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**NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY  
OF THEIR CHARACTERISTICS AND PROBLEMS**

by

Nancy S. Blom

B.A., University of Montana, 1981

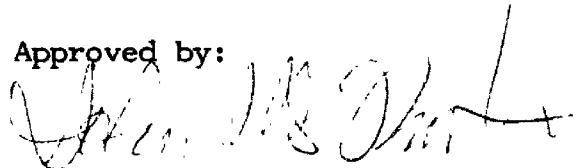
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1985

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Sociology

Non-Traditional Students: A Descriptive Study of Their  
Characteristics and Problems (56 pp.)

Director: John M. McQuiston



This research provides a description of the older learners attending the University of Montana. The study also identifies why non-traditional students return to college and what academic and institutional problems they encounter once they do return.

The data were collected via a mailed survey questionnaire. Respondents were undergraduate students 25 years of age or older who were randomly selected from a computer printout from the Registrar's office. Two weeks after the initial mailing, a follow-up postcard was sent to those who had not yet responded. A return rate of 66 percent was ultimately achieved.

Most of the non-traditional students are between the ages of 25 and 35, single or divorced, maintain above average grades, and carry full-time credit loads in three main areas: the Arts and Sciences, Business, and Education. Half are working, one out of three are parents, and personal employment, savings, loans, and grants are financial sources most often used to pay for their education. Older learners return to school for personal satisfaction, to obtain a degree, to improve income, intellectual stimulation, to prepare for a job, and to prepare for a better job.

One major conclusion of this study is that institutional practices such as entrance exams, course requirements, registration, the times courses are offered, and transferring credits are not troublesome for returning students. However, the second major conclusion is that older students are clearly concerned about their note-taking, writing, arithmetic and study skills. The author recommends a number of resources available on campus in order to alleviate these academic problems.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT . . . . .	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	iii
LIST OF TABLES . . . . .	v
I. CHAPTER ONE	
Introduction . . . . .	1
Significance of Study . . . . .	2
Review of the Literature . . . . .	4
Statement of the Problem . . . . .	6
Methodology . . . . .	7
Sample . . . . .	7
Procedure . . . . .	7
Instrument . . . . .	8
II. CHAPTER TWO	
Profile of the Non-traditional Student . . . . .	9
Profile of Male and Female Non-traditional Students . . . . .	15
Institutional and Academic Problems . . . . .	24
III. CHAPTER THREE	
Summary . . . . .	27
Discussion . . . . .	30
Recommendations . . . . .	35
IV. REFERENCES	
Appendix	
University of Montana Age Distributions in Percentiles . . . . .	44
Questionnaire . . . . .	45
Postcard . . . . .	49
Bibliography . . . . .	50



## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Title	Page
1.	Comparison of age distributions between the sample and University of Montana undergraduate population over the age of twenty-five	9
2.	Marital status of sample respondents	10
3.	Marital status of respondents who are parents	10
4.	Grade point averages of respondents	11
5.	Respondents' majors	11
6.	Sources used by respondents to finance their education	12
7.	Respondents' reasons for returning to school	13
8.	The three most important reasons for returning to school	14
9.	Sex by age of respondents	15
10.	Sex by marital status of respondents	16
11.	Sex by respondents who are parents by marital status	16
12.	Sex of respondents by grade point averages	17
13.	Sex by respondents' majors	18
14.	Sex of respondents by sources used to finance education	19
15.	Sex of respondents by reasons for returning to school	20
16.	The three most frequently ranked reasons for returning to school by sex of respondents	22
17.	The extent of agreement or disagreement to statements regarding academic and institutional problems experienced by respondents	23
18.	Respondents' description of study skills	26

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The traditional model of education is based upon the belief that formal schooling is for the young. However, this view that education is solely the prerogative of youth is becoming obsolete with the "fluid" life cycles of today's men and women who are experiencing an increasing number of role transitions such as marrying, divorcing, and remarrying; rearing children in a two-parent then a one-parent household; and particularly for women, working outside the home, stopping to rear children, then returning to work or, as more and more adults are choosing, returning to college. The last example, adults returning to college, will be the focus of this paper.

The student population on college campuses has traditionally been young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. Yet, within the last decade the enrollments of this age group have been steadily declining. The Chronicle of Higher Education states, "If present patterns were to continue during the 1980's, the declining number of Americans aged 18-24 could be expected to reduce college enrollment by more than nine percent by 1990" (1980:1). Mendelsohn (1982) purports that a declining birth rate will produce a 19 percent drop in the number of 18 year olds between 1980 and 1990. The message is clear: the number of potential college students is dwindling.

The University of Montana has followed the national trend. As shown in the bar chart found in the Appendix, the past decade has seen a consistent decline in the percentage of traditional aged students.

Although the younger students still command the majority of the population on campus, their numbers are rapidly decreasing as evidenced by comparing present percentages with those of ten years ago.

In light of the shortage of traditional aged students, colleges and universities are seeking additional sources of students; consequently, older learners are becoming increasingly important as a student market. Indeed, as one director of admissions notes, "We need to attract the adult learner if we wish to continue to show growth in college enrollments" (Scherer, 1978:592). Rawlins and Lenihan (1982) concur and suggest that with enrollment pressures and the increasing competition for adult learners, it would be in the best interest of every college to carefully design programs that attract older students and meet their needs.

Meeting the needs of adult learners is a key ingredient to not only attracting but also retaining these desired students. Older students have different views, different motivations, and different perspectives from those of students who are 18-22 years old. Therefore, if these students are to be successfully attracted and retained, college personnel and administrators need to become better acquainted with the characteristics and problems of the adult learner (Wharton, 1980; Nuver, 1981).

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This research comes at a time when colleges and universities across the country are facing declining enrollments and reduced funding largely due to the reduction in young adults between the ages of eighteen and

twenty-two. Any change in the future regarding growth in this age group is unlikely based upon the recent results of the Census Bureau which reported that between 1980 and 1984 "the number of people aged 14-17 fell by 9.5 percent and the age 5-13 population dropped by 3.2 percent" (1985:2).

Aware of the effect of these statistics upon them, institutions of higher learning are placing a new emphasis upon the recruitment of older learners in order to stay in business. And, as in any business, to market a product, those selling must know some characteristics of the potential buyer. In this instance, those selling are colleges and universities, the product is education, and the buyers are older learners. However, attracting older students is not the sole answer to maintaining college enrollments. Once an older student returns to college, it is in the best interest of that college to address the problems its students encounter in order to reduce attrition.

This study is important in that it not only contributes to the existing knowledge of non-traditional students, but it also provides the University of Montana with information about the adult population it has sought to attract. In addition to providing characteristics of older learners, this research identifies the problems they encounter. With this knowledge, the University of Montana will be able to better recruit adult learners and address the needs of its older students thus maintaining, possibly increasing, enrollment as well as alleviating attrition of this much needed pool of students.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A non-traditional student is primarily defined by age. For instance, Hiltunen (1965) and Fisher-Thompson (1980) studied adult learners who were 23 years of age or older. Lance, Lourie, and Mayo (1979) identified a non-traditional student as being a minimum of 24 years old; whereas, Danowski (1978) used "25 plus" as her means of defining an older student. Other researchers consider a non-traditional student as a person beyond 30 years of age (Rawlins, 1979; Galliano and Gildea, 1982). There appears somewhat of a discrepancy among researchers concerning what age students need be in order to be considered non-traditional, yet age is consistently a factor in the description.

Demographic profiles provided by various studies indicate similarities among non-traditional students. Most are between the ages of 25 and 40 and equally divided between men and women (Arbeiter, 1976; Danowski, 1978). In addition to these findings, Penn (1978) and Sewall (1984) described the typical older learner as being a parent, married, enrolled full-time, and employed.

Regarding institutional practices, Duley et. al. (1981) point out that entrance examinations and class requirements and prerequisites may be inappropriate or irrelevant in view of previous experiences. The study brought further attention to inconvenient class schedules and registration procedures which interfere with the majority of non-traditional students' responsibilities such as work and family.

Since many re-entry students have attended college prior to their present educational experience, a number of students transfer previously

earned credits. According to Fisher-Thompson (1980), transferring credits can prove difficult. A transfer student may find his or her credits are not fully accepted or credits earned from a course taken previously may also not be accepted if the current school does not offer that particular course. The result of these instances is that the non-traditional student must take more credits to graduate resulting in the expenditure of more time and money.

