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# Persistence and attrition among college students facing similar challenges : an analysis of the choice to stay or leave.

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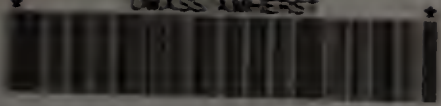
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**FIVE COLLEGE  
DEPOSITORY**

PERSISTENCE AND ATTRITION  
AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS FACING SIMILAR CHALLENGES:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHOICE TO STAY OR LEAVE

A Dissertation Presented

by

JOSEPH P. FARRAGHER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1994

Education

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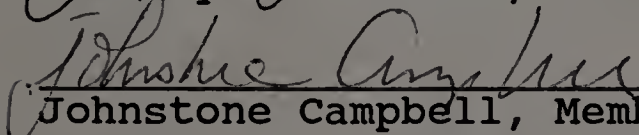
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## DEDICATION

To Kate, Patrick and Peter:

To Kate

for the sacrifices she made  
and the incredible support she lent  
over the last eight and one half years  
so I could pursue my dream;

To Patrick and Peter

who have waited through seven chapters  
and over 49,000 words  
for a time when I won't have to sit  
at the computer and work on this project  
and I will play games with them again.

I love you all very much.

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I sincerely believe my faith had a lot to do with my success and, therefore, wish to acknowledge the member's of the Lord's team that were constantly pulling and praying for me -- Sister Mary Bernard, Monsignor John Bendik, Father Henry Gagnon (who salvaged my faith during my senior year in

college) and Sister Sarah Landis (who always says "I'm in sales not management").

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To all of you: Thanks for assisting with my journey toward this dream, this fantasy. Your participation will always be treasured and admired.

ABSTRACT

PERSISTENCE AND ATTRITION

AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS FACING SIMILAR CHALLENGES:

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHOICE TO STAY OR LEAVE

May, 1994

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Directed by: Professor Jeffrey Eiseman

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As the number of students entering college declines, or levels off, and competition for these students intensifies, retaining the students they recruit will be the path to survival for many schools. When the retention effort is not successful with individual students, they withdraw from college and become an attrition statistic. This represents a cost to the institution (resources allocated to recruit that student) and lost revenue (tuition and fees).

Many withdrawing students, maybe because of the emotional stress of the situation, cite reasons that will make the exit interview process as short and painless as possible. This leaves the institution in possession of withdrawal data that may not be entirely accurate or

complete. Many decisions are made by institutions, particularly operational changes, relying on this data.

There are two main avenues to sustaining adequate enrollments: recruit a larger class every year to compensate for those who leave; or, concentrate on retaining those recruited. At four-year institutions, retention activities benefit three classes of students, whereas recruitment efforts affect only one (Astin, 1975). Given the reality of declining enrollments and increasing competition, the greatest influence colleges and universities have over enrollment patterns is internal in nature. If the admissions effort has failed to accurately portray the institution's educational and social environment, those responsible for retaining students -- in many cases, all non-admissions personnel -- start from a negative position.

This study will involved five phases. Phase One, presented in chapter 2, involved reviewing relevant dropout and retention literature. Phase Two involved the proposal of an enrollment enhancement plan designed to increase retention. Phase Three involved an interview with the Dean of Students at each institution to obtain an institutional perspective on the reasons they feel students leave their institution, establish a profile of the type(s) of

student(s) they feel their institution serves best, and review current retention practices. This information was used to frame an additional question asked each group of interviewees. Phase Four involved interviewing three groups of students from two different institutions: (a) a group of freshmen who withdrew during their first semester, (b) a group of freshmen who withdrew between their first and second semester, and (c) a group of seniors during their last semester. Phase Five will involve the analysis of the data.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

During the 20 years spanning the late 50's, 60's and early 70's, higher education was a growth industry unconcerned with attracting or retaining its customers, the students. The federal government reported that the number of students increased from 2.5 million in 1955 to 8.8 million in 1974, a more than three-fold increase. Higher education absorbed not only many young people born in the "baby boom," but the percentage of young people who viewed college as necessary expanded. George Keller (1983), in his book Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution in American Higher Education, referred to this period as "the most prosperous years ever for American higher education" (p. 8) and chronicled these other changes: the percentage of 18-to-24-year-olds enrolled for degrees rose from 17.8% in 1955 to 33.5% in 1974; the number of black students in college increased, almost eight times over, from 95,000 in 1955 to 814,000 in 1974; foreign students, who were rare in the United States in the 1950's, numbered 152,000 by 1974; during this period the proportion of women, as they prepared for general equality, increased from one-third to one-half of all those attending colleges and universities (p. 8-9).

In their book, The Strategic Management of College Enrollments, Don Hossler, John Bean & Associates (1990), two of the most widely reputed enrollment management scholars, defined the enrollment situation in which higher education faculty and administrators currently find themselves. In the early 70's, they wrote, "after a hundred years of sustained growth, American colleges and universities began to project declines in student enrollments. Demographic data indicated that the number of new students entering college would diminish throughout the remainder of the century" (p. 3). Near the end of the 1970's, the demographic projections became clearer and bleaker: a 25% national decline in the number of 18-year olds between 1979 and 1994. The 12 states in which this decline would be particularly acute were: Rhode Island -- 49%; Connecticut, Massachusetts and New York -- 43%; New Jersey and Pennsylvania -- 39%; Michigan -- 36%; Minnesota -- 35%; and Illinois, Iowa, Ohio and Wisconsin -- 34% (Nolan, 1988).

In his doctoral dissertation, Charles Pollock (1987a) reviewed the demographic information from a variety of sources including the Carnegie Council. The declines for the period 1978-1997 were not projected to be steady. The years 1978 through 1983 would be a period of level enrollment. A decline in enrollments would occur from 1983 through the 1988-89 academic year followed by a plateau or

potential increases for the 1989-90 and 1990-91 academic years. Higher education would then experience another major decline over the span of eight academic years beginning in the Fall of 1991. According to Pollock (1987a), "the first decline would represent approximately 40% of the total drop in enrollments and the second decline would encompass 60% of the total. Enrollments would begin to increase in the fall of 1998 and would reach 1979 levels by 2010" (pp. 19-20).

In the beginning, most of those involved with the management of the educational enterprise ignored these projections. However, Hossler, Bean & Associates (1990) continued, "faculty and administrators traditionally thought that their mission included 'washing out' a certain number of students each year. [By the mid 70's, though,] with declining enrollments a real possibility, campus administrators quickly became interested in attracting and retaining students from a shrinking pool of applicants" (p. 3-4).

Another trend adding to the enrollment disruption during this period is a changing college completion rate. Throughout most of this century, colleges and universities could count on close to 50% of their students earning undergraduate degrees in four years and another 25% earning degrees later (Cope & Hannah, 1975). More specifically,

Eric Dey (1990), in his review of enrollment data, stated that in 1972, 46.7% of college students earned degrees in four years whereas by 1987 only 36.1% completed degrees in four years. Each institution needs to evaluate and track its own record, of course. In his "Report on Higher Education," Frank Newman (1971) cited a couple of examples: 1) only 30% of entering students at the University of Texas graduated within four years and after a fifth year a total of less than 50%; 2) throughout the California State College system only 13% of entering freshmen graduate from the college they first entered (Cope & Hannah, 1975, p. 135).

Over the last five to ten years, attrition rates have changed only slightly. In 1985, Lee Noel identified attrition rates across all institutional types as follows: "the freshmen-to-sophomore attrition rate increased slightly from 33% in 1975 and 1976 to 35% in 1977; ...[in the early 80's, on the aggregate] 34% of all full-time entering freshmen across America were not at the same institution one year later" (p. 5). Separating the first to second year attrition data by institutional type, the following numbers appear (numbers from Noel, Levitz and Saluri's 1985 study appear first with 1991 ACT data (Noel & Levitz, 1992) in parenthesis): two-year public institutions, 44% (47.9%); four-year public institutions, 33 % (31.9%); two-year

private institutions, 37% (27.4%); and the four-year private institutions, 29% (26.4%).

There have been many studies of enrollment patterns and student choice. For instance, in his book Preventing Students From Dropping Out, Alexander Astin (1975) listed the twelve most often identified reasons for dropping out as: Boredom with courses; financial difficulties; marriage, pregnancy, or other family responsibilities; poor grades; dissatisfaction with requirements or regulations; change in career goals; inability to take desired courses or programs; good job offer; illness or accident; difficulty commuting to college; and disciplinary troubles. From their review of the literature, Cope and Hannah (1975) concluded that "many students, especially at the more selective institutions, are leaving because of dissatisfaction with the academic process, because of the social environment, and because of the desire not to get 'caught up in a meaningless rat race'" (p.5). The reasons cited most often in their studies were: poor choice; bureaucracy; teaching quality; identity seeking; value confrontations; and general circumstances.

Ten years after Cope and Hannah's review, in a book entitled Increasing Student Retention: Effective Programs and Practices for Reducing the Dropout Rate, Lee Noel made the following observation:

Dropping out of college is a complex decision that is nearly always the result of a combination of factors. We therefore have come to think in terms of the themes of dropping out, the forces of attrition, and what we can do to counter them. The major themes we have found are academic boredom and uncertainty about what to study, transition/adjustment problems, limited and/or unrealistic expectations of college, academic underpreparedness, incompatibility, and irrelevancy. [1985, p. 10]

The change being experienced in recent times is summed up in one way by Charles Pollock (1987a):

[Over the last three decades] many colleges...enrolled more students than they could adequately handle; and the term enrollment management referred to the processes of handling the ever increasing masses of students, building classrooms and residence halls, and finding qualified instructors to teach the overwhelming numbers. [The term] enrollment management is currently being used to refer to a process in which the institution attempts to gain control over its own destiny during a period of decline rather than growth. [p. 1]

### Problem Statement

As the number of students entering college declines, or levels off, and competition for these students intensifies, retaining the students they recruit will be the path to survival for many schools. When the retention effort is not successful with individual students, they withdraw from college and become an attrition statistic. This represents a cost to the institution (resources allocated to recruit that student) and lost revenue (tuition and fees).

Most colleges have a formal withdrawal process during which they attempt to ascertain the reasons for withdrawal. Through this withdrawal process, many institutions gather data about their institution and the students who choose to leave. Some researchers have concluded, though, that much of the data are meaningless because student answers are given for convenience. The student tells the exit interviewer the information in a perfunctory manner or checks several responses on the survey so the process can be completed quickly.

Many withdrawing students, maybe because of the emotional stress of the situation, cite reasons that will make the process as short and painless as possible. This leaves the institution in possession of withdrawal data that may not be entirely accurate or complete. Many decisions are made by institutions, particularly operational changes, relying on this data.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the positive contributions to the retention effort that may result from follow up studies of withdrawn students, thereby gaining knowledge of the real reasons students leave, and comparing their responses with the reality of senior persisters who

have faced and survived similar challenges. What lessons can student affairs professionals and others learn from the present study? What changes might strengthen the institution?

Delving further into the reasons why students leave, by conducting a follow-up study several weeks after withdrawal, may prove helpful to institutions sincerely interested in making the appropriate adjustments to their operations. Additionally, identifying a group of seniors with similar general characteristics to those who withdrew and surveying them as to why they persisted accomplishes two objectives: 1) identify some weaknesses within the institution that persisters have tolerated and which, if strengthened, will result in a more positive experience for all involved; and 2) reinforce ideas suggested by withdrawing students which, if implemented, will decrease the attrition rate.

### Significance of study

There are two main avenues to sustaining adequate enrollments: recruit a larger class every year to compensate for those who leave; or, concentrate on retaining those recruited. The former is becoming more and more difficult as the demographic picture gets bleaker. The latter, therefore, presents the greater opportunity for



enrollment enhancement. At four-year institutions, retention activities benefit three classes of students, whereas recruitment efforts affect only one (Astin, 1975). Putting this in clearer perspective Astin (1975) concludes, "investing resources to prevent dropping out may be more 'cost effective' than applying the same resources to more vigorous recruitment" (p. 2). More educationally important, he continues, "changes that help students complete college represent a real service to them, whereas successful recruiting efforts may simply change students' choice of institution" (p. 2).

Given the reality of declining enrollments and increasing competition, the greatest influence colleges and universities have over enrollment patterns is internal in nature. Indeed, the admissions effort is central to the course of institutional survival. The more successful the admissions process is at a particular institution, the greater start that institution has for its retention effort. But once the admissions office has completed its task, those responsible for retention take over. If the admissions effort has failed to accurately portray the institution's educational and social environment, those responsible for retaining students -- in many cases, all non-admissions personnel -- start from a negative position. Levitz & Noel, in a 1988 paper entitled Retention Management -- Catalyst

for Change and Growth, observed that "it is clear that retention and recruitment are closely related, and together contribute to overall enrollment levels at an institution. They are so inextricably linked, in fact, that we say 'retention success is a prerequisite to effective recruiting'" (p. 2).

Adjusting to enrollments that are tapering off can be difficult. Many institutions became accustomed to the rapid expansion of the 60's and 70's. As Astin (1975) described, given the financial and organizational complexities of most higher education institutions, "a 10% decline in enrollment, which is generally accompanied by close to a 10% decline in revenue is not accompanied by a 10% reduction in costs. Under these conditions, adapting to a pattern of steady or even declining enrollments after being used to yearly increases has been traumatic for many institutions" (p. 2).

Higher education tends to look at attrition as a caused event, but no single factor is responsible. Instead, an array of causal factors, forces, or obstacles are responsible. Therefore, according to Edward Anderson (1985), as the various forces acting upon and within particular students or groups of students are identified, and their intensity assessed, colleges and universities need to begin to analyze the causes of attrition. Institutions

must begin the process of planning programs, implementing services, and changing policies and procedures to promote persistence. For as Cope and Hannah (1975) described, attrition is not so much a problem in itself but rather a symptom of other problems.

Alexander Astin (1981) defined a high quality institution of higher education as one that has a solid research method for gathering information about its clientele, the students. Once in possession of this information, the high quality institution has the ability to change programs or policies when adjustments are indicated by the data. Stated in other terms, Astin (1981) says, "quality is equated here not with physical facilities or faculty credentials, but rather with a continuing process of critical examination that focuses on the institution's contribution to the student's intellectual and personal development" (p.162).

In their review of retention studies, "Persistence at the Regent's Universities of Iowa: A Summary of four Studies Covering Twenty Years", Callam, Sjoblom and Wielanga made the following observation:

future studies should make an effort to assess attitudinal and motivational reasons as to why students become persisters or non-persisters. An attempt was made in the 1975-76 study to assess levels of satisfaction and reasons for leaving for the non-persisters. However, no effort was made to compare

similar information for those who persisted to graduation. [1984, p. 11]

It is a given that students who leave before graduation need to be replaced. What some faculty and administrators fail to realize, however, is that dissatisfied students can have a seriously negative effect on continuing recruitment efforts. Noel and Levitz (1992) report that each person who has a complaint will tell between 9 and 11 people. Erdmann (1990) writes, "students who have bad experiences at schools convey their impressions to prospective students. This negative publicity can have catastrophic enrollment consequences" (p. 38). These consequences are particularly acute for institutions that recruit from the same high schools year after year. Ingersoll (1988) tells us that controlling retention cannot be a realistic goal for any college or university where the profile of each year's new class does not correlate with the educational goals of the institution.

Hossler (1990) defines retention in terms of economic and moral victories. He writes, "it is a moral victory because a student has decided that the education a school has to offer is worth pursuing" (p. 294). The school then can address that student as a satisfied and committed customer ready to accept the knowledge and wisdom the institution has to offer. Hossler continues, "it is an

economic victory because the student continues to pay tuition" (p. 294). Given these victories, one has to wonder why, in many cases, the resources allocated to the recruiting effort far outweigh those allocated to retention efforts. Ingersoll (1988) outlines retention resources as being, "the people at the institution, especially the faculty, and the relationship management efforts of all individuals at the institution. Resources also include the service package, meeting expectations, and the characteristics of the entering class" (p. 227).

Noel, Levitz, Saluri & Associates (1985) put these resources into perspective. They comment that institutions striving to improve the quality of campus programs and services, identify the most caring and competent faculty, advisers, and staff and put them in frontline positions, and match responsive services and support directly with student needs will enjoy the benefits made possible by full classrooms. "When students find that their needs are being met, when we facilitate their success in the classroom and help them translate that success into their lives beyond the campus," they surmise, "education becomes a clear priority for them and they return to the campus" (p. xiii). Looking at it from a slightly different angle, Cope and Hannah (1975) posited that where "there is friction between the

person and the place, it is the person who inevitably wears away" (p. vii).

Ernest Boyer (1987) wrote, "For whatever reasons, too many students, once they get to campus, do not make a satisfactory adjustment. Some, for the best of reasons, transfer or drop out, planning to return. Others drift away from campus because of an absence of 'a feeling of belonging or fitting in at the institution'" (pp. 44-45). Identifying the real reasons students leave a college or university before graduation, or, in many cases, before the end of their first semester, will allow student affairs professionals to make meaningful adjustments to the campus environment and increase retention rates. Finding out why students stay may be as beneficial. The more a college knows about student experiences, the better it can hold onto current students as well as create a better campus environment for future students.

Retention is a management challenge. As George Keller (1983) remarked, however, "The very idea of management in higher education sends shudders into the legs and fury into the veins of many scholars" (p. x). The reality of the current situation is, as Keller (1983) continues, that, "Good management is a vital necessity for today's colleges and universities. It has been for decades. But now the

profound changes facing higher education no longer allow campuses to evade the necessity" (p. x). Are higher education institutions up to the challenge of retaining their students in greater numbers in order to keep pace with the declining enrollments and increased competition?

Chapter 2 highlights the contributions of the literature to the field of retention or enrollment management. The term retention is used because the focus will be on the actions of an institution after the students arrive. Chapter 3, then, outlines the method employed as part of this study to research the stated problem and its significance to the future of many institutions of higher education.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter serves as a review of the literature in the areas of enrollment management, retention and attrition. Although not exhaustive, this review presents research and critical analysis by authors who have developed a strong reputation in these subjects. This review, with a few notable exceptions, concerns itself with the writings of the last ten years.

#### Significance of Retention Research

How significant a problem is attrition? Chapter 1 presented many statistics on retention and attrition rates. Tinto's studies, which found that leavers outnumber persisters, put this problem in perspective. Of the 2.8 million students who were new to higher education in 1986, for instance, "over 1.6 million (57%) will leave their first institution without receiving a degree. Of those, approximately 1.2 million (43% of the original number of students) will leave higher education altogether without ever completing a degree program, two- or four-year" (1987, p. 1).

Robert Dickeson (1992), in a paper entitled The Role Retention Plays in Cutback Management, turned some retention



data into dollars and cents. He cited the following example of the revenue impact attrition had on one campus in particular:

| <u>Class</u>                        | <u>No. of Dropouts</u> | <u>Tuition Dollars Lost (Less Institutional Assistance)</u> |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Freshman                            | 441                    | \$4,833,360   |
| Sophomore                           | 236                    | 2,586,560   |
| Junior                              | 117                    | 1,282,320   |
| Senior                              | 57                     | 824,720   |
|                                     |                        | -----   |
| Potential Tuition Loss for one year |                        | \$9,326,960   |
|                                     |                        | =====   |

"No campus in America can afford that kind of needless loss", Dickeson wrote. He went on to bring these kind of numbers into perspective:

Imagine going to the president of your institution with a budget request for \$9 million, the purposes of which are to cut enrollment and to ensure that otherwise academically prepared students would leave, dissatisfied with the institution. Sound crazy? Of course. And yet that is precisely the kind of budget judgments being made, in effect, on countless campuses. Far wiser judgments would be to invest a fraction of the potential loss in diagnostic tools, training programs, quality service programs, and caring professionals that would effectively mount and maintain strong retention initiatives. [1992, p. 3]

The writings in this area reveal that the educational environment has not changed significantly over the years. Consider the following example. In 1966, Alden Thresher, in a book entitled College Admissions and the Public Interest, characterized higher education as a tension between two poles. At one end are the students Thresher called the

naturals, "for whom the urge to know is overmastering, who need no other incentive" (p. 36). At the other end lies a larger group "impelled by practical considerations to 'hire themselves educated.'" For these, a degree is the goal, and what pleasure and interest can be got along the way is only a small extra" (p. 34).

Fast forward to 1989 and a Frances Stage article entitled, "Motivation, Academic and Social Integration and the Early Dropout." In her study, Stage placed students into 3 categories: cognitive, certification, and community service. Using Thresher's polar tension analogy, at one pole would be the "cognitive" subgroup who are "those who attended the university for primarily academic reasons (to seek knowledge for its own sake, to learn for the sake of learning)" (Stage, p.389). At the other pole there would be the largest subgroup, "certification," who were those who "attended the university primarily for practical reasons (to earn a degree, to get a job)" (Stage, p. 389). Even the relative sizes of each author's groups are similar.

Levitz & Noel (1990) also placed students into three categories according to their level of commitment to and involvement with the institution. Using the above analogy the "observably committed" students would be at one pole. These are the students "who take active steps to identify

for the institution what they need" (p. 4). At the other pole would be a group of students Levitz referred to as "students who are academically or socially incompatible with the dominant culture of the institution. For these students," they continued, "there is such a gap between what they need/want and what the institution can or will offer that the dissonance for them is very great" (p. 4).

As further evidence of this static situation, Vincent Tinto (1987) reported that the 4-year completion rate, approximately 45% of the entering cohort, "appears not to have changed substantially over the last hundred years. Though some variations have occurred over time, the observed rate of degree completion today is very nearly the same as that estimated at the turn of the Century" (p. 22).

Where there has been some change, however, is in the categorization of those students in the middle. In the 60's, according to Thresher, the largest number of students "lie between those extremes, the useful and the poetic. Without some spark of response to the inherent interest of the subject," he wrote about this middle group, "study becomes so intolerably dull that few could continue it; some vestige of interest in learning is always present in those who stick to a course" (1966, p. 34). In the 80's, Stage (1989), who sought to categorize students based on their

source of motivation, defined some of this middle group as interested in community service. She placed in the "community service" subgroup "those who attended the university to gain skills for helping others (to prepare for community service, to better serve humankind)" (p. 390).

Levitz & Noel (1990) placed in a "marginally involved" category those students who are "generally invisible to the institution, unless special measures are taken to identify them" (p. 4). These students are generally polite and unobtrusive. Levitz & Noel (1990) further observed that these students "shy away from any situation that would make them stand out or be noticed. These students will almost never follow up on vague or impersonal invitations, such as a faculty member's invitation to 'drop by my office to chat,' or an activity announcement placed on a bulletin board inviting students to come to a meeting or join an organization" (p. 4).

There has been at least one other significant change. The terminology used to describe retention programs as well as the focus of research efforts in this area have evolved. Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates (1985) summed up this shift of emphasis as follows:

In the sixties, we began with an academic literature on issues of student persistence and attainment. During the seventies, the vocabulary shifted from "persistence" to "retention," that is, to the needs of

the institution; the focus moved to techniques and program adaptations believed to retain students. Now we are in a new phase, in which the focus is less on techniques and brushing up on services than it is on the overall character of the experience offered to students. [p. x]

### Causes of Attrition

Attrition research, of course, focuses on the reasons students leave higher education. Robert Cope and William Hannah (1975) put together one of the landmark compilations of attrition information -- Revolving College Doors: The Causes and Consequences of Dropping Out, Stopping Out and Transferring. They identified the following primary reasons for dropping out: poor choice, bureaucracy, teaching quality, identity seeking, value confrontations, and circumstances. Several of these deserve greater explanation.

Cope and Hannah wrote that a large number of students leave their first college or university because they soon realize they made a poor decision. Sometimes it is a "matter of inadequate academic promise on their part," while other times it can be a "matter of insufficient intellectual challenge" (32). Other authors postulate that a poor social environment can be the cause for an early departure. Teaching quality appears to be a frequently cited reason for dropping out among students who leave large universities.

Also mentioned as causes for leaving related to teaching quality are classroom size and a heavy reliance on lecturing.

As mentioned in chapter 1, Astin (1975) listed the 12 reasons most often indicated by students in his studies as reasons for leaving college. The top seven, in terms of percentage response, were: boredom with classes; financial difficulties; marriage, pregnancy or other family responsibilities; poor grades; dissatisfaction with requirements or regulations; change in career goals; and inability to take desired courses or programs (p. 14). In a 1987 article in the Educational Record, Astin, Korn & Green summarized their findings as follows:

Students are most satisfied during their undergraduate years with courses in their majors and with library facilities. They are least satisfied with personal services such as career counseling and advising, academic advising, financial aid, and job placement. Only moderate levels of satisfaction are reported with campus health services, student housing, tutorial and academic assistance, and amount of contact with faculty and administrators. Considering the key role that academic advising can play in student involvement and retention, the low rating given to this important activity by the students should be a cause for concern. [p. 42]

Billson & Terry found the following to be the central problems faced by students: "difficulty coping with the transition into adulthood (for traditional age students); lack of study skills and discipline; inadequate family supports (especially for first generation students);

underdeveloped problem-solving skills; difficulty relating academic work to career plans (or lack of career goals)" (1987, p. 292). The resolution of these problems will determine whether they stay or leave higher education.

More specifically, from a list of 20 alternatives, Cope & Hannah (1975) asked leavers to identify which topics they considered as possible reasons for withdrawal. The 10 cited most frequently were:

- 1) Academic underachievement or difficulty;
- 2) Educational plans and purposes;
- 3) Vocational plans;
- 4) Religious beliefs;
- 5) Attitudes and values;
- 6) Financial problems;
- 7) Plans concerning life in general;
- 8) College rules and regulations;
- 9) Limited offering in college programs; and
- 10) Educational opportunities elsewhere. [p. 53]

To underscore one of the difficulties with attrition research, a review is in order. In the paragraphs above, information was reported from studies conducted by four different authors. Separately, these authors cited close to 40 individual reasons why students have said they made a decision to leave higher education. Although some duplication occurs throughout these studies, if you combine

similar responses, the following 21 individual reasons still remain: inadequate family supports; poor choice; marriage, pregnancy, or other family responsibilities; bureaucracy; values confrontations; boredom with classes; quality of teaching; general circumstances; poor social environment; religious beliefs; college rules and regulations; financial problems; educational plans & purposes; change in career goals; career counseling and advising; academic advising; difficulty coping with the transition into adulthood (identity seeking); underdeveloped problem solving skills; lack of contact with faculty and administration; limited offering in college programs; and academic underachievement or difficulty.

