred a collectivist

school environment but perceived HU as a corporate environment, and one participant preferred a collectivist school environment but perceived HU as a bureaucratic environment.

Examined separately, the grid and group categories reveal the participants' preference for a strong group school environment was congruent with their perception of the environment at HU for all but one participant. The participants' preferences for social incorporation as well as their loyalty to the university are characteristics of strong group and support the premise that at least in the group category, their perceptions of the university and their preferences for a school environment were congruent.

The same cannot be said for the grid category. Four preferred a strong grid environment and four preferred a weak grid environment. The participants all perceived HU as having a strong grid environment, one with minimum autonomy, centralized power and authority, and specifically defined roles, rules and responsibilities. While the participants appeared to enjoy the benefits of a well-maintained university, certain areas in the strong grid systems of the university were only tolerated. Even though the participants expected large classes, they preferred classes with more interesting and effective instruction. Although they understood the student to teacher ratio in large classes prohibited close student/teacher relationships their freshman year, they preferred their more comfortable relationships with their high school teachers.

The data showed that the participants preferred a strong group environment; however, the participants were evenly split on their preference for an environment with little autonomy and many rules and specific roles dominating the environment, or an environment with a great deal of autonomy with few rules and roles in the environment.

The data also showed that the majority of the participants perceived Heartland University in the corporate quadrant, which is an environment that has minimal autonomy with specifically defined rules and roles, but that also has strong allegiance to school and strong social incorporation. While one can conclude that the participants' preferences and perceptions were congruent in the group characteristics, the same is not true of the grid characteristics. Further, a specific examination of the detail of the freshman year reveals a lack of congruency in key areas.

During analysis of the themes that emerged from the data through the grid and group lens, the congruency and lack of congruency of the participants' preferences and perceptions could be evaluated. The participants' preferences were not congruent with their perceptions of close student/teacher relationships and faculty support. Even though the participants were successful in earning their bachelor's degrees or had a plan to do so, the study showed that some of the participants had challenges in persisting and barriers to overcome. The participants' preferences and perceptions for their freshman year experiences were not congruent; however, six of the eight ultimately earned bachelor's degrees. Thus the importance of congruency of perceptions and preferences for students' success in earning bachelor's degrees is not supported in this study. The criterion for success for this study was the participants persisting and earning bachelor's degrees. Only two of the participants who earned bachelor's degrees showed congruency in their preferences and perceptions for a university environment. The other four who earned bachelor's degrees did not show congruency in their preferences and perceptions for a university environment; thus, the study did not support the idea that one of the

reasons for students not persisting is the lack of congruency between what they prefer their school environment and what they perceive their school environment to be.

Implications for Research, Theory, and Practice

This descriptive case study, while limited in scope, benefits research, theory, and practice.

Implications for Research

Research on college retention and college persistence has been on-going for decades (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, & Hayek, 2007; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975). However, while college enrollment continues to increase, during the last decade the college graduation rate has remained at about 31% of 25 to 29 year-olds (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009a).

While statistical evidence is effective in providing one view of the problem of students persisting in college until completion of a degree, a qualitative view of students who have completed bachelor's degrees and those who have attended college but have not completed their degrees provides valuable insight. The participants' stories about their freshman year support the earlier research of social and academic integration (Tinto, 1998). Earlier research also supports the importance of interaction between faculty and students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1998). The participants in this study emphasized their preference for close student/teacher relationships supporting the importance of interaction with faculty.

Implications for Theory

Using Douglas's (1982) grid and group theory in educational settings is beneficial in understanding educational environments. The theory is based on the action and

decisions of individuals. Using the characteristics of the four quadrants, individuals can be seen as working from different environments. While not being predictive, by using grid and group characteristics, the action and decisions of the individuals can be understood within the dimensions of a certain environment. In educational settings, analyzing the actions and decisions of the participants in the setting through the grid and group lens, provides insight into why individuals behave in certain ways. Further, it provides insight into how environments and the individuals in those environments change.

Douglas's (1982) theory has been used in many settings (Braman, Kahan, & Grimmelmann, 2005; Jayne, 2003; Lockhart, 1999). Harris (2005) applied grid and group typology to school settings, providing characteristics of the four quadrants in school environments. Douglas's typology is a tool that allows a look at actions and decisions and a finite framework through which to view them. This descriptive case study adds yet another study of educational environments using Douglas's grid and group typology.