Rawlins (1979) and Brandenburg (1974) stress in their studies that non-traditional students have more responsibilities such as families and jobs than their traditional aged counterparts. Therefore, the older learners' needs are different as well. For instance, child care or the lack of it may create academic problems. "Educational ... opportunities that women (and men) cannot pursue due to inadequate child care are opportunities effectively denied" (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1983). Many students who are parents feel their primary responsibility is to their children. Consequently, if they are unable to find quality child care for their child(ren), they may miss a class or they may not even register for certain classes. Both situations impede the student's progress in school. As Danowski notes, "We wonder how many courses are chosen because they fit the babysitter's schedule rather than the student's interests" (1978:3).

Many non-traditional students feel their learning skills are rusty when they enter the academic realm (Mendelsohn, 1982; Maes, 1979; Curtin and Heckinger, 1981) and request help in developing their skills (Lance, Lourie, and Mayo, 1979). The results of these studies and others have pointed to an inadequacy of basic skills such as studying, taking notes,

and writing papers (Krings, 1976; Brandenburg, 1974). Concomitant with these findings, Adelstein's (1979) research suggests that there is a need for "refresher" courses covering basic academic skills, i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic.

In conclusion, over the past ten years, the percentage of students over the age of twenty-five attending the University of Montana has increased from less than twenty-five percent to nearly thirty-seven percent. Presently, well over one-third of the undergraduate population is 25 years old or older. In other words, one out of every three students sitting in the classroom is a returning student. Yet if these adult learners are to be successfully retained, the University of Montana needs to become better acquainted with its non-traditional students' characteristics and problems such as those discussed above.

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The purpose of this investigation is to describe the non-traditional students (students 25 years of age or older) attending the University of Montana. More specifically, answers to the following questions are sought:

- 1) What are the demographic characteristics of the non-traditional student?
- 2) Why did these older students return to school?
- 3) What are the institutional practices non-traditional students find problematic?; and
- 4) What are the academic problems they encounter?

The review of the literature suggests a number of variables to be analyzed in order to achieve these answers. To describe characteristics of the non-traditional learner, the following variables will be analyzed: age, sex, marital status, parental status, grade point

average, major, credit loads, employment status, and sources used to finance their education. Secondly, seventeen reasons for returning to school will be analyzed to find out why older students choose to enter the college realm. Thirdly, this study will determine how problematic certain institutional practices, i.e., entrance exams, course requirements and prerequisites, daytime registration, class schedules, transferring credits, and the availability of child care, are to the adult students on the University of Montana campus. Finally, the degree to which non-traditional students have problems with academic skills such as studying, note-taking, reading, writing, and arithmetic will be investigated.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **SAMPLE**

The data were collected via a mailed questionnaire. Respondents were undergraduate students enrolled during Winter quarter, 1984 at the University of Montana. Participation was voluntary. Criteria for inclusion were that the student be: (1) 25 years of age or older, (2) currently enrolled, and (3) have no previous college degree.

### **PROCEDURE**

A systematic random sample was selected from a University of Montana Registrar's computer printout listing the names, social security numbers, ages, and addresses of the undergraduate students enrolled Winter quarter, 1984. The process of sampling involved selecting a number from the Table of Random Numbers and comparing it to the last



digit of each student's social security number. If the two were the same, that student was then chosen to be in the sample. The procedure yielded a total of 385 potential respondents. These students were mailed a cover letter, questionnaire, and a stamped return envelope. Initially, two-hundred twenty-four responded. A follow-up postcard was sent after two weeks to those who had not yet responded which resulted in increasing by twenty-nine the number of questionnaires received to 253. Accounting for undeliverable questionnaires (6) and students not meeting the criteria (11), a return rate of 66 percent (242 of 368) was ultimately achieved.

#### **INSTRUMENT**

The students were asked to complete a four page questionnaire constructed by the researcher (see Appendix). The first section of the survey instrument was designed to develop a profile of the non-traditional student attending the University of Montana. The remainder of the questionnaire consisted of scales designed to determine the extent of academic and institutional, financial, and personal problems of the respondent while he or she was attending school. For the purpose of this study, only those variables representing the academic and institutional problems which face the returning student were selected for analysis.

## CHAPTER II

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

#### Profile of the Non-Traditional Student

The respondents ranged in age from 25 to 59 with the mean age being thirty-one and the median twenty-nine. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of the sample in comparison to the distribution of all the undergraduate students 25 years of age or older at the University of Montana. The results of a KS test ( $\chi^2=3.179$ , n.s. .05) indicate that the sample is similar to the institutional population.

**TABLE 1.** Comparison of age distributions between the sample and University of Montana undergraduate population over the age of twenty-five.

Age	Sample		Student Population Fall 1983	
	N	%	N	%
25	34	14.2	339	18.7
26-30	109	45.4	857	47.3
31-35	56	23.3	382	21.0
36-40	21	8.8	117	6.4
41-45	10	4.2	67	3.7
46-50	6	2.5	28	1.5
51-55	0	0.0	14	.8
56-60	4	1.7	8	.4
61-65	0	0.0	1	.0
over 65	0	0.0	3	.2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1816</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

$\chi^2 = 3.179$  n.s. .05

**TABLE 2.** Marital status of sample respondents.

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
single	101	41.9
divorced	33	13.7
widowed	3	.4
married	89	36.9
living together	15	6.2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

As shown in Table 2, the majority of the respondents are single (41.9%) or divorced (13.7%) while a little over one-third (36.9%) are married. Those students cohabitating account for 6.2 percent of the sample. Less than one percent are widowed.

Slightly more than one-third (34.3%) of the sample were parents of at least one child, 16.1 percent have a second child, and 5.4 percent have a third child. A total of five respondents have a fourth child while only one case had five or more children. Of the eighty-three respondents who have children, almost one-third of them are single parents (see Table 3). More specifically, 3.6 percent have never married, 25.3 percent are divorced, and 1.2 percent are widowed. Two-thirds (66.3%) of the respondents with children are married, while 3.6 percent are cohabitating.

**TABLE 3.** Marital status of respondents who are parents.

<b>Marital status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
single	3	3.6
divorced	21	25.3
widowed	1	1.2
married	55	66.3
living together	3	3.6
<b>Total:</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The students' gradepoint averages were indicative of their success. As revealed in Table 4, over half (54.5%) of the students maintained a B average or better. In their selection of majors, the majority (65.7%) of the respondents as shown in Table 5 were concentrated in three fields of study: the Arts and Sciences (33.6%), Business (21.3%), and Education (10.9%).

**TABLE 4.** Gradepoint averages of respondents.

GPA	N	%
A (4.00)	9	3.9
B (3.00)	117	50.6
C (2.00)	99	42.9
D (1.00)	6	2.6
<b>Total:</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**TABLE 5.** Respondents' majors (classified by School or College).

School or College	N	%
College of Arts & Sciences	80	33.6
School of Business	51	21.3
School of Education	26	10.9
School of Forestry	17	7.1
School of Pharmacy	10	4.2
School of Fine Arts	9	3.8
School of Journalism	6	2.5
General	8	3.3
Joint majors	18	7.5
Other	13	5.8
<b>Total:</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The majority (76.3%) of reentry students at the University of Montana are taking full credit loads, that is, twelve or more credits per quarter. The mean number of credits taken was thirteen while the mode was twelve.

Three-quarters (74.9%) of the sample were working before entering school and half (50.4%) continued to do so at least part-time in addition to taking classes. The primary means by which the respondents financed their education appears related to their employment status. When asked, "How are you currently financing your education?" over half (56.6%) of the sample noted personal employment; personal savings was marked 41.3 percent of the time. Other major sources were loans and grants (see Table 6). Scholarships was one of the least cited financial sources for these students. This finding was not surprising since previous studies (Thompson, 1980; Klewin, 1981) and oral accounts from non-traditional students have documented the difficulty these students have in acquiring financial aid including scholarships.

**TABLE 6.** Sources used by respondents to finance their education

Sources	N*	%*
personal employment	137	56.6
personal savings	100	41.3
loans	95	39.3
grants	82	33.9
help from parents/relatives	53	21.9
help from spouse	52	21.5
work study	28	11.6
G.I. Bill	28	11.6
scholarships	19	7.9
complete support from spouse	18	7.4
complete support from parents/ relatives	10	4.1

\* totals do not add to 242 nor 100% as students were asked to check all financial sources used.