If an institution had 40 students leave in their first semester and each cited a different reason for leaving it would be extremely difficult to draw any conclusions or develop any action plans. Even combining similar reasons, so you have 21 instead of 40, it would still be a challenge to base a retention strategy on such a diverse set of responses. In order to come up with a more manageable number of causes of attrition, these 21 need to be further consolidated. Two reasons can be eliminated as out of the institution's control: inadequate family supports and religious beliefs. A third reason, general circumstances, is eliminated from serious consideration due to its



vagueness. The remaining 18 reasons can then be categorized, for purposes of this study, as follows:

Personal:

Values confrontations

Difficulty coping with the transition into adulthood (identity seeking)

Underdeveloped problem-solving skills

Marriage, pregnancy or other family responsibilities

Financial Problems

Institutional Organizational Structure:

Bureaucracy

College rules and regulations

Poor social environment

Lack of contact with faculty and administrators

Academic:

Boredom with classes and teaching

Limited offering in college programs

Academic underachievement or difficulty

Quality of Teaching

Academic Advising

Student's Educational Commitment:

Educational plans and purposes

Change in career goals

Poor choice

Career counseling and advising

In their review of retention research, Hossler, Bean & Associates (1990) found that students having contact with a faculty member, academic advisor or a residence hall staff member during this critical period were more likely to stay in school than their peers who made no such contact. They cited three separate studies that found "that making a friend during the first month of school increases the chances for retention" (p. 197). Levitz & Noel (1991) advanced the following observation as a result of their many studies:

Frequent interaction with faculty is more strongly related to satisfaction with college than any type of involvement, or indeed, any other student or institutional characteristic. Students who interact frequently with faculty members are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even the administration of the institution. And satisfied students are much more likely to be students who stay. [p. 4]

Much has been written about "student-institution fit" as a key ingredient in the retention process. Hossler (1984) wrote "attracting students who are congruent with the college or university is a proactive approach to reducing the dropout rate" (p. 67). Tinto (1987) wrote "incongruence and isolation are distinct roots of student departure. While the former arises from interactions [between person and environment] and the person's evaluation of the character of those interactions, the latter results from the absence of interactions" (p. 53).

Cope & Hannah (1975) wrote of an interactive approach to addressing the issue of retention, "which views dropping out not as an individual or an institutional problem, but one involving harmony or lack of it between the individual and the institutional environment" (p. 29). Simpson, Baker & Mellinger (1980), who referred to it as social and academic integration, found a "lack of social integration" to be common to all withdrawals. In their studies at Berkeley, all those who left within the first month reported having fewer friends which points to a lack of social congruence or 'fit'" (p. 207-208). You may recall reading in chapter 1 that Cope & Hannah (1975) wrote where "there is friction between the person and the place, it is the person who inevitably wears away" (p. vii).

George Stern (1970) studied the relationship between needs and presses. According to Stern, needs refer to "organizational tendencies which appear to give unity and direction to a person's behavior" (p. 6). He described environmental presses as those forces that provide "an external situational counterpart to the internalized personality needs. In the ultimate sense of the term, press refers to the phenomenological world of the individual, the unique and inevitable private view each person has of the events in which he takes part" (p. 7). Stern (1970) describes the role of needs and presses as follows:

Congruence might be defined empirically in terms of the actual combinations of needs and presses found characterizing such spontaneously flourishing groups. A dissonant relationship then would be an unstable needs-press combination, which must lead either to a modification of the press in a more congruent direction or to a withdrawal of the participants, unless an artificial equilibrium is maintained through the use of coercion. For the individual case, a congruent relationship would be one producing a sense of satisfaction or fulfillment for the participant. Discomfort and stress are the concomitants of dissonance. [p. 8]

Bynum & Thompson (1983) wrote, "the presence of...social support systems increases the likelihood that the student will remain in college and refrain from dropping out" (p. 40). According to Ingersoll (1988), who refers to fit as "student satisfaction level", if the student-institution fit is not positive then "it will only be a matter of time until the student becomes sufficiently dissatisfied and leaves the institution" (p. 227). Ingersoll (1988) also posited that "the closer the fit, the better the chance that the institution has to maintain levels of satisfaction and commitment" (p. 230). The relationship between retention and student-institution fit is a significant one. Satisfaction and commitment are two of the prime building blocks of any successful retention effort.

Tinto (1987) offers two observations on the relevant importance of this "fit". He writes, "students who identify themselves as being marginal to the mainstream of

institutional life are somewhat more likely to withdraw than are persons who perceive themselves as belonging to the mainstream of institutional life" (p. 60). More specifically, he observes, "the absence of sufficient contact with other members of the institution proves to be the single most important predictor of eventual departure" (p. 64-65). One can conclude from Tinto's (1987) writings that "absence of sufficient contact" contributes to a feeling of "being marginal to the mainstream" and, therefore, results in lack of 'fit'.

Levitz & Noel (1990) identified two key steps to retention of the marginal student:

[The first step is identifying] a means of detecting a student's academic motivation, ease with which they are likely to make the transition to the college environment, level and type of help that is likely to be needed to be successful in college, and the likelihood that the student will be receptive to interventions on the part of college or university personnel. [The second step involves establishing] a method for using information on individual students in a systematic way to increase the likelihood that they will succeed and stay. This is done by tracking and monitoring a student's progress in and interaction with the institution. [This step enables an institution to customize services to] meet the needs of individual students -- and to reach students early, before they are in trouble or before they decide to drop out. [p. 5]

An article entitled College Makes Students "Job 1," in the January 1992 issue of Recruitment and Retention, reported there is some resistance in higher education to identifying students as customers. The same article quoted

an admissions professional as saying "whether we call them 'students' or 'customers', we need to treat them well and make sure we are serving their needs as effectively as we can" (Staff, 1992c, p. 2). In the September 1992 issue of the same periodical, Lee Noel set out the following "components of a successful customer service program":

Commitment to Service -- putting students first means understanding and responding to their needs. Sometimes, this is just a matter of perception. One example: many institutions impose a late fee for applications submitted after a deadline. Instead of calling it a late fee, this article suggests renaming the "normal" application fee a "discount" for early filing. What was a punishment -- the late fee -- now has no stigma attached. Using a reward in place of a punishment increases the sense of customer satisfaction.

Recovery Strategy -- what do you do if you make a mistake? Some people are so afraid of "blowing it" they don't ever try anything new. But there's a better way of going about this. . . . [Take] it for granted [you're] going to make mistakes. The best thing to do is apologize and improve. Many businesses try to brush mistakes under the carpet and often lose the customer they slighted. You can build stronger relationships by admitting mistakes and then fixing them.

Listening -- one of the best customer service techniques is just listening. That alone can often take care of problems.

Emphasis on the front line staff -- Your front line people must be your best, most sensitive employees. On an ordinary day [a manager] may see 10 or 15 people. In the same time period, [the] front desk people will see anywhere from 500 to 600. It's absolutely vital your front line people know how to respond to students well.

Positive feedback for workers -- people need praise for doing things right, more than they need criticism for the wrong behavior. You should try to catch people doing something right so you have an opportunity to praise them. [Staff, 1992j, p. 6]

The article went on to point out the benefits which can accrue to the administration by taking on strong customer service orientation. For example:

Reduce employee turnover -- One school found that since [they] started doing customer service training in student affairs [their] turnover rate has dropped 20%;

Increase income -- If a college or university is doing a better job retaining students, they can reduce the resources needed to recruit new ones;

Improve employee evaluations -- customer service standards can form the backbone of employee evaluations, providing quantifiable, objective criteria for evaluations. [Staff, 1992j, p. 6-7]

On a day-to-day basis it is the quality of the service provided to students which has the greatest impact on fit. "These are the moments of truth," writes Ingersoll (1988), "that determine the satisfaction level of the student at the end of each day's experience with the school. These can include such items as the tone with which a question is answered, problem solving, reactions to requests for help, dealing with complaints, and overall style of interaction with the student" (p. 230). This is not a one-way relationship by any means. The quality of the fit depends as much on the student as it does on the institution. Either part of the equation can affect its strength.

How can one measure the amount of 'fit' between a given institution and its students? Overall you look for the degree of congruence (Tinto, 1987) and/or harmony (Cope &

Hannah, 1975) between an institution and its students. Essential components of institutional 'fit' have been articulated by several authors including the following:

- 1) Amount and quality of student contact with other members of the academic community -- peers, faculty and staff (Tinto, 1987);
- 2) Quality of social integration (Bynum & Thompson, 1983);
- 3) Quality of integration of student into the general college environment (Bynum & Thompson, 1983);
- 4) Quality of the interaction between the student and the environment (Hossler, 1984);
- 5) Ability of institution to meet the goals, interests, needs, values and expectations of its students (Williams, 1986);
- 6) Quality of overall service provided to students (Ingersoll, 1988); and
- 7) The presence of social support system and ability to make friends (Bynum & Thompson, 1983);

Hossler (1984) wrote, as mentioned earlier, any institution that attempts to measure the level of student-institution fit present on campus must first "carefully consider three important factors: student characteristics, institutional characteristics and effects of the interaction between the student and the institution" (p. 70). Terry



Williams (1986) described a model for evaluating student-institution fit which consists of the following steps:

- 1) This first step...requires the institution to systemically collect a wide variety of demographic and perceptual data on all students at the time of their matriculation.
- 2) [The second step is to] clearly understand their own campus environment before they can begin to assess the impact it has on students.
- 3) [The third step involves] investigating not only how the environment has both positively and negatively affected the student but also how student involvement in the institution has influenced the environment. The process of identifying fit between student and campus includes recording where apparent matches and mismatches have occurred.
- 4) The fourth step in the process model involves evaluation and analysis of the data collected through Step 3. The primary objective of this step is to enable the enrollment management team or other institutional officers to make important decisions regarding whether or not to proceed with a plan for an intervention that would reduce mismatches between student and campus.
- 5) [In the fifth and final step] an enrollment team considers as valid not only those interventions that focus on assisting students to adjust to or to cope with the campus environment but also interventions that focus on adapting or changing the campus environment to meet the needs, interests, goals, and expectations of students.  
[p. 38-43]

"Fitting in is not an all-or-nothing issue, but occurs in degrees," according to Hossler, Bean & Associates (1990). They contend, "a student's poor match in one area can be counter-balanced by a good match in another" (p. 149). Students, for instance, may or may not fit in for social,

academic, religious, economic or even cultural reasons.

"One fairly constant finding," they conclude, "is that students leave school because they do not fit in" (p. 149). According to Williams (1986), fit or congruence is present when the campus environment adequately meets student goals, needs, interests, values and expectations. From the institution's perspective, he writes, "when the student's academic and social abilities seem to mesh well with campus requirements, the fit or match between student and institution is also believed to exist" (p. 36). Ernest Boyer (1987) wrote that weakness and insecurity are not uncommon feelings among freshmen. He cited a student newspaper editorial that contained the following warning:

You're all out in the wilderness now, away from your homes and your roots, wandering around trying to spot where you can settle down -- you are trying to fit in. . . .The first thing you're going to have to learn about student life after orientation is that there isn't any. No, you are not going to die, but a lot of the time you're going to feel no one at this school would really care if you did. [p. 44]

Another essential component of retention research is analyzing the data and looking at it from a student and institutional perspective as well as from a marketing or recruiting perspective. One important element of the retention equation is the state of mind or level of personal development being experienced by students as they make their decision to persist or withdraw. Many studies have been conducted in the field of student development.

Levels of development have been categorized as stages by many authors including Erikson and Loevinger, as vectors by Chickering, as challenges by Sanford and as positions by Perry. Several of these warrant further explanation. Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) recently compiled a tremendous amount of information about the college experience in their volume, How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research. They reviewed, for instance, Chickering's seven vectors: 1) Achieving Competence; 2) Managing Emotions; 3) Developing Autonomy; 4) Establishing Identity; 5) Freeing Interpersonal Relationships; 6) Developing Purpose; and 7) Developing Integrity.

The critical vector is the fourth -- Establishing Identity. Cope and Hannah (1975) found many students who identified this as a cause for their leaving said they were taking time off "to find myself, to discover what kind of person I really want to be, to have an opportunity to think through what I really believe, to discover what values are important to me" (p. 35-36). Students who seek greater relevance in the curriculum may also be trying to discover who they are. Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) wrote that identity establishment is somewhat dependent upon "growth along the competence, emotions, and autonomy vectors, and development on this vector fosters and facilitates changes along the remaining three vectors. For young men or women,"

they continued, "clarifications of their conceptions of their physical characteristics and personal appearance and of appropriate sexual roles and behaviors are important psycho-social events" (p. 21).

Cope & Hannah (1975) surmised that many of these identity-seekers drop out with every intention of returning to higher education and most plan to return to the same school. In an article entitled, "Retention and Student Development," Levitz (1992a) quoted College Survival Inc.'s Charles Knauer as saying "when students understand the developmental process...and undertake responsibility for their first year, retention is enhanced" (p. 4). One of the tenets of developmental theory is that individual growth occurs along a continuum in response to societal demands. Knauer continues, "this demand to master new behavior brings about a crisis, and resolving the crisis helps move the individual into the next stage of maturity" (p. 4). Three of the many reasons articulated earlier speak to this area of personal development or identity seeking. They are religious beliefs, values confrontations and difficulty coping with the transition into adulthood.

In Forms of Intellectual Development and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme, William G. Perry, Jr. (1968) describes a series of positions taken by

college students at different times in their educational experience. They can be summarized as follows: Position 1 -- the world is seen in polar terms of we/right/good vs. other/wrong/bad; Position 2 -- the perception is one of diversity of opinion and uncertainty, which are experienced as unwarranted confusion; Position 3 -- diversity and uncertainty are accepted as legitimate but still temporary; Position 4 -- legitimate uncertainty is perceived to be extensive; Position 5 -- knowledge and values (including authority's) are perceived as contextual and relativistic and subordinated; Position 6 -- the necessity of orienting one's self in a relativistic world through some form of personal commitment is recognized; Position 7 -- an initial commitment in some area is made; Position 8 -- the implications of commitment are experienced and the subjective and stylistic issues of responsibility are explored; Position 9 -- the affirmation of identity among multiple responsibilities and realized commitment is recognized as an ongoing, unfolding activity through which one expresses one's lifestyle (p. 9-10).

Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) chronicled the work of Loevinger who postulated nine stages: 1) Symbiotic; 2) Impulsive; 3) Self-Protective; 4) Conformist; 5) Self-Aware; 6) Conscientious; 7) Individualistic; 8) Autonomous; and 9) Integrated. The first three are generally pre-college

stages while no research has found any college students experiencing the latter three stages. The middle three stages are, then, the ones most frequently being experienced by college students. Most new freshmen, according to these authors, are at the Conformist stage where the behaviors, values and attitudes of the individual are mostly determined by those of the group. At this stage, also, the need for acceptance is high and individual differences are barely recognized. The Self-Aware stage serves as a transition from conformism to conscientiousness. During this transition "salient characteristics are an increase in self-awareness and the appreciation of multiple possibilities in situations" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 35). Once one reaches the Conscientious stage "rules and values have been internalized, and the individual has attained the capacity for detachment and empathy. Reasoning is more complex, and responsibility for one's actions is recognized" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 35).

Perry (1968) sees the critical position as that of commitment or Position seven. Perry (1968) describes this position as that point in the life of the student where

he has undertaken to decide on his own responsibility who he is, or who he will be, in some major area of his life (for example, "I have decided on medicine"). He is at the moment rather taken up with the impact of the content of the Commitment. Internally he typically experiences a relief in settled purpose, and at the same time he feels strongly defined by the external

forms typifying the role he has chosen (for example, medical student, doctor). [p. 153-154]

Tinto (1987) writes about "commitment" being the secret to successful retention. The level of comfort or 'fit' experienced by a student is crucial to whether or not they become committed to their college or university. Where they are developmentally, and the college's awareness of same, is critical to their sense of commitment. If the institution is willing to involve itself in the "social and intellectual development" of the student, this becomes the "primary source of student commitment to the institution and their involvement in their own learning" (p. 7). Levitz & Noel (1990) report that while students may have potential to be "highly motivated, independent student-scholars, considerable anecdotal reports from faculty and staff across the nation indicate that today's students do not walk in the door with the level of independence, skill, and savvy of students in years past" (p. 2). Their evidence leads them to conclude that "a primary institutional goal should be to move students from low or no-levels of commitment (intellectually, emotionally, socially) to high levels of commitment where they become independent learners" (p. 2).

Tinto (1987) describes the "two attributes that stand out as primary roots of departure [with]...the terms intention and commitment" (p. 39). From the institution's

perspective he writes of "the four forms of individual experience [as]... adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation" (p. 39). The importance Tinto (1987) places on commitment is apparent as he writes

Individual commitments take two major forms, goal and institutional. Goal commitment refers to a person's commitment to the educational and occupational goals one holds for oneself. It specifies that person's willingness to work toward the attainment of those goals. Institutional commitment refers to a person's commitment to the institution in which he/she is enrolled. It indicates the degree to which one is willing to work toward the attainment of one's goals within a given higher educational institution. In either case, but especially the latter, the greater one's commitment, the greater the likelihood of institutional persistence. [p. 45]

### Retention Programming

Some researchers took a more positive outlook and studied how colleges and universities can promote student persistence. Charles Pollock (1987a), for instance, identified the following areas where institutions can have the greatest impact on persistence: extracurricular activities such as varsity sports, intramural sports, fraternities sororities and professional or honorary societies (one study found that "79% of the persisters were involved in at least one extracurricular activity while only 42% of the dropouts were involved"); academic advising and counseling; orientation (which "should provide support and information, strengthen the student's choice of the



institution, [and]...should not be confined to the period before the first day of class [but] continue at least during the first semester"); financial aid; exit interviews ("a formal exit interview process provides beneficial data on attrition and encourages persistence for some students. Some students decide to continue their enrollment after talking to someone who cares about them and who can suggest alternatives") (p. 33-37). Pollock (1987a) surmised that three fourths of those who leave do so voluntarily.

The September 1992 issue of Recruitment and Retention reported on a study conducted by The College of DuPage's Committee for Student Success. Over 6000 students were sent a slightly modified version of ACT's Student Opinion Survey and nearly 4000 responded. Comparing the commonalities among each group of students they found that those who persisted:

- 1) had previous two- or four-year college experience, or had come directly from high school or the military;
- 2) had used other college services -- library, advising, cafeteria;
- 3) had frequently consulted instructors outside of class; and
- 4) had some goals of completion. [Staff, 1992j, p. 3]

Similarly they compared the responses of those who withdrew and found that they:

- 1) indicated up-front that they weren't there for the long term;
- 2) generally weren't leaving because their needs weren't being met;
- 3) had applied for admission less than one month before the quarter began. "This could be a warning sign that late applicants will be the first ones out the door,"; and
- 4) indicated they seldom spoke to an instructor outside of class. [Staff, 1992j, p. 3]

Additionally, Edward Anderson (1985), writing about forces that influence student persistence and achievement, presented the following as persistence factors that can be implemented by colleges and universities:

- 1) Individuals who take a personal interest in students and relate to them as persons can promote persistence in a variety of ways;
- 2) Financial support that adequately fulfills basic maintenance needs;
- 3) Assessment and referral procedures that initiate interviews with students to identify needs and problems and stimulate use of resources to contribute to student perseverance;
- 4) Orientation activities that begin soon after admission and continue through first term;
- 5) Counseling services; and
- 6) Support system within the college environment which fulfills belonging needs. [p. 57-59]

Lee Noel (1985) referred to a "critical time period" during which institutions should establish relationships and one-on-one contacts with students that will impact student

success and satisfaction. There is wide agreement that this time period is the first several weeks of the freshman year. Noel (1985) writes "It is not uncommon to find that of the students who drop out during the terms of the freshman year (not between terms), 50 percent drop out during the first six weeks. If students make it through that high-risk first year and return for the sophomore year, experience indicates the attrition rate begins to drop off by almost 50 percent each succeeding year" (p. 20).

The idea of student institution fit, discussed at length earlier, is part of the broader conceptual framework of person-environment interaction. "The application of this concept to higher education," according to Williams (1986), "has recently been the focus of much attention as more and more administrators learn about and subscribe to the campus ecology movement" (p. 37). Levitz & Noel (1992) observe that "students bring with them to campus widely different expectations, affective needs, cognitive needs and support needs. It is only through an assessment of these needs" they continued, "that [colleges and universities] can determine the best way to marshal [their] resources in order to make students successful and satisfied" (p. 4).

In an article entitled "A Network Approach to Retention," Lee Noel (1992b) cited the efforts of Coppin

State College. Coppin's vice president for student affairs offered that "our mission statement identifies retention as a major indicator of success and...pledges a commitment to improve retention and graduation rates. Furthermore, it stipulates that adequate resources will be devoted toward developing innovative retention programs" (p. 6). What they came up with is referred to as a "network approach" to retention which has four specific goals:

- 1) To identify student needs in a timely manner.
- 2) To identify resources available throughout the college to meet those needs.
- 3) To assign those resources -- with all involved parties being aware of those assignments.
- 4) To monitor the delivery of those resources as they're being used. [Noel, 1992b, p. 6]

Hossler (1984) characterized student-institution fit as follows:

The importance in understanding factors contributing to person-environment interaction in higher education becomes very clear if one assumes that all aspects of human behavior -- what one knows, feels, and does -- cannot occur in a vacuum. Not only do people bring their own physical, social, and psychological characteristics into the environment, but the environment in which they live will necessarily have impact and influence on their behavior. [p. 72]

Summarizing the work of Ekehammer, Hossler (1984) sets out the following approaches to the idea of person-environment interaction: 1) Personologism -- individual attributes or traits that cause people to behave in

consistent ways across situations or environments; 2) Situationism -- externally controlled by the environment where one's behavior changes from setting to setting and personal characteristics would have little or no impact; and 3) Interactionism -- both the person and the environment interact and thus contribute to behavior. This last position rejects personologism and situationism as sole determinants of behavior. "It is this interactionist perspective," Hossler (1984) concludes, "that serves as the link between the enrollment managers and their understanding of student-institution fit" (p. 72).

The campus environment is created through the interaction of a particular college or university campus with the characteristics of its student body (Hossler, 1984). According to Stern (1970), "Denominational colleges are the most congruent, with very little discrepancy between school and student patterns. The greatest divergence is shown by the independent liberal arts colleges and the business administration programs, the former setting standards of overachievement for their students, the latter attempting to hold back some of their least academically relevant interests" (p. 216-218). Every institution, however, is not the right place for every student. One student's utopia may be another student's worst nightmare.

Hossler (1984) puts this into clearer perspective with the following comment:

As enrollment managers define for their own institutions the nature of student-institution fit, they must carefully consider three important factors: student characteristics, institutional characteristics, and effects of the interaction between the student and the institution. . . .The physical, cognitive, and affective interactions between students and their college or university constitute an important relationship that can lead to varying degrees of student satisfaction, academic achievement, and persistence in the institution. [p. 70]

The student may be the victim, offers Hossler, Bean & Associates (1990), but, "a student's leaving school is the joint responsibility of the school and the student. The student may be completely justified in withdrawal, and the college or university may be at fault" (p. 149). According to Levitz & Noel, many expectations of students are within the control of the institution. They commented that "both before and after enrollment, institutions must assume an active posture, directing individual interventions with the goal of shaping appropriate expectations of 'how one goes to school here'" (p. 4).

Tinto (1987) advances the argument that full integration in both the social and academic environment of a college or university is not necessary for persistence nor does the failure to become integrated in either environment lead to departure. Tinto (1987) does contend, however, that

"some degree of social and intellectual integration must exist as a condition for continued persistence" (p. 119). Step 4 in Williams' (1986) model, evaluation, therefore, is the most critical and most complex step. This step is where an institution identifies areas of student-institution match and mismatch. Williams (1986) makes the following observation regarding the importance of this distinction:

A major assumption underlying this evaluative step is that not all mismatches can or even should be corrected through special interventions. It is probable that some mismatches may involve variables totally out of the control of the institution. After careful evaluation, the institution may also find that a potential solution, or intervention, for a mismatch between one group of students and the campus may in itself lead to a more serious problem with another group of students. Therefore, the evaluation component is a most important step in this process model that must not be undervalued. [p. 42]

As mentioned earlier, Noel, Levitz, Saluri & Associates (1985) noted that higher education is in a new phase of understanding and confronting the retention issue by focusing "less on techniques and brushing up on services... [and more] on the overall character of the experience offered to students" (p. x). This new focus had its genesis in the 70's as the demographic downturn was becoming apparent. Cope & Hannah (1975) cited a "growing interest in an interactive approach" to issues of retention. This meant that higher education administrators were beginning to see attrition not as an individual or an institutional problem, but the result of the interaction between the two. This

perspective has become referred to as enrollment management and is defined by Don Hossler (1984), one of the premiere researchers in this field, as:

a process, or an activity, that influences the size, the shape, and the characteristics of a student body by directing institutional efforts in marketing, recruitment, and admissions as well as pricing and financial aid. In addition, the process exerts a significant influence on academic advising, institutional research agenda, orientation, retention studies, and student services. It is not simply an administrative process. Enrollment management involves the entire campus. [p. 5-6]

With the exception of those institutions who have students lined up to avail themselves of the educational opportunities offered within their hallowed halls, enrollment management is a challenge laid at the feet of all of higher education. It is a matter of coping with change. Demographics, the percentage of students choosing to enter college and issues of importance in the college choice process are all changing. Smith, Lippitt & Sprandel (1985) commented that, "whether or not we want change to occur, change takes place, triggered by a myriad of internal and external forces" (p. 367). Describing the task ahead for higher education, they continued, "changes in attitude and practice, ...as students move in and through the institution, will have to occur on many campuses in order to create a more positive and staying environment" (p. 367).



Levitz (1992) reported one faculty member's advice for those in charge of retention on campuses who referred to those in charge of retention programs as the "generals." Douglas Kornemann from the Milwaukee Area says, "Forget the flashy, high-tech weaponry, he says. If you really want to retain your students, you'd get more bang for the buck by concentrating on 'trench warfare'" (p. 6). In Kornemann's analogy, classrooms, "where most of the day-to-day interactions between students and their instructors take place" (1992, p. 6) are the trenches. Kornemann underscores five main themes with which one can conduct successful "'trench warfare': enthusiasm; caring; believing; stretching; and involvement" (p. 7).