Implications for Practice

This study benefits practice by allowing the student voice to be heard. A qualitative voice allows the experience to support the statistical evidence. The participants' description of their university experiences provides insight into problems that need to be addressed. In looking at the data, one can see the areas of difficulty for the students. The participants discussed their preparation for college, their freshman year, and their experiences with the freedom that college provided. They emphasized the importance of their support systems in working through barriers in order to complete their degrees.

The participants preferred strong social incorporation, strong pressure to consider the group's goals and activities, and strong allegiance to school. The implication for universities is to take advantage of students' preferences in as many university settings as possible, including academic and social settings. Research has shown that the more students are academically and socially involved on campus and the more they interact with their peers as well as with faculty members, the more likely they are to persist (Tinto, 1998).

Implications for high schools include providing more information to high school students about the availability of concurrent enrollment. Students' early awareness of the benefits of earning college credit in high school at a reduced financial cost is essential if students are going to take advantage of this program. Also, participants in this study focused on weaknesses in their academic preparation, specifically in science, math, and research skills. Implications include reviewing policies and funding practices that affect these curricular areas.

While none of these areas are new to the research, the participants' unique views of their experiences can provide insight and perhaps impetus for changes in the college environment. Their candor about their university experiences was exceptional. They were able to remain loyal to the university they attended, although they described details that were not positive in their experiences. In reading the participants' stories, practitioners may discover a way to impact student persistence on college campuses.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although the interviews and assessments provided important information about the participants' experiences at the university, the study may have been improved if

additional participants had been located. Another limitation of the study was minimal demographic information. Expanded demographic information could have provided additional insight into the participants' preferences for a school environment and their perceptions of Heartland University.

Recommendations for further research include research focusing on the specific concerns of the freshman year. Studying specific areas of the freshman year in a qualitative format may provide greater insight into the persistence of freshman students. A study comparing the perceptions and preferences of instructors of freshman level classes and the perceptions and preferences of students of the same classes would be interesting. Using Douglas's (1982) grid and group typology along with the characteristics of school environments provided by Harris (2005) could provide some valuable insight into these courses. Research questions still to be explored include the following:

1. How do instructors of freshman level classes perceive their roles as educators of freshman level students?
2. How do students in freshman level classes perceive their roles as students in these classes?
3. How does Douglas's (1982) grid and group typology explain the relationship between freshman students and instructors of freshman classes?

Comments

During my career first as a high school teacher and then as a high school principal, I watched as students left the relative comfort of the high school setting and went off to college. I watched as some who I thought were well prepared and ready for

the college experience did not make it through the first year. Others continued their college career and ultimately earned their degrees. In looking at these students from the perspective of a high school principal, I could not help but wonder why some completed their degrees and others did not. While this study has not provided definitive answers to my questions, it has brought me closer to an understanding of college persistence. I find myself thinking, not only of the college student, but also of the high school, the junior high, and the elementary student. And I remember as a teacher and as a principal, always pushing the status quo.

The status quo must always be questioned. I pushed myself and my faculty and staff to understand their role in providing pathways for student success in what they accomplished in their classrooms and offices every day. What could we have done differently? Perhaps reach across school sites and encourage teachers and counselors of junior high students to encourage students to search for careers and set goals. Perhaps allow time for high school counselors to help students in an ongoing appraisal of the cost of postsecondary education and the sources for funding their goals. Perhaps increase rigor and expectations of what students must learn in their classes in junior high and high schools as well as an honest look at what students are learning about science and math in elementary classrooms.

While the hopes and dreams of a first grade student may seem far removed from the college professor or even the high school teacher, in order to crack the code for college persistence, we must look at congruency of preferred and perceived environments; we must look at student/faculty relationships at the college level; we must look at faculty support for students in their endeavors to earn a bachelor's degree. We

must also look at our kindergarteners, our first graders, our junior high students, and our high school students to access what more can be done to provide avenues for them to fulfill their goals.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SOCIAL GAME ASSESSMENT TOOL

Item	Grid Consideration	Score
1	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where authority structures are:</p> <p>decentralized/ nonhierarchical centralized/ hierarchical</p>	
2	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where my role(s) is:</p> <p>nonspecialized/ no explicit job descriptions specialized/explicit job descriptions.</p>	
3	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where teachers have:</p> <p>full autonomy in textbook selection no autonomy in textbook selection</p>	
4	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where individual teachers have:</p> <p>full autonomy in generating their educational goals for their classrooms no autonomy in generating their educational goals for their classrooms</p>	
5	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where individual teachers have:</p> <p>full autonomy in choosing instructional methods/strategies no autonomy in choosing instructional methods/strategies</p>	
6	<p>I prefer a teaching and learning atmosphere where students are:</p> <p>encouraged to participate in/ take ownership of their education discouraged from participating in/ taking ownership of their education</p>	