When asked to check all the reasons why they returned to school, 90.1 percent of the respondents checked "to obtain a degree" and 87.2 percent checked "personal satisfaction." "To improve income" and "intellectual stimulation" were selected by two-thirds of the sample, 64.9 percent for each reason. Two other reasons were also chosen by over 60 percent of the respondents: "to prepare for a job" (62.8%) and "to secure a better job" (61.2%). None of the remaining 11 items displayed in Table 7 are checked more than 40 percent of the time.

**TABLE 7.** Respondents' reasons for returning to school.

Reasons	N*	%*
to obtain a degree	218	90.1
personal satisfaction	211	87.2
to improve income	157	64.9
intellectual stimulation	157	64.9
to prepare for a job	152	62.8
to secure a better job	148	61.2
to prepare for a different job	97	40.1
continue an interrupted education	78	32.2
to meet new people	75	31.0
to prepare for graduate school	57	23.6
find out more about self	54	22.3
could finally afford it	48	19.8
to satisfy family	42	17.4
G.I. benefits	29	12.0
advancement in present job	17	7.0
could not find a job	11	4.5
to satisfy employer	6	2.5

\* totals do not add to 242 nor 100% as students were asked to check all reasons for returning to school.

The respondents were then asked to rank order their three most important reasons for returning to school with the first reason being ranked the highest priority reason (see Table 8). Supporting the results in Table 7, "personal satisfaction" was the most important reason for returning to school, not only for the first ranking but for the second and third rankings as well. Perusal of Table 8 suggests that six reasons summarize why older learners return to school: personal satisfaction, to obtain a degree, to secure a better job, to improve income, to prepare for a job, and intellectual stimulation.

**TABLE 8.** The three most important reasons for returning to school as selected by the respondents.

Reasons	most important		second most important		third most important	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
to obtain a degree	40	17.3	29	12.6	38	16.8
personal satisfaction	61	26.4	47	20.4	38	16.8
to improve income	17	7.4	30	13.0	26	11.5
intellectual stimulation	23	10.0	22	9.6	20	8.8
to prepare for a job	18	7.8	22	9.6	22	9.7
to secure a better job	27	11.7	25	10.9	24	10.6
prepare f/different job	14	6.1	13	5.7	9	4.0
cont. interrupted educ.	1	.4	5	2.2	6	2.7
to meet new people	0	0.0	4	1.7	5	2.2
prepare for grad. school	1	.4	8	3.5	16	7.1
find out more about self	3	1.3	5	2.2	3	1.3
could finally afford it	4	1.7	5	2.2	4	1.8
to satisfy family	6	2.6	3	1.3	3	1.3
G.I. benefits	1	.4	5	2.2	8	3.5
advance in present job	3	1.3	0	0.0	1	.4
could not find a job	1	.4	1	.4	2	.9
to satisfy family	0	0.0	2	.9	0	0.0
other	11	4.8	4	1.7	1	.4
<b>total:</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

### Profile of Male and Female Non-Traditional Students

The sample was almost equally divided between men and women. Of the respondents, 52.5 percent were men and 47.5 percent were women. The ages of the male and female students are inversely related. Examination of Table 9 shows there are half again as many men as women in the 25-30 age group and equal numbers in the 31-35 range. After age 35, however, women far outnumber the men, sometimes as much as 6:1.

TABLE 9. Sex by age of respondents.

Age	S E X				TOTAL	
	Female N	%	Male N	%	N	%
25	13	11.4	21	16.7	34	14.2
26-30	39	34.2	70	55.5	109	45.4
31-35	28	24.6	28	22.2	56	23.3
36-40	18	15.8	3	2.4	21	8.8
41-45	8	7.0	2	1.6	10	4.2
46-50	5	4.4	1	.8	6	2.5
51-55	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
56-60	3	2.6	1	.8	4	1.7
<b>Total:</b>	114	100.0%	126	100.0%	240	100.0%

In Table 10, a breakdown of marital status by sex reveals that over half (56.0%) of the male returning students are single. Of the remaining 44 percent, 39.3 percent are married or cohabitating, while less than 5 percent are divorced. In contrast, one-quarter (26.3%) of the female non-traditional students are single, nearly half (47.4%) are married or cohabitating, and another quarter (23.7%) are divorced. All of the widowed students are women.



**TABLE 10.** Sex by marital status of respondents.

Marital Status	S E X					
	Female		Male		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
single	30	26.3	71	56.0	101	41.9
divorced	27	23.7	6	4.7	33	13.7
widowed	3	2.6	0	0.0	3	.4
married	45	39.5	44	34.6	89	36.9
living together	9	7.9	6	4.7	15	6.2
<b>Total:</b>	114	100.0%	127	100.0%	241	100.0%

A crosstabulation of marital status by parental status by sex shows twice as many female non-traditional students than their male counterparts have children at home. Moreover, of the female students with children, 42.1 percent are parents without spouses. This finding is in stark contrast to 3.8 percent of the male returning students who are single parents. Table 11 clearly indicates that male non-traditional students have a spouse or partner with whom they share the demands of raising a child while, in addition to their student role, nearly half of the female adult learners with children have the sole responsibility of fulfilling their parental role.

**TABLE 11.** Sex of respondents who are parents by marital status.

Marital Status	S E X					
	Female		Male		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
single	2	3.5	1	3.8	3	3.6
divorced	21	36.8	0	0.0	21	25.3
widowed	1	1.8	0	0.0	1	1.2
married	31	54.4	24	92.3	55	66.3
living together	2	3.5	1	3.8	3	3.6
<b>Total:</b>	57	100.0%	26	100.0%	83	100.0%

In reference to grade point averages, perusal of Table 12 shows male and female non-traditional students comparable only when achieving an "A" average. Nearly two-thirds (65.8%) of the women maintained a "B" average while over half (55.8%) of the men maintained "C" averages.

**TABLE 12.** Sex of respondents by grade point averages.

GPA	S E X					
	Female		Male		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
A (4.00)	5	4.5	4	3.3	9	3.9
B (3.00)	73	65.8	44	36.7	117	50.6
C (2.00)	32	28.8	67	55.8	99	42.9
D (1.00)	1	.9	5	4.2	6	2.6
<b>TOTAL:</b>	111	100.0%	120	100.0%	231	100.0%

The majors selected by male and female students fall within similar realms. For instance, the College of Arts and Sciences enrolls the largest percentage of both men and women, 41.7 percent and 24.3 percent respectively, followed by approximately one-fifth of both sexes with majors in the School of Business (see Table 13). However, differences appear where the third largest percentage of female returning students major in the School of Education, while the third most popular major for male non-traditional students is within the School of Forestry.

**TABLE 13.** Sex by respondents' majors (classified by School or College).

School or College	Female		S E X		Male		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Coll. Arts & Sciences	27	24.3	53	41.7	80	33.6		
School of Business	23	20.7	28	22.0	51	21.4		
School of Education	18	16.2	8	6.3	26	10.9		
School of Forestry	3	2.7	14	11.0	17	7.1		
School of Pharmacy	6	5.4	4	3.2	10	4.2		
School of Fine Arts	8	7.2	1	.8	9	3.8		
School of Journalism	2	1.8	4	3.2	6	2.5		
General	4	3.6	4	3.2	8	3.4		
Joint Major	10	9.0	8	6.3	18	7.6		

As noted earlier, the majority of the students surveyed were working prior to college. The data further indicate that of those who continue to work while going to school, nearly half (44.1%) are women. In regards to how male and female returning students finance their education, there are no strong differences between the sexes. As evidenced in Table 15 they appear to be evenly divided when using various financial sources to pay for their education. The only notable differences are that more women than men get complete support from their spouses and that more men than women use G.I. benefits.

**TABLE 14.** Sex of respondents by sources used to finance their education.

Sources	S E X				TOTAL	
	Female		Male		N*	%*
	N*	%*	N*	%*	N*	%*
personal employment	58	50.9	79	62.2	137	56.6
personal savings	46	40.4	54	42.5	100	41.3
loans	45	39.5	50	39.4	95	39.3
grants	41	36.0	41	32.3	82	33.9
help from parents/ relatives	22	19.3	31	24.4	53	21.9
help from spouse	23	20.2	29	22.8	52	21.5
work study	12	10.5	16	12.6	28	11.6
G.I. Bill	4	3.5	24	18.9	28	11.6
scholarships	9	7.9	10	7.9	19	7.9
complete support from spouse	16	14.0	2	1.6	18	7.4
complete support from parents/relatives	3	2.6	7	5.5	10	4.1
<b>Total:</b>	114	---	127	---	241	---

\* sources do not add to Total "N" nor 100% as students were asked to check all financial sources used.