Dickeson (1992) posits the following as the most powerful retention strategies "based on mobilization of existing resources, not massive infusion of new resources. Four such strategies are:

- 1) Strong emphasis on Freshman success/orientation/individualized plans;
- 2) Campus-wide ownership and management of retention;
- 3) Transferring admissions relationships to teaching/advising relationships; and
- 4) Emphasis on student-centered service excellence.  
[p. 4]

Levitz & Noel (1992) described those campuses that are truly student-centered as those that:

- 1) have been designed to meet student needs, not the convenience of the institution;
- 2) track and are sensitive to comments and suggestions of the users;
- 3) have "memory" of what has worked well in the past;
- 4) encourage employees to take actions that make sense;
- 5) are open to personalization; and
- 6) reflect the individual spirit of those who work within the unit. (p. 5)

Hossler, Bean & Associates (1990) put forth the following four major enrollment management organizational mechanisms:

- 1) The Enrollment Management Committee -- charged with looking at the institution's current marketing and student retention efforts...[and usually staffed] by the director of admissions, a student affairs administrator, a faculty member [and others];
- 2) The Enrollment Management Coordinator -- [an individual is] charged with organizational recruitment and retention activities...[and is] often a mid-level administrator, such as the director or dean of admissions;
- 3) The Enrollment Management Matrix. -- An existing senior-level administrator such as the vice-president for student affairs, academic affairs, or institutional advancement directs the activities of the enrollment management matrix...[in which]...administrative units continue their existing reporting relationships, but...become part of the enrollment management matrix. In essence, these administrative units work with two senior administrators; and
- 4) The Enrollment Management Division -- A vice president or associate vice-president is assigned the responsibilities for all enrollment management activities. The vice-president houses most or all

of the administrative areas that influence student enrollments within one large functional unit. [p. 49]

Recognizing the multitude of organizational types among the over 3000 higher education institutions, Hossler, Bean & Associates (1990) conceded there was no right answer to the question of enrollment management. Not every institution's retention efforts will fit into one of these four boxes. In addition to compatibility with the traditions, culture and management milieu, they wrote that, "enrollment management must be adapted to the needs, organizational climate, and administrative skills available on each campus" (p. 44). According to a study conducted by Pollock & Wolf (1989) 134 (59%) of the surveyed institutions have some sort of an enrollment management program with the most prevalent type of organization being "other" as opposed to one of four models mentioned above. The number of institutions with programs may, in fact, "be more significant than the particular type of structure described, since an ideal structure for one institution may not be appropriate for another because of the nature of the institution and the personalities, skills, and abilities of the college personnel" (Pollock & Wolf, 1989, p. 372-373)

Research is the first step in any enrollment management effort. Levitz and Noel (1985) outlined the following

"overriding objectives" in drawing up a research program with retention as its focus:

- 1) To study success -- to find out what the institution is doing well in order that it may do more of it;
- 2) To pinpoint campus services that need further attention so that they may become the type of student resources of which the institution can be proud;
- 3) To determine the type of intervention programs and practices that are linked to student success and student persistence;
- 4) To follow those students who receive special attention or participate in special programs to determine whether the intervention is having the desired impact;
- 5) To target students who will benefit from interventions known to have a positive impact; and
- 6) To provide validation of the outcomes the institution is striving to achieve. [p. 350]

Saluri (1985) cited the following as main organizational components of a successful retention program:

- 1) Identifying the existence of a problem in its early stages and developing data necessary to determine the nature of the problem;
- 2) Defining what kind of attrition (in-class, semester-to-semester, entry-to-graduation, or dropout) the college will address;
- 3) Involving the college community from president to faculty to clerical staff in finding workable solutions;
- 4) Burying the knee-jerk tendency to blame someone or some program;
- 5) Providing a model which can be used to assess systematically the problem from a holistic point of view; and

- 6) Following through by constantly informing faculty of results. [p. 412-13]

Hossler, Bean & Associates (1990), after having described the various organizational formats of enrollment management programs, outlined the types of studies commonly used to gather the data needed for an enrollment management effort as follows:

Autopsy Studies: take place after a student has decided to leave or has already left school...are usually descriptive...[and gather information] from the student by interview or paper-and-pencil questionnaire;

Cross-Sectional Studies: information is gathered from a number of students at one time...[and] typically... use existing student records or data gathered by questionnaires;

Longitudinal Studies: involve collecting data at more than one time from the same group of students or from different groups at the same time in their academic careers...[are] descriptive...[and] involve collecting data about students at least twice;

Qualitative Studies: give the clearest picture of the attrition process for those students included in the study...[and] differs from autopsy studies by being of longer duration, using open-ended questions, checking findings by triangulation, and focusing on accurate descriptions that make discovery of new influences on attrition likely;

Quantitative Analytical Approaches: concern issues of data analysis...assume that an institution has quantitative data, which would come from any of the data-gathering techniques, [and] can be used to predict attrition (or length of time enrolled); and

Program Evaluation: focuses on the effects of interventions on retention rates...[where] participants in a program are compared to similar students who did not participate to see if they leave at different

rates...[and where] if fewer program participants than non-participants leave, the program was effective. [p. 180]

In another of their Occasional Papers, Levitz & Noel (1988) delineated what they referred to as a "blueprint for managing retention." It is organized as follows:

Review and Renew Your Mission:

A first step...is a review of your mission to determine just how central student success and student satisfaction is to the core of the institution. Unfortunately, on only a few campuses have missions statements been constructed in such a way as to provide day-to-day guidance and direction.

Develop an Outcomes-Based Marketing, Recruiting, and Admissions Program:

An outcomes-based marketing approach is one designed to recruit "graduates-to-be" rather than just "freshmen-to-be". . . Nationwide, only 54% of entering freshmen feel that chances are very good they'll be selected. And 94% of these students have entered their first- or second-choice college.

Achieve a Better Understanding of Students' Needs at Point of Entry to College:

Regardless of whether these needs are real or perceived, they occupy central importance in students' minds. Thus, they must be addressed. It is essential that institutional programs, services, and delivery approaches be designed to:

- 1) maximize student comfort during this transitional time;
- 2) create and develop the right expectations about college;
- 3) help students understand their readiness for academic success; and
- 4) learn specific ways to bolster their chances of success in college.

### Individualize Institutional Responses to Student Needs:

The distinguishing feature of this approach is that the institutional services are "intrusively" delivered. The best-of-the-best performing institutions do not rely on students taking the initiative. Rather, the institution is the one that takes the risk and extends the invitation to individuals, asking them in a positive but forceful way, to participate.

### Adopt a Smooth and Integrated Approach to Meeting Student Needs:

Institutions that have shown the greatest gains in persistence rates have intensified their ability to respond to students' needs through a concentrated and interlocking pattern of student "intake" services. Such intake services include: orientation and advising, assessment, and course placement, academic support services, and career planning. . . .If retention rates are to increase, it is essential that students' needs and interests drive the delivery of these services.

### Create a Student-Centered Campus Environment:

Competent, caring teachers and advisors are potent retention agents. Positive, student-centered attitudes go a long way to compensate for even substantial deficits in physical environment. Students must be made to feel as though they are the most important people on the campus, that they are the primary reason the institution exists.

### Measure and Evaluate Students Satisfaction on a Regular Basis:

Tapping students' opinions is a quick way to pinpoint "performance gaps" on campus and to identify priorities for change. Students today are sophisticated customers and consumers. Institutions must take a lesson from the corporate world and stay "close to their customers."

### Moving Your Campus Forward:

Managing retention in the years ahead will require us to extend our programs, services, and people to the students we are here to serve. . . .With both institutional growth and student growth, quality is the constant, time in the variable. [pp. 3-5]

The next chapter outlines the methods to be employed in this study to shed further light on the problem of attrition. Chapter four will outline a retention Management Program. Chapter five will present the results of the study which will compare responses of students who have withdrawn with those of senior persisters at two institutions of higher education in an effort to better understand the dynamics of the decision to withdraw or persist. Chapter six will present analysis conclusions and chapter seven will present recommendations and suggest areas for further study.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study is to explore the positive contributions to the retention effort that may result from comparing the responses from follow-up studies of withdrawn students with the responses of senior persisters who have faced and conquered similar challenges. This study consists of three main components. Part one is the development of a Retention Plan. Part two involves a series of phone interviews with two groups of students who withdrew from their institution: One group withdrew prior to the beginning of the second semester of their freshmen year, and one group withdrew between semesters. Part three entails one or two focus groups with seniors at each institution.

Part two, as mentioned above, is a follow-up study, several months after withdrawal from two higher education institutions, and examines reasons why students leave college. Additionally, in part three of the study, a group of seniors, with similar general characteristics to those who withdrew, was identified at each of the two institutions and surveyed as to why they persisted. This accomplished two objectives: 1) some weaknesses within the institution that persisters have tolerated were identified which, if strengthened, could result in more positive experiences for

all involved; and 2) ideas suggested by withdrawing students which could increase the retention rate were reinforced.

This chapter describes the samples to be studied and lays out the design of the study. Attention will be given to the questions to be asked during both interview phases (the one-on-one interviews with those who withdrew and the focus group interviews with the seniors), to how the data will be analyzed, and to the limitations of the study.

### The Samples

Data was collected from three samples of students at two institutions of Higher Education:

- 1) 8 traditional students who withdrew during the first semester of their freshman year;
- 2) 23 traditional students who withdrew between the first and second semester of their freshmen year and, therefore, did not experience an exit interview; and
- 3) 31 traditional students, during their senior year, who experienced the same type of hardship that traditionally leads students to withdraw yet chose to persist.

Groups one and two above were sent a letter announcing the intention of the study and then interviewed, one-on-one, over the phone. Group three above was surveyed to determine

which of the persisters have experienced problems similar to those who withdrew (see Appendix A for the survey used). Those so identified were then invited to be interviewed in a focus group format on each campus. Because of class and work schedules the number seniors attending each interview was low -- 3 at College A and 7 at College B. To increase the number of seniors interviewed, therefore, a number of those invited to the focus group interview but did not show were interviewed one-on-one by phone.

The total number of interviewees within the three groups was 62. One institution is a private, non-sectarian, four-year institution with approximately 3,100 students. The other institution is a private, Catholic, four-year institution with approximately 2,000 students which went co-educational about 15 years ago. The group one and two interviewees chosen at each institution were those students who withdrew during the first semester or between the first and second semester of their freshman year. These interviewees were identified using the sampling method mentioned later and in consultation with the Dean of Students at each institution.

The Dean of Students at each institution reviewed the names of those students who withdrew and excluded those who

withdrew involuntarily. Each sample was then chosen at random according to the following criteria:

- 1) An attempt was made to have a mix, roughly 50 percent each, of those students who withdrew during the semester and indicated financial reasons as their primary reason for leaving college and those who didn't;
- 2) Those who withdrew between the first and second semesters of their freshmen year and, therefore, most likely did not have an exit interview were chosen using a random sampling technique;
- 3) Among the seniors indicating they had considered withdrawing at some point during their college years a balance was sought among those who indicated having financial difficulty during their college career and those who did not;

The random sample in each case was chosen by creating an alphabetical listing of each group and including every third, fourth, or fifth person, however the mathematics works out, to reach the desired number of interviewees in each category.

### Research Design

This study involved five phases. Phase One, already completed and presented in chapter two, involved reviewing

relevant dropout and retention literature. Phase Two, presented in chapter four will involved the proposal of an enrollment enhancement plan designed to increase retention. Phase Three was an interview with the Dean of Students at each institution to obtain an institutional perspective on the reasons they feel students leave their institution, establish a profile of the type(s) of student(s) they feel their institution serves best, and review current retention practices. This information was used to frame an additional question to be asked each group of interviewees. Phase Four involved the interviews mentioned above. Phase Five involved the analysis of the data.

The retention plan was designed combining information from the literature review with the personal experiences in higher education of the author of the present study. This plan consists of seven components: a prior assessment (before enrollment); an early warning system; a current assessment (during enrollment); an on-going orientation program; a systematic attempt to establish academic performance and intention goals for each student; an on-going institutional retention review process; a subsequent assessment (after graduation or withdrawal); and a systematic attempt to establish, as part of the retention plan, academic intention and performance goals for each student. Certain elements of this plan were discussed with

the interviewees. The purpose of discussing the plan with the interviewees was to obtain their views as to whether its components, individually or collectively, might address some of the problems they experienced while in college.

The main post-withdrawal questions addressed to group one by this study were: 1) What were their main reasons for going to college in the first place? 2) Did they feel they belonged to the institutional community? 3) Were these students intimidated in any way by the withdrawal process? 4) Have their reason(s) for leaving, as stated during the withdrawal process, changed or were they not complete? 5) What are other factors, if any, do they now consider to have contributed to their decision to transfer, stopout or dropout? 6) If their institution had implemented any or all of the components of the proposed retention plan, might it have addressed some of the problems they experienced and might it have changed their mind about leaving? 7) What could the institution have done differently, if anything, that would have changed their mind about leaving?

The main post-withdrawal questions asked of group two interviewees were be the same as questions one, two, five, six and seven identified as group one questions above. In place of the other group one questions (three and four) will be the following: 1) Why did they withdraw from college?

and 2) Why did they leave between semesters without notifying anyone at their institution? See Appendix C and D for the script used for these interviews.

The primary questions asked of the seniors were: 1) What were their main reasons for going to college in the first place? 2) How did they cope with their circumstances and make it through four years? 3) After outlining for them the retention plan mentioned above, ask, had their institution implemented any or all of the components of this plan, would it have made their college experience less stressful, more productive, or more meaningful? 4) What could the institution have done differently, if anything, that would have made their college experience less stressful, more productive, or more meaningful? 5) Do they feel they belong to the institutional community? 6) What other qualities did they find in their institution of choice which kept them enrolled? See Appendix E for the script used for these interviews.

In each case the questions mentioned acted as a conversational framework. In most cases, additional questions were asked to clarify responses and gain more information. These additional questions will be articulated as part of the final report of the study in chapters five and six.

## Data Analysis

The information gathered from each set of interviews was analyzed in a variety of ways. First, the responses to each individual question were grouped and analyzed to identify any commonalities or themes among the interviewees from each institution. Secondly, the responses to each question were reviewed for similarities or disparities across institutions. This was possible for the following areas: 1) main reasons for going to college in the first place, 2) reaction to the proposed retention plan, 3) community belongingness, 4) factors that contributed to their decision to leave school, and 5) what the institution could have done differently to have changed their mind about leaving (freshman) or to have made their experience less stressful, more productive or more meaningful (seniors).

Next, where appropriate, an attempt was made to determine if any response patterns existed within demographic groupings such as gender, date of withdrawal and financial aid status, both at each institution and across institutions. Coping strategies evident through the responses of the persisters were analyzed. Conclusions were formed regarding institutional changes which, if implemented, could alter the enrollment decisions of the withdrawing groups or make the experience of persisters more enjoyable.



An enrollment strategy that has as its goal increasing the retention rate at similar higher education institutions was outlined. This strategy will be shared with the institutions involved with the study for their use however they choose. This can prove helpful to these and other institutions interested in making the appropriate adjustments to their operations.

### Limitations

There are several limitations to this study:

- 1) The fact that only two institutions are studied impinges on the generalizability of the results beyond these institutions and institutions that may be remarkably similar in profile;
- 2) The retention plan proposed in the study and used as part of the interviews to elicit reaction from those interviewed was developed for purposes of this study and has not been implemented. It may, therefore, be a somewhat unrealistic plan not having undergone the scrutiny of review at any particular institution;
- 3) Responses to any proposed plan will likely differ from responses to an actual, implemented version; and

- 4) Those in attendance at the focus groups of senior persisters may not be representative of the whole group identified as having similar characteristics to those who had withdrawn. This self-selected group may be skewed to some degree toward positive or negative attitudes about their institution.

### Remaining Chapters

The remaining chapters will be organized as follows. Chapter four, A Retention Plan, presents the retention proposal based primarily on the literature reviewed in chapter two with some modifications based on the experience of the author of the present study. Chapter five, The Results, presents the results and analysis of the interviews conducted as part of this study. Chapter six, Analysis and Conclusions, and chapter seven, Recommendations and Implications, summarize the findings of the interviews and draw conclusions about the relevance of these findings to the field. Potential refinements to the retention proposal which, if any, became evident during the interviews, are presented in chapter six.

Additionally, the final chapter will address the following questions which were outlined in Chapter One: What lessons can student affairs professionals and others

learn from the present study? What changes might strengthen the institution? These questions are addressed by considering how the importance of the findings of the present study could affect the way institutions answer these questions on their campuses. Implications of the present study for further research will also be explored.

## CHAPTER 4

### A RETENTION PLAN

This chapter outlines a retention plan designed by combining information from the literature reviewed in chapter two with the author's personal experiences in higher education. This plan consists of seven components: a prior assessment (before enrollment); an early warning system; a current assessment (during enrollment); an on-going orientation program; a systematic attempt to establish academic performance and intention goals for each student; an on-going institutional retention review process; and a subsequent assessment (after graduation or withdrawal). Certain elements of this plan were discussed with the interviewees. The purpose of discussing the plan with the interviewees is to determine its feasibility as an intervention mechanism by assessing whether it would result in higher retention numbers at these and other similar institutions.

The literature reviewed in chapter two contains several references to retention programming and planning. Charles Pollock (1987a) identified areas where institutions can have an impact on persistence such as: extracurricular activities; academic advising and counseling; orientation; financial aid; and the exit interview process (p. 7). Comparing similarities among 4000 respondents to ACT's

Student Opinion Survey the College of DuPage's Committee for Student Success found that students who persisted "had used other college services -- library, advising, cafeteria; had frequently consulted instructors outside of class; and had some goals of completion" (Staff, 1992j, p. 3). Edward Anderson (1985) identified the following persistence factors which colleges and universities can employ: "individuals who take a personal interest in students and relate to them as persons...; financial support that adequately fulfills basic maintenance needs; assessment and referral procedures that initiate interviews with students...; orientation activities that begin soon after admission and continue through first term; counseling services; and a support system within the college environment which fulfills belonging needs" (p. 57-59).

Several authors put forth more specific versions of retention plans. Levitz & Noel for instance outlined a "blueprint for managing retention" which was comprised of the following steps: review and renew your mission; develop an outcomes-based marketing, recruiting, and admissions program; achieve a better understanding of students' needs at point of entry to college; individualize institutional responses to student needs; adopt a smooth and integrated approach to meeting student needs; create a student-centered campus environment; measure and evaluate students

satisfaction on a regular basis; and, moving your campus forward. Dickeson (1992) wrote about the following four retention strategies which are "based on mobilization of existing resources, not massive infusion of new resources: ...strong emphasis on freshman success/orientation/individualized plans; campus-wide ownership and management of retention; transferring admissions relationships to teaching/ advising relationships; and emphasis on student-centered service excellence" (p. 4). At Coppin State College they developed a "network approach" to retention focused on the following goals:

- 1) To identify student needs in a timely manner.
- 2) To identify resources available throughout the college to meet those needs.
- 3) To assign those resources -- with all involved parties being aware of those assignments.
- 4) To monitor the delivery of those resources as they're being used. [Noel, 1992b, p. 6]

The retention plan proposed here takes bits and pieces from each of these and adds a dash of experience. It begins with an assessment instrument administered during the summer before the new class arrives for orientation. This survey should ask about interests, needs, anxieties and expectations and should allow the institution to paint a picture of its new clientele. The survey, under the category of expectations, should ask the student what their intentions are such as: take a few refresher courses; stay

a year or two and then transfer to their "first-choice" college; or persist to graduation. It should also ask what their expectations are for grades. Many other areas can be covered by this survey as well: demographic information, why they chose a particular institution, their values, their social expectations and much more.

Assessment on the other end of a student's experience is also an important component of the retention plan. An exit interview process should be in place that attempts to obtain information, regarding their reasons, from students who decide to leave before graduation. In addition, however, as is the purpose of the present study, colleges and universities should conduct follow-up studies of students who withdraw to solicit more accurate data about the forces that contributed to their becoming so dissatisfied that they chose to leave. Institutions should survey those who graduate, one to five years after graduation, to bring a sense of closure to the process but also to obtain evaluative data from those who have been through the institution and have the luxury of being on the far side looking back.

The heart of the plan, however, is carried out between these assessment bookends. An extensive, on-going orientation program would be the ideal. The program, at the

very least should include a summer and/or end-of-summer orientation experience which may extend into the first two weeks of the semester. The main goals of this program would be to ease the transition of the student into their college experience and create a sense of belonging to a community. Certain expectations of behavior, academic and social policies and procedures, and realities of college life need to be communicated. There also needs to be some structured and unstructured recreational time so students can learn more about each other and form a group of friends at the earliest possible moment in their college experience. Many colleges and universities are offering a semester- or year-long freshmen year experience modeled on the University of South Carolina's University 101 Program.

At least one session during this orientation experience needs to be devoted to goal setting. The session would begin with a short lecture about the process and benefits of goal setting and then involve the students in a goal setting exercise. Many varieties of goal setting exercises exist and each institution needs to design a session to meet the needs of its own students. The result of the session, however, would be the same across institutions. Each student would leave the session with goals established for their college experience -- a certain grade point average their first semester, choosing a major by the end of their



freshman year, involvement in extracurricular activities, leadership positions, a commitment to obtaining their degree in four years from their chosen institution, and more. Each student would walk away with a sheet of paper on which is written their goals. A copy of this sheet can be filed in their permanent file and/or with their academic advisor for future reference.

The first several weeks of the freshmen year are the most important for one's acclimation to a new environment. Lee Noel (1985) referred to it as the "critical time period" for establishing contacts with students which will positively impact their success and satisfaction. Noel wrote "it is not uncommon to find that of the students who drop out during the terms of the freshman year (not between terms), 50 percent drop out during the first six weeks" (p. 20). Simpson, Baker & Mellinger (1980) found "in their studies at Berkeley, all those who left within the first month reported having fewer friends which points to a lack of social congruence or 'fit'" (p. 207).

An early warning system, to identify those students experiencing academic and/or social difficulties, was advocated in the literature. This system will differ from campus to campus but a concerted effort on each campus that has as its main goal reaching out to students in need will

reap worthwhile rewards for the institution. An academic intervention for those students below a certain grade point average at mid-term of each semester of the freshmen year and at the end of the first semester should be established. This would mean the student would be contacted at these times by someone from the academic affairs office, the academic support program office or the student's academic advisor. Students exhibiting inappropriate social behavior would be approached by the counseling or residence hall staff and confronted regarding this behavior. The goal of this intervention would be to re-channel the students' energy in a positive direction. Levitz & Noel (1991) wrote "institutions must assume an active posture, directing individual interventions with the goal of shaping appropriate expectations of 'how one goes to school here'" (p. 4).

Another important component of a retention plan is a fourth assessment instrument administered to current students. This survey would seek the opinions of students as to the quality of the overall experience they are having at a particular college or university. Areas such as residence hall living, academic advising, food service, student activities, the quality of the classroom experience and much more. It allows an institution to take a snapshot of the campus environment at a particular time and analyze

it for possible changes which could be implemented.

Hossler, Bean & Associates (1990), as mentioned in chapter 2, defined six data gathering techniques as follows: autopsy studies; cross-sectional studies; longitudinal studies; qualitative studies; quantitative analytical approaches; and program evaluation (p.180).

The string that ties this all together is the retention review mechanism which needs to be present but may take on many forms across institutions. Don Hossler (1984), as mentioned in chapter 2, described four such mechanisms: enrollment management committee; enrollment management coordinator; enrollment management matrix, and enrollment management division. The actuality of the enrollment management milieu created by an individual institution needs to be "adapted to the needs, organizational climate, and administrative skills available on each campus" (Hossler, Bean & Associates, 1990, p. 44). The type of oversight process is not as important as its existence. In a 1989 study, Pollock & Wolf found that 59% of the surveyed institutions had some sort of enrollment management program but, when asked what type of program, the most popular response was "other" as opposed to any of the four programs Hossler (1984) described. They concluded that the existence of a program may "be more significant than the particular type of structure described, since an ideal structure for

one institution may not be appropriate for another because of the nature of the institution and the personalities, skills, and abilities of the college personnel" (p. 372).

An institution needs a review mechanism of some kind to evaluate current practices and review information gathered through the assessments mentioned above. Those responsible for oversight can also keep the energies and resources of the institution focused on providing the highest quality overall environment for its main clientele, its students. The institutions that will be most successful over the next ten years will be those that are truly student-centered. Levitz & Noel (1992) wrote that truly student-centered campuses have been designed to meet student needs and not institutional needs. Student-centered campuses solicit and are sensitive to suggestions and comments from their students. As one of the main components of their "blueprint for managing retention" Levitz & Noel (1988) included creating a "student-centered campus environment" about which they wrote:

Competent, caring teachers and advisors are potent retention agents. Positive, student-centered attitudes go a long way to compensate for even substantial deficits in physical environment. Students must be made to feel as though they are the most important people on the campus, that they are the primary reason the institution exists. [p. 4]

As part of the study this plan was evaluated in two ways. The Deans of Students at each institution were asked about the assessments in which they currently engage and if they have a retention oversight group currently functioning. The interviewees were asked questions regarding the other components of the plan: orientation (did they attend; how would they describe their experience); early warning system (were they ever contacted by counseling or academic affairs to talk about difficulties they may be having; would it have helped if they had been); academic performance and intention goals (were they ever asked to make a commitment regarding their educational intention or set a goal for their academic performance); prior assessment (if the college or university knew more about you would they have been able to make it easier for you to stay).

## CHAPTER 5

### THE RESULTS

The questions that were asked of the participants and some of their answers are presented in this chapter. Because of the sheer volume of information resulting from this study, discussion of the data, including its relationship to the literature, will be postponed until Chapter Six.

As discussed in chapter three, there were six samples involved in this study -- three samples each from two institutions. There were two groups of freshmen identified at each of two institutions, College A and College B. The first group were freshmen who withdrew during their first semester. The second group were freshmen who completed their first semester but did not return for their second semester. There was also a sample of seniors at each college who were preparing for graduation and who had experienced difficulties similar to these freshmen, as indicated on a senior survey.