7	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where teachers obtain instructional resources (i.e., technology, manipulatives, materials, and tools) through:</p> <p>individual competition/negotiation administrative allotment/ allocation</p>	
8	<p>I prefer a teaching and learning atmosphere where instruction is:</p> <p>individualized/personalized for each student not individualized/personalized for each student</p>	
9	<p>I am motivated by:</p> <p>intrinsic/self-defined interests extrinsic/institutional rewards</p>	
10	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where hiring decisions are:</p> <p>decentralized/controlled by teachers centralized/controlled by administrator(s)</p>	
11	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where class schedules are determined through:</p> <p>individual teacher negotiation institutional rules/routines</p>	
12	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where rules and procedures are:</p> <p>few/implicit numerous/explicit</p>	
<p>Sum of sample grid scores: _____</p> <p>Average of sample grid scores (sum/12): _____</p>		

Item	Group Consideration	Score
1	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where instructional activities are initiated/planned by:</p> <p>individual teachers working alone all educators working collaboratively</p>	
2	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where educators' socialization and work are:</p> <p>separate/dichotomous activities incorporated/united activities</p>	
3	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where rewards primarily benefit:</p> <p>the individual everyone at the school site</p>	
4	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where teaching and learning are planned/organized around:</p> <p>individual teacher goals/interests group goals/interests</p>	
5	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where teaching performance is evaluated according to:</p> <p>individual teacher goals, priorities, and criteria group goals, priorities, and criteria</p>	
6	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where members work:</p> <p>in isolation toward goals and objectives collaboratively toward goals and objectives</p>	

7	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where curricular goals are generated:</p> <p>individually collaboratively</p>	
8	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where communication flows primarily through:</p> <p>individual, informal networks corporate, formal networks</p>	
9	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where instructional resources are controlled/owned:</p> <p>individually collaboratively</p>	
10	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where educators and students have:</p> <p>no allegiance/loyalty to the school much allegiance/loyalty to the school</p>	
11	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where responsibilities of teachers and administrators are:</p> <p>ambiguous/fragmented with no accountability clear/communal with much accountability</p>	
12	<p>I prefer a work atmosphere where most decisions are made:</p> <p>privately by factions or independent verdict corporately by consensus or group approval</p>	
		Sum of group scores: _____ Average of group scores (sum/12): _____

(Harris, 2005, p. 184-189).

APPENDIX B: GRID AND GROUP ASSESSMENT TOOL

Item	Grid Consideration	Score
1	<p>Authority structures are:</p> <p>decentralized/ nonhierarchical</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">centralized/ hierarchical</p>	
2	<p>Roles are:</p> <p>nonspecialized/ no explicit job descriptions</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">specialized/ explicit job descriptions</p>	
3	<p>Individual teachers have:</p> <p>full autonomy in textbook selection</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">no autonomy in textbook selection</p>	
4	<p>Individual teachers have:</p> <p>full autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">no autonomy in generating educational goals for their classrooms</p>	
5	<p>Individual teachers have:</p> <p>full autonomy in selecting instructional methods/ strategies</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">no autonomy in selecting instructional methods/ strategies</p>	
6	<p>Students are:</p> <p>encouraged to participate in and take ownership of their education</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">discouraged from participating in and taking ownership of their education</p>	