Male and female non-traditional students have very similar reasons for returning to school as evidenced in Table 15. Indeed, more often than not both sexes are in agreement when identifying reasons for returning to school. Yet, three reasons were chosen disproportionately by more women than men: personal satisfaction, intellectual stimulation, and to continue an interrupted education. On the other hand, a larger percentage of men than women chose the following reasons for attending school: to prepare for a different job, to meet new people, and G.I. benefits.

TABLE 15. Sex of respondents by reasons for returning to school.

Reasons	S E X				TOTAL	
	Female		Male		N*	%*
	N*	%*	N*	%*		
obtain degree	107	93.8	111	87.4	218	90.1
personal satis.	108	94.7	103	81.1	211	87.2
improve income	78	68.4	79	62.2	157	64.9
intell. stimulation	82	71.9	75	59.1	157	64.9
prepare for job	68	59.6	84	66.1	152	62.8
secure better job	67	58.7	81	63.8	148	61.2
prep. for diff. job	39	34.2	58	45.7	97	40.1
cont. interrupted ed.	43	37.7	35	27.6	78	32.2
meet new people	28	24.6	47	37.0	75	31.0
prep. f/grad school	23	20.2	34	26.8	57	23.6
find out about self	26	22.8	28	22.0	54	22.3
finally afford it	27	23.7	21	16.5	48	19.8
satisfy family	15	13.2	27	21.3	42	17.4
G.I. benefits	5	4.4	24	18.9	29	12.0
advance in job	7	6.1	10	7.9	17	7.0
could not find job	2	1.8	9	7.1	11	4.5
satisfy employer	2	1.8	4	3.1	6	2.5
<b>Total:</b>	114	---	127	---	241	---

\* reasons do not add to Total "N" nor 100% as students were asked to check all financial sources used.

The respondents were also asked to rank order their reasons for returning to school. The most frequently rank ordered reasons, divided according to male and female responses, are displayed in Table 16. The data indicate that not only is personal satisfaction the major reason for returning to school but it was chosen most often by both male and female students. When the second most important reason is examined, personal satisfaction is again the most frequently specified by both sexes. The third most important reason for returning to school displays some differences. For the women, the most popular tertiary reason chosen is "to improve income." As for the male students, "to obtain a degree" received the largest number of responses.

Table 16 also shows the reasons for returning which were ranked above the others by both the male and female non-traditional students: personal satisfaction, to obtain a degree, to improve income, intellectual stimulation, to prepare for a job, and to prepare for a better job. Of interest is that of those six, a larger percentage of women than men consistently chose only three of those reasons: personal satisfaction, to obtain a degree, and to improve income.

**TABLE 16.** The three most frequently ranked reasons for returning to school by sex of respondents.

<b>MOST IMPORTANT REASON</b>			
<b>Female</b>		<b>Male</b>	
personal satisfaction	(30.3%)	personal satisfaction	(23.0%)
obtain a degree	(19.3%)	better job (15.6%)/obtain a degree	(15.6%)
improve inc. (10.1%)/intell. stimulation	(10.1%)	intellectual stimulation	(9.8%)
<b>Total that the reasons account for:</b>	<b>69.8%</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>64.0%</b>

<b>SECOND MOST IMPORTANT REASON</b>			
personal satisfaction	(22.2%)	personal satisfaction	(18.9%)
obtain a degree	(14.8%)	improve inc. (12.3%)/intell. stimulation	(12.3%)
improve income	(13.9%)	obtain a degree	(10.7%)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>50.9%</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>54.2%</b>

<b>THIRD MOST IMPORTANT REASON</b>			
improve income	(17.8%)	obtain a degree	(17.6%)
personal satisfaction	(16.8%)	personal satisfaction	(16.8%)
obtain a degree	(15.9%)	prepare for a job	(12.6%)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>50.5%</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>47.0%</b>

**TABLE 17.** The extent of agreement or disagreement to statements regarding academic and institutional problems experienced by the respondents.

<b>Academic and institutional problems:</b>	<b>strongly disagree</b>	<b>disagree</b>	<b>agree</b>	<b>strongly agree</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Taking entrance exams made it difficult to be admitted to the university.	(N) 58 (%) 41.7	76 54.7	2 1.4	3 2.2	139 100.0
Course requirements and prerequisites have interfered with my taking classes I wanted.	(N) 14 (%) 6.0	112 47.6	67 28.5	42 17.9	235 100.0
It was inconvenient to register for classes during the day.	(N) 42 (%) 17.7	125 52.8	46 19.4	24 10.1	237 100.0
The times most courses are offered fit my schedule.	(N) 9 (%) 3.7	51 21.3	145 60.4	35 14.6	240 100.0
I did <b>not</b> have any trouble transferring previously earned credits.	(N) 13 (%) 7.7	19 11.2	91 53.9	46 27.2	169 100.0
There were times I could not go to class because I couldn't find a babysitter.	(N) 14 (%) 24.6	21 36.8	13 22.8	9 15.8	57 100.0
I have <b>not</b> had any problems with note-taking, writing, arithmetic, or my study habits.	(N) 29 (%) 12.0	100 41.3	82 33.9	31 12.8	242 100.0



**Institutional and Academic Problems** (see Table 17)

Entrance examinations apparently pose no problem for non-traditional students since only 3.6 percent of the students who responded agreed that taking entrance exams made it difficult to be admitted to the university. Since little over half of the sample (139) found the question applicable, that in itself suggests entrance exams are not problematic for returning students.

As to course requirements and prerequisites interfering with classes non-traditional students want, the responses were almost evenly divided between agreeing (46.4%) and disagreeing (53.7%), as seen in Table 18. More specifically, 17.9 percent felt strongly about course requirements and prerequisites being a problem for them in contrast to only 6.0 percent who did not have any trouble with course requirements or prerequisites.

Registering during the day does not appear to be a real inconvenience for non-traditional students since the majority (70.4%) of the sample disagreed with the statement, "It was inconvenient to register for classes during the day." However, nearly one-fifth (19.4%) did find registration inconvenient with an additional 10.1 percent of the students strongly agreeing that it was troublesome.

The respondents seemed satisfied with class times, since three-quarters (75.0%) of the sample agreed that "The times most courses are offered fit my schedule." Of the remaining 25.0 percent who felt differently, only 3.7 percent strongly noted that the course times did not fit their schedules.

A resounding 81.1 percent of the students who responded agreed to the statement that they did not have any problem transferring previously earned credits. Yet, since less than three-quarters of the sample (169) found this issue applicable, those who did not respond may possibly be students new to higher education or had attended the University of Montana prior to their current experience. In any event, those who apparently did transfer credits did not have any trouble doing so.

As illustrated in Table 17, the difficulty in finding child care in order to attend class appears to be somewhat mixed. Of the non-traditional students who are parents, 38.6 percent indicated that there were times they did not go to class because they could not find a sitter for their child(ren). On the other hand, 36.8 percent of the parents who responded apparently had little trouble finding a babysitter in order to go to school. In fact, one-quarter (24.6%) noted that they had no problem whatsoever.

Over half of the sample (53.3%) have experienced problems with their academic skills such as note-taking, writing, arithmetic, and general study habits. Moreover, 12.0 percent of the respondents reported that these areas were very problematic for them. The results to a question concerning study skills corroborates these findings. As show in Table 18, the students described their study skills as "very rusty" (23.6%) or "rusty" (23.6%). These two percentages combined represent practically half the sample. One-fifth (21.5%) of the students viewed their skills as "average" while another one-fifth (21.5%) considered their study skills "satisfactory". Finally, less than ten percent (9.9%) labeled their skills as "very satisfactory".

These findings clearly illustrate that struggling with such academic skills as note-taking, writing, arithmetic, and study habits is the most problematic for the non-traditional student.

**TABLE 18.** Respondents' description of study skills.

	N	%
very rusty	57	23.6
rusty	57	23.6
average	52	21.5
satisfactory	52	21.5
very satisfactory	24	9.9
<b>Total:</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## CHAPTER III

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

#### SUMMARY:

Older learners are returning to institutions of higher learning in record numbers. Colleges and universities are looking upon these adult learners as an additional source of students to offset the declining enrollment of traditional aged students. Most colleges focus their programs and services toward the 18 to 22 year old population, but older students are different than their younger peers; consequently, their needs differ as well. Non-traditional students have other responsibilities besides school such as a job, a spouse, and/or a family. With this in mind, if non-traditional students are to be successfully attracted to the University of Montana and retained, the campus faculty and administration need to become better informed about who the returning students are and what problems they encounter when they return to school.