A listing of newly enrolled students who had withdrawn after the beginning of the Fall 1992 semester but before the beginning of the Spring 1993 semester was obtained from each institution. These lists were separated into two groups: those who had withdrawn prior to completing one semester;

**Table 5.1 -- Breakdown of Freshman Interview Sample**

|    |                  | <u>College A</u> |          | <u>College B</u> |          |
|----|------------------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|
|    |                  | Withdrew         |          | Withdrew         |          |
|    |                  | During           | Between  | During           | Between  |
|    |                  | Semester         | Semester | Semester         | Semester |
|    |                  | -----            | -----    | -----            | -----    |
| a) | # in sample      | 5                | 18       | 14               | 16       |
| b) | # refusals       | 2                | 1        | 2                | 1        |
| c) | # unreachable    | 1                | 4        | 4                | 2        |
| d) | # stop-outs      | 0                | 1        | 2                | 2        |
| e) | Total interviews | 2                | 12       | 6                | 11       |

and those who had withdrawn after the completion of the Fall '92 semester but before the beginning of the Spring '93 semester. A breakdown for this sample is presented in Table 5.1 (see Appendix F for a more detailed breakdown of those interviewed). As mentioned in chapter three, there was an attempt to have a mix of students who had and had not indicated financial problems as their reason for withdrawing as well as a balance between those who withdrew during and those who withdrew after their first semester. College A reported 23 total new withdrawals prior to the beginning of the Spring '93 semester. Unfortunately there are problems with College A's record-keeping and only one individual could be identified from these records as having left during the semester. College A had a number of students who left during the semester but didn't tell anyone. College A refers to these students as "walkaways". It was necessary therefore to ask the date of withdrawal during the

interviews. In the final analysis, 5 out of the 23 left during the semester and 18 left between semesters. From College B, whose record-keeping was much better, out of the sample of 30 new students who withdrew during the same time frame, 14 withdrew during the semester and 16 withdrew between semesters.

Identifying the sample of seniors took an entirely different path. Using information from the literature and exit interview forms from two different colleges, one of which was College A, a senior survey was developed and administered at each institution (see Appendix A). At College B there were 151 respondents to the senior survey out of a senior class of 410 for a 37% return. There were 134 respondents to College A's senior survey out of a senior class of 464 for a 29% return.

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**Table 5.2 -- Breakdown of Senior Interview Sample**

|                                   | College A |    | College B |    |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|----|-----------|----|
|                                   | #         | %  | #         | %  |
| a) Had thought about withdrawing  | 49        | 37 | 50        | 33 |
| b) Experienced financial problems | 72        | 54 | 81        | 54 |
| c) Interested in follow-up inter. | 56        | 42 | 55        | 36 |
| d) (a), (b) and (c)               | 11        | 8  | 6         | 4  |
| e) (a) and (c) but not (b)        | 9         | 7  | 10        | 7  |
| f) Eligible for follow-up inter.  | 20        |    | 16        |    |
| g) Refused to be interviewed      | 1         |    | 0         |    |
| h) Unable to contact              | 2         |    | 2         |    |
| i) Total number of interviews     | 17        |    | 14        |    |



Those seniors who indicated that they had thought about withdrawing sometime during their college years and had an interest in participating in a follow-up interview became the interview sample. As indicated in chapter three, a mix was sought within this pool of seniors who did and did not indicate, on the senior survey, having financial difficulty during their college years. The mix achieved was six and eight respectively from College A and eight and six respectively from College B. The resulting sample is described in Table 5.2 (see Appendix G for a more detailed breakdown of those interviewed).

The intention had been to interview 10-15 students in each of the 4 freshmen groupings mentioned above and 15-20 seniors from each institution. This was a lot easier to write about than to actually achieve. Approximately 200 phone calls later, 62 interviews had been completed in total across all samples. What follows is a narrative of the results of these interviews. The freshman interviews will be summarized first followed by the senior interviews.

### The Freshmen

Each interview followed basically the same pattern with a script being used to ensure consistency across interviews but there was some variation where follow-up questions were

asked. The questions asked of each freshman interviewed are listed in Appendix C and D.

### The Results

Eight of the 14 freshmen respondents from College A mentioned getting a better a job as their main reason for going to college. Five mentioned the education itself or the acquisition of knowledge as their main reason for attending while 4 of the 14 cited a particular curriculum as being the primary motivating factor. Living independently was mentioned by two freshmen as their reason. One person was simply looking for a new environment. For one individual in particular college was essentially a foregone conclusion as evidenced by her response to the question:

A: I don't know, I always assumed after high school that I would go to college. I never had any doubt in my mind that I wouldn't [sic].

There are more responses than respondents because most of them gave more than one response. For example here is the text of one of those exchanges:

Q: What were your main reasons for going to college in the first place?

A: My main reasons for going to [College A] in particular is that I felt very comfortable with

the campus first of all and it definitely did have the program I was looking for, namely the television field -- anything in the communications field.

Q: Is that your main reason for going to college in general?

A: Not just because of the major and the campus the way it looked. For independence. To live alone in the dorm away from my family for a change.

The College B respondents were more animated and varied with their responses with 8 of the 17 respondents mentioning employment as one of their main reasons for attending and five were in search of the education itself. One respondent remarked, "Basically...to make a living in this world you gotta have a degree." The similarity ended there, however, as only 2 students mentioned a particular curriculum as the attraction while no one spoke of living independently. One person sought to meet new people and one was seeking a direction in life. Four people went to college to please their families as exhibited by the response of one who said, "Oh, God. It was basically because my parents thought it was a good idea. My brother and sister went and it was the logical thing." Another simply said, "I don't know. To make my mom happy." Three more respondents came to college because as one of them said, it "just seemed like the

logical thing to do." Another three mentioned sports as their main reason for going and, in each case, when the sport lost its attraction, or they lost their ability to play, they subsequently lost interest in college altogether. One football player, for instance, left college after an injury while another lost motivation for school when the season was over. The most honest response, perhaps, was the following:

A: Oh, Boy. Basically to get some kind of base because I'm really not...decided about what I want to do. And I thought that college was going to help me do that. You know, that it would give me...a starting point. I thought that maybe if I was familiar with all these new and different things that I would just automatically decide what I wanted to do and know the rest of my life.

Delving a little further into their reasons for going to college, several of the respondents from each college were asked why they chose the particular college they did. For College A the attraction was a combination of the campus environment, its location, its enrollment and its curriculum. Continuing the pattern of the first question, College B respondents had a variety of reasons, from it being "just far enough away" to "basically because it was close." For three, members of their family had preceded

them while three others were influenced by friends. An academic curriculum lured five students and one was on a wrestling scholarship. For one it was "the only place I really liked that I looked at." Two of the 17 were motivated by romance but neither relationship lasted. One of those had this to say:

A: Basically, because, and I regret these reasons, because it was close to my home, about 100 miles, a good 2 hour trip. This is the worst reason, I had a girlfriend in high school, but, of course, it didn't last. But that was a dumb reason to stay, I just wanted to be near to my girlfriend.

Feeling they belonged to a community, that they have a sense of identity with the institution, is critical to a student's decision to stay or leave a particular college or university. The literature, summarized in chapter 2, refers to it variably as social or academic integration, congruence or student-institution fit. Of the 31 freshmen asked whether they felt they "belonged to the institutional community," only 16, 8 at each college, or slightly over half of the respondents answered affirmatively. At College A, 8 represents 57 percent of the sample while at College B, 8 represents 47 percent of the sample.

Those who said they felt they belonged to a community at College A were primarily residence hall students and felt comfortable on campus. Those who did not feel they belonged or didn't fit in were mostly disappointed with the lack of social activity on campus. For example, one student first said yes to the question but then talked himself out of it. This person's response was, "Yes I did, except that there was, I don't know, not enough going on on campus. And I felt like it was just like high school. Not a lot of people mixed together. I don't know, I just didn't like the atmosphere at all." Another person found that the atmosphere was not what she had been led to believe:

A: It was more like a private school you just lived on campus. Actually, there are a lot of commuters. It wasn't really part of the town. They told me when I went there that, "you are going to be special in town because they're going to know that you are from [College A]."

Q: And you didn't feel that happened?

A: No, not really

At College B the story had a slightly different twist. Eight former students said they did feel part of the community, a couple of them were not 100% satisfied with the institution while three others qualified their answers by saying that although they felt comfortable socially,

academically they didn't feel as welcomed. One person, for instance, said, "with the students, yeah. With the faculty, not so much." Another said, "academically and relating to the school, I'd say no, but, socially, yes." Then there was one of the respondents who wasn't really sure. This part of the conversation went like this:

A: There was, in a sense. I really did not try and make friends because I really didn't expect to be staying and I had a boy friend at home. So, I didn't really try. I'm not very outgoing. People in my dorm were pretty friendly. . . .I think it just wasn't my school. I didn't fall in love with the place, I wanted to go to a school that I fell in love with. My parents had a friend whose son went there and they really talked it up and I think they really wanted me to go there, that I would like it there because their son liked it there.

Then came the moment of truth. I asked each person why they withdrew from college. Only five of the respondents from College A mentioned money as their reason for leaving. The non-monetary reasons ranged from not fitting in to not liking the location. A sampling of the responses is as follows:

A: I came home almost every weekend and the distance was kind of far. I just didn't fit in at [College A]. I met a lot of friends there and they were really nice but the school wasn't for me.

A: I didn't really like it. And also I'm dyslexic and I found out about [New School] and it sounded like such a great school. And I wasn't too happy there [at College A] and I was going to wait a year and come here [to New School] but instead I decided to get out earlier and get a head start.

A: There wasn't much, besides on the college, there wasn't a lot to do up there. I don't think the social atmosphere was very good for college. . . .On the weekends so many people went home. There wasn't a lot to do. I mean we did stuff but the social atmosphere wasn't really great.

A: Oh, because of the location, mainly.

Q: A little too far from home?

A: Yes, and I wasn't really satisfied with the...area.

It was a similar situation with College B's freshmen. Eight of them mentioned finances as at least one of the main reasons they withdrew. Other reasons ranged from simply losing interest to not liking the surrounding area, from being ostracized because you looked different to not getting



along with the faculty, from low grades to homesickness.

Some of these comments are mentioned below:

A: I didn't like the school, I didn't like how small it was. All around, I didn't like the studies, I didn't like what I was going for, I wanted to try something new.

A: Basically because I was homesick and I...live in...New Jersey but,...I'm right near the Pennsylvania border but there's just a big difference between New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It was just being in Pennsylvania that I didn't like, it wasn't the school. It was just that I had a hard time adjusting and I was homesick.

A: I am an "LD" student. Actually they promised to help me. They knew I was a really slow learner. They promised me the tutors and stuff. It wasn't given to me.

A: I moved in with my boyfriend. He lives about an hour and a half away. I had to return and work.

A: It was hard because I wasn't comfortable wrestling there and I kind of wanted to go home to go to school. . . .I talked about it for a while and then, as a matter of fact, I decided to stay at one time. I decided to get back into it and stay. Because I had just stopped going to classes then, finally, I decided to go back to classes, to try

to start all over again, then one day I just went home. I decided I wasn't ready for it.

A: There were other reasons. I didn't really like the teachers as much. My Art teachers, I did not really care for. Second of all...I didn't really feel as comfortable in the area...I did hang out with a lot of people on my floor and it just seemed like there wasn't as much to do. It seems like the whole place shuts down at seven.

Each respondent was then asked to rate each of the following factors in response to the following question: I'm going to list a number of factors that are believed to contribute to a student's decision to withdraw from or continue at a particular institution. As I mention these, please indicate how that factor contributed to your decision to withdraw according to the following scale: 1 = to a great extent; 2 = to some extent; 3 = to a little extent; and 4 = not at all. Appendix H lists these factors and shows the results of this exercise for respondents from each College.

The lists below indicate those factors which, based on their low ratings, contributed most to the students' decision to withdraw. Those factors which received the lowest ratings are listed first. There are more than ten on

each list because some of the factors received identical averages:

College A:

Feeling [College A] was not the right college  
Financial problems  
Social environment on campus  
Male/female ratio  
Distance from home  
Lack of contact with faculty and administrators  
Bureaucracy (red tape)  
Coping with the transition to college  
Adhering to college rules and regulations  
Cultural opportunities on campus  
Boredom with classes and teaching

College B:

Uncertainty regarding educational plans and purposes  
Financial problems  
Feeling [College B] was not the right college  
Lower grades than expected  
Change in career goals  
Size of student body  
Boredom with classes and teaching  
Course work  
Coping with the transition to college  
Type of student body

Quality of teaching

Quality of academic advising

Limited offering in college programs

Lack of career counseling and advising

Residence hall environment

Bureaucracy (red tape)

The factors appearing on both lists and, therefore, representing those which contributed most to a student's decision to withdraw are, in order of lowest combined rating: Financial Problems; Feeling [College name] Was Not the Right College; Boredom With Classes and Teaching; Coping With the Transition to College; and Bureaucracy (red tape). In most cases the respondents were asked to elaborate on those items which contributed to some extent, to their decision to withdraw. The following are comments made regarding some of the factors which appeared on both lists above:

Q: What about feeling [College B] was not the right college?

A: I never should have gone there in the first place. I shouldn't have gone to such a small school in such a small town. There just really isn't much to do. You hear that everywhere you go, everybody says "there's nothing to do around here." But particularly at [College B] I think

there really was very little to do. . . .Once in a while they'd have a dance on a Friday night where nobody would show up. . . .There was no pride whatsoever.

Q: What about lack of career counseling and advising?

A: I didn't really need to talk to anybody but I think a lot of people needed to talk to someone but I don't think anyone really did or there wasn't anybody.

A: They didn't want to hear anything. It was their job, they wanted to get you in and out as soon as possible. They always had too many people too little time.

Q: What about coping with the transition to college?

A: I coped with being away because I was always out doing things. It's just the (city where college is) was not my town.

After having asked why they withdrew and then listing the above factors, each participant was asked, "Are there any other factors, which haven't been mentioned, that you now consider to have contributed to your decision to withdraw?" This generated a few interesting responses. One person from College A, for instance, said, "I didn't like

the meal plan they had because there was only one set plan. . . .That was not a big factor but that was something I didn't like." Another said, "just kind of everything actually." Two of the most interesting responses from College A respondents were as follows:

A: I don't believe my high school prepared (me) in the least little bit for college. . . .Right before I left [College A] I had to do a paper and I went to the library and I was completely lost. I didn't know the first thing about the library at all. . . .If I was to go up to somebody in the library I'd have to say, "listen, I don't know the first thing about the library you're going to have to explain everything to me." I didn't know where to look for books, I didn't know what to look for in the books, I didn't know how to start, I didn't know how to write my paper.

A: Finances. Lack of student activities. Lack of guidance as far as financial goes. . . .When I first enrolled at [College A], I assumed there was going to be a financial problem and I talked to the...financial aid counselor about that because originally I was not going to dorm because it would be a lot more expensive. . . .But there was a counselor that told me to dorm anyway because my financial aid should cover it. It turned out that

I moved onto campus, dormed, and it didn't cover it. So, I think if I had more financial aid guidance then maybe I'd still be in [College A] right now.

One of the College B respondents wanted a second chance, a fresh start. This person said, "Basically, it was too small, I changed my major. And another reason I'm transferring now, I get to start all over, sort of. All the 2.0's don't really matter, I can have a new GPA all over again." One person said, "I was just uncomfortable, basically," while another mentioned, "parking was a big problem for me...especially during the winter." For two people, in particular, this question triggered the following more substantive responses:

A: Well, the dorm life was great when I first got there but after a while I kind of got sick of it, people in and out of my room all day long. I mean I had a great time, but I just can't work like that. But if I'm home, I can go out but if I want to study...I can just go home to my room, no one's going to bother me unless the phone rings.

A: OK, well the teacher I didn't really care for was also my advisor. . . .I really had a problem with him. Second of all, at the end of the year,...I had him for color design,...and the art work

wasn't like any masterpieces or anything like that it just took a lot of time and came to be important to me because it had taken so much time and effort. . . .So, at the end of the semester...I wanted to get back all the artwork and...I told him what day I was leaving and at first he said "oh no you can't do that." That means I've got to come three hours all the way back here to get my artwork or have to send for it or whatever so, I was kind of upset about that . . . .we talked about it again and he said "what I'll do is I'll try and get it all done and you can come back at five (on the day you are leaving). . . .The night I was leaving...I ran over to the place where I had my art class and the door was locked. So, I went downstairs to where the Security office was and asked them if they could open the room and I told them the reason why. . . .he (the security officer) said "no, because the teacher didn't give any clearance and we're not allowed to take it out." I was like, my name is on the artwork, I've got an ID card. But they just wouldn't do it. So, to this day the artwork is still there. . . .That was one thing that really bothered me. And also one of my other art teachers, at the end of the year, I had gotten



back my grade and all through the semester he had been saying this is pretty good and then on my one notebook he had added up the grades and it was...totally off. And so I called up and it turns out that he messed up my grade, too. And I know that's...possible, but I just figured they would double check their work.

Another critical component of a student's assimilation into an academic community is an orientation program. Combining the results from both colleges, 21 of 31, or over two-thirds of the withdrawn students, reported having attended orientation. As a follow-up question, each person was asked whether orientation was a positive or negative experience. Responses from College A, where 8 of the 14 respondents attended orientation, were mostly positive with one person remarking, "Yes, it was very positive. I guess because it was my first year and I was excited to go." Another said, "Yes. It was a very positive experience." One particular student though, who was most troubled throughout his short experience, responded, "I didn't get too much involved with it because that's the way I am. Not because I didn't want to be bothered with it, but, like I said, I'm shy."

At College B, 13 out of 17 reported attending orientation. However, the idea of it being a positive or negative experience played to mixed reviews. A couple of people had unequivocally positive experiences with one remarking, simply, "yes," while another said, "yes, I was surprised it was a good one." Another person who had a positive experience commented that, "it just helped start things off. You went there and met a lot of new people. It made things easier when you got there in the fall, a lot easier. Which is what it is for." One person who wasn't so sure said, "I think it was positive."

Several respondents qualified their positive responses, such as one who said it was positive but thought it could have been longer because, "I didn't like how they rushed us through like the placement test and all." One person remained, "neutral really. Basically they said all the same stuff you always hear about, look to your left, look to your right. And, I really didn't find it positive or negative. It was a nice way to get introduced around the campus, but that was about it." Another former student was firm about orientation being a negative experience and remarked, "To be honest with you I didn't really enjoy it. I felt like I was at summer camp or something. I don't like going away doing things like that, like the camp atmosphere, I don't like

that. It got me used to the school a little bit so it was good in that way but otherwise no."

One of the components of the Retention Plan outlined in Chapter Four was "An Early Warning System" which is descriptive of any process a higher education institution may institute to identify students who may be struggling, academically, socially or emotionally, and who could benefit from discussing these problems with someone. To test this component of the plan, participants were asked two questions: were you ever contacted by anyone from the counseling or academic affairs offices to talk about difficulties you may have been having?; and, if they answered no to the first question, would it have been helpful if you had been contacted by someone? Of the 31 respondents 6 were not asked this question but among the 25 who were asked 16, or over four fifths, were not contacted by anyone reaching out to them to lend assistance.

Several people from College B, who were contacted by someone, reported this being a helpful experience for them. One individual proclaimed, "Oh yeah. In the music department they were always open with if you needed anything to come and talk, 'how are you doing today, do you need anybody to talk to.'" Another remarked, "It was half and half...yeah, very friendly. . . .When they heard that I was

leaving, then they were finally 'what was my problem,' and I was at 'F's and stuff. That's why I tried to tell you I really need a lot of help." From those who were not contacted the following responses were heard to the follow-up question about whether it would have been helpful to have been contacted by someone:

A: I spoke with my academic advisor a lot who was very helpful. I was depressed because I really wanted to go to [College B]. . . .If more options existed for funding and someone told me about them that would have been helpful.

A: The state I was in then, no. It was up to me and that's just what I wanted to do. You know, you have your mind set.

A: Well, in the beginning I was put onto a STEP program, but after that no one really contacted me about it, after that summer session I had. I always knew it was there but I'm one of those people who try to do it on my own.

A: I think maybe, at that time, if I had talked to somebody I may have stuck it out but I don't think so.

A: Possibly, but I don't really think because I know what was going on in my head.

Several people simply and emphatically said, "No," "No," "No, I don't think so." One College respondent, in particular, bore out what the literature says about students wanting to avoid the exit interview or get through it expediently by saying they are leaving for financial reasons or some other reason that will serve to satisfy the interviewer. This person's response was:

A: Well, one time I actually went to my German teacher...because I had overslept...but then I started like just breaking down and he said...why don't you talk to [the] Dean [of Students]...and I was, like,...I don't know I really didn't want to that much and he was like oh, I think you should probably talk to her sometime and I just never did. But nobody called me or anything. [When asked why not talk to the Dean] Well, because first of all I felt really stupid for just...breaking down like that. . . .I just figured it would be that she would like "oh, why don't you stay at [College B]". Because that's what they wanted. Because I said I was thinking of leaving. I had called my parents already and told them I was just miserable here. And I figured if I talked to [the] Dean [of Students] it would be like this big trying to sell me back on school.

College A respondents had a slightly different view of the potential benefits of "An Early Warning System." It was almost an even split as far as having been contacted. One student who couldn't remember having been contacted said, "I don't know if that would have helped." Another said, "No, because my grades were already in and I had already decided to withdraw. It was after the semester was over they contacted me." Others were on the fence:

A: A lot of people did come up and say "if you have any problems, come talk with me." But they never followed up. I never went and talked to anybody. (When asked if it would have helped if someone had followed-up, the respondent said,) I don't know, because I didn't really need to talk to anybody...but I think it would be nice if they did get in touch with you.

One College A respondent was very specific about the positive effect this contact could have had. He remarked:

A: Most definitely. Most definitely. I took it upon myself to go in, when my financial aid finally did come in, I took it upon myself to talk to counselors to tell them what was going on and everything. But at that point it was three quarters through the semester and nothing could be

done. Maybe if...someone had got to me earlier, something could have been done.

To focus one's attention on the future and begin to lay the groundwork for the commitment necessary to sustain a student and motivate that student to persist to graduation, an institution of higher education should establish a systematic goal-setting process. The viability of a goal-setting exercise was the reason behind a series of three questions in this study. Each participant was asked the following questions:

- 1) Were you ever asked to make a commitment regarding your educational intentions (i.e., graduation, one year then transfer, etc.)?;
- 2) Were you ever asked to set a goal for your academic performance (predict what your grade point average would be at end of first semester, for instance)?; and,
- 3) Do you think this would make/have made (for those who answered no to both one and two) a difference in your decision to leave?. The overwhelming responses to questions one and two above were "No," or "I don't remember." Close to half, however, thought it would, or at least could, have made a difference.

Several College A respondents were not sure if it would have made a difference to have set some concrete goals. These people made comments such as, "It might have," and, "sort of but I'm not quite sure about that." Most of the negative responses were simply "No's" but one person interestingly pointed out, "I think it would create a little pressure." One of the people who said they thought a goal-setting process could have helped remarked, "Possibly. This school [name of new school] is very much about setting goals, so, it is helpful." This person had transferred to another school and was there when this phone interview was conducted. Another person in favor of goal setting made the following suggestion, "I think it would have. Throughout the semester if there were maybe monthly meetings...with advisors, I think it would have kept me more focused."

Not everyone remembered, but College B had a course entitled Core Studies, that all new students had to take. As part of this course, each person was asked to record their goals. The weakness, however, was these goals were never again utilized in any way. However, the majority of respondents said it would not have made a difference anyway. One person considered it too early to be setting goals. When asked if it would have been helpful, this person said, "Not really, because at that point I didn't really know. I couldn't really make a goal because I was unsure of it."



One person saw the goal-setting process as a chore, saying, "It was more of an assignment and 'what can we do to get this done.'" Two respondents put an interesting twist on this question as indicated by the following responses:

A: I don't know if I would have stayed there, but it probably would have been helpful.

A: It may have. But the way my mind was set then like the state of mind I was in, it probably wouldn't have. Because I just don't think I was ready for all that work then. Right after I graduated, right after that summer I don't think I was ready for it. I needed a year to relax, to get a job.

In the original plan of the study, each participant was to have been asked whether they filled out a survey prior to arriving on campus for classes and if they thought it would have made any difference in their experience if the college or university had known more about them before they arrived. The question was abandoned, however, because no one could remember having been surveyed and, more germane to the abandonment of the question, no one could say if it would have made any difference in their experience.

After having asked all of the previous questions and engaged students in actively thinking about why they left,

each person was asked, "Could [institution name here] have done anything different which would have changed your mind about leaving?" The response to this question was a real mixed bag. Slightly more than half of the respondents from each college thought their school either could have done or may have been able to do something which would have kept them enrolled.

A sampling of the negative responses from College A respondents is as follows:

A: Not really because the environment was not, I guess, my scene. A lot of people who went there enjoyed it a lot it is just not the type school I would want to go to.

A: Well, the money was really a factor. . . .I guess when it came down to talking to the financial aid counselors I...found it hard to talk to them, whereas some of my other counselors, I don't know. It was just a lot that made me leave.

A: No. Not really because I knew I was in trouble. I had to face the facts. I had to do what I had to do.

A: Probably just plan more activities.

College A enrolled a fair number of non-traditional, older students and several of them found their way into this

study. In response to this question, one older respondent remarked, "Probably, I guess. . . .Make the adult student environment a little better. Because...I just didn't get the feel for the classes with the younger people." The following response came from the person mentioned earlier who had been erroneously advised by the financial aid office to live on campus:

A: Basically, the main factor for leaving was, again, finances. If I would have known earlier, about the situation that was going to arise at the end of the semester, if I had known about that earlier, I could have done something. I could have left the dorm and paid only half the (semester) for the dorm or something. If I was alerted to the situation earlier, I think I could have done something where I wouldn't be in the situation I am in now.

The following exchange ties a lot of the issues of retention into one case. This person was in need of a lot of assistance:

Q: What could [College A] as an institution have done differently, if anything, that would have changed your mind about leaving?

A: I don't know, I don't have much of a problem with how things were run and everything. It's just the

way I felt about myself being there, if that makes sense.

Q: If they knew that you were having that kind of difficulty, could they have helped you through that?

A: They might have, yeah. Because I think maybe if I had talked to somebody, I might have ended up changing majors or something, I'd realize that...I left more or less because I felt I didn't belong there and maybe they'd be able to help me.