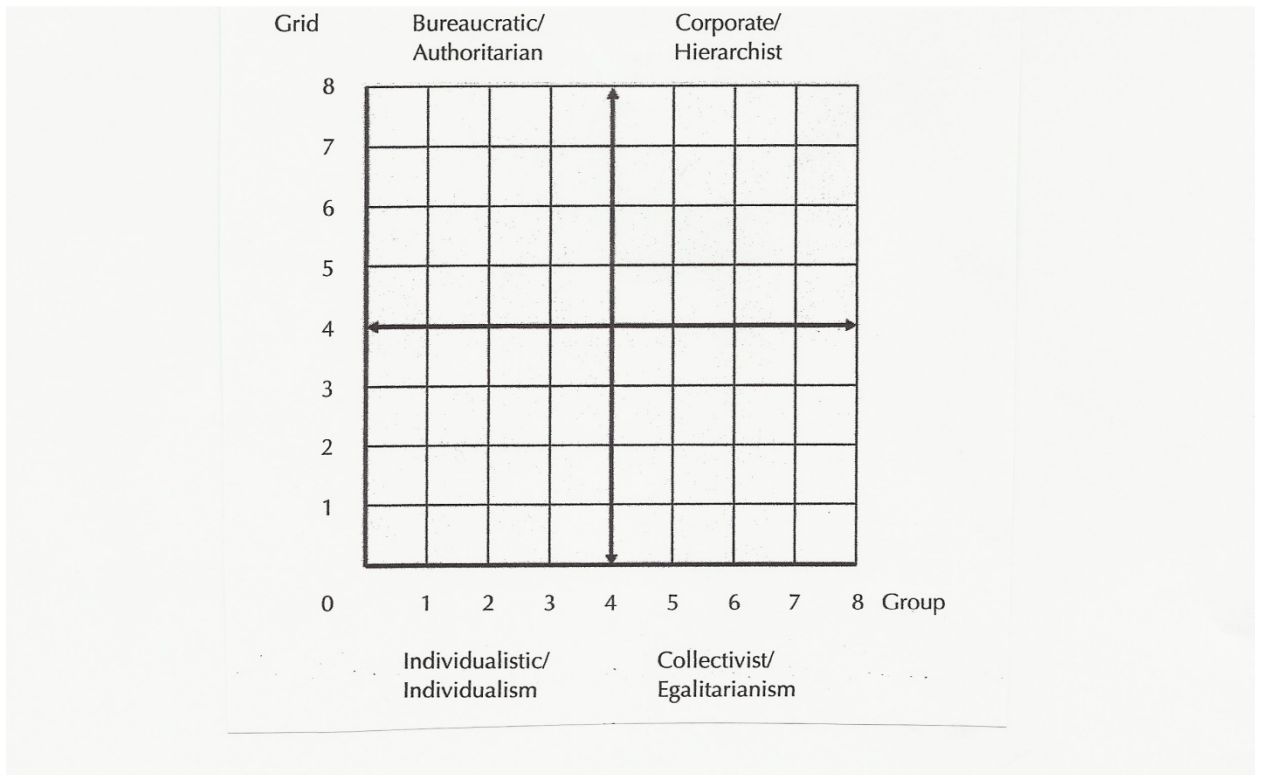
Item	Grid Consideration	Score
7	<p>Teachers obtain instructional resources (i.e., technology, manipulatives, materials, and tools) through:</p> <p>individual competition/ negotiation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">administrative allotment/ allocation</p>	
8	<p>Instruction is:</p> <p>individualized/ personalized for each student</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">not individualized/ personalized for each student</p>	
9	<p>Individual teachers are motivated by:</p> <p>intrinsic/ self-defined interests</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">extrinsic/ institutional rewards</p>	
10	<p>Hiring decisions are:</p> <p>decentralized/ controlled by teachers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">centralized/ controlled by administrator(s)</p>	
11	<p>Class schedules are determined through:</p> <p>individual teacher negotiation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">institutional rules/ routines</p>	
12	<p>Rules and procedures are:</p> <p>few/implicit</p> <p style="text-align: center;">← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 →</p> <p style="text-align: right;">numerous/explicit</p>	
Sum of grid scores: _____		
Average of grid scores (sum/12): _____		

Item	Group Consideration	Score
1	<p>Instructional activities are initiated/planned by:</p> <p>individual teachers working alone all educators working collaboratively</p>	
2	<p>Educators' socialization and work are:</p> <p>separate/dichotomous activities incorporated/united activities</p>	
3	<p>Extrinsic rewards primarily benefit:</p> <p>the individual everyone at the school site</p>	
4	<p>Teaching and learning are planned/organized around:</p> <p>individual teacher goals/interests group goals/interests</p>	
5	<p>Teaching performance is evaluated according to:</p> <p>individual teacher goals, priorities, and criteria group goals, priorities, and criteria</p>	
6	<p>Members work:</p> <p>in isolation toward goals and objectives collaboratively toward goals and objectives</p>	
7	<p>Curricular goals are generated:</p> <p>individually collaboratively</p>	

Item	Group Consideration	Score
8	<p>Communication flows primarily through:</p> <p>individual, informal networks corporate, formal networks</p>	
9	<p>Instructional resources are controlled/owned:</p> <p>individually collaboratively</p>	
10	<p>Educators and students have:</p> <p>no allegiance/loyalty to the school much allegiance/loyalty to the school</p>	
11	<p>Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are:</p> <p>ambiguous/fragmented with no accountability clear/communal with much accountability</p>	
12	<p>Most decisions are made:</p> <p>privately by factions or independent verdict corporately by consensus or group approval</p>	
Sum of group scores: _____		
Average of group scores (sum/12): _____		

(Harris, 2005, p. 193-196).