To describe the characteristics indicative of the non-traditional student the following variables were analyzed: age, marital status, parental status, grade point average, major, credit loads, employment status, reasons for returning to school, and sources used to finance their education. In addition to these variables, the literature review suggested that entrance exams, course requirements and prerequisites, class registration, class schedules, transferring credits, the availability of child care, and academic skills are problems encountered by returning students. In order to find out if and to what extent non-

traditional students experience these problems and to develop a profile of the returning student, a survey questionnaire was mailed to 385 randomly selected respondents. Two-hundred forty-two students met the criteria required for inclusion in the analysis, i.e., 25 years of age or older, currently enrolled (Winter quarter, 1984), and no previous college degree.

Results of the analysis indicate that most of the non-traditional students are between the ages of 25 and 35, single (never married) or divorced, maintain a B gradepoint average or better, and carry a full-time credit load in three main areas of study: the Arts and Sciences, Business, and Education. Half of the returning students are working for wages, and one out of three are parents of at least one child. A combination of sources are used by non-traditional students to pay for their schooling with personal employment, savings, loans, and grants the most frequently mentioned.

The number of male and female non-traditional students is almost equal although their age distributions are not as comparable. Men clearly dominate the 25 to 30 age category while women far outnumber the men in the over 35 age group. As to marital status, most of the male returning students are either married or single, with the latter describing over half the men. One in four of the non-traditional female students are divorced contrasted to one in twenty of the men. Almost half the women are married while a quarter of them are single. Also, more women than men have children at home, and of the women, almost half are single parents. Of the men, less than four percent are single parents.

The majority of the non-traditional female students achieved "B" grade point averages while most of the male students maintained "C" averages. The most popular majors for both men and women are within the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Business. Next in popularity for women is a major in Education and for men, Forestry. The sexes are almost evenly divided in the employment realm; that is, nearly as many women as men are working while attending school.

Very clearly the main reason for returning to school is for personal satisfaction. Other reasons ranked highly by both men and women are: to obtain a degree, to improve income, intellectual stimulation, to prepare for a job, and to prepare for a better job. Of these six reasons more women than men consistently chose the first three.

Except for course requirements and prerequisites interfering with taking classes the students desired, specific institutional practices such as entrance exams, daytime registration, the times classes are offered, and transferring credits are not particularly troublesome for the non-traditional student at the University of Montana. Finding child care, though, is somewhat problematic: one in three parents noted that they were not able to attend class for lack of finding a sitter. Lastly, honing skills needed in academia, i.e., note-taking, writing, and arithmetic, is definitely an area of concern for returning students. In fact, the latter was acknowledged as a problem by over half the sample.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this research suggest that the institutional practices non-traditional students encounter at the University of Montana are not as problematic as the literature would lead one to believe. This is not to say returning students do not encounter problems with the institutional practices at the university, but rather, they are not regarded by the non-traditional students as an overwhelming problem.

However, within the academic realm, over half of the non-traditional students feel their basic academic skills are inadequate albeit the majority of them are achieving A's and B's. Although their grade point averages show empirically that they are doing above average in school, the students themselves are not comfortable with their skills. Moreover, they tend to underestimate their learning abilities. This is not an uncommon reaction for older learners entering school (Smith, 1980). Many older students are apprehensive about their skills especially when compared to those of the traditional aged college student who is accustomed to the classroom, homework, and studying (Mardoyan, Alleman, and Cochran, 1983).

In actuality, returning students do just as well as or better than their younger peers. Von der Embse and Childs (1979) conducted research to examine age and marital status as factors of academic performance. They propose that older students are more likely to be high achievers than younger students because of a greater commitment to their educational goals and by drawing upon outside experiences. Marital status did not significantly affect grade point averages; however,

further analysis indicated that sex was a major factor in academic performance. Von der Embse and Childs found that female older students maintained above average grades while their male counterparts earned average grades. Their findings are in agreement with those of the present study which found that the non-traditional women attending the University of Montana achieve B grade point averages while the non-traditional men maintain C grade point averages.

There are other areas as well in which male and female older learners differ. For instance, there is quite a discrepancy in the ages of male and female students: there are clearly more men in the 25-30 age range and more women after the age of thirty-five. Marital status is another variable with differences between the sexes. Many more men than women have never been married; whereas, a large percentage of the women have been married and then divorced.

Perhaps one of the greatest differences between the male returning students and the female is that of being a parent. Twice as many women as men who return to school have children living at home with them and almost half of them are single parents. This fact coincides with earlier findings that one-quarter of the female non-traditional women are divorced while male returning students are more likely to have never married.

What does all this mean? What is the sociological explanation for these findings? The three areas briefly discussed above (age, marital status, and parental status) in addition to the reasons why older learners return to college will be further developed with two concepts in mind: the life cycle and major life changes.



The life cycle must be considered when discussing why non-traditional students return to school. As Smith notes, "During one's thirties and forties, one's time to live becomes increasingly finite, with implications for how to spend it, and for considering such matters as changing careers or returning to school" (1982:38). The present findings suggest that adult students are combining both of these decisions, whether to change careers or return to college, since the majority of the non-traditional students chose "to prepare for a job" and "to prepare for a better job" as primary reasons for returning to school.

These reasons for returning are in accordance with Sewall's findings (1984). Over half of his respondents selected career oriented objectives as the most important reason for entering school. These reasons may be a consequence of the technological advances taking place in our society. The rapid changes are forcing adults to update their occupational skills in order to maintain their jobs (Williams, et. al., 1973). Or, as some experience, a totally new career is necessary as their present occupations are phased out.

The respondents in Sewall's research (1984) also chose personal growth as a major reason for entering college. This finding, too, coincides with the present study's research which found that "personal satisfaction" and "intellectual stimulation," in other words, personal growth items, were other reasons cited besides career preparation. These reasons are not too surprising since many adults turn to education in search for meaning in life and for discovering and developing their potential (Rawlins, 1979).

And finally, returning students choose to enter the college realm for very pragmatic reasons: to obtain a degree and to improve income. In terms of the life cycle, it is suggested that these adult learners have been out in the "real world" working before returning to college, and they recognize the advantage of having a college degree and how it would contribute positively to their financial situation.

Beyond these specific reasons for returning to school, there are other reasons as well. Adult developmental theory proposes that adulthood is divided into various stages, i.e., periods of stability and periods of transition. Knox (1977) suggests that during periods of transition or following major life change events such as divorce or a loss of one's job, adults are receptive to education and learning to reassert themselves as valued members of society. However, Aslanian and Brickell (1980) purport that returning to school is not so much a transition in itself as it is a consequence of another change in one's circumstances. In reference to this research, the point is not to decide whether returning to school is merely a transition in one's life or the outcome of a prior change. The purpose of the discussion is to apply these ideas to the present study's results. Hence, the concepts of the life cycle and major life changes are not only important in understanding why non-traditional students return to school, but they are also important in that they augment the understanding of the demographic composition of the adult student population.

Regarding male returning students, most are between 25 and 30 years of age, over half have never married, and very few have children. This might suggest that they have not experienced a great number of familial

responsibilities or related life changes. However, it is possible they have been in the workforce a minimum of seven years thus experiencing dissatisfaction with their jobs or they have found the need to update their skills. Whatever the reason, there appears to be no suggestion of a major upheaval in the majority of the men's personal lives such as divorce since a small percentage fall within this marital status.

On the other hand, the marital status of the female returning students indicate the possibility of having experienced this major life change since a substantial proportion of the female returning students are divorced. Divorce is often a precipitating event for women to seek a job, or in this case, return to college (Kahnweiler and Johnson, 1980), or even both since many women view a college education as a means to a secure financial future.

Keeping in mind the life cycle, it is not surprising that there are more older women than men attending college because, in this society, women in their twenties are usually the bearers and caretakers of children. Milner (1984) found in her study of housewives that many women enter college after high school, get married, leave school, and then have children. These women more than likely stay home to rear their children until they are of school age. When the children leave for school, the women are then free to attend school themselves. This would then explain the increased number of women in their thirties who return to complete their college education as did the women in Brandenburg's research (1974).