The last question asked each participant was, "Do you have any other general comments about [College A] or your decision to withdraw which may be helpful?" From College A respondents there were a couple of comments about the male/female ratio. Several people took the opportunity to praise the school like, "I think it was a pretty good school," "I loved the school. I thought it was great," and, "It's a nice school." One person accepted responsibility for the circumstances by saying, "I could have put more effort into it and I shouldn't have been so stubborn as to my decision. I should have talked to people but as far as I remember I don't really have too many problems with the school itself." The following comments point to one of College A's weaknesses, student activities:

A: Well, from what I've noticed, a lot of the girls, I was just a freshman and I left and a lot of the people that were on my wing in my dorm left also. And it just seems that...there has to be something done about [activities] because...there is stuff at the U [a university across town] but not enough in conjunction with [College A], I thought. And I was involved in a lot and I still didn't think there was enough. But, I think that and probably more the social atmosphere has to be changed.

A: They do need, I know a big complaint when I was there, not only with me but with other students, is that they need more student activities. We were looking around at the other colleges and universities in the area, and (they) are far cheaper in tuition than [College A], and [College A] seems to have the least for their students as far as activities, social gathering places for their students, social activities for the students, things like that. So I know that was a big complaint on campus that there was nowhere actually for the students to go on campus.

## The Seniors

There were 31 interviews involved in the persisting senior sample, 6 males and 25 females, 17 from College A and 14 from College B. When asked their main reasons for going to college in the first place, the responses were similar in several respects. Seven respondents from each institution went to college to get a better job. Additionally, three respondents from College A and four from College B went to college to please or at the behest of their parents, two people from College A and three from College B sought to better themselves, and three from College A and one from College B were looking for a particular program or curriculum. This is where their paths diverged, however.

One person from College A had a very specific purpose in mind when starting college saying, "I had a son at the age of 21 and I didn't have an education so I had no basic skills to support myself and my child so I decided that I first wanted to get my GED and then go to college so I could provide a life for my child." Eight respondents from College A were in search of education for its own sake. The following comments were made by some of these individuals:

A: To get an education, to learn. [when prodded for other reasons] Well,...first of all I started out as a part-time student and...I think I was not

very focused on what I wanted to do except I knew whatever I wanted to do would need a college education. So, I felt whatever direction my life would take at that point I would need some type of degree.

A: To go to school, further my education, for the intrinsic value I guess.

A: Because I had been out in the workforce all these years and felt that I had missed something in my life. As a young person growing up I was not encouraged to go to college. I was a woman who was going to get a business degree out of high school, go out and work, get married, have children, stay home and raise my family. That was the thinking then. My brothers were educated and the two girls were not.

There was a slightly different perspective voiced in the comments of the College B cohort. Several individuals went to college simply because it was the thing to do.

Evidence of this can be found in such comments as:

A: Well, it was the thing to do once you get out of high school.

A: It seemed better than going to work and most of my friends were doing it and I had nothing else

better to do. So, I tried it and it seemed to work out.

A: For me it was always that's what we were expected to do. My parents always talked about it. . . .I was just thinking about going to work after graduation but Mom and Dad always kept talking about college. They never forced us but I just figured I'd go along with it.

One person wanted simply to meet new people while two others wanted independence. One of these freedom seekers commented:

A: Basically, why I didn't (want to) go to college, I was involved in a relationship and I just wanted to walk barefoot around the house and have children. When that split, I finally gathered myself together and decided I don't want a man to support me, I want to support myself. So, it took that to get me to decide what I wanted.

One person was seeking refuge as indicated by the comment:

A: I was very happy to go to college. I come from a very strict father and I was counting the days to go. It just meant freedom to me.



To set some kind of context for the rest of the interview as well as to get some insight into the perspective of each respondent, each person was asked to state a highlight and lowlight of their college experience. The responses in both categories were all over the map at each institution.

College A respondents mentioned such highlights as forming a lacrosse team, meeting people from diverse backgrounds and places, the campus environment, making new friends, their academic department itself, starting one's own business during one's senior year, the transition back to college after a lengthy absence, and, of course, one person said, "graduating was a highlight." Two people said their student teaching was a highlight. One of those seniors commented that a highlight would have to be, "student teaching, when I student taught at [College A] because I finally felt all I had been working for for three years, I finally got to put into practice and do what I wanted to do." Two people spoke of the overall educational experience as one respondent mentioned feeling "more of a well-rounded person because it [was] a liberal arts college and I touched on all different subjects." Three seniors attributed highlight status to the faculty with one saying:

A: I think my favorite part of [College A] was the instructors. . . .I had several instructors that were right on, very good, with-it kind of teachers, who knew what they were doing.

Two mentioned realizing their academic potential as being their highlight. One person, for instance said, "I would have to say my success academically." For three others from College A the coursework itself was a highlight. As one person described:

A: My positive experience here at [College A] is that I enjoyed most of the courses. They were interesting they weren't boring or anything. The other positive part I noticed as I kept coming and coming I realized that [College A] is not just a place you come and take classes, there is a purpose. Their purpose is they teach a student to think, think about a problem, they want you to think it out.

Highlights mentioned by College B respondents reflected College A responses to a degree, such as: the faculty, sports affiliations, the coursework, and the learning process itself. Two students mentioned student activities as a highlight. A communications major had an opportunity to work on the production of a TV movie. For three seniors

discovering their academic potential was their highlight. For instance, one person remarked, "The highlight was that I did discover that I was very interested in psychology and that I know I can eventually go for my Ph.D., hopefully." Four of the respondents, the largest concentration of responses, mentioned making new friends as their highlight. This is one of the critical retention components cited in the literature. This is evidenced here by comments such as, "The highlight is the friends that I made. I don't know if that had any relevance to be in your study. But it is definitely the friends, they did make a major mark in my life," and, "I think my highlight would be the people I met, my roommates and other friends." For one person, the highlight happened late in the college experience and had future ramifications. This person said, "the high point came when I was applying to graduate school [and] I was really able to get a lot of assistance from my two academic advisors. They went out on a limb and did a lot of work for me and helped me out quite a bit."

The lowlights mentioned by the respondents were also varied. At College A, the lowlights ranged from having to take liberal arts courses to adjusting to your first semester, from roommate conflicts to having been a commuter and missing "out on a lot of college because I had two part-time jobs during college," from a lack of student activities

to poor relationships with faculty. The largest duplication of responses was regarding the tuition situation. Consider the following comments:

A: The thing I didn't like about [College A] was they kept raising tuition. . . .When I started going there it was \$200 or \$225 and by the time I left it was up to \$300 per credit.

A: Financially, I think the cost of it was low, not low but not a highlight, I think that got out of hand.

A: Lowlight, let's see, I guess the cost.

The following five responses, though each addressing separate issues, exhibited the most emotion from any College A respondents:

A: I think the low (point) was probably the lack of counseling and direction and advising, basically. I found out more through my classmates than I did through my advisor. I had two advisors because in the middle I had to take a two year leave of absence so when I came back after the absence I had another advisor than from when I left. . . .I don't feel that they offered the best direction...and because of it I felt there were some mistakes made in my curriculum.

A: I could list a few incidents that happened that, for me, were negative but you've limited us to one. Generally speaking, I was not happy with the advisement here and I felt as though I had no one to turn to beyond that, because...I felt as though our marks could have been affected by speaking out at times. I found that to be a problem for me.

A: The low part of my experience at [College A] would be that most of the professors that I ran into...had no idea how to educate. I think you can be very educated and not be an educator and I think that [College A] has a serious problem with the quality of educators it has.

A: The down side of it, some of the faculty members I had some differences with. Certain incidents took place within the classroom and I took proper channels in trying to resolve these problems and it was basically ignored by the administration. I'd rather not go into certain incidents. It was just things with other class members, things that took place within the classroom and the teachers performance within the classroom I didn't agree with. I was disappointed in that respect that I took the proper perspective in handling the situation and nothing was really done about it. They really swept it under the rug.

The lowlights mentioned by College B seniors were a mix also. They included being generally disappointed with the experience, dealing with the core curriculum, the cost, the negative attitudes of the faculty, the sheer amount of work, not liking the registrar's office, academic difficulties as well as the condition of equipment necessary to learn in some areas. Two people went into detail about their views of the faculty and made the following comments:

A: The low point is probably some of the faculty attitudes. Personally, I have had several negative experiences with different offices, administration on campus. . . .I know what I want to do now, I want to go into teaching, biology, and several times there hasn't been the communication between departments to let me know what I needed as far as certification and graduation.

A: The lowlight was probably just some of the politics involved with some of the goings on especially in the music department. Some of the...professors that are involved in the music department...deal a lot in a political way as far as doing things for people that will help themselves, especially with music. That's a big thing because a professor might need some kind of musical assistance for a concert they're doing or

something and they'll treat you nicely for that but as soon as that's over it's back to the way it was before.

Two respondents experienced social difficulties which colored their perspective of the rest of their experience. Their comments are as follows:

A: Socially, I had a few mishaps here and that's probably one downfall I had. And also, the switching of advisors. I was constantly switching advisors. Somehow it got me a little behind. I had too many core classes and I never needed that. And now I am stuck here an extra semester to do my student teaching and my parents have to pay for that and it was avoidable if things were done the right way.

A: I'd say the low point came certainly in my freshmen year. Near the end of the year I had problems living in the dorm. There was an incident that occurred and it wasn't handled well at all and I got entwined in the incident so that was certainly the low point...and even when we got to the level we had to go to certain Deans, I don't think it was handled too well there either.

The following comments, expressed by College B seniors, are worthy of note not only for their content but for the emotion with which they were expressed:

A: The lowest, I was disappointed with [College B]. Maybe not the whole school itself, well, no, I am really disappointed with the whole school. It is not what I thought it would be. I guess with the kind of tuition I pay I don't have any idea where our tuition money is going. Generally, I was very disappointed with the nursing program, not with the nursing program, the nursing program was very good, but the core requirements which would go together with the nursing program. I mean a pharmacology class is not required, instead I have to take a culture and values class. I think pharmacology would help me much better in my field. I just think the way the whole program is constructed and our library is awful.

A: I have had classes thrown at me last minute that really put a wrench in my plans as far as a career. Then I spoke with people at the career center yesterday who pretty much told me, without trying to make any positive steps toward finding (me) a job, I found out I couldn't find a job, that I wouldn't find a job that nobody would hire



me. That kind of negative attitude is prevalent on campus.

A: My biggest disappointment here is I tried to study abroad...and...I was accepted in London at a university and they would not transfer my financial aid from here. I was just asking state and federal not even [College B] aid, and I went to the President and everyone and they wouldn't transfer it.

A: In my first semester, sophomore year when I did actually switch my major from biology to psychology, I went through a very hard time here. Consequently I wanted to drop out of school and I had a really tough time with that. . . .No one really helped with that decision. So that's what made me want to just drop out because I really didn't have anyone to talk to until I had found my advisor now and he really helped.

A: The attitude of the Nursing instructors. I sometimes think that...their attitude was reflected in their teaching. If I went to my clinical at the hospital, depending on what mood they were in, a lot of times I noticed myself I felt cut down as a student as a person and I know a lot of other students felt like that too. For example, a lot of students...had a lot of

problems, GI problems with their stomach, they'd be crying all the time. They'd be studying 16 hours a day and it wasn't enough. You just could never [study] enough for some instructors. I'm the type of person, I'll study 24 hours a day but I don't need to have their attitude reflected in anything. . . .I went to the campus counselor and, this is coming from him, he said, "you can't quote me on this, you'll just have to take my word for it," the campus counselor he even said that the majority of the students who come there are Nursing students, particularly because of the stress factor. I'm not saying that I thought I was losing it or anything but I just needed help with the stress because it did overwhelm me at a point. . . .I was told there was nothing that could be done about it. That's the way the program is and that they know what instructors are that way and because...they're tenured they really can't say anything to them.

The participants were then asked why they chose this particular college. Many gave more than one reason. Ten College A seniors identified characteristics of the campus such as cleaner, nicer and more friendly, safer and smaller, as reasons for their decision. One person said, "[College

A] has one of the prettiest campuses. The aesthetics, the atmosphere, even the people here. It is just harmony, a harmonious environment. You just look at [College A]."

Nine chose College A because it was close to home while two liked its location because it was far enough away from home yet close enough to be home on the weekend. One person each responded that they chose College A because they had an alumna in the family, liked the employment possibilities offered by College A, received a partial academic scholarship, or were drawn to the religious environment. Eight respondents were attracted by the reputation of a particular curriculum that was the second highest response rate. One of these people was also attracted because "for my junior year they had a program where I could go to F.I.T. in NYC and by that time I felt I would want to have a change." Another stated, frankly, "My mom was a professor so I could go free." One person had little choice, saying, "I'm married with children and in this area, for a four year college, there is [College A] or [a University across town] and that's it." Perhaps the most interesting response was the following:

Q: Why did you choose [College A]?

A: Actually, because of the things I heard about it. We moved here on the day school started and I went there.

Q: You moved into the area the day classes started?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: You walked over and said "here I am."

A: Yes, I did. Exactly. And they accepted me until my transcript came and told me if I wasn't accepted I could just walk away at that time.

The responses from the seniors at College B were a little less scattered. Six of these respondents chose College B for its reputation in particular curricula. Three more chose it because it was close to home and six went there simply because they got accepted. One of the people in this latter category said, "For me, I first attended [another college] for two years and I flunked out after my sophomore year. . . .I started applying and came up for an interview at [College B] and right after the interview they said 'Welcome to [College B]', so, I decided well, if you're going to take me I might as well as go." Two thought the campus was nicer than others they looked at, one was influenced by an alumna in the family, one attended College B because family members had attended the college across town and another wanted to play sports. One respondent followed a mentor, saying, "a [music] teacher I had been working with...in high school also taught at College B, so that was my main reason for coming here." One person, seeking independence remarked, "My father and I were having a little argument when I had to make my decision. College B

offered me a full scholarship so I figured this was a way I could be as independent as possible and I wouldn't have to owe them anything. So, I pretty much based my decision purely on financial assistance." The following two responses were the most interesting. The first, which was related by the student who went to college to get away from her father, is quite unsettling, the second rather humorous:

A: It was 3 1/2 hours away from home so that's far enough but, also, my father went to the college across town so I knew the area. My sister was a senior at the college across town and I was really close to her. But the college across town didn't have the art program I wanted, they have no art at all. Also my father probably wouldn't have driven me anywhere else. I was accepted at [a college in New York] and got a very good financial aid [package] there but if I took a bus that's [the only way] I would get there [because my father would only drive me here] so that made my decision.

A: Technically, I applied to [the college across town] and I got accepted here at College B. We wrote, I applied, I have the application to [the college across town] and I wrote the check to [the college across town]. I have a copy of it. But I got accepted to College B. (Did your mother send

the application to College B?) No. It was a [the college across town] application. When I came down for an interview I had both the same day. We had never heard of [College B], we just happened to find out that [College B] was here with [the college across town]. So, I never technically applied to [College B], which I probably shouldn't say because they could recall that at anytime. But my mother had found the college. She had talked to some of her friends and they loved the area.

Seniors were then asked about the concept of community. At both colleges the responses were split as to whether students felt a sense of community. Commuters in particular seemed at a loss for feeling they belonged to a college community. The following comments were from College A commuters:

A: I didn't, I have a small child, he was only 18 months when I started school, he's six now, but, I didn't do anything at [College A]. I don't feel that I can rate it. I went to classes and that's it. . . .So, if I felt like I didn't belong it was only because I wasn't involved because I know there's a lot of things at [College A] to do but I didn't do them.

A: I did what I had to do and I came home. I really didn't take too much part in everything that went on there besides what was actually in my major.

A: No, not really. I commuted so I didn't get as involved I guess.

A sampling of positive responses from College A is as follows:

A: Yes, definitely. . . .I don't know if I would have felt that way had I not been a resident student. I don't know if commuters feel the same way, but there are not a lot of us that dormed, especially those of us that dormed for four years. Those that did, you really get to know the people in your dorm, the people on your floor. I think dorm life really gave me a sense of community, living there with others. And then definitely getting involved in activities helped me feel a sense of community. Being a leader on campus I think that also gave me a feeling I belonged there.

A: Absolutely, it is a very community oriented school.

A: Yeah, after, I'd say second semester freshman year, there was definitely that feeling. . . .First semester I was just getting used to everything. . . .I lived in the dorms. If I

hadn't lived in the dorms I don't think I would have felt comfortable but all the other girls, it was nice, a family feeling.

Several of the respondents saw it both ways as evidenced by the following passages:

- A: I felt I belonged to the communication arts department not the college as a whole because the college did not give our department very much support.
- A: That came basically through Lacrosse. It was like belonging to a fraternity. Of course, we weren't allowed to have any at [College A]. It was a bonding, mostly male bonding. When I first got to the college, the guys, we felt a little alienated because there wasn't much for us or anything. Some of the nuns didn't seem to like us there, we thought anyway. As more males showed up on campus, then we got a sense, it was nice. As far as males and females, we were like brothers and sisters for a while. [When asked what he meant by saying the nuns didn't seem to like men there, he elaborated] Some of the attitudes. A lot of the ones that were involved in teaching and administration, working at the desk, you go to pick up a girl for a date and they seemed very



suspicious, cold and aloof. Not very warm, personable.

A: Yeah, the times I was there I felt I was part of the [College A] community. I could have been involved more but it was my personal choice. I had to work. I probably could have been more of the community but, due to the circumstances, but when I was there I did feel part of the community.

One non-traditional student weighed in on the subject with a very thoughtful observation:

A: I realize we are in an awkward situation as non-traditional students because I've been very involved with campus life here and felt it was open to me. However, I tried to be sensitive to the younger students as well, because they're coming through at 19, 20, and 21 and they need to experience some things that I may have in another setting, like work-study. Perhaps it was some resistance toward non-traditional students at some point, not that I have experienced it personally, because I try and be sensitive and stay back, but other non-traditional students have felt some resentment towards them by the younger students because we're probably more assertive, more confident. Generally, I think there is a

wonderful feeling of community here and the nuns and the faculty help to inspire that. They make a lot available to people to become involved.

There were two main obstacles to feeling you belonged to College B's community as evidenced by some of the responses: being a commuter and/or being a nursing major. One commuter, for instance, said,

A: When I first came no, definitely not. I think that's because I commute, and there is definitely a different attitude toward commuters than there is toward students who dorm. Everybody is treated as though they're already on campus and they don't have too many other things to do. I've experienced that from mostly teachers, I'd say.

One nursing major commented:

A: No, not really. Like I said the nursing majors were, I think anyway, plus I was a commuter, you're so separate in that you are always going to the hospital and picking up assignments and just study, study, study. People were going to games, I couldn't even think of going to a game. [Not enough time?] The priorities, the whole week, Monday to Friday, there was always something, something to study.

Like a number of College A respondents, there were a couple of College B seniors who saw this question of community as, in the words of one of them, "situational." Consider the following comments:

A: Sometimes you're an individual and other times you're part of a community. Like within your major you have clubs which serve the major. You go to parties and your part of a community because everyone is having fun there. Other times you're just on your own.

A: I live with seven other guys so I have instant community. I never really felt I was much of any school community. I would say that's more of a social community, we all had [College B] in common but we didn't always talk about school. This year a little bit, I've noticed that our math department, I'm a math major, and our math department is hiring some new people and it really struck me that they are asking for a lot of student input on who they should hire when these people come in and apply and I really felt like I was part of the school then. That was the first time I was really involved in any kind of decision making or anything important but up until then it was a little bit of the social aspect but not that much community.

In response to whether they attended orientation, the majority of respondents indicated affirmative. The interesting part of this discussion occurred when the respondents were asked one of two follow-up questions. If they did attend orientation they were asked if it were a positive or negative experience. If they did not attend orientation they were asked if they thought it would have made a difference in their decision to withdraw had they done so.

At College A, of the nine people who attended orientation, only two commented on having a negative experience while three could not remember orientation, and four considered it positive. One of those who couldn't remember was a part time student who remarked, "I don't know. I have no idea. It was a long time ago." One person who did not attend, when asked if it would have made a difference if she had, commented,

A: I thought that it might have early on. I met people who had gone. But recently a friend and I were talking about it, she is in the same major as I, and she said that it really didn't make a difference. She liked the social aspect and she got a step ahead of the dorm life and the campus and she knew where things were located around campus. But she said that, academically it didn't

make any difference. I guess in that respect, I wish I would have known where I was going sometimes when I first got there and how some things work. But it turned out ok, I guess.

It was a slightly different story at College B. Of those who didn't attend, one person wasn't sure if it would have made a difference or not while another person commented, "I think I would have known where more things were or what the university had to offer." Some of the more interesting responses, though, came from those individuals who had attended but had a negative experience. One of these people said he didn't enjoy it because all he remembered was sitting around for three days and taking some tests. Some of the other negative responses were as follows:

A: It wasn't much more than standing in line all day. It seemed to me as though there was a few comments in the beginning about welcome to [College B], but nothing to make you feel you were part of everything. . . .From there, it was about a 15 minute speech and then from there you stand in line for class admit cards, then you go to the bookstore and stand in line there for two hours to get books. That was it. . . .I didn't look on it favorably.

A: I thought our 11 O'Clock curfew was too much though.

A: I hated it. I actually went home, I couldn't stand it. . . .I stayed in Pickering Hall and the floor, the whole room, was in shambles. The dresser drawers were all broken. I woke up the one night I stayed there and the floor was all wet, the bathrooms were filthy. I just couldn't, in fact the reason why I escaped, because they had people that were watching so you didn't leave because they didn't want anyone leaving and getting hurt. There wasn't even a lock on my window, it was broke, so I climbed out and I left. . . .I had to leave, it was that bad.

A: I hated orientation. When I came back from orientation I was not setting foot on this campus. [When she was asked if something happened, she said] No, I hated it. I thought the people were, I don't know, maybe because...I didn't want to go away but I hated it. My parents stayed up in the [Pocono Mountains] because they didn't want to drive back and forth. I called them and said if you love me, you'll come get me. My father said,...sorry...got a golf game at nine, you're staying. My mother called back and said "I'll come get you," but he took her car keys. He

wouldn't let her go. I hated it...my roommate happened to be a commuter, she knew she wasn't going to be there, she had a boyfriend, she snuck out, she was never there, she was from this area, she could have been a lot of help but, no, she said "see ya later."

As with the freshmen, the seniors were asked to rate the identical contributing factors, as shown in Appendix I, as to how much difficulty they had in each area over their four years according to the following scale: 1 = to a great extent; 2 = to some extent; 3 = to a little extent; or 4 = not at all. The ten areas with which the seniors at each college had the most difficulty, based on the average rating assigned to each factor, are listed below in ascending order (areas of greatest difficulty listed first). There are more than ten on each list because some of the factors received identical averages.

#### College A

Lack of career counseling and advising

Financial problems

Quality of academic advising

Bureaucracy (red tape)

Limited offering in college programs

Boredom with classes and teaching

Marriage, pregnancy or other family responsibilities

Social environment on campus  
Uncertainty regarding educational plans and purposes  
Lower grades than expected  
Cultural opportunities on campus  
Quality of teaching

#### College B

Quality of academic advising  
Bureaucracy (red tape)  
Feeling [College B] was not the right college  
Limited offering in college programs  
Boredom with classes and teaching  
Quality of teaching  
Uncertainty regarding educational plans and purposes  
Type of Student Body  
Coping with the transition to college  
Financial problems  
Lack of contact with faculty and administrators

The seven factors listed as areas of difficulty by seniors at both colleges and, therefore, representing areas of most difficulty among the combined group of seniors, in order of degree of difficulty, are: quality of academic advising; bureaucracy (red tape); limited offering in college programs; financial problems; boredom with classes and teaching; uncertainty regarding educational plans and



purposes; and overall quality of teaching. When asked to elaborate on some of these items the following observations surfaced from College A respondents:

On Bureaucracy

A: I had a problem there. I was trying to drop a class because I had it back in high school. I took it for college credit, it was economics, and I had, as a matter of fact, the same teacher [Dr. F]. And I wanted to drop the class. And I think it was the day before I wasn't able to get my 100% tuition back and I wanted to see Dr. B (student's advisor). And he was standing in his office and he wouldn't give me one second. He said make an appointment and come in and see me. I said I have to see you today because if I drop it tomorrow I'm going to lose 20% of my money. He said "make the appointment, I have to go." And then in the meantime, he sits there on the secretary's desk with his legs crossed, talking about something that happened last week. It just really made me mad. I went to the Dean about it. . . .It was the same teacher, that was really funny. And he's the one who told me to drop it. He said you shouldn't be taking this again, you had the same thing in high school.

A: I was very outspoken. When I had a problem, they were the first to know about it. I know a lot of students when they did have problems just groaned and whined and didn't say much to anyone. When I had problems I took them straight to the head, straight to the department and got it taken care of. There were a couple red tape issues as far as classes goes, and I just went to the head and told them I was paying this much money and what I expected. I think they pretty much knew how I felt when I walked in the office. There was some bureaucracy but I took care of it on my own.

A: My advisor was one of the teachers I had a problem with that I spoke about earlier and she was also my department chairperson as well. So, I really didn't have anyone to talk to about these problems except higher up the ladder. I made sure I made the appointments with the people to talk with them face-to-face. In one particular incident I spoke with the teacher after class and that was brushed off. So, I made an appointment with this teacher and in the office they didn't really want to acknowledge my complaint at all. Since I didn't get anywhere with that I went to the chairperson and when I was in the office with this person they seemed to try to make everything fine and dandy

and then try and make you happy and get you out of there is the feeling you got. But then nothing was ever done. They'd say "we'll see about this" and then they wouldn't follow through. I even went a step farther and went to the dean about it and I feel better. I wouldn't have rested if I didn't follow through on it. Nothing was ever done. The faculty member was never called into the dean's office, they never even asked this faculty about it, so nothing was ever done about this problem.

A: Well, I'm basically thinking of the Department Heads all the way down to the cashier's office, the financial aid office and such. As a student there is actually a lack of communication. You're sent a letter, here's what's going to happen, contact us if you want. And then if you do contact them you get thrown around to the secretary's is what I find. After a while you quit trying.

On limited offering in college programs

A: [They didn't have] all the majors that other colleges might offer. That would draw in different types of people as well. We don't have sororities or fraternities. Some things that

larger colleges have that [College A] doesn't have. They had a good variety of things but there were some things they didn't offer.

