BARRIERS TO AND SUPPORTS FOR SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS OLDER THAN AVERAGE ATTENDING THE COLLEGE

BESSIE MERRIGAN

Memorial
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BARRIERS TO AND SUPPORTS FOR SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS OLDER THAN AVERAGE ATTENDING THE COLLEGE

Bessie Merrigan

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Abstract

Personal, institutional and academic factors contributing to or impeding the success of students older than average registered at four campuses of the College of the North Atlantic from 1998-2000 were examined in this study. Students, twenty-five years and older, who had completed their program, were compared with those who had voluntarily withdrawn. The study was completed in two phases. Phase I involved the collection of data through the mailout of a questionnaire. Sixty-eight people responded to the questionnaire. After analyses of the data from those respondents, it was decided to conduct interviews. Phase II consisted of the collection of qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, conducted with 12 of the original respondents.

Graduates and those who withdrew from the College faced common barriers to success. The study revealed that all students older than average expected respect from instructors, wanted their experiences acknowledged, had fixed ways of doing things, and indicated problems identifying with younger students in the class. Students who had the most difficulty with their perceived lack of respect seemed more likely to withdraw. While all expressed concern with balancing home and school responsibility, a significant difference emerged between the two groups as per their ability to cope with that responsibility. Results also showed a significant difference between the two groups as per the grade point average obtained at the College. The higher the GPA, the more likely the chances of graduating.

The most significant theme that emerged from the study was the difference between the two groups as to their perceptions of course instructors, the support received

from instructors, and the variety of teaching techniques. Graduates found that instructors were helpful and supportive and used a variety of teaching techniques, and those who withdrew reported experiencing the opposite.

During the interviews, an important difference emerged between male and female students as per the difficulty experienced in balancing home and school responsibility. Women faced the greatest adjustment in attempting to balance that responsibility. It appeared from this study that those women who successfully managed home and school were the ones who graduated.

The data from this study support the need for the College to identify perceived or real institutional barriers to success. There were clearly identified differences between those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew. Further research into academic, institutional and personal factors for students older than average would provide more support for the College, and to students older than average.

Acknowledgment

As a student older than average, I am fully aware of the supports necessary for successful completion of a program. I would like first of all to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Mildred Cahill, for her assistance, patience and encouragement provided in producing this study. I would also like to thank Mr. Gerry White whose editing assistance with the statistical section of this study was invaluable. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the College of the North Atlantic for providing me with the necessary student data. To the students who answered the questionnaires and to the participants who allowed me to interview them, my sincere thank you.

As with the students involved with this study, family support is vital to success. To my parents who encouraged me to value education, thank you. To my children, Jamie and Paul, who shared my university experiences at the same time they were completing their education, thank you for your patience and understanding and for the help you have provided over the many years of having a mother completing post-secondary courses. Last, but not least, to my husband, Jim, who has encouraged me over the years to continue with post-secondary studies, who shared the home responsibilities willingly, who chauffeured me to many classes out of town and who convinced me that I could complete my Master of Education, a most sincere thank you. Your love, support and encouragement have been a positive influence on my persistence in pursuing my educational goals.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the barriers to and supports for success for the students older than average enrolled at the College of the North Atlantic from 1998 - 2000. The study included students at the four campuses in the St. John's area: Ridge Road, Prince Philip Drive, Seal Cove and Topsail Road as well as students registered at the Corner Brook campus. These five campuses offered the majority of programs and comprised more than half the student population of the college. The study considered the personal, institutional and academic factors that contributed to or impeded the success of the older student. It compared and contrasted students twenty-five years and older using two categories: students who successfully completed their program, and those who voluntarily withdrew.

Significance of Study

Changing Demographics

Although adult learners now comprise almost 40 percent of the student population at colleges and universities, the majority of these students participate in traditional on-campus undergraduate programs based on traditional models of learning (Kasworm & Pike, 1994). According to Padula (1994), total college enrollment of both men and women was higher in 1988 (13.1 million students) than in any previous year in the United States. Most of this growth has been among students 25 years of age or older with

women 25 years or older constituting 48.6% of the total college enrollment from 1980-1989. By 1992, non-traditional students comprised 44% of the school population (Breese & O'Toole, 1995; Padula, 1994). Breese and O'Toole (1995) noted that 66% of all incoming students into colleges in the United States in 1995 were non-traditional students. It is predicted that the reentry trend will continue (Padula, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998). Yet, according to Pascarella and Terenzini (1998), while there have been numerous studies completed on traditional students attending four-year college and university programs, there have been few studies completed on two-year community college programs, and few completed on the increasing non-traditional students population at the post-secondary level. These researchers argued that, in the absence of research evidence from this large student population, policies for higher education and funding priorities may negatively impact these individuals who currently constitute the majority of post-secondary college students. This dearth of research is also evident in Canada (Barnetson, 1998).

Barriers to Success

Adult students returning to college face many barriers to success. Institutional barriers include: locations, schedules, fee structures, attitudes of professors, campus friendliness, lack of satisfaction in the student role and the unwillingness or inability of institutions to recognize and accredit college-level prior learning experiences. Personal barriers include: job commitments, home responsibilities, lack of money, lack of child care, and transportation problems. There are also psycho-social barriers where attitudes,

beliefs and values of individuals and significant others affect career decision. Academic barriers include poor study skills, inability to cope with course load, and academic level prior to entering college (Brookfield, 1986; Belanger & Mount, 1998; Davis, 1990; Herr & Cramer, 1996; Kerha, 1995; Padula, 1994; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).

A lack of satisfaction in the student role has been reported by both reentry men and women with the greatest dissatisfaction from reentry women. One of the major problems centred around home-school satisfaction (Padula, 1994; Tomlinson-Clarke, 1998; Toray & Cooley, 1998). Hamilton (1997) believed that the greatest barrier to success for adults who are otherwise prepared to return to school was the unwillingness or inability of institutions to recognize and accredit college-level prior learning experiences. The students find it especially discouraging when their learning acquired through employment is not validated. A sure way to stifle a student's motivation is to require an adult learner to complete a course for which he/she already has the required knowledge.

Prior learning assessment is a process that identifies, articulates, measures and accredits learning acquired outside the traditional classroom setting (Belanger & Mount, 1998). Two decades ago, Knowles (1978) stressed the importance of recognizing prior knowledge and argued that adult learning occurred in a variety of situations. He believed that appreciating and taking into consideration this prior knowledge and experience of learners should become a basic facet of adult educators. This prior knowledge is still not readily acknowledged 20 years later in the formal setting of a college or university (Evans, 1995).

Knowles, in introducing the andragogical model of learner-centered or learner directed instruction, introduced a key concept that is different from any other instructional model - - the learner is viewed as a mutual partner, or as the primary designer, of the learning activity. However, this model has not been used a great deal in actual practice in any formal setting, especially at the post-secondary level where the main mode of instruction remains primarily instructor-designed and instructor-directed (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Reasons for Returning

The adult student identified in the research has increasingly become the norm at colleges and universities. Research (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Breese & O'Toole, 1995; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997) on why older students return to college identified many factors that influenced students returning. Structural changes in family situations including the addition or loss of a family member, death of a spouse, divorce, disability, and unemployment often motivate a return to school (Breese & O'Toole, 1995; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997). Developmental changes provided the incentive for a return to school that was interrupted or not considered earlier. As well, industry downsizing, new technology and changing occupational pressure may also require an older student to enroll in college or university (Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997). The single most important reason adult students gave for enrolling in post-secondary courses, according to Ashar and Skenes (1993) was career enhancement needs.

Gender Factors

While this study examined factors surrounding all students older than average returning to the college, it also attempted to compare and contrast men and women to determine if there were different factors that were gender-specific. One area of research identified differences and similarities between men and women as to why they reentered college (Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997; Padula, 1994). Motivational reasons for women's re-entry centered around family, redefining of marriage and family roles. Influencing factors for both genders included: the number of colleges previously attended, employment in larger organizations, and a prior perception that college has been beneficial in preparation for the work force. Other factors included increased knowledge, self-actualization, self-improvement and social and humanitarian motives (Barnetson, 1998; Padula, 1994).

The Study Rationale

Newfoundland Research

According to Sharpe and Spain (1993), although there have been some studies completed on post-secondary student attrition and retention in Canada, there have been few studies completed on post-secondary student attrition and retention in Newfoundland, with even fewer focusing on the student older than average (Budgell, 1985). Concentrated research is needed to determine if factors applicable to student success in the general population are the same for students older than average.

In 1993 the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador initiated an indicators project to "systematically compile, analyze and publish in the form of indicators report,

information on the Province's public and private colleges and Memorial University" (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995, p. viii). The goals of *Postsecondary Indicators* include keeping the public and the educational community informed about major trends and developments in the post- secondary system, and providing information that will assist the institutions in making sound educational decisions (Government, 1995). While this document provided considerable information on students in general, including satisfaction with the post-secondary institutes, participation rates by gender, and graduation and attrition rates, it did not make any distinction in the results according to age. Research (Breese & O' Toole, 1995; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997; Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Merriam & Cafferella, 1999; Padula, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998) shows that up to 50% of the current post-secondary population consists of non-traditional student and students older than 25. It is, therefore, extremely important for institutions to have current research on this changing population.

The follow-up study, *Postsecondary Indicators '98,* showed that for the public college system from 1991 - 1997 most programs graduate fewer than 50% of students who enter(Government of Newfoundland, 1998). It also indicated that the proportion of females participating in post-secondary has increased 122% over the past twenty years. However, there was a major lack of information on distinguishing between traditional and non-traditional students. As is shown in the literature review of the adult learner, students older than average constitute a different population from the traditional student and must be recognized by the post-secondary institutions as unique. Institutions need to factor in these differences when making policies and choosing program delivery.

College of the North Atlantic Research

In recent years, there have been several studies completed on the public post-secondary college system in Newfoundland including an examination of prior learning assessment (Evans, 1995), college student attrition (Kirby, 2000) and satisfaction with counselling (Lindstrom, 2000; Smith 1999). While these studies have indicated a need for further research on student success, student satisfaction and student retention, there has been no focus on the non-traditional older student.

Byrne (1990) found that at Cabot Institute (now College of the North Atlantic), more females than males voluntarily withdrew from post-secondary programs while more males than females were academically dismissed. Her findings showed that 75% of terminated students were between the ages of 18 and 21.

In 1997 the College of the North Atlantic issued a report called *Attrition and Graduation Rates of the College of the North Atlantic 1994-1997.* Results from this report showed that high attrition rates were related to the type of program attempted. This report indicated that the graduation rates for one and two-year programs were 58% and 60% with higher attrition rates reported in two-year technology programs, such as Computer Aided Drafting and Business Computer Studies. The average graduation rate for three-year programs was only 40%. Further to those findings, only 34% of students entering three-year engineering programs completed the program in the three-year time frame (College of the North Atlantic, 1999).

The results of this report did not address why students were not completing programs. A follow-up survey was completed by telephone during the summer of 1998.