APPENDIX C: GRID AND GROUP GRAPH TEMPLATE



(Harris, 2005, p. 197).

APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Name: _____

Circle one: **MALE** **FEMALE**

Age: _____

1. From what high school did you graduate? _____

2. In what year did you graduate? _____

3. What year did you enter OSU? _____

Circle **YES** or **No** for the following questions.

- | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| 4. Did you have any college credits when you graduated from high school? | YES | NO |
| 5. Were you a transfer student? | YES | NO |
| 6. Have you been continuously enrolled (excluding the summer semester) since you started your postsecondary education? | YES | NO |
| 7. Have you taken remediation courses in college? | YES | NO |

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Describe your experience at Heartland University?
- In your opinion, why was your experience successful
- In your opinion, why was your experience unsuccessful?
- What did you do to be successful at HU?
- Who, if anyone, helped you?
- What was the most difficult aspect you faced?
- What/who prepared you for the venture? How?
- How could you have been better prepared?
- What metaphor best describes your college experience?
- What/who in your high school setting prepared you for your college experience?
- What/who in your high school created barriers for your entrance in college?
- How did you overcome those barriers?
- What metaphor best describes your high school experience?

APPENDIX F
ASSESSMENT RESPONSES

Item	Scale: 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8	Individual Scores							
		Frank	John	Allen	Joanne	Mary	Betty	Michael	Edward
Social Game Assessment Tool: Grid									
1	I prefer a work atmosphere where authority structures are: decentralized/ nonhierarchical								
	centralized/ hierarchical	8	6	6	6	3	5	7	6
2	I prefer a work atmosphere where my role(s) is: nonspecialized/ no explicit job descriptions								
	specialized/explicit job descriptions	7	8	4	7	5	7	6	5
3	I prefer a work atmosphere where teachers have: full autonomy in textbook selection								
	no autonomy in textbook selection	1	3	3	1	4	6	4	6
4	I prefer a work atmosphere where individual teachers have: full autonomy in generating their educational goals for their classrooms								
	no autonomy in generating their educational goals for their classrooms	1	3	4	2	4	3	4	3
5	I prefer a work atmosphere where individual teachers have: full autonomy in choosing instructional methods/strategies								
	no autonomy in choosing instructional methods/strategies	3	3	5	2	2	3	6	5
6	I prefer a teaching and learning atmosphere where students are: encouraged to participate in/ take ownership of their education								
	discouraged from participating in/ taking ownership of their education	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
7	I prefer a work atmosphere where teachers obtain instructional resources (i.e., technology, manipulatives, materials, and tools) through: individual competition/ negotiation								
	administrative allotment/ allocation	6	1	3	3	6	6	4	5
8	I prefer a teaching and learning atmosphere where instruction is: individualized/ personalized for each student								
	not individualized/ personalized for each student	3	8	2	4	2	2	3	6
9	I am motivated by: Intrinsic/ self-defined interests								
	extrinsic/ institutional rewards	5	6	2	1	4	7	2	1
10	I prefer a work atmosphere where hiring decisions are: decentralized/ controlled by teachers								
	centralized/ controlled by administrator(s)	4	1	3	3	6	6	6	6