A: It got worse for me because I guess I got more demanding. The more education I got I felt that I needed more of a challenge. Some courses are only offered at certain times or in certain semesters, in other words there was no flexibility. A lot of colleges will offer courses in the late afternoon or early evening as well as in the morning, [College A] doesn't have that option for a lot of their courses. Or they will offer a course every other year in the fall, so, if you don't take it then and you don't know that you have only one opportunity to take it, it's gone. Now, specifically for business, they encourage you to take certain electives and the last year I was there none of those electives were being offered. They encourage you to take them but there is no one there to teach them. There was one elective that I was waiting to come around because I really wanted to take it and I had been waiting for it for years and I only found out in senior year that it really hasn't been taught in years, they didn't have anyone to teach it, so, they're very good with the intro courses and they're very good with

the sophomore offerings but once you get into the higher levels, where maybe there's a smaller class size because only people who are really interested in that subject want to take it, they're not offered all the time.

#### On financial problems

A: Taking out the amount of student loans and having to pay them back, the cost of books are absolutely phenomenal. The fact there are not that many scholarships and grants for people that are underprivileged, I consider myself at this point in time to be underprivileged, poverty line and there is no incentive for someone to go to college. You take on a tremendous amount of debt and the college should be a little bit more apt to help you in that area, beyond work-study. . . . What is the goal of giving you \$500 in work-study for a semester if you can't earn \$500.

A: I was fortunate enough to have my parents pay my tuition but, the fact that books were so outrageously priced. My mom and dad offered to pay my tuition and that was wonderful but I don't ask my parents for anything else. I have a car to get back and forth from school. I had to work and books alone every semester could be \$300-350.

That's a lot of money for a student who is trying to maintain life outside of college. . . .If you have to go have your schedule changed they charge you money for that, to punch your name up on the computer. Little things like that I think they really took advantage of and I don't think there was need for that, there was no need for that whatsoever.

#### On boredom with classes and teaching

A: Well, there are just certain professors there that are just too old to be there. I think tenure is a problem, ...I think that...the educational process isn't a matter of someone standing up in front of the classroom reciting things from the book or using an overhead projector and tossing out a bunch of notes. You have to be able to get involved. If you can't get involved in a class then students are going to sit and be bored and they're not going to take it all in. They're going to take it in for the time being just until they have to regurgitate it back and that's it. No absorption.

A: Some classes were, because they were required more or less, we had to take them to graduate, I was not interested in these courses whatsoever, and

then because they are required I think it is so much easier to just sit there and not really want to be involved because you are not interested to begin with. But, some of the courses that were required like that, it seemed like some of the professors were just there doing what they had to do and they knew it was required and they knew some of the students just didn't want to be there...and it was just like you take the course and you get it done and it's finished with.

A: I had one particular professor who taught a lot of classes in my major who didn't teach. He went on about his personal life. I really missed a lot in my major because of those classes. I used to dread them. They were so boring, I was so sick of hearing about his personal life. It wasn't a lot of teachers but this particular professor played a major part in my major area of studies.

#### On quality of teaching

A: There were some really good teachers. The English teachers were awful, I thought. There was maybe one [who] was a really good teacher. Other than that I had a couple of To-Be-Announced teachers and I just thought they were very frustrating. The Religion courses really aggravated me. I was

under the impression they were supposed to give you general knowledge and sometimes certain teachers would just push their views on you. There are certain teachers you just can't push them in opposite directions.

A: I think that [College A is] going to have a serious problem considering the fact that most of the professors that I have talked to, that I felt were very good professors are leaving [College A]. And there going to be stuck with what's left. The fact that they are raising their tuition and getting rid of the quality teachers, I think is going to be a serious problem. As a matter of fact someone said to me the other day they were sending their daughter to [College A] and how did I feel about that and I said, well, I couldn't really say anything positive. I believe that if your going to raise the tuition let's raise the quality of education along with it.

One of College A's major problem areas, based on these interviews, was the Financial Aid Office. The attitude of the people who work there was the main problem. Financial Aid is one of the most difficult and bureaucratic areas of higher education administration. Both federal and state regulations and their respective need determination formulas



are getting out of hand. Dealing with students poorly, however, only serves to exacerbate the difficulty with an already confusing process. Consider the following comments regarding the people in College A's financial aid office:

A: The information, especially at graduation, they said, "Oh, all this money is available," you don't know about it. I would like to know where it goes and who it goes to. I realize people like to keep things confidential. But, still, if I were receiving financial aid I'd be willing to tell people. There is just a lot of stuff you don't know.

A: They're not very personable. Whenever I would go in there they're very short with you. I know other people who had the same problem as well. They don't seem to want to help you and you get a very cold feeling from them.

A: I hated the people in financial aid. I thought they were total bitches. They weren't friendly, they weren't nice and they're supposed to be there to help you. They were just snotty when you walk in there. . . .And you know what though, it was not just the financial aid office. Like anywhere you work there's always a nice group of people but there was a lot of older women there who were just crotchety.

A: Maybe it is because they do the same thing over and over and its easy for them to understand and they get sick of explaining, but they have no tolerance for questions that you have and there's an awful lot of work that you have to do for financial aid and forms and everything and...the people in the financial aid office are real intolerant of questions and concerns that you have.

The following comments were generated by asking College B respondents to elaborate on several areas of difficulty:

On limited offering in college programs

A: In Economics, they have the major Economics, so its available, but they have no one to teach, well, actually they have a limited number, maybe 2 professors that are willing to teach a full load each semester so there really isn't a lot of coursework offered in Economics.

A: I was going to say the same thing with the major I'm in. I have a class that's only offered every 3rd semester and if, by chance, it wasn't offered this semester I wouldn't graduate. That's not fair, I mean, its not normal it should be offered. Like he said there's only 3-4 professors. I feel bad for the people who are graduating next year

because half the business people are taking sabbaticals, so they're not going to be offering anything.

On financial problems

A: Financially, I didn't have any difficulty financially because my parents paid for it. But my father had lost his job about four years ago, I was a freshman in college and my sister was a senior in college at the time, they would not give him a red penny in financial aid, nothing, we couldn't get anything. I see how many people who get education for free and get all these grants and things, it seems a little unfair sometimes.

A: I've had a lot of trouble. After my freshman year I...I paid for it on my own but they didn't understand that my parents weren't contributing. Then [a woman in the financial aid office] helped me out and I turned independent]. But now I work 30 hours a week to go here, it's a lot of work.

A: My sister was a junior when I first came so there were two of us in college. Her tuition was \$16-17,000. My parents were paying for both of us so they made us both take out loans so they could afford it. So she had 2 years of loans and I had 2 years of loans. Then my brother just entered

school so, of course, he's getting 2 years of loans and I'm getting 2 years of loans. I'm getting stuck with 4 years and they're only getting stuck with 2 so I'm a little upset.

#### On boredom with classes and teaching

A: I think there are a lot of professors that are on this campus that should have been gone a long time ago. Just because they're either too old or there's things that happen but there very, very smart professors but they just leave them with us and I think its because they don't want to hire new professors. I think it really hurts some of the classes because I know some of the psychology classes could be very interesting but its just the wrong professor they're keeping.

A: There are certain classes, certain teachers are pretty good teachers but there are others that are not. Certain classes there is only one teacher offered for that class and so you're sort of stuck taking them, and sometimes it bothers me that they're not there.

#### On Quality of Teaching

A: I have a class now, psychological testing, and it's with this professor, he is a brilliant man

but the whole semester he hasn't taught us one thing. He tells us about his wife who passed away, his granddaughter, who...went to college when she was 16, everything else but what we needed to learn and its a class I'm going to need at graduate school and I'm probably going to hurt when I go.

A: I was going to say a more positive attitude on the teachers by encouraging you a little bit more along the way. I'm not asking for anyone to take me by the hand but when I do well I want to be recognized.

A: Some professors give me the impression they don't want you to succeed. They won't go out of their way to make you [succeed]. I basically have always gotten the grades I deserved. I've always gotten the benefit of the doubt, I'd have to say. [In] some classes I did have difficulties...I failed a course here, it was a statistics course and I missed it by a point last spring. I attended every single class, I did all my homework, I just had a really difficult time with statistics and she wouldn't give me the benefit of the doubt. I understand there is a cutoff point and you have to draw the line somewhere. But I think because of my attitude and my participation,

I should have passed the course. That is basically the only problem I had with grades.

One of the main problem areas with College B is its Academic Advising process. A few comments made by seniors might help shed some light on this area of concern:

A: [When asked if [College B] could have done anything differently, this person replied] Better advising and I think my problem was that they should really plan it out for your four years, what classes you are going to take.

A: I'd have to say, because I've heard so many mixed reviews from people, I went through 3 different advisors, my last advisor was very good, the other two weren't particularly bad but I've heard horror stories from other people that the advisors don't know what's going on. Even when I was being advised, I was lucky enough to have a very patient [advisor] who would go through the handbook and we tried to figure it out on our own. Because it seemed somewhere along the line somebody wasn't telling somebody something.

A: Well, when I first came in as a freshman I was undecided, they automatically give you to a dean. They don't have special people to be advisors they're all the professors and the deans. The

dean gave me classes like physics, biology, anthropology. I had too many, you needed a certain amount of classes from each area, and I had too many from certain areas and it brought me back a little. Then, when I decided on Education, I got switched to an education advisor. This one advisor I had when I was pre-registering he didn't really know much about my major. I said my roommate is also a psychology major and he [the advisor] said "well let's give her a call and see what classes you should take" and I think he should have known that.

A: My example is when I started talking about graduate school he [the advisor] told me I'd make a really good administrator. He didn't try and talk me into taking the special area of sociology he tried to have me do the administration. So, I got somebody else for my counseling and he just suggested not to change advisors because my advisor at the time writes really good letters of recommendation, so, if I was to change advisors I might not get that great of a letter of recommendation.

A: My advisor is just really, really busy. He's the chairperson of the...department so that I can understand. But when I go in and try and make an

appointment, sometimes, not recently, because I'm doing independent research and, basically, I'm pretty much in line but I know sometimes he'd be like "Oh, just fill it out and I'll sign the bottom, ok, bye." and I'd be like "you know I'm graduating, I need to sit down with you and really see if this is what needs to be done" and I know a lot of times I just went to someone else even if not my department.

To assess whether either college had an effective "Early Warning System" as part of their retention strategy, each senior, as was each freshman, was asked if they had ever been contacted by anyone from the school to discuss any difficulties they may have been having. College A respondents were overwhelmingly negative in their response to this item. Only three people recalled having been contacted to discuss any problems. Two of these contacts involved the tutoring program that offered free tutoring. Neither student, however, availed themselves of the services, because one was being tutored by a relative and the other was disappointed with the knowledge of the tutor. The other of the three contacts came through the counseling office after the student simply just stopped going to one particular class.



Those who were not contacted by anyone were then asked if it would have been helpful if that contact had occurred. With the exception of two or three, all thought it would have been helpful if someone had reached out to them. A sampling of the comments follows:

A: Yes, I think so. As long as they weren't part of the problem.

A: Oh, I'm sure it would have. Sure, whenever somebody comes after you you feel like you have been noticed and I think that builds your morale and makes you feel special in some ways.

A: If it was a personal problem and someone was calling me and saying "we know you are having a personal problem" I might get a little nervous thinking who's talking about me and why are they calling me. But if I changed my major or something and they called me and said "do you want to come in and talk about your career move" that would be very nice and that would make me feel included and that they really cared. But I don't know about personal problems. Maybe if I was having a problem in the dorm and the RA referred my name that would be good to. I would like that.

College B respondents were fairly evenly split though slightly more hadn't been contacted than had. Most of those

who weren't contacted, however, were more pessimistic about the effect of this contact than their College A colleagues. For instance, one person remarked, "it wouldn't have made a difference," while another commented, "I think if I'm having trouble there is nothing anyone else can do to help me. If its personal I don't like to share it with anyone who is not familiar with me." One person had a negative experience with someone who reached out, reporting that:

A: [Nursing students] had to take this test, it was a pre-determiner of state boards. There were 17 out of 23 that had failed or had just passed it and ...[the department chairperson] called us in and was putting us down saying you are going to have trouble if you don't study. It was a big lack of communication, because if I would have known it was that type of test I would have studied. She didn't know any of us until our senior year and I think that's very wrong. How can someone slam somebody they don't even know. So, I don't think it was her place even to speak with us on that subject.

Another person had this type of contact initiated on her behalf. She related the following:

A: These people, these girls I hung out with, after I wasn't friends with them anymore, they had told

the school psychiatrist that I was very depressed and actually thought that I was contemplating suicide, and they went to him and they told him...we think this girl is very upset and very depressed and we don't want to be blamed for anything if anything does happen to her. So, I think the school psychiatrist actually knew who I was and was looking out for me, to tell you the truth. . . .I found this out through my other friends that this is what happened. Through word of mouth, [College B] is a small school. You find these things out. [Had you gone to see the counseling center would it have made life less stressful maybe and a little more productive?] Yeah, I think it would have. I think I was just "oh, my God, no" I just couldn't see myself going to talk to a shrink. That's probably why I didn't do it. I probably should have and it probably would have helped me.

One of the cornerstones of any retention program is a student's sense of commitment to any particular institution. The goal of the next series of questions was to determine if either college had endeavored to secure a commitment from their students. Each participant was first asked if a request had been made of them by the college to make a

commitment regarding their educational intentions such as whether they intended to graduate or to stay one or two years and then transfer to another college. A vast majority of College A respondents either were not asked or could not remember having been asked to set such goals. A similar result occurred at College B where although many remembered some goal setting as part of the Core Studies course, no one recalled it being very productive.

Participants were then asked if a request had been made of them to declare some academic performance goals. Again, from both colleges, the majority of those interviewed could not recall having been asked to set performance goals. A couple of College A responders had some interesting answers to this question. One commented that the academic department, though not coming right out and asking, required that "you must maintain a certain level or you will not be able to student teach in your senior year." Another student similarly remarked, "In our department they gave us an outline of things we should have accomplished each semester, the courses, if you would count that. I really set my own goals in that respect, made sure I took all the classes on time at the particular time I was supposed to so I wouldn't get behind."

The third question in this trilogy on goal setting sought the respondent's opinions on whether a systematic goal setting process would have been helpful to them in their college experience. The response, surprisingly, was a split decision. Those from College A who thought it would not have made a difference were asked to explain why. One person said, "I have my own personal goals for what I want." One person responded, "I think at that level it is important to set a personal goal and you don't need to proclaim that to everybody." Another agreed, "I guess I had goals for myself but I never had to tell what they were."

The most interesting exchange from a College A respondent was as follows:

Q: Were you ever asked to set a goals for your academic performance?

A: No. Yeah, in the very beginning of each class I think that each professor always asked what grade you would like to receive in this class. And, of course, I always did the middle of the road B.

Q: Was that a helpful exercise for you?

A: No. I thought it was absolutely pointless. What I want and what I am able to obtain through your teaching are two entirely different things. I could say I want an A and feel that when I go into [the classroom] I can say 'hey, I really like this

course material' and if that course material is not...presented to me in a way that is comprehensible to me then I'm not going to get anything out of it and whether I said a 'B' or an 'A' or an 'F' for that matter is irrelevant.

On the other side of the coin were those who thought a goal-setting exercise would have helped them in their college experience. One such person simply commented, "yeah, it sounds like a great idea." The following responses were the result of some more thought on the matter:

A: Yes, I did have a couple of classes where we were to predict our grade and try to work to a goal . . . .It didn't make much of a difference to me because I want A's in everything, but being an educator I can see how that could affect someone . . . .it becomes more of an external goal when you put it down on paper.

A: Well, I think so. I was very satisfied with the grade point average. I graduated Summa Cum Laude with a 3.8. I set my own personal goal. I think if someone had set a goal for me I would definitely strive to meet those.

A: I guess maybe in the beginning if I had a counseling session at the end of the first year

and they said "look this is where you are; where do you want to be." Maybe once a year and not just with your advisor because they are always on it, but maybe with someone like the assistant if she called every student in after the first year. Someone higher up with more authority who acted like they cared, it would make a difference.

At College B, it was a slightly different story regarding the value of a goal setting exercise. When this year's seniors were freshmen, College B initiated what they called a Core Studies program. This was meant to be a freshman year experience program, from what I gather, but was unsuccessful and subsequently eliminated. It was a joke according to one of the participants who continued, "the only goal thing that they did they wanted you to make out a chart on what you plan on doing over the next 8 semesters, write down your classes and tell them what you wanted to be when you grew up. I thought it was funny. Where is that paper today though they said they'd keep it." As freshmen they were asked to set goals but then these goals were never discussed again. One student spoke frankly on why they cancelled the Core Studies course, saying, "they found out how stupid it was." Lastly one senior had another angle on why the goal setting effort failed:

A: The teachers weren't happy to be there to begin with. They look at that as, I won't say, punishment, but once in a while it comes around and it's something you just have to do. Teachers weren't happy to be there for the goal setting part to be any good. It would have to be more individualistic. They just assigned the project to everybody, collected them all the same day, and put them in a box. There was nothing to be gained by that.

Next to commitment, another important retention factor has proven to be having someone on campus with whom the student develops an affiliation or mentorship. To ascertain the impact these kinds of relationships had on retention, each senior was asked to mention "one or two people who had a particularly positive influence on your experience at [college name here]." This was the only question where the response from all 31 seniors was unanimous. All were quick to mention one or several people who fulfilled this role. In keeping with the findings from the literature, the vast majority of these contacts were with faculty members. One person from College A remarked, for instance, "In administration I don't really know anyone. I saw the President for the first time at Graduation. I saw her in



the paper but never in person." Interestingly, most of these important relationships were not with advisors either.

One person from College A commented, "I think [Dr. M.] was really good. I enjoyed his classes. He's very much into relating to his students. It was a very personable experience. He made the learning enjoyable. And, [Dr. McC.] She is a part-time teacher. . . .She was very nice. She was also very in tune with the students. You were able to talk freely in her classes." Another respondent said of one professor, "I think he is very open with his students. I've seen him tutor kids in math and he doesn't even teach math. He has the most office hours I have ever seen. He's there a lot. He teaches a difficult class and he is, himself, a difficult teacher but he will walk you through it if you need it. If you come down to his office, he doesn't turn people away or say 'go find a tutor,' he will help you as much as he can." Still another remarked about one of her history professors, "He gave a wonderful speech. I had him for the first class ever, and he was tying a liberal arts education in with what humanity was trying to shoot for during the age of enlightenment and the age of reason and the value of becoming a more global citizen. It went through the whole class period. It was great and it really motivated me to get learning." Perhaps the impact people

can have on students is most evident in the following two responses:

A: I found strength within myself by watching her [Dr. B.]. She is a single parent, very successful, very willing to take you under her wing and guide you through things. And, like I said, I only got a 'D' in her class but I found her as a person, she is definitely an educator. If I had taken anybody else I probably wouldn't have learned anything in Spanish. I have a great admiration for the woman.

A: There were three people that were really important to me here. First, was Sister [M. G.] because I always felt her door was open and she made it possible for me to continue my education here when I might have otherwise had to drop out because my husband passed away two years ago. It was a trauma, loss of finances, everything, It was like ripping out the bottom of your life. Sister [R. K.], I happened to take a religion course with her the fall semester after my husband passed away. And she was available to me, to sit with me, to listen to me. . . .She was really sensitive to me and through my writings had realized there had been a trauma. So, she lent me the emotional support and Sister [M. G.] lent me the financial

wherewithal. . . .It if wasn't for both of those women...

Respondents from College B had similar comments about these very important relationships. One person remarked about one professor, "He was my favorite instructor. He would open up the labs for us and he would spend time when he wasn't even working just going over bones and muscles and always made sure he went through everything, if there was anything you had a question on." Another commented about a different professor, "he has a great method of teaching but I needed some help on a couple of occasions and I just got this impression this guy's here for the students, that's the impression I got. He'd go out on a limb for you if he had to. He's one guy, when I leave, he'll be one of the professors I'll remember the most." Yet another said, "Dr. T. is one, even though he's very hard to (contact). He just makes me feel good about myself. Like psychology, he says that there is definitely something there that I have with psychology and he just makes me feel really good about it."

After discussing positives and negatives, each participant was asked "What could (college name here) have done differently, if anything, that would have made your college experience less stressful, more productive, or more meaningful?" The responses, though all over the map, were

all related with emotion. College A responses ranged from wanting better treatment by the nuns to more student participation, from more attention paid to a particular department to unmotivated faculty, from the unfairness of what seemed like unwritten rules to more outreach by faculty and staff as well as requests for more activities, more career forums and a complaint by one senior that College A "dragged out" her program of study. This student commented, "I definitely feel it was dragged out. It was partly my fault too, because I did so many things in between. Instead of finishing in four years [three additional years at College A], I should have finished in three years seeing that I did a year at [another college], they dragged it out to five years [four additional years at College A]."

Three areas of concern received more than one comment: parking; paying more attention to student complaints; and the desire for narrower curricula which were not so incredibly "well-rounded." A comment from each of these three areas is noted below:

A: They could have let me park in front of the dorms, sometimes. It has, I think over the last several years become a stressful situation, parking.

A: I'd love to see them pay more attention to student complaints about some of the professors here. There are some valid complaints going on and...it

doesn't appear as though they are being dealt with and I don't know why.

A: I understand that [College A] is a liberal arts college, I do understand that, I knew that going into it but, I think they put entirely way too much stress on courses like foreign languages and history. For a speech pathology major, ...unless I chose to be a bi-lingual speech pathologist, something like Spanish would not help me in any way, whatsoever. And they put way too much stress on classes that...I feel just aren't going to help you once you get out into the real world. . . .There should have been more choice. Like maybe for speech pathology or special education, instead of taking Spanish or German or French we may have been able to take sign language because that is a foreign language to many people and would have been very useful to us.

Two College A seniors were brave enough to accept at least partial responsibility for their negative experiences. One remarked, "I think a lot of the reason I didn't get involved was my own fault," while the other said, "I didn't get involved and do anything. There were a lot of things I could have done...but I didn't have the time. . . .I hear a

lot of people complaining about how boring it is but I never got involved in anything so I never complained about that."

From College B respondents there was a similar variety of answers. Comments were made about academic advising, the lack of a swimming pool, building maintenance, faculty evaluations, a more positive faculty attitude, and more faculty/student interaction, particularly intra-departmentally. The biggest rub among the seniors had to do with what they clearly perceived as an unfair distribution of resources resulting in not enough academic resources, too many athletic resources and a generally disorganized and mismanaged institution. One student, for instance, remarked, "I think [College B] in general is very unorganized." Comments in these latter three categories included the following:

A: More resources to music department. Physical facility for music program was poor. Other programs get more funding. Music didn't seem important to College B.

A: I think mostly its money, they don't get nearly as much as they need. The theatre department gets \$6,000 a year, ok, that's terrible. You could spend that on one production easily. The camera and stuff they have downstairs for the television

in the Stark Building, they are 15-20 years old which is pathetic.

A: I think they spend too much money supporting the wrestler's thing because they have, I just found this out, that at [an area restaurant] they have a running account that wrestler's just go there and eat for free and they have all the scholarships they are giving to wrestlers. I just think it is sort of, for a small school like this to try and support our wrestling team, ridiculous.

A: They really do give too much money to sporting activities because we all pay the same tuition bill here, if anything, those who play sports pay less because of scholarships and whatnot, and 1/2 the things we have on campus we can't even use.

A: A couple of the programs they started when we came in, how you switch advisors, I don't think they communicate with one another what they are trying to accomplish."

During the focus group interview at College B, which represented the first set of senior interviews, the following impromptu question was asked: If you knew then what you know now, would you have chosen College B? The responses received were interesting enough that the question was then repeated during each interview. Of the total

sample of 31 seniors, slightly over 60 percent either were definite they would not have chosen their current college or leaned in that direction. Only about 40 percent were sure they made the right choice.

Two of the more interesting comments from each college's pool of respondents are noted below:

From College A respondents:

A: For the education that I have gained in my major, yes, as far as the liberal arts background goes. But now I wish I had majored in something that was more tangible as far as having a career, like engineering. I'm a certified scuba diving instructor, I sky dive and I climb and I would have liked to go into something where I could put all that together, which is why I had intended to be an army officer. But then my career was cut short with the cutdowns. So, I'm trying to find out where I'm going. I would like to see [College A] have more majors branching out into the sciences rather than the arts.

A: Probably not. I went through this. I have a friend who is thinking of applying as a freshman this fall and I had to go through this with him. . .I just presented him the facts, I didn't really advise him. But he chose not to apply. The size



is good for me but other people it is not good for. It is a very homogenous group of people that go there. It seems like they are trying to make an effort to recruit different kinds of people from different areas. They are really not all the way there yet. That is something I feel I missed out on, that a larger school would have presented.

From College B respondents:

A: I ask myself this question a lot, I was in a really good position to go to graduate school, I had no bills and if I went to another school I would have bills. That might make next year a different situation for me. So from that standpoint I'm glad I'm in the position I'm in. But, if I get to [college name] and find that these people are running circles around me, and I look back and say I did everything they asked me and I'm just not ready to be here, I'm going to be ready to punch some heads.

A: I did an internship this summer, and some things I really don't think [College B] prepared me for. Some things sounded familiar, what they were talking about but other things, not a clue. They were like "didn't you learn this," and I was like, "no, I'm taking that class next semester." What

do you say to that. A lot of things I thought were a challenge. I don't know if it was my study habits maybe it was then but I really don't think [College B] prepared me. [When asked "Why did you stay?" the response was,] My roommates. That was it, they were why I stayed. . . .I was accepted to another college and I liked that because it had a Co-op program that placed you in a job and that was what I really wanted to do but they were like "no, stay here." Of course, they only had a year left and here, I had two more.

After discussing the areas of difficulty and probing for specifics regarding some of them, participants were asked if they had any other general comments about their experience at their respective schools. Over half of the respondents from College A had very little more to add at this point with most simply saying they thought they had expressed all or most of their concerns. One person did, however, comment that, "as far as the Art Department goes, I'm not familiar with the other departments, but more internships. I think more of the kids should be placed out in the field and I don't think it should wait until senior year." Several used this opportunity to place a disclaimer on their criticisms. One person, for instance, remarked, "For all my complaints about it, if it was really that bad I

would have quit. Maybe because I'm older I expect a little bit more, and there are some things that I didn't like about the college but, in general, it was a positive experience, I'm glad I went." Another person spoke highly of College A but not about their specific major, saying, "I don't want to put the school down, and I don't mean to, just for my major, fashion design, it's not the ideal place to go. . . .All in all it was a good experience. I would recommend it to someone who was in a different field. If someone wants to go into nursing I would definitely say go to [College A]."