Two questionnaires, *The Student Dropout Survey* and *The Student Academic Termination Survey,* were used to survey a total of 278 students; 143 who voluntarily withdrew and 135 who were academically terminated. Reasons for withdrawal were divided into five categories: academic, employment, personal, institutional and financial. Reasons for termination were divided into four major categories: academic, employment, personal and institutional. Academics was the major factor listed by both groups of individuals for failure to continue their programs. For those who voluntarily withdrew, the major academic reason was dissatisfaction with grades while those who were academically dismissed listed courses being too difficult (College of the North Atlantic, 1999). Again, there was no attempt to distinguish between traditional students and non-traditional students.

Since the college accepts students on a first-come first-served basis, the question that arose was whether students were prepared academically or whether the college provided sufficient information to the students prior to acceptance as to the degree of difficulty with the various programs. While these results provided a general overview of the reasons why students either voluntarily withdraw or were academically terminated, there has been no specific research completed on the group of students identified as the student older than average. Since this group of students appeared to comprise a larger proportion of the student body, it was important that a study be completed that would identify the needs of this population.

Definition of term, research questions guiding this study and limitations of the study follow.

Definition of Terms

Academic integration:

The process whereby a student is successful in adjusting to the academic environment at the post-secondary level, attending classes, passing courses and accepting academic assistance (Grayson, 1997; Tinto, 1987).

Academic termination/dismissal:

The process whereby a student is terminated from the post-secondary institution for failure to perform to the academic standard of that institution (Tinto, 1987).

Adult education:

Courses and other educational activities, both formal and non-formal organized by teachers or sponsoring agencies and taken by persons beyond compulsory school age (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Adult learner:

An adult who is enrolled in any course of study, whether special or regular to develop new skills or qualifications or improving existing skills and qualifications (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Andragogy:

A concept of adult learning first used in Europe in 1833. Used to differentiate adult theory from pedagogy, the theory of youth learning. This theory recognizes adult learners as autonomous and independent people who prefer an independent or self-directed learning process (Knowles, 1978). A term used to describe the

characteristics of adult learners and a set of assumptions for most effectively teaching adults (Lee, 1998).

Graduate:

A student who successfully completes the required program of studies and receives a certificate or diploma.

Mature student status:

Under the policy of the College, individuals who do not meet the educational prerequisites for a program may be considered for admission provided they: are at least 19 years of age, have been out of school at least one year, present a certified copy of the highest educational level attained and be willing to complete the standardized assessment instrument at a level approved by the College (College of the North Atlantic, 2000).

Prior learning assessment:

A process that identifies, articulates, measures and accredits learning acquired outside the traditional classroom setting (Belanger & Mount, 1998).

Social integration:

"Pertains to the degree of congruency between the individual student and the social system of a college or university" (Bray, Braxton & Sullivan, 1999, p. 645). It also includes informal peer group associations, extracurricular activities and integration with faculty and staff (Bray et al., 1999).

Student older than average:

Generally described as the non-traditional student, twenty-five years or older, who returns to college or enters for the first time (Kaseworm & Pike, 1994; Muse, Teal, Williamson & Fowler, 1992).

Student persistence:

Based on Tinto's model of student departure, it implies that colleges and universities that are socially and academically highly integrated will have higher rates of students who persist in their courses and successfully complete their programs (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Tinto, 1987).

Voluntarily withdraw:

The process whereby a student withdraws from a post-secondary institution prior to completion of program for reasons other than inadequate academic performance (Tinto, 1987).

Research Questions

The sample for this study consisted of all students twenty-five years and over who were identified by the data received from the College of the North Atlantic, registered from 1998-2000 at the four campuses in the St. John's area: Ridge Road, Prince Philip Drive, Seal Cove and Topsail Road, as well as students registered at the Corner Brook Campus. These five campuses offered the majority of programs and comprised more than half of the student population of the college. Questionnaires were sent to students using three categories: students who had successfully completed their programs; students who

were academically terminated; and students who had voluntarily withdrawn.

From previous research, there appeared to be a variety of factors influencing whether students graduated, voluntarily withdrew or were academically terminated. However, as already stated, much of this research in Canada and Newfoundland has focused on traditional students. The focus of these research questions should provide some indication of factors that may apply to students older than average. The research questions are as follows:

1. Are there significant differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per the following background/demographic characteristics: (a) gender; (b) age; (c) martial status; (d) dependents; (e) home community size; and (f) place of residence?

2. Are there significant differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per: (a) "mature student" status; (b) highest schooling completed; (c) years since last formal education; (d) employment during attendance at college; (e) school average; and (f) grade point average during attendance at college?

3. Are there significant differences identified by students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per reasons for: (a) entering the programs at the college; and (b) choosing the specific program at the college?

4. Are there differences identified among students older than average as per reasons for: (a) graduating; (b) voluntarily withdrawing; or (c) academically terminating?

5. Are there significant differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per factors relating to the following college experiences: (a) academic integration; (b) support of family, friends, or college personnel; (c) social integration; (d) academic preparedness; (e) satisfaction with college experiences and services; (f) financial concerns; and (g) self-esteem?

6. Are there differences in attrition rates among students older than average who voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per the choice of programs?

7. Are there differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per their recommendations: (a) to future students older than average; (b) to the institution prior to students entering; and (c) to the college during the student's program?

Limitations

This study was conducted at five campuses in the public college system in two large urban centres in Newfoundland and Labrador on students older than average. The limitations included:

1. The sample population was limited to the public college system. Since all institutions do not necessarily attract similar populations, the findings cannot be generalized to persons who attend other post-secondary institutions.

2. The study focused on only students older than average, and therefore, a comparison between traditional and non-traditional students was not possible from this research.

3. The questionnaires were mailed and response was voluntary. The study, therefore, was limited to those who responded, making for poor comparative analysis of some programs and populations that were under-represented. This was particularly evident in studying particular factors relating to specific programs.

4. There was no guarantee that individuals who chose to answer the questionnaire would respond differently than those who chose not to participate.

5. Although questionnaires were randomly distributed to all three student categories, there were no responses from those who were academically terminated. A comparison among three categories, therefore, was not possible.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A review of selected literature in relation to this study focused on the student older than average and the barriers to and supports for success of those students at the post-secondary level. Various theories were examined, as per the relation to student development in general and adult development specifically. Research on adult learners, including characteristics of adult learners as compared to children, was examined as well as how non-traditional students were identified in the post-secondary institutions. The section on adults as learners concluded with an examination of factors on adult motivation. Personal, institutional and academic factors that contribute to or impede the success of students older than average were also examined. Included in this section was research on persistence and retention. Finally, the literature search included interventions and special adaptations to programs that may constitute support for success of the student older than average.

According to Sharpe and Spain (1993), while there have been some studies completed on post secondary student attrition and retention in Canada, there have been few studies completed on post secondary in Newfoundland, with even fewer focusing on the student older than average (Budgell, 1985). Research is needed to determine if factors that are applicable to student success in the general population are the same for students older than average. Although a Government document called *Postsecondary Indicators '98* provided considerable information on post secondary students in general, including satisfaction with the post-secondary institutes, participation by gender, and graduation

and attrition rates, it did not distinguish results according to age (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1995). Research (Breese & O'Toole, 1995; Graham, 1998; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997; Kasworm & Pike,1994; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Padula, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Tice, 1997) shows that up to 50% of current post-secondary population consists of non-traditional students and students older than twenty-five. It is, therefore, important for institutions to have current research on these non-traditional students.

Student Development Theories

Student Development

In any examination of barriers to success for students older than average entering college, the theories that describe students in general and the processes that the students follow must be examined. Since there are more adult students returning to college than ever before, it is vital that adult learning and development be understood by educators, researchers and administration at the post secondary level.

Within the past 20 years since Knowles (1978) reported his idea of andragogy as a model for adult learners, there has been a great focus on what constitutes an adult learner and what separates adults as learners from children as learners. It has been suggested that an examination of adult education would indicate little change from education of any other member of the population. However, in recent decades a different school of thought has developed that differs from the traditional philosophical approach. This developmental approach stresses the state of adulthood as a process of development

(Squires, 1993). It is essential then to examine student development and why it is of value to higher education.

Development refers to the process of human growth and change, but can also refer to the characteristics that derive from the unfolding change process. Sandford, as cited in Evans, Forney & Guido-DiBrito (1998), defined development as "the organization of increasing complexity" (p.47). Development, according to him, is a positive growth process allowing the individual to integrate and act upon many different experiences and influences. During the 1960s there were significant changes in higher education and in the way students were viewed by institutions. According to Evans et al. (1998), Sandford focused on the relationship between college environment and transitional stages of the student, D. Heath focused on the concept of maturity, while R. Heath introduced a theory that focused on how individual differences affect students' progress toward maturity.

Since the 1960s there have been numerous developmental theories related to students including psychosocial theories, cognitive-structural theories and typology theories (Cote & Levine, 1997; Evans et al., 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). These theorists have attempted to explain how or why students develop, how they think and how students view the world. What was clear from an examination of these theories was that no one theory accurately described or explained students' development through college, explained what motivates some students and not others, or what made some students successful while others fail or drop-out. It is valuable, however, to examine several of these theories for clarification of the factors involved in how students develop and why

they are successful. Mackinnon-Slaney (1994) noted, "student development in higher education must be interpreted with care when applied to adult learners" (p.72).

One psychosocial developmental model examined was Chickering and Reisser's vectors of development. This has been highly influential in developmental theory because of its realistic and practical application to higher education (Chickering & Reisser, 1997; Evans et al., 1998; Arnold & King, 1997; Merriam &Caffarella, 1999). According to Evans et al. (1998), the validity of this theory is also evident from the investigative research completed to date on various populations.

This model proposed seven vectors as maps that help determine where students are and where they are heading. The model stressed that development for college students is a fluid and non-linear process. While each person is different and proceeds through the vectors at different rates and by different ways, there are recurring themes that Chickering and Reisser (1997) identified as "gaining competencies and self-awareness, balancing intimacy with freedom, learning control and flexibility, finding one's voice or vocation, refining beliefs, and making commitments" (p.35). These vectors included: developing intellectual, physical, manual and interpersonal competencies; managing emotions such as anger, anxiety, fear, hurt, longing, boredom and tension; moving through autonomy toward independence; learning to take responsibility for pursuing self-chosen goals; developing mature interpersonal relationships; establishing identity that depends partially on the previous vectors; developing purpose; developing integrity that involves humanizing values, personalizing values and developing congruence (Chickering, & Reisser, 1997; Evans et al., 1998).

This model differed from other models in that it was not age or stage related, but viewed students' development proceeding through sequential building blocks. Chickering and Reisser (1997) believed that, regardless of the age of the college student, college will move students along the first four vectors with growth in each area helping the individual's identity. As well, this theory afforded equal merit to emotional, interpersonal, ethical and intellectual development.