The "empty nest" period is another possible explanation for more women than men in their late thirties and forties attending college.

Most men at this time in their lives are well into their careers but for some women who made a career of raising children, they found their jobs ending when their children left. Children leaving should also be considered a major life change as well as a natural life occurrence prompting older women to return to college and pursue personal interests or acquire occupational skills.

To summarize the above discussion, this researcher proposed that the demographic characteristics of non-traditional students and their reasons for returning to school can best be understood through knowledge of the life cycle and awareness of major life changes. It is hoped that the information gathered from this research will be used to address the problems of the older students on the University of Montana campus. By doing so, the University as a whole will benefit as will the students themselves. With this in mind, the following recommendations are made.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The demographic characteristics and reasons adults return to school provided by this study suggest to whom the University of Montana should direct their marketing and what information should be presented. Targeted groups include men between 25 and 30 years of age and women who are in their thirties or over. Information helpful to these students would be the time classes are offered, since three-quarters of the adults who enter school are working prior to entering and half maintain their employment status while in school. The Continuing Education Program is succeeding in offering more evening classes to accommodate those in this situation.

Since many adults also have family responsibilities in addition to their jobs and student role, they should be informed not only of class times but services offered such as single parent support groups and workshops regarding time and stress management. Child care information is also important (see below).

As indicated in the findings, older students not only return for personal satisfaction but also because of career objectives; therefore, information explaining degrees offered, career options, career counseling, and job placement services should be included in any marketing used. Having this information may stir interest in those adults not yet enrolled plus it may reinforce the desire to continue for those who are already in school.

Once non-traditional students are attracted to the University, what can be done to help retain them? The results of this study draw attention to two major areas which prove problematic for adult learners.

Because one in three of the returning students who have children noted that there were times they did not go to class because they could not find a sitter, a child care booklet should be developed and made available to these students. The booklet should include such information as the names of child care centers, their locations, the hours they are open, their fees, the minimum age of children accepted, phone numbers, and whether drop-ins are accepted.

With this booklet non-traditional students who are parents would have ready access to available child care thus reducing the number of times they miss class. The booklet should be located in places most frequented by non-traditional students, for instance, the Phoenix office

(a social organization on campus for non-traditional students) located in the University Center and the Phoenix announcement board, also in the University Center on the second floor. In light of the findings that more women than men have children at home and that nearly half of those women are single parents, the Women's Resource Center would be another valuable location to place the booklet.

The second major problem concerns the students' academic abilities. Nearly half of the returning students described their academic skills as rusty and over half viewed their note-taking, arithmetic, and writing skills as problematic. A number of resources could be utilized to help non-traditional students develop and become more comfortable with their skills.

Some of these resources already exist on campus such as workshops offered by the Center for Student Development. These workshops focus on study skills, listening skills, and test anxiety. A suggestion directed at attracting adult students to these workshops would be to announce them to non-traditional students via the Phoenix newsletter and the bulletin board in the University Center. Although the Center for Student Development puts out announcements itself, many older learners could be reached better if the information were directed specifically to them.

The Center for Continuing Education and Summer Programs conducted a mass mailing to the public prior to summer session 1983 in order to inform prospective students of two classes, "Improving Reading and Study Skills" and "Introductory Algebra," designed for those persons who

needed to develop or refresh their academic skills. These classes also have been advertised in the 1983-85 summer session bulletins.

The class, "Improving Reading and Study Skills" was so popular that it is currently being offered by the School of Education throughout the academic school year by Dr. Rhea Ashmore and Suzy Hampton of Special Services. This author has heard "word of mouth" that the class has been a "lifesaver" and very worthwhile. Again, information concerning this class should be made available by means of the sources mentioned above.

The Mathematics Department now offers a series of courses, "College Arithmetic", "Introductory Algebra" and "Intermediate Algebra" which focus upon preparing students for college math courses, during the academic year as well as during the summer session. Based upon her study of students enrolled in these classes, the director of the Basic Skills Mathematics Program, Mary Jean Brod, notes that "older students as a group enter college with lower math skills compared to other students but their pass rates in math classes tend to be much higher" (1983:36-37). It appears, then, that the Basic Skills Math classes are another worthwhile investment and quite beneficial to the non-traditional students on this campus.

Special Services is another resource available to non-traditional students which warrants recognition. Although a student needs to be eligible to use their services, many returning students would have no trouble doing so since one need only be a first generation college student, have a low income, or both. If a student meets one of these requirements, he or she has access to a free tutoring program. The tutoring program provides an individual means of helping students within

disciplines or specific classes which prove difficult for students to comprehend. Special Services also has a reading lab available and a computer assisted guidance program to aid students in directing them toward career objectives.

Some students may prefer not to attend workshops or classes in order to "brush up" on study skills but would rather do it independently. If such is the case, the following references are recommended:

**Apps, Jerold**

1978 **Study Skills for Those Returning to School.** New York: McGraw Hill.

1982 **Improving Your Writing Skills: A Learning Plan for Adults.** Chicago: Follett Publishing Company.

**Maxwell, Martha**

1979 **Improving Student Learning Skills.** San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**Curtin, Bernadette and Fred Hecklinger**

1981 "Academic Survival Skills." The Career Life Assessment Skills Series, Booklet Five. Alexandria, VA: Northern Virginia Community College.

Perhaps the Phoenix organization could stock these books and articles in their office and check them out to students. And, of course, the library itself offers a number of references as well.

Although these classes and reference materials are helpful to returning students in developing their academic skills, strengthening confidence and self-esteem are just as important to a student's success. As noted in the findings and discussion, even though non-traditional students do well in school as evidenced by their grade point averages, they are not initially very confident about their academic skills.



Some confidence naturally occurs over the course of time as older students become more familiar with the college environment and demonstrate to themselves as well as to others that they can do above average work. But, self-esteem and confidence goes beyond grades although they are a major indicator of success in our society.

Phoenix provides a strong support network for older students. Not only does it have weekly luncheons with speakers who talk on subjects of interest to non-traditional students such as financial aid, career services, and child care, but it offers a refuge where older students seek one another out and develop new friendships. These friendships are vital to the personal development and confidence of students. Sometimes when one is feeling pressured by a spouse, children, and/or an employer in addition to the rigors of being a student, it is comforting to meet with a fellow non-traditional student who can empathize with you. Oftentimes a cup of coffee and a friend or counselor, someone who believes in you and understands what you are going through, is what it takes to feel better about yourself, give you boost in confidence, and help you face the next test, the next class, or even the next day.

The director of the Center for Continuing Education recognizes the importance of having contacts with others in the same situation. Dr. Sue Spencer plans to implement a program Fall quarter 1985 in which night school students, primarily older learners, will have peer counselors who periodically call them and "touch base." The gist of the proposed idea is to lend support to these returning students and let them know that they are not alone in their endeavors. Maintaining this

personal contact is bound to help non-traditional students feel more at ease not just academically but with their college experience as a whole.

To conclude, how is this information to be disseminated to prospective and enrolled students? The Office of Continuing Education at Idaho State University has available a pamphlet entitled, "The Adult Student: A Brief Overview of the Characteristics, Motivations, and Needs of the Adult Learner." The pamphlet is printed on good quality paper and folded in thirds, has photographs of non-traditional students in the classroom, and is in a format comparable to that of question and answer.

This researcher suggests a similar pamphlet be printed with an overview of the above information on it. It is also recommended that the pamphlet be available in the Admissions Office with all the other information that is handed out to interested students. The pamphlet should also be mailed accompanying any letters or catalogs to those persons who have requested information on the University. Even if the person who receives the catalog is traditional aged, the pamphlet may pique the interest of a parent or older sibling. Finally, this author strongly believes that the pamphlet will not only be informative to the adult learner but it will add legitimacy to the University's commitment to its non-traditional students.