Item	Scale: 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8	Individual Scores							
		Frank	John	Allen	Joanne	Mary	Betty	Michael	Edward
11	I prefer a work atmosphere where class schedules are determined through: individual teacher negotiation Institutional rules/routines	8	5	6	2	4	3	6	2
12	I prefer a work atmosphere where rules and procedures are: few/implicit numerous/explicit	6	2	5	4	3	2	2	5
Social Game Assessment Tool: Group									
1	I prefer a work atmosphere where instructional activities are initiated/planned by: individual teachers working alone all educators working collaboratively	6	3	6	5	2	7	2	5
2	I prefer a work atmosphere where educators' socialization and work are: separate/dichotomous activities incorporated/united activities	6	8	7	5	5	7	3	6
3	I prefer a work atmosphere where rewards primarily benefit: the individual everyone at the school site	2	2	7	7	6	7	7	7
4	I prefer a work atmosphere where teaching and learning are planned/organized around: individual teacher goals/interests group goals/interests	7	3	6	6	4	8	2	6
5	I prefer a work atmosphere where teaching performance is evaluated according to: individual teacher goals, priorities, and criteria group goals, priorities, and criteria	4	1	3	6	5	7	2	7
6	I prefer a work atmosphere where members work: in isolation toward goals and objectives collaboratively toward goals and objectives	3	3	6	6	6	7	7	6
7	I prefer a work atmosphere where curricular goals are generated: individually collaboratively	5	3	6	7	7	7	6	4
8	I prefer a work atmosphere where communication flows primarily through: individual, informal networks corporate, formal networks	3	3	4	5	3	7	2	4
9	I prefer a work atmosphere where instructional resources are controlled/owned: individually collaboratively	4	2	7	6	2	6	7	5

Item	Scale: 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8	Individual Scores							
		Frank	John	Allen	Joanne	Mary	Betty	Michael	Edward
6	Members work: in isolation toward goals and objectives								
	collaboratively toward goals and objectives	6	6	5	6	4	5	3	7
7	Curricular goals are generated: individually								
	collaboratively	8	2	5	6	5	6	7	3
8	Communication flows primarily through: individual, informal networks								
	corporate, formal networks	7	3	6	7	3	6	4	4
9	Instructional resources are controlled/owned: individually								
	collaboratively	6	8	6	2	6	7	6	6
10	Educators and students have: no allegiance/ loyalty to the school								
	much allegiance/ loyalty to the school	7	3	7	8	8	8	8	6
11	Responsibilities of teachers and administrators are: ambiguous/ fragmented with no accountability								
	clear/communal with much accountability	7	4	4	6	6	5	5	7
12	Most decisions are made: privately by factions or independent verdict								
	corporately by consensus or group approval	2	2	6	4	5	7	7	6

APPENDIX G

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, November 17, 2010
IRB Application No ED10147
Proposal Title: Perceptions and Preferences of Students from Small Rural High Schools in Pursuing Bachelor's Degrees

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 11/16/2011

Principal Investigator(s):

Margaret Hrencher 601 Harned Ave. Stillwater, OK 74075	Edward Harris 308 Willard Stillwater, OK 74078
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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

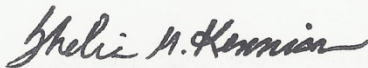
The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Margaret O. Hrencher

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Thesis: PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES OF STUDENTS FROM SMALL RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN PURSUING BACHELOR'S DEGREES

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Stillwater, Oklahoma September 14, 1947, the daughter of A.J. and Opal Schott.

Education: Graduated from Stillwater High School, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 1965; received Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 1969. Received Master of Science in Educational Administration from Oklahoma State University in May, 1988. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree with a major in School Administration from Oklahoma State University in May, 2011.

Experience: Employed as a public school teacher at Perkins-Tryon High School in Perkins, Oklahoma, August, 1980, to May, 1989. Employed as a public school teacher and assistant principal at Perkins-Tryon High School in Perkins, Oklahoma, August, 1989, to May, 1992. Employed as high school principal at Perkins-Tryon High School, June, 1992, to June 2008.

Name: Margaret O. Hrencher

Date of Degree: May, 2011

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES OF STUDENTS FROM SMALL
RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN PURSUING BACHELOR'S DEGREES

Pages in Study: 160

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major Field: School Administration

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this descriptive case study was to describe the perceptions and preferences of students from small rural high schools in pursuing bachelor's degrees in a university setting. The lack of congruency between the students' preferred university environment and their perception of their university environment was posited as a reason for students not persisting and earning bachelor's degrees. Eight participants were part of the study. The participants graduated from high schools of less than 400 students which were located within 60 miles of the university they attended. Each participant responded to two assessments: the Social Game Assessment Tool and the Grid and Group Assessment Tool, and each participant participated in an interview. Data was triangulated through the assessments, interviews, field notes, university brochures, catalogs, and websites.

Findings and Conclusions: The participants' preferences for a university environment and

their perceptions of their university environment were not congruent for four of the six students who earned bachelor's degrees, the criterion for success for this study. The study specifically showed a lack of congruency in the student's preferences and perception of student/instructor relationships and faculty support during their freshman year. Since six of the eight participants earned bachelor's degrees, the importance of congruency of perceptions and preferences for student success is not supported in this study.