Chickering and Reisser (1997) further identified seven key environmental factors that influence student development: institutional objective; institutional size; student-faculty relationship; curriculum; teaching; friendships and student communities; and student development programs and services. Three principles that emphasize these factors were also introduced. Firstly, *integration of work and learning*, called for a collaborative relationship between business, the community and the institutes of higher learning. Secondly, there must be *recognition and respect for individual differences* and finally there had to be an *acknowledgment of the cyclical nature of learning and development* (Chickering, & Reisser, 1997; Evans et al., 1998). Since this model is neither age nor stage related, it should be a model that can be applied equally to traditional and non-traditional students.

Perry (1968) researched how students interpret and make meaning of the teaching and learning process, and from this research developed an intellectual and ethical development theory that described the development of students' patterns of thought. These "forms" of intellectual and ethical development were viewed as the structures that shaped how people view their experiences. His scheme moved from very simplistic

forms to complex forms over the continuum of development, and consisted of nine positions that are static with development occurring not in the positions, but during the transitions between them.

Key words found in Perry's positions that represented fundamental differences in the process of meaning-making included: *duality, multiplicity, relativism and commitment.* The student, in the position of duality, tended to view the world in black or white with learning described as an exchange of information with the instructor as the expert imparting his knowledge to the student. The transition to multiplicity began when cognitive dissonance occurred and disequilibrium was introduced into the meaning-making process of the dualistic student. The students now realized that more than one opinion was valid and the responsibility for independent thinking deepened. The next important transition was to relativism when the student recognized that all opinions are not necessarily valid and knowledge was viewed more qualitatively, based on evidence and supporting arguments (Perry, 1968).

Evans et al. (1998) stated that the movement from relativism to commitment involved making choices in a contextual world, and could be viewed as the beginning of the ethical development of the student. The commitment process that involved choices, decisions and affirmations carried the student through major social decisions such as career choices and relationships.

Perry's (1968) theory of student development has been widely researched and acknowledged as a realistic theory of student development. Institutions who recognize that students develop from a simplistic form of meaning-making process to a more

complex form will provide the necessary support for students to enable them to make transitions necessary for realistic student development.

Adult Developmental Learning

Developmental learning with clearly identifiable developmental characteristics does occur in adult learning. Psychological theories of adult development have their roots in the 1960s when higher educational professionals attempted to promote student growth through understanding patterns of change and examining conditions necessary to promote development. Developmental theory can assist personnel in structuring the environment to influence student growth and change. It can provide a rationale for supporting student goals, designing optimal learning environments, and explaining the interrelationship between a student's intellectual and personal growth (Arnold & King, 1997).

Are there differences between average-aged students and students older than average? Do adults learn differently than children? Prior to the 1970s, there was no distinction made between the adult learner and the child as learner. Since that time, there has been considerable research completed on adults as learners with a number of theories pursued by adult educators. However, there is no single theory that explains all of human learning, nor is there one single theory of adult learning.

One of the first models of adult learning, called andragogy, was introduced by Knowles in 1978. He believed that a theory of adult learning was necessary to account for the unique characteristics of adult learners. His original andragogy theory was based

on at least four main assumptions (the fifth was added at a later date) that are different from those of pedagogy. These five assumptions are summarized as follows:

- change in self-concept is an assumption that as a person grows and matures, his self-concept grows from one of dependence to increasing self-directedness. When students perceive themselves as self-directed and are treated as children, the learning process is impacted negatively.
- role of experience is an assumption that as an individual matures he amasses experiences that increase his learning resources and provide a base to relate new learning. Since these experiences help to define the adult, in any situation where an adult perceives his experiences to be rejected, he also feels rejected as a person.
- readiness to learn is an assumption that adult learners are ready to learn the things they need to learn because of their current developmental phase.
- orientation to learning is the assumption that adults tend to have problem-centered orientation to learning rather than subject-centered orientation (Knowles, 1978).
- motivation to learn is an internal function of adult (Spencer, 1998).

Since this theory was developed, considerable research has centered around adult learning, and whether in fact Knowles' assumptions could be considered a theory. His idea of self-directed learning centered around the premise that adults can participate in

finding their learning needs, planning and implementing the learning experience and then evaluating these experiences. While there has been considerable debate on andragogy as theory, there is also a recognition that this model has provided the field of adult learners and adult educators with a separate identity (Brookfield, 1991; Feuer & Geber, 1988; Merriam & Caffarella 1999). It has certainly provided a background for much discussion and the framework for how adults are viewed in the educational field.

One of the problems researchers have with Knowles's theory of andragogy is the lack of empirical testing of the theory (Brookfield, 1986; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). According to Davenport and Davenport (1985), another problem has centered around the defining of andragogy as, "a theory of adult education, theory of adult learning, theory of technology of adult learning, method of adult education, technique of adult education and a set of assumptions" (p.157). Brookfield (1986), Davenport and Davenport (1985) and Merriam and Caffarella (1999) have proposed that the research is inconclusive as to whether adults taught using the self-directed model of learning show greater satisfaction or achieve more than those using traditional student-centered approaches. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) supported the notion that, as adults mature, they move toward self-direction lending support to the assumption that the readiness of an adult was linked to the development task of his/ her social role. In the 20 years since his original publications on andragogy, Knowles's assumptions on adult learners and his descriptions of adults as learners have provided considerable understanding for adults as learners and have been the catalyst for much research in the field of adult learning.

Although andragogy has remained the best known model of adult learning, there are other selected models to consider when examining the associated literature. Cross (1981) developed a Characteristics of Adults as Learners (CAL) model to explain the differences between children and adults and to provide a framework for thinking about what and how adults learn. The model consisted of two classes of variables: personal characteristics and situational characteristics. Cross believed her model could readily incorporate some of the assumptions of andragogy and that it incorporated completed research in various areas of development. One of the problems identified with this model was the concentration on characteristics of adults while ignoring how adults really learn. Another problem with the model was that the identified personal characteristics could be applied to both adults and children, and there was no clear delineation between children and adults within the situational characteristics (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Another theory, discussed by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), developed during the 1970s was McClusky's theory of margin. His theory, based on the idea of adulthood as a time of change, growth and integration, centred around the balance adults are constantly seeking between the amount of energy needed and the amount available for learning. The equation used to explain his theory (M=L/P) viewed this balance as a ratio between the load (L) of life or energy needed and the power (P) that allowed an individual to deal with the load. The energy left over he called the "margin of life". He believed that in order for adults to engage in learning, there must be some margin of power available for the learning situation. For students who have to juggle work, family responsibilities and other responsibilities with their studies, this theory would seem to

make sense. Unless there is sufficient energy left after balancing all the other responsibilities, the student may very well be unable to cope with the many demands, and therefore self-terminate or be academically dismissed for failure to apply the necessary energy to the learning situation. While this theory is valuable in that it relates every day events and life transitions, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) argued it is perhaps a better counselling tool than an explanation of adult learning. For the individuals entering post-secondary at a later stage in life, it is a valuable model for institutions to learn, if they are interested in knowing how to promote successful student experiences.

Other researchers in adult development, as in student development, have focused on social cultural theories to explain how adults learn. Jarvis (1987), for example, believed all experience occurred within a social context. His model of the learning process started with the person's involvement in a social situation from which a potential learning experience could occur. According to Jarvis, there are nine different routes which an individual may take, some resulting in learning, others not. These nine routes formed a hierarchy. The first three: presumption, non-consideration and rejecting were non-learning responses. The second three: preconscious, practice and memorization, were non-reflective learning. The final three: contemplation, reflective practice and experimental learning, were reflective learning and formed the higher levels of learning because they called for more involvement by the individual. His model described learning and encompassed multiple types of learning and their different outcomes. While this model was formed from research with adults, there was no clear delineation between adults and children in his model. However, it has placed learning within the social

context showing that learning is an interactive process, not an isolated internal process (Bonk & Kim, 1998; Jarvis,1987; Merriam & Caffarella,1999).

Another useful model discussed by Squires (1993) is the life span developmental psychology. Squires (1993) cited Bates in arguing that "there are three main kinds of influence on adulthood: biological aging; social experiences as a member of a particular generation or group; and individual life-events." (p.91). Biological factors are important during childhood but diminish with age. Social experiences, confined to family during the early years gained in importance during adulthood as people matured and became engaged in society through work, leisure and other social functions. Nesselroade and Baltes (1979) suggested that the importance of life-events in adulthood may cause considerable influence with the cumulative effects making individuals different from one another as time passes, thus increasing the importance of this influence.

In the examination of theories focussed on adult development, an examination of at least one career development model should be considered. Super's (1975) longitudinal Career Pattern Study or what is now called the Life-Span, Life Space Approach to Careers is valuable in that it clearly defined various stages of one's life as crucial to career development. Super's development theory consisted of 14 propositions that can be briefly summarized. He believed that people differed in their various traits and were qualified by these traits for more than one occupation that in turn required characteristic patterns of ability. People's lives, occupations, vocational preferences and self-concept changed over time. This process of changes could be summarized in a series of life cycles (Herr & Cramer, 1996; Super, 1975; Super, 1980).

Super believed that success was determined by the readiness of the individual to cope with the stresses and demands of the occupation chosen. Career maturity was a hypothetical construct that was as difficult to define as intelligence. Career development could be guided by combining the maturing of abilities with the reality testing and the development of self-concept. This self-concept was the centre of the process of career development. There was constant compromise between the individual and social factors, and self-concept and reality, with the individual learning from feedback from others. Work satisfaction and life satisfaction were intrinsically tied together and was dependent on the extent to which an individual was adequately able to find outlet for his abilities and all other traits and factors that comprised the individual. This degree of satisfaction in work was intrinsically tied to self-concept (Herr & Cramer, 1996; Super, 1975; Super, 1980).

Finally, Super stated that work and occupation is the focus of personality organization for most people with social traditions greatly influencing the individual in determining preferences for work, leisure, etc. For Super, then, career development and personal development were intimately linked. He later integrated a new model into his life-career model called the Archway Model (Herr & Cramer, 1996; Super, 1975; Super, 1980).

Super (1975) believed that the individual is capable of mastering increasingly complex tasks at various stages of his development. His life span theory focussed on a linear progression of the predictable and major life stages with each life stage task further delineated into a sequence of major developmental tasks. The findings of his Career

Pattern case study showed that skipping a stage in the normal cycle can lead to difficulties at a later stage. This is valuable information for this research since adults returning or entering college for the first time at an older age, according to this model, have deviated from the normal sequence of life stages.

Models of adult development brought into focus the fact that adult life is not static, but moving, full of ups and downs, changes in family circumstances, role changes, and changes in jobs (Squires 1993; Tennant, 1993). Tennant (1993) argued that if adult education agencies were to be successful they needed to focus their marketing strategies and instructional activities to cater to the different needs of adults at different life stages. It is essential, therefore, for educators to become familiar with these life stages and their impact on adult learning.

Adult Learner

Since the 1960s, considerable research (Brookfield, 1986; Daines et al., 1993; Graham, 1998; Lee, 1998; Kidd, 1973; Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989) had been completed on what constitutes an adult learner, and the characteristics that separate the adult learner from the child or adolescent learner. This section examined selected literature that defined the adult learner and how that adult learns. Also examined was literature that defined the characteristics and motivation of the adult learner.