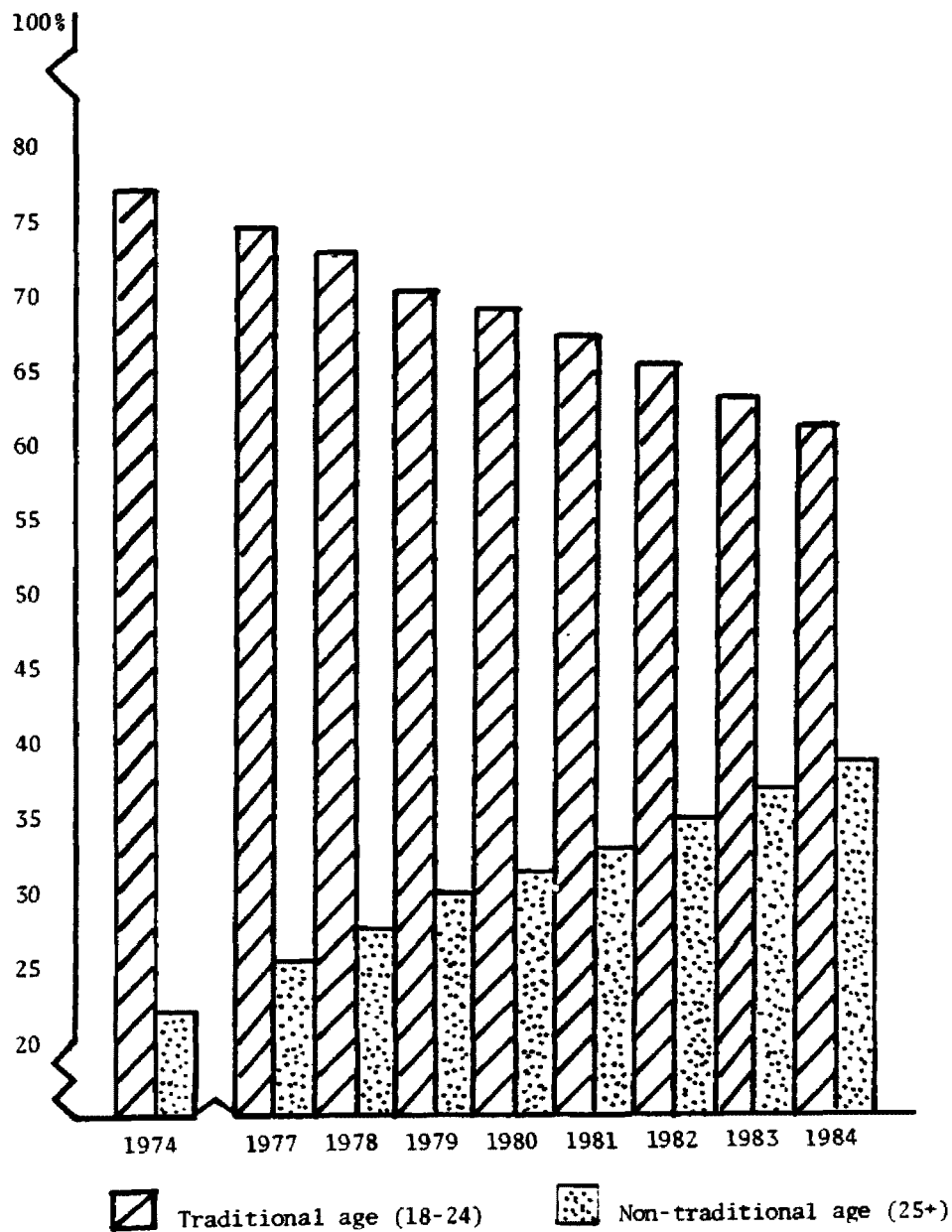
**DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The results of this study suggest a number of questions for future research:

- To what extent are grade differences related to age?
- As the number of roles (responsibilities) increase for the non-traditional student, what are the effects upon GPA?
- What is the relationship between the ages of returning students who are parents and those of their children?
- What are/were the present occupations of non-traditional students?
- To what degree do non-traditional students experience intra-role conflict?
- To what degree do non-traditional students experience inter-role conflict?
- Which significant others provide the greatest amount of emotional support to returning students?

## **APPENDIX**

University of Montana Age Distributions in Percentiles  
 Traditional and Non-Traditional Students  
 1974 -1984



## UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA RETURNING STUDENT SURVEY

Instructions: Check or circle the responses as instructed. All answers will be kept confidential.

**Do Not Write Your Name on This Form.**

1. Sex:  <sup>1</sup> Female  <sup>2</sup> Male
2. Year of Birth: 19 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Marital Status:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup> single, never married	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup> separated
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup> married	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup> divorced
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup> living with someone	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>6</sup> widowed
4. What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many credits were you enrolled for last quarter? \_\_\_\_\_  
( <sup>00</sup> not applicable, did not attend school last quarter)
6. How many credits are you enrolled for this quarter? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is your grade point average, to the nearest decimal (e.g., 2.1)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Please indicate your present class rank:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup> Freshman	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup> Junior	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>5</sup> M.A. student
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup> Sophomore	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup> Senior	<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>6</sup> Ph.D. student
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>7</sup> other ( _____ )		
9. Year of high school graduation: 19 \_\_\_\_\_
10. Since high school, was there any time that you were NOT in school?
 

No, I went immediately from high school to college and have continued since.

Yes

  - a. What were your primary activities during that time (e.g., I was working and raising a family)?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Why did you not enter college or continue your schooling?  
\_\_\_\_\_
11. Please indicate your formal educational experiences since high school including U of M with the most recent experience first.
 

School	Dates Attended			
	From		To	
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup> university <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup> college	/	/	/	/
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup> jr. college <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup> vo-tech	month	year	month	year
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup> university <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup> college	/	/	/	/
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup> jr. college <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup> vo-tech	month	year	month	year
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup> university <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup> college	/	/	/	/
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup> jr. college <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup> vo-tech	month	year	month	year
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup> university <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup> college	/	/	/	/
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup> jr. college <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup> vo-tech	month	year	month	year
12. For what reasons are you pursuing a higher education? **CHECK ALL** applicable.
 

<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>01</sup> to obtain a degree
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>02</sup> to continue an interrupted education
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>03</sup> to prepare for a job
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>04</sup> to secure a better job
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>05</sup> to prepare for a different job
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>06</sup> for advancement in my present job
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>07</sup> to improve my income
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>08</sup> for personal satisfaction
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>09</sup> to satisfy my family
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>10</sup> could finally afford it
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>11</sup> because of the G.I. Bill
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>12</sup> wanted to find out more about myself
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>13</sup> could not find a job
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>14</sup> for intellectual stimulation
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>15</sup> to meet new people
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>16</sup> to prepare for graduate school
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>17</sup> to satisfy my employer
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>18</sup> other ( _____ )
13. Now go back to those reasons you checked in question 12 and **RANK ORDER** the **THREE** most important reasons, with "1" being the highest priority reason.
14. How are you currently financing your education? **CHECK ALL** that apply.
 

<input type="checkbox"/> personal employment
<input type="checkbox"/> personal savings
<input type="checkbox"/> complete support from spouse
<input type="checkbox"/> help from spouse
<input type="checkbox"/> G.I. Bill
<input type="checkbox"/> work study
<input type="checkbox"/> complete support from parents/relatives
<input type="checkbox"/> help from parents/relatives
<input type="checkbox"/> scholarships
<input type="checkbox"/> loans
<input type="checkbox"/> grants
<input type="checkbox"/> other ( _____ )
15. How adequate have these combined sources been in meeting your expenses?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>1</sup> more than adequate
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>2</sup> adequate
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>3</sup> somewhat adequate
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>4</sup> not adequate
16. During the school year, where do you usually live? **CHECK ONE.**

house ( <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>01</sup> renting <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>02</sup> buying)
UM facility ( <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>03</sup> dorm <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>04</sup> apartment)
mobile home ( <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>05</sup> renting <input type="checkbox"/> <sup>06</sup> buying)
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>07</sup> apartment
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>08</sup> house of relative
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>09</sup> rented room
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>10</sup> commune/collective
<input type="checkbox"/> <sup>11</sup> other ( _____ )
17. How many persons, including yourself, share your living quarters during the school year?  
\_\_\_\_\_

18 In the spaces below, please provide information about those CURRENTLY SHARING your residence.  
( not applicable, I live alone)

Relationship To You	Year of Birth	Sex (Circle)
Spouse/partner	19_____	F M
Child	19_____	F M
Child	19_____	F M
Child	19_____	F M
Others:		
_____	19_____	F M
_____	19_____	F M
_____	19_____	F M

19. Are you employed this quarter?  
 No (if no, please go to question No. 20)  
 Yes  
 a. What is your present occupation?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 b. How many hours per week do you work? \_\_\_\_\_  
 c. How long have you held this job? \_\_\_\_\_  
 d. What is your gross monthly income to the nearest hundred (\$600. \$1200)?  
 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

20. About how much are your monthly living expenses (e.g., rent, utilities, food, car payments, clothing, medical bills)?  
 \$ \_\_\_\_\_

21. NOT counting your present employment, please list your work experiences since 1979 (include 1979) with the most recent first.