One respondent mentioned the parking situation as a detriment and another lamented over the declining quality of the student body. One particular student had some constructive criticism, saying:

A: Maybe one thing is to listen to the students a little more about their opinions about the professors. I know they have these evaluations but I think the professors can choose who they want to give evaluations to. Because I know there seems to be some classes where we evaluated the professor and others where we didn't so they must have to have so many evaluations. Maybe if every class had the opportunity to evaluate their professor. [When asked if there was a sense that those evaluations were used in any way by the

institution, this person responded] Well, when the professors were giving them they always mentioned how important they were. I've heard of one professor being removed, I don't know if the evaluations had anything to do with that. As far as the professors are concerned, they seem to take them very seriously.

College B respondents followed a similar pattern. Most felt they had covered all they wished to with their responses to other questions. One student, however, thought College B needed to motivate the faculty to be more creative, more involved with their classes saying, "If they were going to hire new teachers or if they were going to talk to their teachers about how to prepare students, I think they should take the path of getting teachers involved." Because, this person continued, if the faculty "get involved, the students do better." Parking was also mentioned in response to this question. One student was not as charitable, commenting, I "wouldn't recommend [College B] to anyone. . . .[I] want to know where the money went that [I] paid. The library is awful. [I] go to [another college] to get a good library."

Each of the 31 senior participants were chosen, among other characteristics, because they all had considered

withdrawing at one time or another. After talking with each person and asking all the above questions and listening to their myriad of successes and failures each was asked "How did you cope with the difficulties and make it through the four years?" One person from College A, who simply did not want to talk about it commented, "It is personal and I really don't want to discuss it. I left for personal reasons and I went back for personal reasons. And they are private and personal but they had nothing to do with [College A]. They had to do with my personal life." Other reasons, mentioned once each, included being treated as an individual not a number, the beautiful campus, the dedication of the faculty and staff in general, and the particular dedication of the department faculty. The last comment was mentioned twice. Multiple responses were received in three major areas: the encouragement of family and/or friends, the personal and financial value of the education itself, and sheer personal motivation. A sampling of responses in these latter three areas is as follows:

A: At the time I had some support. I had a boyfriend at the time who was very proud of me and encouraged me. I also had a few family members who were very supportive and that kept me hanging in there. Second year I also met a very good friend there and together we got through it in the four years, she was my support.

A: Probably my family would be one because they were very supportive in terms of helping me make decisions. And if I did have a problem they would help me with it. That and just my goals just thinking I started this I want to finish it.

A: Well, I realized how important an education is, especially to make it in to society, and I don't want to have to work for minimum wage the rest of my life and to accomplish that I need the degree and go on for the Masters and so forth, and raise my family and everything else.

A: Well, I felt like I didn't have a choice. I could either be poor during my college days and dealt with that or I could have been poor the rest of my life.

A: Well, it had nothing to do with [College A]. It had to do with the fact that I have a 6-year old son. He needs to be taken care of. I want a life-style for him that is quality. That was my main goal. That was my higher power, so to speak.

A: I think the fact that I knew how important a college education was. The reason I was thinking about leaving was not because I didn't like [College A],...I wasn't doing as well as I had anticipated in the beginning and I had a professor who wasn't helping the situation any [by] trying

to get me to change majors. . . .At one point I was ready to give it in and say ok, I'm going to do what this person wants me to do and I'm going to leave but, then I was like no way, I know I can do this and I'm going to make it and I did.

College B respondents exhibited similar diversity in their responses which included singular responses of: academic department personnel; the major they had chosen; faculty support; fear of change; and changing a major. There were two areas of multiple response which were, as was the case with College A, encouragement of friends and family and personal motivation. Below are a couple of responses from these latter categories:

A: I think it has a lot to do with friends. I met a lot of good friends they just made my time here more enjoyable. Every time I'm home I'm like I can't wait to be back with those guys. When I graduate I'm gonna miss this place.

A: I had one particular friend that I met at College B and if it wasn't for her I don't think I would have made it through. My parents pushed me, well they didn't really push me, they encouraged me. I always looked up to my brother, my brother's a doctor, so I always looked to him, he is a role model to me and so was my family. For the past

two years it has been my fiance. He pushed me a lot too. He wants me to do the best that I can. So, I guess it was friends and family. The biggest influence was that friend.

A: I think it was my own self-motivation that kept me there. I wanted to stick it out. I wanted to see if I could somehow make something good come out of everything. My family supported me no matter what I did. . . .But I wanted to stick it out just to know that I finished. I didn't want to feel that I left something undone.

A: I had a great freshman year, as I said. Sophomore year came and, socially, I had personal problems, relationships, friends. It was the first semester of my sophomore year and everything collided at once...and I let my personal life get too involved with my academics and my grades totally dropped ...my self-esteem was down. I was planning on transferring, I had withdrawn from [College B], I hadn't registered for the following semester. I took everything out of my dorm. I was going to the [other college]. I just decided on my own, I had too many credits, I thought, I'm going to go back, hold my head up high and bring my grades back up. And that's what I did, I got a 3.0 that semester. I made a new life for myself.



As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, because of the volume of information the results above were presented in a straight-forward question-by-question format. The next chapter will go a step further and analyze the results by comparing the results within each sample and between samples along several dimensions such as gender and date of withdrawal. Conclusions, drawn from the data, and the relationship of some of the findings to the literature will be explored in the next chapter also. Recommendations for College A and College B individually and collectively as well as implications for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management practitioners will be articulated in Chapter Seven.

## CHAPTER 6

### ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will look at the results of this study by comparing the responses from the two colleges according to gender, residency status, time of withdrawal, class standing and college attended. In the next and final chapter, I shall suggest recommendations for both colleges involved in the study as well as implications for Student Affairs practitioners and for further study.

Freshmen, regardless of whether you compare residents to commuters, males to females or those who withdrew during their first semester to those who withdrew between semesters, differed ever so slightly regarding their reasons for going to college in the first place and the reasons they chose to go to either College A or College B. There was, however, an interesting difference between residents and commuters as to why they left their respective institutions. It seems that those commuter students who left lacked a sense of commitment from the very start of their college experience. More commuters than residents said that they left for financial reasons. Probing further, however, I found that they also left because the college didn't live up to their expectations, which were not very well formulated. Commuters seemed to invest little effort in their choice of college. They wanted to stay close to home, thus limiting

their options. College, unfortunately, became just another activity they tried to fit into their already busy lives. As an example of poor choice, one freshman commuter said, "I didn't like the studies, I didn't like what I was going for, I wanted to try something new."

In more cases than not, saying they were leaving for financial reasons was a convenient answer. Most students who originally claimed financial difficulty as their motive for leaving painted a cloudy picture when asked to explain their reasons more clearly. It was more accurate to say that they decided they could no longer afford to pay such a high price to pursue goals when they were unsure that they were the right goals for them. It was a question of priorities. One student, for instance, said, "Well, the GPA wasn't there and I couldn't see spending that much money for it," while another, who perhaps had made a wrong choice of college to begin with, replied, "Because it was too expensive...and they didn't have what I wanted to major in. I wanted to go into the health field but they didn't have exactly what I wanted."

The comparable question asked of the seniors was, "How did you cope with the difficulties and make it through four years?" Although no differences were found among the answers to this question between males and females,

residents and commuters exhibited slightly different coping mechanisms. Those seniors who lived on campus, as well as those at College B who lived in the neighborhoods adjacent to the campus, got their motivation primarily from family and friends. Commuters, however, received their primary encouragement through a combination of self-motivation and involvement with faculty members who served as mentors. Additionally, persisting commuters were able to establish a list of personal priorities with education near the top.

All respondents were asked why they chose the particular College, A or B, to attend. Looking at freshmen first, between males and females and between residents and commuters, there are no discernible differences in the stated reasons. Comparing responses from those freshmen who withdrew during the semester to those who withdrew between semesters there is a noticeable difference in the motivation and commitment levels of the respondents. Those who decided to get through the semester before withdrawing exhibited a stronger sense of purpose with comments about academic programs, high academic standards and campus aesthetics. On the other hand, those who bailed out mid-semester revealed, through their responses, much more spurious reasons for choosing a college. Among them were, "I wanted to stay (close to) home, that was the main reason," "My sister went there," and "It wasn't my first choice but it was a Division

1 school and I had a chance to go there and I got money for it." Most of those who withdrew during the semester appear to be attending college for the wrong reasons and, in many cases, someone else's reasons not their own.

Senior respondents weighing in on the subject, why they chose College A or B, revealed similar memories among males and females with differences occurring between residents and commuters. Commuters were less discriminating in what they looked for in a college. This was primarily due to their options being limited because they chose to remain close to home. Some were motivated by a perceived need to be close to family and friends while others felt the need to continue working at a part-time job. One respondent, for instance, said, "because it was close to home." Another said, "when I graduated from high school I didn't want to go away." Still another remarked, "I went to [another college] and then I transferred home because I wanted to get more involved with the family business." Resident students, conversely, by virtue of their decision to leave home, had many more options from which to choose. Their decisions were the result of deeper thought and comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the colleges or universities that they were considering at the time. One resident student offered, "in comparison to [another college]...[College A] was much cleaner, it was nicer and seemed more friendly." Another

offered, "I liked the location of it a lot. I was interested in education and I had heard good things about the department of education at [College A]. . . .And then when I visited the campus I just fell in love with it." Some were not as altruistic. You may remember the respondent, cited in chapter five, who was having a fight with his father at college decision time and the full scholarship at College B offered him financial independence.

The concept of community was dealt with at some length in chapter five. What bears repeating is that, with regards to feeling a part of a community, the main disparity occurred between residents and commuters with commuters not developing as great a sense of belonging as residents. No appreciable difference exists, however, between any of the other senior or freshman groups being compared, at least on any of the dimensions I explored.

One of the best opportunities an institution has to impact on a student's opinion of the school and to get them started on the right track is Orientation. Comparing responses of the freshman between males and females and between those withdrawing during and after completing one semester shows no difference in either attendance rates or satisfaction levels. Similarly, no difference is evident among senior respondents when separated by gender. When the

data were organized into commuter and resident groups, however, there were two interesting discernible patterns among freshman and senior respondents. First, commuters show a smaller attendance rate. This isn't surprising when one considers most colleges and universities have difficulty attracting commuters to any out-of-classroom experiences. Secondly, among those commuters who did attend orientation many reported it as a negative experience. There was a higher number of negative responses among commuters than residents.

When asked if they had ever been contacted by someone at the college or university to discuss difficulties they may have been having, no real difference existed in responses when organized by gender, residency status or time of withdrawal alone. But when you look at the aggregate responses in each category, a pattern emerged. In each grouping, and, therefore, in the sample as a whole, the majority of respondents do not remember having been contacted. Additionally, the vast majority of senior respondents as well as a fair number of freshmen, felt it would have been helpful had this contact occurred.

Tinto (1987) wrote, "it does seem to be the case that students who identify themselves as being marginal to the mainstream of institutional life are somewhat more likely to

withdraw than are persons who perceive themselves as belonging to the mainstream of institutional life" (p. 60). Elucidating further, he remarked, "the absence of sufficient contact with other members of the institution proves to be the single most important predictor of eventual departure" (pp. 64-65). This early warning system is one of the components of the retention plan in chapter four, which will be discussed later in this chapter, and these findings point to its potential effectiveness. Bynum & Thompson (1983) observed that the presence of this kind of support system would increase "the likelihood that the student will remain in college and refrain from dropping out" (p. 40).

Goal setting was the theme of the following three-question set:

- 1) Were you ever asked to make a commitment regarding your educational intentions (i.e., graduation, one year then transfer, etc.)?;
- 2) Were you ever asked to set a goal for your academic performance (predict what your grade point average would be at end of first semester)?;  
and
- 3) Do you think it would have made a difference in your decision to leave if you had been asked to set goals for yourself?



The responses point out that whatever goal setting process each institution employed was applied inconsistently and follow-up was minimal. College B, for instance, had instituted a Core Studies program during the semester when this group of seniors began. They asked the students to set various goals but hardly ever followed up on them later in the college experience. As a result, the students regarded this as a joke. In at least 50% of the cases, regardless of how the data were organized, students said a goal setting exercise would have been helpful to them in their educational experience. The one exception to this is freshman commuters, where 80% indicated a goal setting exercise would not have been helpful to them.

Commuters, in general, not only indicated much lower amount of goal setting experience, they also hold out little hope for any goal setting exercise to make a positive impact on their satisfaction levels. Additionally, seniors also indicate that goal setting played a small part in their overall experience. However, at least half of the senior cohort responded affirmatively when asked if a goal setting exercise would have been helpful to them. This was one component of chapter four's retention plan and these results indicate this would be a viable part of that effort.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two and the conversations that were part of this study confirm an observation made by Lee Noel in his book, Increasing Student Retention: Effective Programs and Practices for Reducing the Dropout Rate. Noel wrote, "Dropping out of college is a complex decision that is nearly always the result of a combination of factors. We therefore have come to think in terms of the themes of dropping out, the forces of attrition, and what we can do to counter them" (1985, p. 10). The complexity of the situation lies within the combination of factors involved in any one student's decision to leave a particular college or university. It is an additional obstacle if no pattern exists among these individual decisions made by individual students.

### Conclusions

Institutions of higher education owe it to themselves and to their respective futures to strive to learn as much as they can about why students leave their hallowed halls. They can draw conclusions from the aggregate of information they receive and take appropriate action. College A and College B, by agreeing to participate in this study have taken this step. What follows are conclusions reached as a result of this effort.

One of the most evident disparities pointed out by this study is between responses from residents and commuters. From the reasons freshman withdrew to how seniors derived their motivation to persist as well as from their differing levels of commitment to the institution to their feelings about belonging to the institutional community, residents and commuters marched to the beat of different drummers. College A and College B, therefore, need to develop different strategies for meeting the needs of each group. This is an area, as colleges and universities across the country are realizing, that needs to be addressed.

The results of this study support the conclusion reached by some researchers in the field that students do not reveal all reasons for withdrawing during an exit interview. Whether they say they are leaving for financial reasons, which is the most common response, or some other reason, there is more information to be gained, in most instances, through a follow-up study. Accomplished by either written survey or telephone interview, as in this study, additional communication with at least some of the withdrawn students is warranted and, arguably, necessary to get the full picture of why students leave.

As mentioned earlier, orientation is considered, by practitioners and researchers alike, to be an institution's

best opportunity to impact on a student's overall opinion of the school, to engender a positive outlook and, indeed, to begin to establish a sense of commitment to the overall educational experience. There is wide agreement in the literature and in practice that the first several weeks a student spends on any campus represent what Lee Noel (1985) refers to as the "critical time period." Noel goes on to point out that "it is not uncommon to find that of the students who drop out during the terms of the freshman year (not between terms), 50 percent drop out during the first six weeks" (p. 20). Of the 31 freshman interviewed, 18, or well over half, either didn't attend orientation or remembered it as a negative experience. Of the 21 who did attend 13, or well over half, remembered it as a positive experience. Both Colleges, therefore, need to improve both the quality of the program, so that more people enjoy it and start their college career positively, and the attendance rate, so more students are exposed to the experience. In one of their occasional papers entitled, "Accountability and Assessment -- Getting Ahead of the Game," Levitz and Noel (1991) observed that "student satisfaction provides a qualitative reading of the extent to which students' actual experiences measure up to what they expected [or perceived to be important] in a particular situation" (p. 3).

Thomas & Bean (1988) observed that "the more an institution facilitates the interaction of its students with its academic and social systems, the more likely it is the students will be inclined to remain at the school" (p. 3). Levitz and Noel remarked that, "students who interact frequently with faculty members are more likely than other students to express satisfaction with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even the administration of the institution. And satisfied students are much more likely to be students who stay" (1991, p. 4). The results of this study, as mentioned earlier, reveal that although most students, seniors and freshmen, could not identify anyone as having reached out and contacted them about difficulty they might have been having, the overwhelming majority reported it would have had a positive impact on their experience. This early warning system might, therefore, have provided College's A & B with a double benefit. Each college may have been able to retain a higher number of freshman and have a more satisfied student body as a whole. This latter group could be an effective marketing force for the institution.

Similar to the early warning system mentioned above, most students could not remember being involved with any goal setting exercise. In at least 50% of the cases,

students said that such an exercise would have been helpful. A goal setting exercise is an effective way to establish a commitment to the institution on the part of students. Goals could be established in many areas such as social involvement, academic performance and intention to graduate from college whether or not it is the one they entered. Commitment, Perry's (1968) seventh and pivotal position, is critical to a student's success both personally and academically. The data show that College A and College B would probably benefit from this type of exercise. In College B's case, because it failed with an attempt at a Core Studies course, mentioned earlier, much thought and planning would be necessary to avoid the pitfalls of the past.

The final conclusion deals with the retention plan advanced in Chapter Four. Four components of this plan were to be evaluated during the interview phase of this study: orientation; an early warning system; a goal setting process; and prior assessment. Evaluation of the latter component, prior assessment, had to be abandoned because none of the respondents could remember participating in one, and, more important, no one could say, with any certainty, that it would have been helpful to their overall experience. The data clearly point out the effectiveness of the other three components and support the assertion that

implementation of these retention practices might well positively benefit both College A and College B. The specific programs needed at each college will be articulated in the next chapter which will deal with recommendations and implications.

## CHAPTER 7

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Recommendations

In Chapter One it was stated that this study would accomplish two main objectives: 1) identify some weaknesses within the institution that persisters have tolerated and which, if strengthened, could have resulted in a more positive experience for all involved; and 2) reinforce ideas suggested by withdrawing students which, if implemented, may decrease the attrition rate. The discussion of the findings in Chapter Five and the conclusions in Chapter Six speak to Objective 1 by identifying the weaknesses pointed out by the respondents as well as indicating how the persisters tolerated these weaknesses. The recommendations outlined below will speak to Objective 2 by providing some concrete suggestions for programs and activities which, if implemented, will serve to decrease the attrition rate or, to state it more positively, increase the retention rate.

The recommendations that are relevant to each college will be presented first. These will target those programs, activities and peculiarities that were only mentioned by respondents from one or the other of the colleges. The criticisms and comments that were common across the respondent groups will be presented as a set of general



recommendations for both colleges. The suggestions will be organized in priority fashion with the more critical areas, where both the number of respondents mentioning a particular problem and by the emotion with which it was related were high, being discussed first in each category.

As discussed in chapter two, there are a myriad of reasons for a student's withdrawal. Through combining similar reasons and the elimination of a few that were beyond the control of the college or university, the 18 remaining reasons for withdrawal were separated into categories. Each recommendation, therefore, will have a bracketed reference to the appropriate category of reasons for withdrawal as follows:

1. Personal;
2. Financial;
3. Institutional Organizational Structure;
4. Academic; and/or
5. Student's Educational Commitment.

### **College A**

The first four recommendations for College A are of equal importance: increase the number of social activities; review the manner in which the Financial Aid Office relates to students; deal with the consequences of an aging faculty;

and revise the process for evaluating faculty performance. First, College A should review its Student Activities program [3]. This review should focus on the number and type of activities as well as their timing. Many respondents complained there is nothing to do on weekends and that most students go home. Students should be involved in the planning, execution and marketing of the activities and events. Ideas for activities should be constantly solicited from the student body.

The problem of bureaucracy will be discussed, in general, as relevant to both colleges but one particular office at College A needs to be singled out. The Financial Aid Office was mentioned many times as a place to be avoided. It is also, unfortunately for College A and its students, one of the most critical student service functions. Frustration with how students were treated by the office staff -- belittled, yelled at, ignored, poorly advised -- were at the top of the complaint pile. This is a true case of its-not-what-you-say-but-how-you-say-it. The operation of the office needs to be reviewed and the staff needs to be made aware of the affects of its actions [2,3].

The third and fourth most critical areas of concern involve the faculty. Whether perception or reality, students are frustrated and upset about the ineptness of the

classroom teacher which they attribute to the average age of faculty members. From faculty who ramble on to those who espouse their own views to the exclusion of others, students are asking for a more effective review of the quality of teaching [4]. One of the reasons for student departure identified by Cope & Hannah was that of "insufficient intellectual challenge." It is also the feeling of the students at College A that faculty evaluations are done sporadically and not utilized by the administration to monitor the performance of the faculty. College A should review its evaluation procedures and ensure that they are consistently applied [4].

Additional recommendations for College A are as follows:

- 5) The environment needs to be made more comfortable for its sizeable adult student population. From different learning styles to differing life schedules, some adjustments are needed to make adult students feel more at ease in the classroom [3,4]
- 6) The guidelines for behavior need to be reviewed with an eye toward easing up on some [3]. The one regulation mentioned quite often was the visitation policy. One student, for instance, mentioned needing permission for family members to

visit her room and even then the door to the room had to remain open. A male student remembered having to wait in the lobby for his date to meet him.

- 7) Students who withdraw should be required to participate in an exit interview to allow for conversation with an administrator during which valuable information can be garnered [3]. Too many of the withdrawals are what College A refers to as "walkaways".
- 8) The location of the school was mentioned quite often as a negative. The institution needs to make their students more aware of the many resources available in the surrounding area so that students don't feel so isolated [1].

### **College B**

The three most critical areas needing improvement at College B are: the perception of inappropriate resource allocation; the quality of teaching; and the manner in which students are treated by the Registrar Office Personnel. First, many students feel that the institution's resources, generated primarily from their tuition monies, are not appropriately allocated and, more specifically, that too many resources are expended in the area of athletics.

College B should review its resource allocation process and, more important, conduct some internal marketing to clearly communicate to students where their money goes and why [3].

The quality of teaching was identified as a weakness by College B respondents but for slightly different reasons than for College A. Similar to College A, the faculty at College B were perceived as aging where many ramble rather than teach. In addition, however, many respondents remarked about a negative attitude on the part of the faculty. Students are looking to be encouraged, not discouraged in the pursuit of academic and personal goals. An evaluation of the quality of the interaction between faculty and students within the academic relationship, as teacher and mentor, is in order [4].

The office with which students claimed to have the most difficulty at College B was the Registrar's Office. Some registered complaints about fees charged for dropping/adding courses beyond certain deadlines as well as for other services. Many, however, mentioned the attitude of the people who work in the Registrar's Office as being unfriendly and unhelpful. Some energy should be expended by the institution to evaluate this critical function [3].

Additional recommendations for College B are as follows:

- 4) The institution needs to be more consistent with formulation and implementation of academic policies [4]. Seniors mentioned, for instance, the changing nature of the core curriculum over the span of their time at the institution.
- 5) Attention needs to be paid to the relationship between the Nursing faculty and their students [3,4]. Communication needs to be improved and a more positive and nurturing attitude would be appreciated by the students.
- 6) Evaluate the communication of academic requirements within departments [4]. Students mentioned being blind-sided by regulations as they approached graduation with the Nursing and Psychology departments being, perhaps, the worst offenders.

#### **College A & B**

There was a large overlap of comments and criticisms between the respondent groups from College A and B. As a result of this overlap, eleven general recommendations relevant to both institutions will be presented below. The six areas of improvement that are considered most critical

to both colleges if they wish to improve their overall ability to retain students are: review and revise the academic advising and career counseling process, strengthen the interaction between faculty and students outside the classroom, evaluate the administrative structure of the institution, review and strengthen the orientation program, establish an early warning system and develop an effective goal-setting mechanism.

First and foremost, a review of the advising process, to include both academic advising and career counseling, is in order at both colleges [4]. Students complained about the attitudes of advisors as well as their competence. The procedure for switching advisors should be streamlined and made easier for students to negotiate. From personality conflicts to information deficits to perceived lack of interest, the problems in this area are critical. For example, one College B respondent recalled how, when pre-registering for classes, her advisor "didn't really know much about my major. I said my roommate is also a psychology major and he said 'well let's give her a call and see what classes you should take' and I think he should have known that." The advisor-advisee relationship is one of the most important areas of interaction between the college and the student: it deserves more attention than it is getting.

The student/faculty relationship is another one of the most important in the academy. Ingersoll (1988) identified faculty as an essential retention resource. Hossler, Bean & Associates (1990) wrote that students who made contact with a faculty member were more likely to stay in school than their peers who made no such contact. Both colleges need to strengthen the out-of-classroom interaction between faculty and students [3,4]. Improvements should be from the perspective of both the quantity of time spent together outside the classroom and quality of that interchange.

The administrative structure of each institution needs to be reviewed and refined so that the needs of the student are satisfied and unnecessary obstacles are eliminated [3]. Bureaucracy can be and most often is one of the major reasons students leave, and the main source of frustration for students who stay. Efforts to smooth out some of the bureaucratic obstacles institutions place in the way of their clients, the students, will pay for themselves very quickly as retention percentages rise and increased resources become available to the campus.

It is said you never get a second chance to make a first impression. In many cases, however, colleges and universities get a chance to reshape a student's first impression. The first impression is created through the



admissions process with orientation being the second chance. College A & B need to review their respective orientation programs with two primary goals in mind: 1) make it a program students will remember, and 2) increase attendance especially among commuters [3,4,5]. This is the one opportunity colleges have to address their incoming students as a group before their impressions of their new school gel. Most orientation programs happen just before the start of classes at the beginning of what researchers refer to as the "Critical Period," the first month of school.

Levitz & Noel (1991) advocated that institutions assume an active posture by "directing individual interventions with the goal of shaping appropriate expectations of 'how one goes to school here (p. 4)." College A & B should establish what the literature refers to as an "Early Warning System [1]." By reaching out to students at risk, academically and socially, a school has an opportunity to control a portion of its own future as it actively assists students in getting acclimated to and succeeding within their new environment. Levitz & Noel (1990) asserted that any system of retention management should include "a means of detecting a student's academic motivation, ease with which they are likely to make the transition to the college environment,...type of...[assistance] that is likely to be needed to be successful in college, and the likelihood that

the student will be receptive to interventions on the part of college or university personnel" (p. 5).

One of the key components of any college's retention effort should be developing a sense of commitment among its students. As one way to move students toward commitment, each college should design a goal-setting process that requires students to record their short and long term plans [5]. These plans should address academic pursuits and could also pertain to a student's social experience. Once identified and recorded, these goal statements should be placed in a student's academic file and a copy given to their advisor and to the Student Affairs Office. These statements of purpose should then be frequently reviewed and, if appropriate, revised as a means of chronicling a student's progress toward their achievement.