The National Advisory council for Adult Education in the United States (1980) defined the adult learner as "an adult who is enrolled in any course of study, whether special or regular to develop new skills or qualifications or improving existing skills and

qualifications", and adult education as "courses and other educational activities, organized by teachers or sponsoring agencies and taken by persons beyond compulsory school age" (Brookfield, 1986, p.30). These narrow definitions completely ignored the heterogeneous group of adult learners who currently comprise half the post-secondary population. Brookfield (1986) suggested that simply bringing adults together in a classroom is not an indication that learning is taking place. The adult population, as clearly defined, is a heterogeneous group with specific common characteristics. However, they are unique individuals who are experiencing great periods of change in a rapidly changing world.

For the purposes of this paper, the student older than average was defined as the adult 25 years and over returning to college. Is the adult learner a definable entity? Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) answered "yes" and "no". "Yes, adult learners have special needs and capacities that distinguish them from traditional-age students,... No, adult learners are a heterogeneous group, just as younger learners are" (p.2). These writers used three categories: age, role and learning capacity to describe the characteristics of the adult experience and of the adult learner. To categorize a person by age is difficult today since people grow old differently, and people engage in renewal activities throughout adulthood. It is wrong, according to these authors, to assume that appearance or age can be used to define how people think, feel or behave. It is equally difficult to define adults in terms of the roles they play since roles can be narrow in focus or highly complex. However, role involvement as well as learning capacity, influences

adult learners in educational and occupational decisions. A terrible injustice is executed when it is assumed that all learning capacity diminishes over time.

Characteristics of Adult Learner

It is generally accepted today that adults bring much more to the educational situation than younger children. They bring a considerable store of knowledge and experience that they are able to transfer to their current learning (Daines et al, 1993; Graham, 1998; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997; Squires, 1993; Zemke & Zemke, 1995). Adults tend to be more self-directed, are competency-based learners, prefer experiential learning techniques over passive listening, and are aware of specific learning needs generated by real-life events (Brookfield, 1991; Brundage, Keane & Mackneson, 1993; Mackinnon-Slaney, 1994; Zemke & Zemke, 1995). They also bring established attitudes, patterns of thought and fixed ways of doing things that may be productive or counter productive. They have a wealth of personal and work experiences to which they can tie new knowledge and learning. They are more likely to associate their classroom learning to their roles as parents, as members of a community, as workers or as members in a social context. Since adults generally have accepted responsibility for themselves, they often do not respond well when told what to do, as opposed to participating in the decision making process. They sometimes lack confidence in themselves and under-estimate their own power, but they expect to be treated with respect and the equality of adulthood (Daines et al., 1993; Graham, 1998; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997). However, it is important to recognize that even Knowles, in an interview, once noted that "the only

universal characteristic of adult learners is the quality and quantity of their experiences" (Lee, 1998, p. 50)

In 1973, Rudy Kidd asked some pertinent questions on the concept of adult as learner. These questions included:

> Is adult learning concerned primarily with the clarification of ideas and intellectual processes or preparing the learner for action in the community or society?
> Should the curriculum satisfy what the adult says he wants or what he ought to have?
> Are the requirements of the adult learner significantly different or the same as those of the child?
> Should the curriculum be selected, organized and evaluated by a 'teacher' or by those taking part in the educational program?
> Should stress be placed upon the content and subject matter of adult education or upon the methods of adult education?
> Should the teacher of adults have a permissive philosophy or seek to bring about changes in the adult student?
>
> (Kidd, 1973, p. 27-28)

Students in the post-secondary system 30 years later may still be asking whether these questions have been answered, or attempted to be answered, in providing an environment that will afford the optimum opportunity for adults to succeed. As was earlier stated, the post-secondary system in North America has been steadily moving toward a larger population of non-traditional students. For the institution and the students they serve, it is important to distinguish the characteristics of those students that differ from the traditional student.

In the era of the 60s and 70s most of the students considered as adult learners were those who were attending part-time evening classes (Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1978). This has changed dramatically in the past decade or two. However, what has not

changed is the notion of experiences as a key factor in differentiating adults from children (Brookfield, 1986; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, Schlossberg et al.,1989). Kidd (1973) noted three main differences between adults and children regarding their experiences: "adults have *more* experiences; adults have *different* kinds of experiences; and adult experiences are *organized differently*" (p.46). These experiences provide adults with their self-identity because they define who they are in terms of their experiences and have a valuable investment in the value of these experiences. These life experiences function in ways that are unique to adult learning. Firstly, experiences are important resources for learning; secondly, a need to make sense out of the experience is often an incentive for learning; thirdly, adults use their experiences to modify, transfer or reintegrate meanings, values, strategies and skills while children use their experiences to learn new knowledge and skills; and finally, adults can use past experiences as obstacles to new learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Mackeracher (1996) examined five inter-related characteristics of adult learners in relationship to learning situations. These included: physiological factors, past experiences, time perspectives, the self and self-direction. As students age, two physiological factors may influence their learning: sensory acuity and speed of physical responses. The older the student, the more adjustments that may be necessary from the institutional viewpoint ranging from clear and easy-to-read print material to increased time frames for completion of work assigned.

When examining past experiences there are a number of factors to consider. Past experiences, both negative and positive, must be recognized and validated as active

components of learning. Learning must also relate to the past experiences in order for adults to value or make sense of that learning. When new learning is presented, adults must have sufficient time to assimilate that information into past experiences to avoid potential conflict between present knowledge and past knowledge (Kidd, 1973; Mackeracher, 1996).

The final two characteristics of adult learners, according to Mackeracher (1996), are the self and self-direction. She believed that the individual's sense of self evolved out of the experiences with the world, with other individuals and the kinds of interaction with these individuals. Self-direction as a characteristic of adult learners, according to Mackeracher, was probably one of the most discussed and debated issues in adult education. One of the problems centered around the definition of self-direction as a process or as a goal. She stated that self-direction "usually includes the idea that the autonomous person has the will and capacity to complete any plans of action arrived at through planning, choosing or reflecting, without having to depend on others for support and encouragement" (p.51). Placing an adult learner in a learning environment with few restraints and telling them to be self-directed, however, is not an adequate way to facilitate self-directedness. As well, not every adult learner reaches adulthood as a self-directed individual. The notion of self-directedness for all adults then is unrealistic.

Adult Motivation

Knowles was the first adult educator to recognize the characteristics of adult learners as different from children. He presented four basic assumptions on these

differences. However, he also continued to modify his views on adults and added a fifth assumption that adults are more motivated to learn by internal factors such as increased self-esteem (Lee, 1998). "When the conditions are right, adults seek out and demand learning experiences" (Zemke & Zemke, 1995, p. 32). Adults who see a need or have a desire to know will learn. Life changes often create a perceived need to learn. The more life-changing events adults face, the more likely they are to seek out related learning experiences (Zemke & Zemke, 1995).

Is adult motivation different from that of children? Dweck's (1986) model of achievement motivation, used on children, recognized two different behaviour patterns underlying achievement goal orientation. The learning goal orientation, characterized by a desire to increase competence through mastering new problems and skills, is generally accompanied by persistence when faced with obstacles. Those individuals with a performance goal orientation, characterized by a desire to have performances viewed favourably, generally seek out easier tasks that ensure success and have a lower persistence when faced with obstacles.

Only one study, to date, has applied Dweck's model of motivation to traditional and non-traditional college students. This study by Eppler and Harju (1997) showed clear developmental differences between the two groups. One of the major findings showed that the older the student, the more strongly committed they were to a learning goal orientation, showing that non-traditional students are intrinsically motivated to acquire knowledge and develop skills. The study also showed that irrational beliefs correlations were not significant for non-traditional students. Since they are already engaged in

multiple roles, they may be resistant to learned helplessness. The least successful students in this study were those who had rated their learning and performance goals as low. For institutions, it would be extremely important to identify those students as quickly as possible, as they appeared to be the most at risk for academic dismissal, or voluntarily withdrawing from college (Eppler & Harju, 1997).

Variables Associated with Post-Secondary Students Older than Average

Traditional Student Versus Non-traditional Student

Many of the earlier models relating to academic performance have been based on research centering around the traditional young adult with little focus on models of academic performance or examination of characteristics of adult students that might impact on academic success. Yet, non-traditional students differ from traditional students in many ways. While they report a strong sense of commitment to their goal of post-secondary education, they often have difficulty integrating into student life. They are more likely to be female and married, have more dependents than younger students and come from families with lower socioeconomic status than younger students (Bean & Metzner, 1986; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Kasworm & Pike, 1994). Adult learners were also different from younger adults in that they have had a considerable time lapse since last returning to school. This resulted in lack of sufficient preparation in academic knowledge and skills. Solomon and Gordon (1991) proposed that older students had not

participated in college preparatory programs, nor did they have as high a grade point average as their younger counterparts.

Graham (1998) was one of the few researchers to have done a comparative analysis of traditional students and students older than average. His findings revealed that adults reported slightly higher levels of development than the younger students, consistent with many of the development theories already discussed. He also found that the greater the satisfaction with the educational climate, the greater the reported growth on outcomes for both groups suggesting to institutions that all students regardless of age need to operate in a climate that responds to them as individuals. His findings showed that faculty's respect for students, their availability, concern and contact with students and the quality of instruction impacted on the students' evaluation of their intellectual and academic development.

Most adults returning to school are either in a career change or family transition. Schlossberg et al. (1989) describes adults returning to the educational setting as individuals who are changing their roles, routines and relationships at home, within the community and in the educational environment. "A transition is thus an event. . . or a nonevent. . . that alters one's roles, relationships, routines and assumptions" (p.14). Schlossberg divided the transitional process of adult learners into three stages: moving into the learning environment; moving through; and moving on. Each stage brings its own transitions and reactions to these changes.

Student Persistence and Retention

The past twenty years have seen considerable research (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Bray, Braxton & Sullivan, 1999; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Parscarella, & Terenzini, 1998; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1998) on student persistence and retention as well as the development and modification of a theory that has helped explain the process that caused students to leave post-secondary institutions prior to completing their program. Much of this research (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Berger & Milem, 1999; Bray, Braxton & Sullivan, 1999; McKeown, MacDonell & Bowman, 1993; Mutter, 1992) has focused on Tinto's model of student persistence and withdrawal. Tinto's (1987) model of student departure, based partly on Durkheim's work on suicide, focussed on integration as the key to retaining students in post secondary. Students who were integrated into the social and academic life of the institution were less likely to drop out. This model considered not only the background of students prior to acceptance into college, but also their experiences during their attendance. Tinto proposed that the student's success or failure was influenced firstly by the background characteristics that a student brought to an institution. He suggested that a lack of integration arose from incongruence and isolation. Incongruence refers to that state where individuals perceive themselves as being substantially at odds with the institution. . . . Isolation refers to the absence of sufficient interactions whereby integration may be achieved. It is that condition in which persons find themselves largely isolated from the daily life of the institution (Tinto, 1987, p .53).