Occupation	Dates	
	From	To
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

22. From which of the following sources do you receive income? CHECK ALL that apply.  
 my own employment  
 spouse  
 relative(s)  
 social security  
 retirement programs  
 alimony  
 child support  
 public assistance (AFDC, ATD, SSI)  
 insurance policies  
 National Guard or Reserve  
 rental units  
 dividends from other investment  
 disability payments  
 other (\_\_\_\_\_)

23. Have you ever been on active duty in the Armed Services of the United States?  
 No  
 Yes  
 period of service: from 19\_\_\_\_\_ to 19\_\_\_\_\_

24. If the University had the following services or increased their availability, would you:

- Use an evening child care center on campus  Yes  No  
( \* N/A, no children)
- Attend evening classes:  Yes  No
- Attend weekend classes:  Yes  No
- Visit a gathering place or lounge designated for re-entry students:  Yes  No

25. The following are some general questions. CHECK the ONE answer that best fits for you.

When I first entered the University of Montana, my study skills were:  
 1 very rusty  
 2 rusty  
 3 average  
 4 satisfactory  
 5 very satisfactory

My financial situation while attending school is:

- 1 very secure
- 2 secure
- 3 all right
- 4 insecure
- 5 very insecure

My spouse's attitude outwardly toward my educational attainment is:

- \* N/A, not married
- 1 very favorable
- 2 favorable
- 3 neutral
- 4 unfavorable
- 5 very unfavorable

I get the feeling my spouse's true feelings toward my schooling are:

- \* N/A, not married
- 1 very favorable
- 2 favorable
- 3 neutral
- 4 unfavorable
- 5 very unfavorable

Overall, how satisfied are you with your education at the University of Montana?

- 1 very satisfied
- 2 satisfied
- 3 mixed feelings
- 4 dissatisfied
- 5 very dissatisfied

While at school, I primarily use the following type of child care:

- \* N/A, no children
- 1 ASUM child care
- 2 relative
- 3 friend
- 4 private sitter
- 5 child care center
- 6 children in school while I am
- 7 spouse
- 8 children old enough to stay by themselves

The most convenient times for me to take classes are:

(Check ALL that apply)

- 1 early morning
- 2 mid-morning
- 3 noon
- 4 early afternoon
- 5 late afternoon
- 6 evenings

Think about the many responsibilities and relationships that you maintain on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis.

26. To what degree does your role AS A STUDENT conflict with your role as:

spouse/partner

- 1 not at all  
 2 some degree  
 3 great degree  
 4 not applicable

parent

- 1 not at all  
 2 some degree  
 3 great degree  
 4 not applicable

employee

- 1 not at all  
 2 some degree  
 3 great degree  
 4 not applicable

employer

- 1 not at all  
 2 some degree  
 3 great degree  
 4 not applicable

brother/sister

- 1 not at all  
 2 some degree  
 3 great degree  
 4 not applicable

friends to others outside the university

- 1 not at all  
 2 some degree  
 3 great degree  
 4 not applicable

member of non-university organizations (church, PTA)

- 1 not at all  
 2 some degree  
 3 great degree  
 4 not applicable

member of university organizations (clubs, committees)

- 1 not at all  
 2 some degree  
 3 great degree  
 4 not applicable

27. Which of the following best describes the type of **EMOTIONAL SUPPORT** you are receiving while in school? For example, "My friends are very supportive." **CHECK** the appropriate box:

spouse/partner

- 1 no support  
 2 little support  
 3 supportive  
 4 very supportive  
 5 not applicable

parents

- 1 no support  
 2 little support  
 3 supportive  
 4 very supportive  
 5 not applicable

child(ren)

- 1 no support  
 2 little support  
 3 supportive  
 4 very supportive  
 5 not applicable

other relatives

- 1 no support  
 2 little support  
 3 supportive  
 4 very supportive  
 5 not applicable

friends

- 1 no support  
 2 little support  
 3 supportive  
 4 very supportive  
 5 not applicable

employer

- 1 no support  
 2 little support  
 3 supportive  
 4 very supportive  
 5 not applicable

28. On the lines below, identify **BY RELATIONSHIP** one or two persons who influence you most or whom you consider when making decisions (e.g., write in "spouse," "children," etc.)  
Do NOT identify them by name.

Person A. \_\_\_\_\_

Person B. \_\_\_\_\_

29. Below are typical expectations attached to the student role.

**CIRCLE** whether or not the persons you just mentioned have these expectations for you.

Y = Yes      N = No

	Expectations of:			
	Person A		Person B	
don't get less than an "A" G.P.A.	Y	N	Y	N
don't get less than a "B" G.P.A.	Y	N	Y	N
don't get less than a "C" G.P.A.	Y	N	Y	N
meet with other students even if it reduces time with family members	Y	N	Y	N
study one hour per class	Y	N	Y	N
spend time at the library on the weekends	Y	N	Y	N
spend time at the library evenings	Y	N	Y	N
don't criticize your professor(s)	Y	N	Y	N
ask questions in class	Y	N	Y	N
attend every class	Y	N	Y	N
get better grades than classmates	Y	N	Y	N
have a career objective	Y	N	Y	N

30. Now **CIRCLE** whether or not you have these expectations for yourself (not necessarily actual behavior)

Y = Yes      N = No

	Self Expectations:	
	Y	N
don't get less than an "A" G.P.A.	Y	N
don't get less than a "B" G.P.A.	Y	N
don't get less than a "C" G.P.A.	Y	N
meet with other students even if it reduces time with family members	Y	N
study one hour per class	Y	N
spend time at the library on the weekends	Y	N
spend time at the library evenings	Y	N
don't criticize your professor(s)	Y	N
ask questions in class	Y	N
attend every class	Y	N
get better grades than classmates	Y	N
have a career objective	Y	N

31. Which of the following expectations cause disagreements between you and the significant people in your life (Persons A and B)? **CHECK ALL** that apply.

- don't get less than an "A" G.P.A.  
 don't get less than a "B" G.P.A.  
 don't get less than a "C" G.P.A.  
 meet with other students even if it reduces time with family members  
 study one hour per class  
 spend time at the library on the weekends  
 spend time at the library evenings  
 don't criticize your professor(s)  
 ask questions in class  
 attend every class  
 get better grades than classmates  
 have a career objective



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
32. To what degree does each statement apply to you and your experiences at the U of M? CIRCLE the appropriate feeling.					
The times most courses are offered fit my schedule.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
Course requirements and prerequisites have interfered with taking classes I wanted.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
When I first entered school, I was worried I would not do well.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I now feel I've done just as well as or better than I expected in school.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I have not been eligible for school loans, grants, or work study because of my income.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I have not been eligible for school loans, grants, or work study because of my spouse's income.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
Faculty members have given me practical advice concerning classes and my career interests.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
Overall, finances have not been a significant problem for me.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I have had no trouble getting to the Registrar, Admissions, and Financial Aid offices during the hours they are open.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I have met and made friends with younger students on campus.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
When I applied for scholarships or grants I had trouble getting letters of recommendation or they were outdated.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I have not had any problems with note-taking, writing, arithmetic, or my study habits.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
Managing my time is a major concern for me.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
There were times I enrolled full-time just because it was cheaper than going to school part-time	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
Taking entrance exams made it difficult to be admitted to the University.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
There have been times I could not go to class because I could not afford a babysitter.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
There have been times I could not go to class because I could not find a babysitter.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I have been able to maintain my responsibilities as an employee at the same standard as they were previous to my going to school.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I had trouble getting copies of my transcripts when I applied for admission to the University.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I've felt isolated from campus activities.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
It was inconvenient to register for classes during the day.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
Since I've been on campus, I have sought out students in my own age group.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I didn't have any problem transferring previously earned credits when I was admitted to the University.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A
I have been able to maintain my family responsibilities at the same standard as they were previous to my going to school.	SD	D	A	SA	N/A

*Please feel free to use the remaining space to make any additional comments.*

Postcard mailed to respondents  
to prompt return of questionnaire

Just a reminder concerning the Returning Student Survey mailed to you three weeks ago. Your input is very much needed in order for changes to take place for non-traditional aged students on the University of Montana campus. I realize finals are coming up, but could you please take a few minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire?

Thank-you,  
Nancy S. Blom  
Center for Population Research

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