Additional recommendations for both College A & B are as follows:

- 7) Develop an Entering Student Survey that attempts to identify the interests, goals, expectations, perceptions of reality and motivation for attending a particular institution [1]. This would allow the institution to create a profile of its entering class as well as forging an individual profile of each student.

- 8) Using the responses from the entering student survey as a backdrop, review the admissions process to assure that prospective students are receiving accurate and consistent information about campus life [1].
- 9) Plan a series of activities early in the first semester with the goal of creating a sense of community and belonging among the new students [1].
- 10) Attention needs to be devoted to the problems of commuter students as they begin a new life without having really left their old one [3]. Commuters are a difficult group to reach and/or attract to activities and student clubs or organizations.
- 11) Review the course scheduling process to assure a student's ability to take required courses in a timely fashion. At the very least, communicate to students, well in advance, when courses are being offered and when they are going to be offered again.

### In the Future...

Two questions were posed while outlining the purpose of this study in Chapter One: What lessons can Student Affairs professionals learn from the present study? and What changes

might strengthen the institution? The answer to these questions are at the same time simple and complicated. The complicated part is, it could be argued, that the conclusions and recommendations resulting from the review of the data are not generalizable because of the design and breadth of the study. Faculty and staff at all colleges and universities can learn something from the present study, however, because students attend all sizes and types of institutions of higher education and either stay until graduation or leave early. That is the simple part. With that said, let's forge ahead.

The conclusions and recommendations above were written for College A & B because that is where the data were collected and, therefore, the analysis was thusly limited. All the same, the problems and concerns of the respondents in this study could have been stated by a freshman or senior at virtually any college or university. Any faculty member or administrator who reads chapter six or the first part of this chapter may be able to say, at least twice, "Hey, that could work here," or, "I bet our students are frustrated by that too." Student Affairs professionals, in particular, should be able to identify some correlation between the results of the present study and the reality on his or her campus and, consequently, review the recommendations with an eye toward adapting them to fit their situation.

The results of this study support the need for further study in this area at Colleges A & B and beyond. They also confirm that College A & B were not receiving, during an exit interview process, the complete picture as to why some students were leaving their institution. The value of follow-up studies such as this is positively demonstrated by the type and depth of information received. Wisdom would indicate a two to three month period before following up with those students who withdraw. These interviews need not be limited to students who withdraw during their Freshman year. Any student who withdraws, regardless of length of time enrolled, should be considered for a random follow-up study. For the persister part of the study, the recommendation would be that the interviews with Seniors be done in a focus group format, if possible, and occur within their last semester.

One of the frustrations during the data collection area of this study was that when the interviews stretched into the summer it was difficult to contact people who were moving around a lot. In any future studies, in addition to adjusting the timing of the interviews, a higher number of respondents should be sought. The number of respondents could have been higher in the present study had the timing of the interviews been better. This study can and should be duplicated at other colleges and universities. It unearths

very valuable information with which to make adjustments to programs and activities.

### And In the End...

After reviewing the literature, conducting 62 interviews, analyzing the responses and comparing the information gained from the respondents of one college to the other, the whole idea of retention comes down to two words: comfort and commitment. The literature referred to comfort in a variety of ways such as student-institution fit, satisfaction levels, academic and social integration and congruence. Tinto (1987) described two of the primary roots of departure as intention and commitment. The more comfortable a student is within his/her environment, the more likely that student will stay in that environment. Astin (1975) wrote that, "after examining the fit between student and institution, it appears that...persistence is enhanced if the student attends an institution in which the social backgrounds of other students resemble his or her own social background" (p. 145). Dropping out is not "an individual or an institutional problem, but one involving harmony or lack of it between the individual and the institutional environment (Cope & Hannah, 1975, p. 29)."

Once comfort is achieved or, at least, approximated, establishing a sense of commitment to the institution on the part of the student should be the main goal of all involved with a particular institution. Colleges and universities do not exist exclusively as a place of employment for faculty administrators and staff but, more important, as a place where students come to learn and grow. The faculty, administration and staff at Colleges A & B, if they haven't already, need to realize that the student is at the center of the academic verse and all else should revolve around this center. As students progress through stages of personal development, a critical period in their lives, as described by Perry's position 7, is Commitment; it is when they undertake to decide on "[their] own responsibility who [they are], or who [they] will be, in some major area of [their] life" (1968, p.153). The student who identifies with and develops a sense of commitment to a particular college is one who is more likely than not to remain there through graduation.

The kind of endeavor needed at College A & B, and indeed at many colleges and universities, to increase their respective retention rates is not possible without concerted effort. The final recommendation, therefore, is that each college, if it hasn't done so already, consider the establishment of a retention oversight group to motivate and

monitor progress and to serve as the catalyst for change on its campus. These groups need to be formulated according to the institutional culture. The four main organizational models were presented in chapter two -- enrollment management committee, enrollment management coordinator, enrollment management matrix and enrollment management division -- but many schools that establish this type of group do so through some combination of these models. This group, depending on the type of organization selected, can then continue to gather information, suggest, recommend and/or implement programs and activities to increase retention rates.



APPENDIX A

SENIOR SURVEY  
SPRING 1993  
(INSTITUTION NAME HERE)  
-----

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

As part of a graduate research project studying the reasons why students decide to leave or stay in college, you are requested to answer the following questions as honestly as possible.

1) **During your years at (Institution name here), have you ever experienced difficulties in any of the following areas? (Check as many as apply)**

- Personal Beliefs Challenged
- Coping with the transition to college
- Solving problems on your own
- Marriage, pregnancy or other family responsibilities
- Financial problems
- University bureaucracy (red tape)
- Adhering to college rules and regulations
- Social environment on campus
- Residence hall environment
- Cultural opportunities on campus
- Distance from home
- Male/female ratio
- Size of student body
- Type of student body
- Lack of contact with faculty and administrators
- Boredom with classes and teaching
- Limited offering in college programs
- Course work
- Lower grades than expected
- Quality of teaching
- Quality of academic advising
- Uncertainty regarding educational plans and purposes
- Change in career goals
- General reputation of (Institution name here)
- Feeling (Institution name) was not the right college
- Lack of career counseling and advising

2) **During your years at (Institution name here), did you ever consider withdrawing from school?**

- Yes
- No

3) If you answered yes to question 2, when did you consider withdrawing (check more than one if appropriate)?

- First semester freshman year
- Second semester freshman year
- First semester sophomore year
- Second semester sophomore year
- First semester junior year
- Second semester junior year
- First semester senior year
- Second semester senior year

4) Which of the following difficulties, if any, contributed to your consideration of withdrawal from (Institution name here) (check all that apply)?

- Personal Beliefs Challenged
- Coping with the transition to college
- Solving problems on your own
- Marriage, pregnancy or other family responsibilities
- Financial problems
- University bureaucracy (red tape)
- Adhering to college rules and regulations
- Social environment on campus
- Residence hall environment
- Cultural opportunities on campus
- Distance from home
- Male/female ratio
- Size of student body
- Type of student body
- Lack of contact with faculty and administrators
- Boredom with classes and teaching
- Limited offering in college programs
- Course work
- Lower grades than expected
- Quality of teaching
- Quality of academic advising
- Uncertainty regarding educational plans and purposes
- Change in career goals
- General reputation of (Institution name here)
- Feeling (Institution name) was not the right college
- Lack of career counseling and advising

5) Would you be willing to participate in a group interview to further discuss your experiences at (Institution name here)?

- Yes
- No

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM  
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW  
(INSTITUTION NAME HERE)  
-----

You completed a senior survey here at (Institution name here) back in March and indicated an interest in participating in a follow-up interview. This is that follow-up interview. You will be asked a series of questions regarding your college experience. You are free to participate or not to participate in this interview without prejudice and may leave at any time.

This interview is being recorded on videotape for research purposes only and to facilitate analysis of the data. This videotape will only be viewed by the researcher and will be erased at the end of the study.

This research is being conducted in conjunction with (Institution name here) in an effort to gather information regarding the reasons students withdraw from (Institution name here) in their freshman year and then comparing those responses with those of seniors who experienced similar difficulties yet persisted. The information received from you for this study will be confidential and only related to (Institution name here) anonymously. In addition to being used in the dissertation, the data gathered today may also be used for journal articles and conference presentations. This interview should take about an hour to an hour and a half.

If you are willing to continue to participate in this interview please so indicate by signing below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX C

FRESHMAN PHONE QUESTIONNAIRE  
DURING SEMESTER WITHDRAWAL  
(INSTITUTION NAME HERE)  
-----

Code #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Male/Female: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Res/Com: \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is Joe Farragher and I'm conducting research for my dissertation. Did you receive a letter from (Institution name here) indicating I would be calling?

A) If Yes. You know then that your participation in this study is voluntary. Do you wish to continue with the interview?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) If Yes. Proceed with questions.
- 2) If No. Ask why, ( \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_) then thank them for their time and end the call.

B) If No. The letter announced that I would be calling you as part of this study. It explained that this is a confidential study and that your participation in this study is voluntary. Do you wish to continue with this study?

- 1) If Yes. Proceed with questions.
- 2) If No. Ask why, ( \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_) then thank them for their time and end the call.

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes only. This tape will only be heard by me and will be erased at the end of my study.

I am working with (Institution name here) in an effort to gather information regarding the reasons students withdraw from (Institution name here) in their freshman year. The information received from you for this study will be confidential and only related to (Institution name here) anonymously. This interview should take about 10-20 minutes.

- 1) What were your main reasons for going to college in the first place?
- 2) While at (institution name here), did you feel you belonged to the institutional community?
- 3) Were you intimidated in any way by the withdrawal process?
- 4) What do you know consider to have been your reason(s) for leaving?
- 5) I'm going to list a number of factors that are believed to contribute to a student's decision to withdraw from or continue at a particular institution. As I mention these please indicate how that factor contributed to your decision to withdraw according to the following scale:
  - 1 = to a great extent
  - 2 = to some extent
  - 3 = to a little extent
  - 4 = not at all

- \_\_\_\_\_ Personal Beliefs in Conflict with (Institution)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Coping with the transition to college
- \_\_\_\_\_ Solving problems on your own
- \_\_\_\_\_ Marriage, pregnancy or other family responsibilities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Financial problems
- \_\_\_\_\_ University bureaucracy (red tape)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adhering to college rules and regulations
- \_\_\_\_\_ Social environment on campus
- \_\_\_\_\_ Residence hall environment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cultural opportunities on campus
- \_\_\_\_\_ Distance from home
- \_\_\_\_\_ Male/female ratio
- \_\_\_\_\_ Size of student body
- \_\_\_\_\_ Type of student body
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of contact with faculty and administrators
- \_\_\_\_\_ Boredom with classes and teaching
- \_\_\_\_\_ Limited offering in college programs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Course work
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lower grades than expected
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quality of teaching
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quality of academic advising
- \_\_\_\_\_ Uncertainty regarding educational plans and purposes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Change in career goals
- \_\_\_\_\_ General reputation of (Institution name here)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling (Institution here) was not the right college
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of career counseling and advising

- 6) What are other factors, if any, do you now consider to have contributed to your decision to transfer, stopout or dropout?

- 7) A) Orientation:
- 1) Did you attend:  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) a) If yes: Was it a positive experience for you?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) If no: Do you think attending orientation would have made a difference in your decision to leave?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- B) Early warning system:
- 1) Were you ever contacted by counseling or academic affairs to talk about difficulties you may have been having?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) If no: Would it have helped if you had been contacted by someone?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- C) Academic performance and intention goals:
- 1) Were you ever asked to make a commitment regarding your educational intentions (i.e., graduation, one year then transfer, etc.)?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) Were you ever asked to set a goal for your academic performance (predict what your grade point average would be at end of first semester)?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3) If no to either: Do you think this would have made a difference in your decision to leave?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- D) Prior assessment:
- 1) Did you complete any survey for (Institution name here) before you arrived for the start of the semester?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) If no: If the college knew more about you before you arrived would they have been able to make it easier for you to stay?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Could (Institution name here) as an institution have done differently, if anything, that would have changed your mind about leaving?
- 9) Do you have any other general comments about (Institution name here) or your decision to withdraw that may be helpful?

APPENDIX D

FRESHMAN PHONE QUESTIONNAIRE  
BETWEEN SEMESTER WITHDRAWAL  
(INSTITUTION NAME HERE)  
-----

Code #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Male/Female: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Res/Com: \_\_\_\_\_

Hello, my name is Joe Farragher and I'm conducting research for my dissertation. Did you receive a letter from (Institution name here) indicating I would be calling?

A) If Yes. You know then that your participation in this study is voluntary. Do you wish to continue with the interview?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) If Yes. Proceed with questions.
- 2) If No. Ask why, ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) then thank them for their time and end the call.

B) If No. The letter announced that I would be calling you as part of this study. It explained that this is a confidential study and that your participation in this study is voluntary. Do you wish to continue with this study?

- 1) If Yes. Proceed with questions.
- 2) If No. Ask why, ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) then thank them for their time and end the call.

This conversation is being recorded for research purposes only. This tape will only be heard by me and will be erased at the end of my study.

I am working with (Institution name here) in an effort to gather information regarding the reasons students withdraw from (Institution name here) in their freshman year. The information received from you for this study will be confidential and only related to (Institution name here) anonymously. This interview should take about 10-20 minutes.

- 1) What were your main reasons for going to college in the first place?
- 2) While at (Institution name here), did you feel you belonged to the (Institution name here) community?
- 3) Why did you withdraw from (Institution name here)?
- 4) Why did you leave (Institution name here) between semesters without notifying anyone at your institution?
- 5) I'm going to list a number of factors that are believed to contribute to a student's decision to withdraw from or continue at a particular institution. As I mention these please indicate how that factor contributed to your decision to withdraw according to the following scale:

- 1 = to a great extent
- 2 = to some extent
- 3 = to a little extent
- 4 = not at all

- \_\_\_\_\_ Personal Beliefs in Conflict with (Institution) College
- \_\_\_\_\_ Coping with the transition to college
- \_\_\_\_\_ Solving problems on your own
- \_\_\_\_\_ Marriage, pregnancy or other family responsibilities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Financial problems
- \_\_\_\_\_ College bureaucracy (red tape)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adhering to college rules and regulations
- \_\_\_\_\_ Social environment on campus
- \_\_\_\_\_ Residence hall environment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cultural opportunities on campus
- \_\_\_\_\_ Distance from home
- \_\_\_\_\_ Male/female ratio
- \_\_\_\_\_ Size of student body
- \_\_\_\_\_ Type of student body
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of contact with faculty and administrators
- \_\_\_\_\_ Boredom with classes and teaching
- \_\_\_\_\_ Limited offering in college programs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Course work
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lower grades than expected
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quality of teaching
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quality of academic advising
- \_\_\_\_\_ Uncertainty regarding educational plans and purposes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Change in career goals
- \_\_\_\_\_ General reputation of (Institution name here)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Feeling (Institution name) was not the right college
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lack of career counseling and advising

- 6) What are other factors, if any, do you now consider to have contributed to your decision to transfer, stopout or dropout?



- 7) A) Orientation:
- 1) Did you attend: Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) a) If yes: Did you form any lasting friendships?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) If no: Do you think attending orientation would have made a difference in your decision to leave?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- B) Early warning system:
- 1) Were you ever contacted by counseling or academic affairs to talk about difficulties you may have been having?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) If no: Would it have helped if you had been contacted by someone?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- C) Academic performance and intention goals:
- 1) Were you ever asked to make a commitment regarding your educational intentions (i.e., graduation, one year then transfer, etc.)?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) Were you ever asked to set a goal for your academic performance (predict what your grade point average would be at end of first semester)?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 3) If no to either: Do you think this would have made a difference in your decision to leave?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- D) Prior assessment:
- 1) Did you complete any survey for (Institution name here) before you arrived for the start of the semester?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) If no: If the college knew more about you before you arrived would they have been able to make it easier for you to stay?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Could (Institution name here) as an institution have done differently, if anything, that would have changed your mind about leaving?
- 9) Do you have any other general comments about (Institution name here) or your decision to withdraw that may be helpful?

## APPENDIX E

### FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW OUTLINE SPRING 1993 (INSTITUTION NAME HERE) -----

- 1) Let's go around and have everyone give both a highlight and lowlight of your experience at (institution name here).
- 2) What were your main reasons for going to college in the first place?
- 3) Why did you choose (institution name here)?
- 4) Do you feel you belong to the (institution name here) community?
- 5) I noticed several areas of difficulty received high responses on the senior survey. I would like to list these for you and hear your responses.
- 6) As part of this study I am also interviewing students who withdrew last semester which was their first. I'm going to share some of their comments and would like to hear your reaction:
- 7) How did you cope with the difficulties and make it through four years?
- 8) Did any of you have one or two people who made a difference for you while at (institution name here)?
- 9) I am going to mention several parts of a retention plan developed for this study and ask you -- if (institution name here) had implemented a particular component of this proposed plan, might it have addressed some of the problems you experienced and might it have made your college experience less stressful, more productive or more meaningful?
  - A) Orientation:
    - 1) Describe your orientation experience?
    - 2) Did orientation prepare you well for your college experience and why?
  - B) Early warning system:
    - 1) Were you ever contacted by counseling or academic affairs to talk about difficulties you may have been having and if so did this

make your college experience less stressful,  
more productive or more meaningful?

- C) Academic performance and intention goals:
- 1) Were you ever asked to make a commitment regarding your educational intentions?
  - 2) Were you ever asked to set a goals for your academic performance?
  - 3) If yes to either: Was this helpful to you? Did it contribute in any way to you staying in school?

- 10) What could (institution name here) have done differently, if anything, that would have made your college experience less stressful, more productive, or more meaningful?
- 11) What other qualities did you find in (institution name here) which kept you enrolled?
- 12) Any other comments either positive or negative that I haven't asked about?
- 13) If you knew then what you know now, would you choose (institution name here)?

APPENDIX F

FRESHMAN INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHICS

-----  
College A

| Code # | M | F | Res | Com | No      |         | Dur Sem | Betw Sem |
|--------|---|---|-----|-----|---------|---------|---------|----------|
|        |   |   |     |     | Fin Dif | Fin Dif |         |          |
| 302    |   | 1 |     | 1   | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 303    | 1 |   | 1   |     |         | 1       | 1       |          |
| 306    |   | 1 | 1   |     |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| 307    | 1 |   |     | 1   |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| 308    | 1 |   | 1   |     | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 309    | 1 |   |     | 1   | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 310    | 1 |   |     | 1   |         | 1       | 1       |          |
| 312    |   | 1 | 1   |     |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| 316    |   | 1 | 1   |     | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 317    |   | 1 | 1   |     | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 319    |   | 1 | 1   |     |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| 322    | 1 |   |     | 1   |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| 323    |   | 1 |     | 1   |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| 324    |   | 1 | 1   |     |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| -----  |   |   |     |     |         |         |         |          |
|        | 6 | 8 | 8   | 6   | 5       | 9       | 2       | 12       |
| =====  |   |   |     |     |         |         |         |          |

College B

| Code # | M | F | Res | Com | No      |         | Dur Sem | Betw Sem |
|--------|---|---|-----|-----|---------|---------|---------|----------|
|        |   |   |     |     | Fin Dif | Fin Dif |         |          |
| 402    | 1 |   |     | 1   | 1       |         | 1       |          |
| 405    | 1 |   | 1   |     |         | 1       | 1       |          |
| 408    | 1 |   |     | 1   | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 409    |   | 1 |     | 1   | 1       |         | 1       |          |
| 410    |   | 1 | 1   |     | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 413    |   | 1 | 1   |     |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| 415    | 1 |   | 1   |     |         | 1       | 1       |          |
| 418    |   | 1 | 1   |     |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| 427    |   | 1 | 1   |     | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 429    | 1 |   | 1   |     | 1       |         | 1       |          |
| 431    | 1 |   | 1   |     | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 434    | 1 |   | 1   |     |         | 1       |         | 1        |
| 436    | 1 |   |     | 1   | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 440    |   | 1 |     | 1   |         | 1       | 1       |          |
| 444    |   | 1 | 1   |     | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 445    |   | 1 |     | 1   | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| 447    |   | 1 |     | 1   | 1       |         |         | 1        |
| -----  |   |   |     |     |         |         |         |          |
|        | 8 | 9 | 10  | 7   | 11      | 6       | 6       | 11       |
| =====  |   |   |     |     |         |         |         |          |

APPENDIX G

SENIOR INTERVIEWEE DEMOGRAPHICS

-----  
College A

| Code # | M | F  | Res | Com | Fin Dif | No Fin Dif |
|--------|---|----|-----|-----|---------|------------|
| 220    |   | 1  | 1   |     | 1       |            |
| 102    |   | 1  |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 118    |   | 1  |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 120    |   | 1  |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 130    |   | 1  |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 135    |   | 1  | 1   |     |         | 1          |
| 151    |   | 1  |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 206    |   | 1  |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 153    | 1 |    |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 205    |   | 1  |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 157    |   | 1  |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 221    |   | 1  |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 223    |   | 1  | 1   |     | 1       |            |
| 165    |   | 1  |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 166    |   | 1  |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 188    |   | 1  |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 201    |   | 1  |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| -----  |   |    |     |     |         |            |
|        | 1 | 16 | 3   | 14  | 10      | 7          |
| =====  |   |    |     |     |         |            |

College B

| Code # | M | F | Res | Com | Apt | Fin Dif | No Fin Dif |
|--------|---|---|-----|-----|-----|---------|------------|
| 103    |   | 1 |     |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 115    |   | 1 |     | 1   |     | 1       |            |
| 119    | 1 |   |     |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 137    |   | 1 |     | 1   |     | 1       |            |
| 141    |   | 1 |     | 1   |     |         | 1          |
| 146    |   | 1 |     |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 150    |   | 1 |     |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 158    |   | 1 | 1   |     |     |         | 1          |
| 182    |   | 1 |     |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 185    | 1 |   |     |     | 1   | 1       |            |
| 188    | 1 |   | 1   |     |     | 1       |            |
| 200    |   | 1 |     | 1   |     | 1       |            |
| 206    | 1 |   |     |     | 1   |         | 1          |
| 213    | 1 |   |     | 1   |     | 1       |            |
| -----  |   |   |     |     |     |         |            |
|        | 5 | 9 | 2   | 5   | 7   | 8       | 6          |
| =====  |   |   |     |     |     |         |            |

APPENDIX H

WITHDRAWAL FACTOR RATINGS  
FRESHMEN

-----

Q) As I mention these factors please indicate how that factor contributed to your decision to withdraw according to the following scale: 1 = to a great extent; 2 = to some extent; 3 = to a little extent; 4 = not at all.

| <u>Clg</u> | <u>Clg</u> |   |
|------------|------------|---|
| <u>A</u>   | <u>B</u>   |   |
| 3.07       | 3.00       | Coping with the transition to college           |
| 3.30       | 3.27       | Solving problems on your own                    |
| 3.38       | 3.60       | Marriage, preg or other family responsibilities |
| 2.84       | 2.20       | Financial problems                              |
| 3.03       | 3.38       | University bureaucracy (red tape)               |
| 3.15       | 3.61       | Adhering to college rules and regulations       |
| 2.84       | 3.33       | Social environment on campus                    |
| 3.53       | 3.16       | Residence hall environment                      |
| 3.23       | 3.61       | Cultural opportunities on campus                |
| 3.00       | 3.44       | Distance from home                              |
| 2.92       | 3.66       | Male/female ratio                               |
| 3.69       | 2.72       | Size of student body                            |
| 3.38       | 3.00       | Type of student body                            |
| 3.23       | 3.00       | Lack of contact with faculty and administrators |
| 3.23       | 2.72       | Boredom with classes and teaching               |
| 3.38       | 3.11       | Limited offering in college programs            |
| 3.23       | 2.88       | Course work                                     |
| 3.23       | 2.50       | Lower grades than expected                      |
| 3.46       | 3.00       | Quality of teaching                             |
| 3.23       | 3.11       | Quality of academic advising                    |
| 3.38       | 2.11       | Uncertainty regarding educ plans and purposes   |
| 3.61       | 2.50       | Change in career goals                          |
| 3.46       | 3.72       | General reputation of Marywood College          |
| 2.80       | 2.33       | Feeling Marywood was not the right college      |
| 3.23       | 3.11       | Lack of career counseling and advising          |

APPENDIX I

WITHDRAWAL FACTOR RATINGS  
SENIORS

-----

Q) On the Senior Survey you filled out earlier this semester, you indicated having experienced difficulty in one or more of the following areas during your years at (Institution name here). Please indicate the degree of difficulty you had with each of these items by assigning each a rating according to the following scale: 1 = to a great extent; 2 = to some extent; 3 = to a little extent; 4 = not at all.

Clg    Clg  
A      B

|      |      |   |
|------|------|---|
| 3.23 | 2.71 | Coping with the transition to college           |
| 3.29 | 2.85 | Solving problems on your own                    |
| 2.82 | 3.71 | Marriage, preg or other family responsibilities |
| 2.23 | 2.78 | Financial problems                              |
| 2.52 | 2.21 | University bureaucracy (red tape)               |
| 3.82 | 3.50 | Adhering to college rules and regulations       |
| 2.88 | 2.85 | Social environment on campus                    |
| 3.82 | 2.92 | Residence hall environment                      |
| 3.17 | 3.00 | Cultural opportunities on campus                |
| 3.64 | 3.71 | Distance from home                              |
| 3.41 | 3.60 | Male/female ratio                               |
| 3.58 | 3.21 | Size of student body                            |
| 3.35 | 2.64 | Type of student body                            |
| 3.52 | 2.78 | Lack of contact with faculty and administrators |
| 2.70 | 2.42 | Boredom with classes and teaching               |
| 2.58 | 2.35 | Limited offering in college programs            |
| 3.41 | 2.50 | Course work                                     |
| 3.05 | 2.71 | Lower grades than expected                      |
| 3.17 | 2.42 | Quality of teaching                             |
| 2.47 | 2.14 | Quality of academic advising                    |
| 2.88 | 2.57 | Uncertainty regarding educ plans and purposes   |
| 3.47 | 2.85 | Change in career goals                          |
| 3.58 | 2.78 | General reputation of Marywood College          |
| 3.17 | 2.28 | Feeling Marywood was not the right college      |
| 2.20 | 2.70 | Lack of career counseling and advising          |

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