A combination of these background characteristics and the level of integration lead to a level of commitment Tinto believed was the most important factor in determining persistence. Increased integration influenced changing commitments, within the student, to both the goal of graduation and to the educational institution (Grayson, 1997; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1998).

Another factor that contributed to student persistence was academic and social involvement. The more a student interacted with other students and faculty, the more likely they viewed these interactions as positive, the more validated they were, the more they persisted. Research (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Berger & Milem, 1999; Bray, Braxton & Shaw, 1999; Mutter, 1992; Tinto, 1998) has proposed that academic integration and social integration were very important to persistence in college programs. Similar results (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Graham, 1998; Kasworm & Pike, 1994) were found when examining non-traditional students. Students in two year programs were more likely to socialize only in the classroom. Therefore, academic involvement would be more important to persistence than social integration (Pascarella, Edison, Hagedorn, Nora & Terenzini, 1996; Tinto, 1998). Involvement also mattered most during the first year of college where attrition rates were the highest. For many adult learners, social integration outside the classroom was not an option; so for persistence to impact there had to be academic involvement (Cleveland-Innes, 1994).

Research on the retention of students (Bean, 1998; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994) indicated that initial success relating to academic demands

can be crucial to student retention. Most students who drop out do so during their first year, particularly during their first semester (Pascarella et al., 1996). Poor academic performance is believed to be the single most important factor contributing to attrition. As well, research (Berger & Braxton; 1998; Bray et al., 1999; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Larose & Roy, 1998; Larose, Robertson, Roy, & Legault, 1998; Nelson, Dunn, Grigg, Primaver, Bacillious, & Miller, 1993) has shown that academic performance and reducing academic failure required more than traditional remedial or study skills assistance. Social adjustment of students is of equal importance in predicting persistence. Social adjustments included becoming integrated into the social life of college, forming a supporting network, adjusting to feelings of homesickness and loneliness and managing new social freedoms (Bean, 1980; Geredes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini 1998; Nelson et al., 1993; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1998).

In a study completed by Murtaugh, Burns and Schuster (1999), survival analysis was used to determine the factors that contributed to attrition. They found that attrition increased with age and decreased with higher GPA. Residential students were more likely to remain as were international students. The study also showed that attrition rates were higher among students away from home. All of these attrition factors should be examined in light of their impact on students older than average at the college. One question that should be examined is whether social integration is as important for students older than average.

According to Mutter(1992), most research on student persistence has been completed at four-year campuses influencing her to use Tinto's theory of departure to

examine persisters and non-persisters at community colleges. Her study indicated that prior research showed that race and gender accounted for the major differences between the persisters and non-persisters with black students and females more likely to be among the persisters. Mutter's main objective in her study was to determine to what degree gender, race, social and academic integration, goal and institutional commitment, and degree of support and encouragement from significant others were associated with student persistence. The results tended to support Tinto's theory of departure on social and academic integration, including individual goals and institutional commitment.

Ashar and Skenes (1993) are two researchers who used Tinto's student departure model to examine non-traditional students. Tinto's model suggested that universities and colleges that are socially and academically integrated will be better able to retain students than less integrated institutions. However, the model has never distinguished between traditional and non-traditional student departure.

Some of the main differences between traditional and non-traditional students include: most adult students work full and part-time; many are married and have children; their social life at college is limited by other commitments; and most importantly they have established social membership within the community outside of the college. According to Ashar and Skenes (1993), for the population surveyed, social and academic integration may not be as important to retaining adult students as the need to enhance their career potential.

Barriers to Adults Returning to Higher Education

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), the greatest issues facing older students and the necessity to return to higher education revolved around the sociocultural context. There are three main dimensions of the current sociocultural context shaping the nature of adult learning as it is known today: demographics, the global economy and technology. Changing demographics, for the first time in the history of the world, have resulted in more adults in society that ever before. In 1987, for the first time ever, Americans over the age of sixty-five outnumbered those under twenty-five. Not only are there more adults than youth, there are more older adults. As well, this adult population is better educated than at any time in history (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). These changing demographics have had an impact on colleges and universities, and on the notion of lifelong learning.

The economic structure, not only of one country, but of the whole world has a direct connection to the changing learning needs of adults, as the recognition of global interdependence and changes in the labour force necessitate changes in the learning environment. No longer does an individual train for a job or career that will last through the adult life time. Education has become an integral part of business and with this change in focus, universities and colleges must change to respond to the needs of adults that are entering their programs.

Nowhere has change occurred so rapidly and profoundly on the world as the technological changes that have occurred in the computer world. These changes have been instrumental in bringing about the 'information society' that has made new jobs

while eliminating others. These changes have also greatly influenced adult education and have contributed to the need for continuing education. People who finish their formal training today can expect to have that training outdated in less than five years. The amount of information available, predicted to double every seven years, can now be expected to double every 20 months with the use of compact disk, the Internet and the World Wide Web (Barnetson, 1998). This profound change from an industrial society to an information society has resulted in major changes to the structure of society including the post secondary environment (Barnetson, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Spandard (1990) identified three barriers to adults (particularly women) returning to higher education. Firstly, there are institutional barriers, including location, schedules, fee structures and campus friendliness. Secondly, there are situational barriers, including job commitments, home responsibilities, lack of money, lack of child care and transportation problems. Finally, there are psychosocial barriers where attitudes, beliefs and values of individuals and significant others affect career decision making. Problems arise when neither the spouse nor the extended family can provide support. Opinions of significant others can have a tremendous impact on the returning student (Herr & Cramer, 1996; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Kerha (1995) listed personal problems, transportation, child care, health, scheduling conflicts and a wide gap between learner expectations and reality as some of the many reasons why adults dropped out of adult education classes. These were also the same barriers, listed by Herr and Cramer (1996), as barriers to adult students returning to higher education. These barriers were often compounded by the length of time necessary

for adult students to achieve their goals. Students who dropped out at the adult education level also have aborted career plans since they often do not have the basic skills necessary to successfully complete a post-secondary program. Kerha (1995) suggested that retaining students directly related to how well the students were socially and academically integrated into an institution.

Daines, Daines, and Graham (1993), Squires (1993), and Weil (1993) focused on issues that adult students have to deal with in returning to the world of academics. Daines et al. (1993) found that learning was more likely to occur when the information was relevant. They also suggested that a person's emotional state influenced the learning process and whether or not the student would be successful. For learning to be successful, individuals had to discover that learning was useful and rewarding. Praise and positive reinforcement accounted in some part for a student's successful completion of a program. For many adult learners, time management issues posed the greatest problem with secondary issues centering around financial and emotional problems, including lack of support of spouse or significant others (Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997).

In a similar study, Weil (1993) researched students who had returned to higher education after an absence of at least five years following the end of their initial education. This study focused on the disjunction and integration experiences as they related to their expectations and experiences of returning to formal education. Disjunction refers "to a sense of feeling at odds with oneself as a learner learning in a particular set of circumstances . . . and can be associated with feelings of alienation, anger, frustration and confusion" (Weil, p.161). She argued that disjunction can be constructive if the various

learning partners in the learning process become more responsible and accountable for what is occurring. When this does not happen, the extent to which adults can cope with disjunction and the above feelings depended on a number of factors that included: influences of previous learning and assumptions about education; experiences of learning and being a learner as an adult both within and outside higher education; one's self-concept; the quality of support and relationships both inside and outside the educational situation; and the kinds of compensating experiences available.

Integration, on the other hand, tended to be associated with a sense of equilibrium. It was not responsible for learning itself, but helped to create the conditions that allowed a student to be an active participant in a learning situation. One of the inherent problems for adult learners revolved around their sense of value for who they are as people and for their prior experience. Without this validation, there can be no integration (Weil, 1993).

Schlossberg (1989) also agreed that an important consideration for educational institutions dealing with adult learners is their need to matter. Her recent study confirmed this notion. Adults who felt they mattered to advisors and to an institution were more inclined to stay learning. Schlossberg believed that institutions that focused on mattering made the difference between adult learners completing their career goals or dropping out. The themes which emerged from the learners in this study included: "a notion of personal stance in teaching and learning; recognizing and respecting differences; 'unlearning to not speak'; the role of relationships in mediating disjunction; and 'learning-in-relation" (Schlossberg, 1989, p.165).

Rogers (1993) agreed with the notion of personal stance in teaching and learning and that the facilitation of learning depended upon the attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner. The most basic attitude was the genuineness or realness of the facilitator and the ability to present this genuineness to the learner. Also included in the attitudinal qualities were the prizing acceptance and trust of the teacher toward the student. This involved an acceptance of the individual as a separate individual or person in his/her own right. Central to this premise was the notion of teaching individuals as opposed to teaching courses. The facilitator who taught students created a climate of learning extremely different from the ordinary classroom. Finally, Rogers suggested that a necessary climate for self-initiated, experiential learning is one of empathic understanding. He believed that only when facilitators were willing to risk discovering themselves that actual learning is taking place.

Women Returning to College

While there were difficulties noted for all non-traditional students returning to college, women with family responsibilities were noted as the fastest growing group of adult students, and perhaps the most vulnerable to dropping out. Adult women students face difficulties that are compounded by their multiple roles (Home, 1998; Padula, 1994; Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989; Tomlinson-Clarke, 1998; Toray & Cooley 1998). There are three distinct dimensions of role strain among women: role conflict from simultaneous roles; incompatible demands; role overload; and role contagion or preoccupation with one role while performing another. Because of demanding life

situations, such as being a single parent or mother of small children, some women may be more vulnerable to strain and the possibility of exiting before graduation. In order to be successful, these women with multiple roles need help with planning and time management, peer support and financial and day care assistance (Horne, 1998).

Interventions

Institutional Assistance for Student Persistence

Graham (1998), Mutter (1992) and Rogers (1993) indicated that efforts should be directed towards finding ways to help community college students become more involved in college life. Staff development activities should be centered around sensitizing staff to integration of students into college life. The needs and concerns of non-traditional students should also be addressed with mentorship programs, support groups and special programs and services for non-traditional students to better integrate into college life and become persistent students.

Murtaugh et al. (1999) noted that there were several ways that colleges can assist students with persistence. Strengthening the efforts of orientation for new students increased the likelihood of success during the first three terms. Sensitivity to non-traditional students was also felt to be valuable in retaining students and assisting them in becoming persistent students. This research also showed that, while older students tend to have higher graduation rates, retention rates in their study appeared to decrease with age. One solution identified was offering relevant courses at times and places convenient to

the older students. Programs specifically designed to accommodate the older than average student should be a priority for institutions with increasing adult student enrollment.

Fostering Student Learning and Development

Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) noted that a vast body of research conducted over the past few decades stressed conditions that foster student learning and development including:

> small institution size, strong faculty emphasis on teaching and student development, a student body that attends college full-time and resides on campus, a common general education emphasis or shared intellectual experience in the curriculum and frequent interaction between students and faculty and between students and their peers (pp. 151- 152).

However, the changing student population showed that this research was completed on traditional students who no longer comprised the majority in college populations. For non-traditional students older than average who have many other factors impacting in their lives, some conditions that would be difficult include: full time attendance and residency and frequent interaction between students and their peers. According to Pascarella and Terenzini (1998), research has also focussed on colleges and universities, not community colleges where the majority of non-traditional students are enrolled.

There are several steps that educational institutions could take to provide for success for the students older than average. These include: clearly defining the structure

of programs with time and financial commitments clearly stated; providing student orientation materials that outline problems often encountered by adult students with suggestions for their management; acknowledging that time is limited and a source of frustration for adult students; identifying common problems and solutions for those problems; structuring the programs to accommodate other adult responsibilities; and assisting in the development of a viable support system among students that include study groups and child care arrangements (Kaplin & Saltier,1997). For at-risk women with multiple roles, orientation sessions led by successful "multiple role" graduates would be beneficial in assisting these women in making realistic expectations and coping strategies (Home, 1998).

Institutions familiar with adult learning theory should also factor in the older student when designing curriculum. According to Zemke and Zemke (1995), adults tend to prefer single concept single theory courses that are problem focussed, need their prior learning acknowledged, react better to realistic activities as opposed to artificial exercises, desire feedback and recognition, and prefer facilitators who use teaching techniques that recognize students' different learning styles.

Counselling is another area that colleges need to focus on when considering the student older than average. MacKinnon-Slaney (1994) proposed an adult persistence-in-learning model for adult learners that integrated existing literature on adult development. She argued that the ten-factor model as outlined in her research took into consideration the multiple factors likely to be of concern to adult learners, and therefore counselling responses could not be confined to single issues. Worries at home influence school work

and a failing grade on a paper has a negative impact upon the home environment. Counselling of students older than average needs to help these students address personal issues of self-awareness, clarification of career and life goals, mastery of life transitions and a sense of interpersonal competence. Learning issues that need to be addressed include the educational component (how to make the educational experience relevant) and intellectual and political competencies (the politics of the institution, the curriculum, faculty and administration). Students and counsellors also need to factor in environmental or institutional issues such as information retrieval, awareness of opportunities and impediments and the compatibility of institutions to adult students (MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994). Institutions whose counsellors recognize the many faceted roles and issues surrounding students older than average will be more readily able to assist these students in becoming persistent and successful students.

Classroom Facilitation

As was earlier stated, the attitude of professors was rated as the most influential factor for student's satisfaction with an institution (Graham, 1998; Rogers, 1993). The classroom environment, therefore is of great significance to the adult learner. A good classroom facilitator establishes goals and clarifies expectations, does not need to be in control or continually lecture, uses questioning techniques to provoke thinking and discussions, recognizes that adults often have frail egos, uses a variety of teaching techniques, and develops a balanced learning environment where opinions are valued and

more than one solution is explored (Brookfield, 1991; Tice, 1997; Zemke & Zemke, 1995).

Institutional Culture

It is important to note that, while there are differences in students who attend colleges, campuses are also unique. What works for one campus may not work for another. According to Stage (1991), Kuh and Whitt (1998) identified four major dimensions that describe the uniqueness of institutional culture. These are:

> the external environment that surrounds a campus, the college or university itself, sub-cultures within the institution (e.g., faculty academic advisors, residence life staff), and individual actors in their roles (e.g. the college president, the chief student affairs officer, and the president of the student body and the faculty senate) (p.57).

It is equally important for colleges to recognize this institutional culture and consider how student development theories would benefit the current students registered in their campuses.

Summary

The literature review indicated that considerable research (Arnold & King, 1997; Brookfield, 1986; Chickering & Reisser, 1997; Evans et al., 1998; Knowles, 1978; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Squires, 1993; Super, 1975; Super, 1980; Tennant, 1993) has been conducted on student development theories and adult learning theories over the past

few decades. While these researchers do not always agree as to which theory best describes student development, results have generally shown that there is some consistency in the notion that students develop in a systematic way. Considerable research (Brookfield, 1986; Bonk & Kim, 1998; Brundage, Kean & Mackneson, 1993; Feuer & Greber, 1988; Knowles, 1978; Mackinnon-Slaney, 1994; Tennant, 1993) has examined student development theory as it relates to adult learners. Students older than average are attending college in greater numbers than ever before. However, it was also evident that research has not kept pace with the increasing changing population, nor have college administrators addressed the needs of this changing population.

Research (Brookfield, 1986; Daines et al, 1993; Graham, 1998; Kaplin & Saltiel, 1997; Kasworm & Marienau, 1997; MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994; Merriam & Caffarella;1999; Schlossberg et al., 1989; Squires, 1993; Zemke & Zemke, 1995) has also been extensive in the area of adult learners and adult education. It was evident from the literature search that adults bring considerable knowledge and experiences to the learning environment. Other characteristics include established attitudes and an acceptance of their actions. They tend to be more self-directed and prefer experiential learning. While they often lack confidence in themselves, they expect respect and equality from college administration and faculty. There is a great need for institutions to be aware of these characteristics, yet researchers have not focused their attention on the changing demographics of the college student population and, therefore, cannot verify that students older than average act differently than the norm.

Research (Bean & Metzner, 1986; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Graham, 1998; Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Solomon & Gordon, 1991; Zemke & Zemke, 1995) indicated considerable differences between traditional and non-traditional students in areas including motivation. Yet, the literature search also indicated a considerable lack of information on whether the non-traditional student conforms to the norms for student persistence and retention as outlined by Tinto (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Mutter, 1992; Kassworm & Pike, 1994; Tinto,1998). Factors that contribute to student persistence and retention include integration, academic and social involvement, and experiences the student brings to the institution. It is important for researchers to more fully explore student persistence and retention as it relates to the student older than average if institutions are to introduce policies and procedures to assist these students in becoming persistent and successful.

While there are considerably more students older than average attending college currently, Daines et al. (1993), Herr and Cramer (1996), Kerha (1995) and Weil (1993) revealed many barriers to success for the non-traditional older student including institutional, situational and psychosocial. These factors were compounded when applied to women attempting to return to college (Padula, 1994; Toray & Cooley, 1998)

The literature search (Graham, 1998; Home, 1998; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997; Murtaugh et al., 1999; Mutter, 1992; Muse et al, 1992; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Zemke & Zemke, 1995) concluded with an examination of the institutional factors that contribute to or impede the success of the student older than average. Previous researchers (Bean, 1980; Belanger & Metzner, 1986; Brookfield, 1986; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Cross,

1981; Daines et al, 1993; Eppler & Harju, 1887, Graham, 1998; Grayson, 1998; MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994; Muse et al., 1992; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Weil, 1993) noted that the needs and concerns of the non-traditional student may not be served in the present college environment. As such, solutions were explored that educational institutions could utilize to provide for persistence and possibly success for the student older than average including institutional assistance, more empathetic facilitating and fostering student learning and development to meet the changing demographics.

It was obvious from the literature search that there have been numerous adult learning theories explored. It was also evident that the adult college population is composed of a group of individuals with unique characteristics and concerns. The literature presented in this chapter provided considerable background information for the research questions presented in Chapter One, and set the framework for the methodology outlined in Chapter Three.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study examined the factors contributing to or distracting from success for students older than average. The study attempted to examine the personal, institutional and/or academic factors that contributed to or impeded the success of the student older than average. It compared and contrasted students 25 years and older using two categories: students who successfully completed their program and those who voluntarily withdrew.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure consisted of two phases. Phase I involved a questionnaire, and Phase II involved the collection of qualitative data through semi-structured interviews.

The Director of Student Services of the College of the North Atlantic was contacted (see Appendix A) to ascertain if the College would allow a survey to be completed of their students older than average at campuses in the St. John's area and Corner Brook. Consent was given to allow access to the student data for purposes of the study (see Appendix A).

Once the official written consent was received from the College and the names and addresses provided, letters explaining the purpose of the research and consent forms for possible interviews (see Appendix A) along with the questionnaires (see Appendix B) were mailed to a percentage of students representing the various college programs.

One of the problems identified early in the research centered around the Student Information System (SIS) that is used by the College to track students. At first glance the number of students older than average that registered with the College was significant. However, a more detailed analysis revealed a major problem. Since the system records all students each semester they register, the printout identified the same student numerous times depending on the number of semesters registered. The first task involved eliminating these duplications.

A second problem was identified after that duplication was eliminated and the questionnaires distributed. Even though the query asked for only those students who had graduated, and were academically dismissed, or voluntarily withdrew, other queries appeared in the mix. Each student had a status code defined by the system. "TER" identified those who had withdrawn prior to completion of the program, "GRA" identified those who had graduated while "DIS" identified students who were academically dismissed. However, the query also included those who were on academic warning (WRN) and those whose diploma had been denied (PDN). These students were still enrolled at the College and could not be considered within the three defined categories. Some of the mail-out included these students.

According to information obtained from the college, there were 1173 students older than average who graduated, were academically dismissed or voluntarily withdrew during the three-year period studied. A random sampling was completed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Norusis, 2001) and questionnaires were mailed to 350 students. Seventy-five were returned for a response rate of 21.4%. However, these

responses included seven that were inadmissible reducing the actual response rate to 19.4%

According to Gay (1992), a minimum acceptable sample size would be 10%. In developing the questionnaire, it was decided that approximately 20% of the students older than average would constitute an acceptable sample size. However, there were a number of factors taken into account when determining an acceptable sample size including: the number of students older than average in each program; the number of potential participants who may have moved from the address provided three years ago; and the number of students from each category who may be willing to participate. If there was not fairly equal representation from those who graduated, those who self-terminated or those who were academically terminated, it would be difficult to do an accurate comparative analysis.

After an analysis of the quantitative data from the 68 participants, it was recommended that a further in-depth analysis be conducted using qualitative data. This was completed using semi-structured interviews with 12 of the original participants. A letter explaining the research and a consent form to be signed by those willing to participate in a follow-up interview should one be necessary, was included with the main questionnaire mailed to the 350 respondents. As well, at the end of the questionnaire, there was space provided for name, address, and telephone number of those who signed consent forms. This information provided the framework for the interviews.

A random sampling was completed on the 22 students who agreed to an interview. Interviews were then conducted with seven males and five females. Responses to the

interviews were examined for underlying themes.

Sample

The study was conducted with students identified as 25 years or older who registered at the College of the North Atlantic from 1997 to 1999. The research was conducted at the four campuses in the St. John's area and at the Corner Brook campus. These campuses were chosen because of their large student population and because the five campuses represent the majority of programs offered by the College.

The study was limited to those three years to attempt to exclude students older than average who had returned to post-secondary after the collapse of the cod fishery. During that time, a considerably larger number of displaced fisher persons returned to post-secondary either voluntarily or involuntarily as a condition of funding. Since this student population was considered unique to a time frame and to socioeconomic conditions, inclusion of these students may provide for an inaccurate view of the normal student older than average population.

During Phase I, a random sampling was completed and questionnaires were mailed to three hundred and fifty (350) students. The respondents were given a deadline date with the mailed questionnaire. At the end of the time frame, 75 questionnaires were returned, but as earlier stated seven were inadmissible. Data was then gathered from the 68 eligible que

Included in the 68 eligible responses were 53 graduates and 15 who voluntarily withdrew. Since there was no response from students who were academically terminated,

the study was narrowed to a comparative analysis of two main groups instead of the three groups originally identified.

After an analysis of the quantitative data from the 68 participants, it was recommended that a further in-depth analysis be conducted using qualitative data. Twelve participants were interviewed and the responses examined for major themes. Phase II provided the results of that data gathering.

Instruments

A questionnaire (see Appendix B) was the main survey instrument. The questionnaire contained a total of 54 items. The questionnaire was comprised of opened-ended questions, closed items and a series of items that ask the individual to respond on a five-point Likert scale, was divided into four sections. These four sections represented variables that have been identified through the literature review as factors that contribute to or distract from success for mainly traditional students, as the literature search indicated insufficient research into the student older than average (Padula, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998). Incorporated into the questionnaire were factors identified by the limited research as to possible reasons for success or nonsuccess for the student older than average.

Section A provided the individual an opportunity to respond to 13 closed items relating to the college and provided information on such factors as differences in grade point average during college, highest schooling completed, whether work interfered with their schooling as outlined in research questions two, three, five and six. Section B

contained a series of 25 items that asked the individual to respond on a five-point Likert-type scale. This section provided further information for question five such as academic integration, academic preparedness, social integration, financial concerns and self-esteem. Section C consisted of seven closed questions on demographic characteristics to assist in answering research question one. Section D contains nine open-ended questions that may provide answers for research questions four and seven. These questions also provided the individual an opportunity to add other pertinent information which may not have been identified through the rest of the survey. It should be noted that the questionnaire was not standardized, nor was there any proven reliability or validity completed. However, it included questions similar to those posed in a recent study on reentry versus early entry women attending the college (Lindstrom, 2000)

The second survey instrument was a set of semi-structured interview questions (Section C). These questions provided further clarification for the open-ended questions in Section D of the questionnaire and provided an opportunity for students to elaborate on factors that may have contributed to or distracted from success. Participants also had an opportunity to discuss major adjustments as students older than average and an opportunity to further clarify ways the College could support students older than average. These interviews provided qualitative data which was integrated into the data gathered through the questionnaire.

Treatment of the Data

Upon completion of the questionnaires, the results were tabulated and analyzed using a variety of statistical analysis. Items in the various sections were analyzed for the frequency and percentage of each possible response. Results were then cross tabulated from the two types of respondents (graduates and those who voluntarily withdrew) and chi-square tests performed. This was completed in order to compare the frequency each possible response was chosen by the two types, and to ascertain if there were any significant differences between factors identified in the research questions. The interview questions were grouped into like themes for comparative analysis and provided further clarification on these questions.

The methodology as outlined in this chapter and the data gathered provided the information for the analysis of the research, and subsequent results are detailed in Chapter Four.

Chapter 4

Analysis Of Data

The results of this study as presented were directed by the research questions outlined in Chapter One. The study was completed in two phases. Phase I involved the collection of data through the mailout of a questionnaire (see Appendix B). Phase II involved the collection of qualitative data through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C).

The questionnaire, comprised of four sections, provided the data for Phase I. These four sections represented variables identified through the literature review (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998) as factors that contributed to or distracted from success of students. The first three sections of the questionnaire provided information on background and demographic characteristics, academic and employment history of each student, and reasons why students entered the College or chose the specific program. Factors relating to college experiences such as social and academic integration, academic readiness, and general satisfaction with the College and its services were also addressed in these sections. The final section provided an opportunity for participants to respond to open-ended questions. These questions provided information on reasons for success in the program or reasons for withdrawing from the program. Students were also provided an opportunity to offer advice to older students returning and offer useful suggestions to the College in assisting students older than average. Since there were no responses from students who were academically dismissed, there could only be a comparative analysis completed on two categories: those who had graduated and those who voluntarily

withdrew.

After an analysis of the of the quantitative data, it was recommended that a further in-depth analysis be conducted using qualitative data gathered through interviews with those participants who had agreed to participate in a follow-up interview. Phase II consisted of semi-structured interviews and provided a more in-depth qualitative analysis and an opportunity for further clarification and/or elaboration by the respondents.

Following the completion of the questionnaires and the interviews, the results were tabulated and analyzed using a variety of statistical analyses. In Phase I, items in the various sections were tabulated as per the frequency and percentage of each possible response. Results were then cross-tabulated from the two types of respondents (graduates and those who voluntarily withdrew) and chi-square tests performed. The collected data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software program providing means and standard deviations used to calculate cross tabulations and chi-squares. Chi-square analyses with a level of significance at $p < 0.05$ was completed on the items. In Phase II, the interview questions were examined for underlying themes and content analyses was completed to determine differences between the two groups identified. Since there were clearly defined themes between male and female interview participants, differences between these were also examined and recorded.

The following results have been tabulated and recorded as per the research questions identified in Chapter One. For ease of reference, the questions have been re-recorded with the corresponding interpretation following. As well, those respondents identified as "voluntarily withdrew" were identified in all tables as "voluntary".

Results

Phase I

Introduction

The results of Phase I of the study, consisting of the main questionnaire (see Appendix B), have been described in this section. The first three parts provided information on background and demographic characteristics, academic and employment history of each student, and reasons why students entered the College or chose the specific program. Factors relating to college experiences such as: social and academic integration, academic readiness, and general satisfaction with the College and its services were also addressed in this section. The last section, consisting of open-ended questions, provided an opportunity for recommendations from the respondents. Each research question was re-recorded with the corresponding interpretation of the data immediately preceding the tables. As well, those respondents categorized as "voluntarily withdrew" were identified in all tables as "voluntary".

Research Question 1

Are there significant differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per the following background/demographic characteristics: (a) gender; (b) age; (c) marital status; (d) dependents; (e) home community size; and place of residence?

Data as per the demographic characteristics of the 68 people who participated in the questionnaire were placed in Tables 4.1 - 4.8. The sample population consisted of 68 respondents. Fifty-three of the students or 77.9% who answered the survey were graduates, while 15 or 22.1% of the respondents voluntarily withdrew. Since the number of respondents in the voluntary category was significantly lower than the graduates' responses, it was difficult to do a comparative analysis. Distribution of respondents by category is illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Distribution of Respondents by Category

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Graduate	53	77.9
Voluntary	15	22.1

The gender distribution (Table 4.2) calculated at 38 or 55.9 % male, and 30 or 44.1% female. Among the graduates, 28 or 52.8% of the participants were male, and 25 or 47.2% were female (Table 4.3). The only major, although not significant, differences in respondents by category (Table 4.3) was that 10 or 66.7% of those who voluntarily withdrew were male, and 5 or 33.3% were female. A larger sampling may have shown significant differences. A study completed by Cabot College in 1990 showed that 70% of students who "dropped out", were male and 29.8% were female (Byrne, 1990).

Table 4.2

Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	38	55.9
Female	30	44.1

Table 4.3

Distribution of Gender by Category

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Gender	f	%	f	%
Male	28	73.7	10	26.3
Female	25	83.3	5	16.7

The age distribution of the participants may be viewed in Table 4.4. According to these results, no one age group dominated the student older than average sample population. Graduate respondents included 12 or 22.6% in both the 25-29 age category and the 40-45 category. While there was no significant difference between graduates and those who voluntarily withdrew, it was interesting to note that a combined total of 23 (12, 7, and 4) or 43.3% (22.6, 13.2 and 7.6) of those who graduated were 40 years old or older. Conversely, among the voluntary, the combined results of the lower age group (25-39) would show that the majority of those who withdrew from the college, 10 (3, 4, 3) or 67.7% (20, 26.7 and 20) were below 40 years old.

Table 4.4

Age Distribution of Respondents

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Age	f	%	f	%
25-29	12	22.6	3	20
30-34	7	13.2	4	26.7
35-39	11	20.8	3	20
40-44	12	22.6	1	6.7
45-49	7	13.2	3	20
Over 50	4	7.6	1	6.6

No significant difference emerged between the two groups as per the marital status of the respondents. Thirteen or 24.5% of graduates were single, and 29 or 54.7% were married. Among the voluntary, 7 or 46.7% of the respondents were single, and 6 or 40% were married. That distribution is illustrated in Table 4.5

Table 4.5

Marital Status Distribution of Respondents

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Marital Status	f	%	f	%
Single/ Never Married	13	24.5	7	46.7
Married	29	54.7	6	40
Common Law	4	7.6	1	6.7
Divorced/ Separated	7	13.2	1	6.6

While there was no significant difference between those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew in relationship to number of dependents, it appeared that a higher percentage of those with a dependent withdrew. From the data collected, it appeared that a student would be more likely to withdraw if he/she had dependents. Potentially, if there were a larger sample available following the trend indicated, ($p = .097$), a significant difference may have been found between those with dependents and those with no dependents as per the success variables. The distribution of respondents with dependents is illustrated in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Distribution of Respondents and Dependents

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Dependents	f	%	f	%
1	7	23.3	5	71.4
2	17	56.7	2	28.6
3	4	13.3	--	--
More than 3	2	6.7	--	--

According to the results, place of residence did not have an impact on whether a student withdrew or graduated. Thirty-five or 66% of graduates lived home and 10 or 66.7% of voluntary respondents lived at home. As well, the percentage of graduates who lived away from home (34%) matched the percentage of those who voluntarily withdrew (33.3%). As can be seen in Table 4.7, place of residence did not have an impact on the status of the student.

Table 4.7

Place of Residence During College

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Place of Residence	f	%	f	%
Hometown	35	66	10	66.7
Away from Hometown	18	34	5	33.3

Home community size, in these results, did not show significant difference between those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew. The only statistic of note was that most students in both categories were from the two large urban areas that constituted the study (See Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

Population of Home Community

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Home Community Size	f	%	f	%
Less than 500	7	13.2	1	7.1
500- 2000	9	17	3	21.5
2001 - 5000	6	11.3	1	7.1
5001 - 10,000	4	7.5	–	--
10,001 - 20,000	5	9.4	1	7.1
More than 20,000	22	41.5	8	57.2

Research Question 2

Are there significant differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per: (a) "mature student" status; (b) highest schooling completed; (c) years since last formal education; (d) employment during attendance at college; (e) school average; and (f) grade point average during attendance at college?

The results of the data as per schooling completed, employment during school, school average and grade point average while attending college can be found in Tables 4.9 - 4.13. No results were tabulated for "mature student" status as the data were inconclusive. Students were not always familiar with the term "mature status"as may be observed in the comparison of questions two and three data. A number of students did not answer that question, and others indicated that they were unsure of the interpretation of the term. According to the college calendar (2000), students are admitted under this clause when they have not attained the high school courses deemed necessary to be accepted into a particular program. An examination of the data showed that some students who answered in the affirmative to mature student status also indicated that they had completed high school, thus invalidating the answers.

All students indicated that they had completed high school prior to entering the College. The highest percentage, 32.1% of graduates, indicated they had already received a college certificate or diploma. Those who voluntarily withdrew had achieved various levels of education prior to entering the College. There appeared to be no significant

difference between highest grade completed and whether a student withdrew from the program. Of those who voluntarily withdrew, one quarter had completed high school through Adult Basic Education while the same number were college graduates. The distribution of highest level of education completed prior to entering the College (Table 4.9) also illustrated that a number of graduates, 10 or 18.9%, had some university, while 5 or 9.4% already had a university degree.

Table 4.9

Distribution of Highest Level of Education

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Highest Level	f	%	f	%
High School	9	17	3	20
Adult Basic Ed.	7	13.2	4	26.7
Some College	4	7.5	--	--
College Graduate	17	32.1	4	26.7
Some University	10	18.9	1	6.6
University Graduate	5	9.4	3	20
Other	1	1.9	--	--

Consistent with the highest level of education completed, there was no significant difference noted in the relationship between the average high school mark and whether a student graduated or withdrew. The majority of students from both groups, as shown in Table 4.10, indicated an average mark range of 65-79 with 22 or 47.8% of the graduates, and 8 or 53.5% of the voluntary included in that group. This is consistent with the grade requirement of 60% to enter the College.

Table 4.10

Distribution of Average High School Mark

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Average Mark	f	%	f	%
Less than 50	--	--	--	--
51 - 64	7	15.2	2	13.3
65-79	22	47.8	8	53.3
80 or higher	17	37	5	33.4

The number of years students had been out of formal education prior to registering with the College was also considered when examining the student older than average. The majority of those who graduated, 16 or 30.2% had been out of school for 1-5 years. The same number, 10 or 18.9% had been out of school from 11-15 years as had been out more than 20. Among those who withdrew, equal numbers, 4 or 26.7% had been out of school for 1-5 years or 6-10 years. Within the samples there were no significant differences between those who graduated and those who academically terminated as per years since formal education as is evident from the results shown in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11

Length of Time Since Last Formal Educations

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Years	f	%	f	%
Less than 1	2	3.8	1	6.7
1-5 Years	16	30.2	4	26.7
6-10 Years	9	17	4	26.7
11-15 Years	10	18.9	1	6.6
16 - 20 Years	6	11.2	2	13.3
More than 20	10	18.9	3	20

Together with the highest average high school mark, the grade point average (GPA) while attending the College was examined. The grade point average at the College is based on 4.0 (College of the North Atlantic, 2000). Forty- five graduates and 10 of the voluntary answered this question. The results (Table 4.12) showed a significant difference ($p<0.05$) between those who graduated and those who voluntary withdrew, indicating a high correlation between high GPA and student success. The higher the GPA the more likely the chances of graduating. This is consistent with previous research (Murtaugh et al., 1999).

Table 4.12

Grade Point Average While Attending College

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Grade Point *	f	%	f	%
Less than 1.9	--	--	1	10
2.0 - 2.9	4	8.9	3	30
3.0 - 3.9	16	35.5	2	20
4.0	25	55.6	4	40

*p = .039

Employment appeared to have little or no impact on whether a student graduated or withdrew from the College. As can be seen in Table 4.13, the majority of students in both groups did not work while attending the College. Forty-three or 81.1% of the graduates did not work and 13 or 96.7% of the voluntary students were not employed.

Table 4.13

Hours Employed Per Week While Attending Classes

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Hours Employed	f	%	f	%
Not employed	43	81.1	13	86.6
Less than 10	5	9.4	1	6.7
11 - 20	2	3.8	1	6.7
21-30	--	--	--	--
31-40	3	5.7	--	--
More than 40	--	--	--	--

Research Question 3

Are there significant differences identified by students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per reasons for: (a) entering the program at the college; and (b) choosing the specific program at the college?

The main reason graduates listed for entering the College was to improve employability skills. This differed significantly ($p<0.05$) from the voluntary group. Forty or 75.5% of graduates listed improving employability skills as a major reason for entering the program compared to 7 or 46.7% of the voluntary. It would appear that the desire to improve one's employment opportunities may be sufficient reason to continue and graduate from the College. It is interesting to note that "job dissatisfaction, better employment" was high for both those who graduated (23 or 43.4%), as well as those who voluntarily withdrew (8 or 53.3%). The reasons why students choose to attend school have been tabulated and the results noted in Table 4.14. Graduates also listed a variety of responses in the "other" category including:

- "qualifications not accepted in Canada".
- "recommended by Manpower".
- "regretted not going when I was accepted in 1981."

Table 4.14

Reasons Why Students Entered the College Program - Yes Responses

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Reasons for Entering Program	f	%	f	%
Job Dissatisfaction/ better employment	23	43.4	8	53.3
Job Loss	14	26.4	3	20
Improve employability skills*	40	75.5	7	46.7
Need for employment	15	28.3	7	46.7
Change careers	23	43.4	5	33.3
Children grown	4	7.5		----
Children older	3	5.7	--	--
Financial Problems	5	9.4	1	6.7
Increase self-esteem	9	17	2	13.3
Become Self-supportive	15	28.3		320
Self-satisfaction in accomplishments	20	37.7	3	20
Meet social expectations	2	3.8	3	20
Need to re-examine marital/family role	3	5.7	--	--
Divorce	3	5.7	1	6.7
Single parenthood	2	3.8	1	6.7
Dissatisfaction with present education	18	34	2	13.3
Boredom	2	3.8	2	13.3
Other	7	13.2	3	20

*p = .033

When questioned on the reasons for choosing to enter the College, "potential job

prospects" rated very high for both graduate and voluntary respondents at 56.6% for graduates, and 60% for those who voluntarily withdrew (Table 4.15). There was no significant difference noted between the two groups. Responses recorded in the "Other" category included:

- "to further educate myself." - (graduate)
- "related to my former job." - (graduate)
- " was sent there." - (graduate)
- "strongly recommended by my father". - (voluntary)

Table 4.15

Reasons for Choice of Program - Yes Responses

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Reasons for Choice of Program	f	%	f	%
Recommended by someone	13	24.5	4	26.7
Potential job prospects	30	56.6	9	60
Interest	34	65.4	8	53.3
Could not get program of choice	3	5.7	2	13.3
Length of Program	2	3.8	1	6.7
Didn't like university	1	1.9	1	6.7
Maintain sponsorship benefits	4	7.5	--	--
Other	5	9.4	2	13.3

Research Question 5

Are there significant differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per factors relating to the following college experiences: (a) academic integration; (b) support of family, friends, or college personnel; (c) social integration; (d) academic preparedness; (e) satisfaction with college experiences and services; (f) financial concerns; and (g) self-esteem.

The data as per support of family, friends or college personnel were recorded in Table 4.16. The most important source of support was from immediate family with spouses constituting 29 or 54.7% for graduates, and 6 or 40% from those who voluntarily withdrew. A significant difference ($p<0.05$) was found between graduates and voluntary with respect to the support from instructors variable. Graduates (31 or 58.5%) were more likely to agree that course instructors provided support, while among those who voluntarily withdrew only 3 or 20% cited that support. "Other" supports noted by graduates included:

- "girlfriend"
- "everybody was very supportive."

Table 4.16

Important Sources of Support

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Important Sources of Support	f	% (yes)	f	% (yes)
Spouse	29	54.7	6	40
Children	17	32.1	5	33.3
Parent	22	41.5	9	60
Other Family Member	11	20.8	3	20
Friends	27	50.9	6	40
College Counsellor	10	18.9	4	26.7
Course Instructor*	31	58.5	3	20
Other Students	28	52.8	7	46.7
College Administrators	9	17	1	6.7
Others	6	11.3	--	--

* $p = .008$

Students were asked which services at the College they found helpful. It was interesting that the only significant difference ($p < 0.05$) was again with the course instructors. Forty-three or 81.1% of the graduates found course instructors helpful, and only 8 or 53.3% of those who voluntarily withdrew found them helpful (Table 4.17).

While there was no significant difference between graduates and voluntary as to how they viewed counselling services, it appeared that those who withdrew were more inclined to consider the counselling services as useful. Perhaps, if there were a larger sample available, following the trend indicated ($p = .097$), a significant difference may have been found between those who graduated, and those who voluntarily withdrew as per the student's views on counselling services. Graduate responses recorded in the "Other" category included:

- "other classmates."
- "it seemed that nobody could answer any career questions. I kept being put on to someone else."
- "income received from peer tutoring."

Table 4.17

Helpful Services at the College - Yes Responses

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Helpful Services at the College	f	% (yes)	f	% (yes)
Counselling Services	13	24.5	7	46.7
Career Employment Services	3	5.7	1	6.7
Peer Tutoring	15	28.3	6	40
Course Instructors*	43	81.1	8	53.3
Program Co-ordinators	11	20.8	2	13.3
Library Services	23	43.4	5	33.3
Orientation Seminars	2	3.8	1	6.7
Student Services Personnel	13	24.5	4	26.7
Other	6	11.3	--	--

*p = .028

The data on the responses from students as per the people who positively influenced their decision to attend the College have been displayed in Table 4.18. Family and friends were the most common responses from both groups, and spouse and/or parent had the greatest influence. Graduate students who responded under "other" contributed such comments as:

- "my own will,"
- "University Professor,"
- "HRDC Counsellor - non-traditional role for woman",
- " no one informed me, the decision was mine".

Table 4.18

People who Positively Influenced Decision to Attend - Yes Responses

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Positive Influences	f	% (yes)	f	% (yes)
Spouse	25	47.2	6	40
Children	15	28.3	3	20
Parent	23	43.4	7	46.7
Other Family Member	11	20.8	4	26.7
Friends	24	45.3	5	33.3
College Counsellor	2	3.8	–	–
Role Model	1	1.9	–	–
Other	11	20.8	–	–

The barriers and/or supports for students older than average as per academic integration, perceived support of college personnel, social integration, financial concerns and self-esteem were surveyed, in part, through a series of items that asked the individual to respond on a five-point Likert scale. The response, as recorded in Tables 4.19- 4.22, are grouped into the following categories: institutional, personal, academic integration, and social integration.

Most participants in this section of the survey, 46 or 86.8% of the graduates and 14 or 93.3% of those who voluntarily withdrew, believed the quality of programs was high at the College. As well, they believed the instructors were helpful and supportive. This varied from the results of Table 4.16 and Table 4.17. Results noted in those tables showed a difference between graduates and voluntary with respect to support from instructors at $p = .008$ and $p = .028$ respectively. One must consider, however, in a Likert-scale response question, there is a possibility of responding in a non-committal manner.

An examination of the section "The instructors valued my experiences," showed significant difference slightly above $p < .05$. Perhaps, if there were a larger sample available, following the trend indicated, ($p = .064$), a significant difference may have been found between those who graduated and those who chose to leave prior to graduation.

A significant difference ($p < 0.05$) was found in "The instructors used a variety of teaching techniques". Those who graduated, 30 or 57.7%, strongly agreed that a variety of teaching techniques were used, while only 3 or 20% of those who withdrew strongly agreed that instructors used a variety of teaching techniques.

Table 4.19

Perceived Institutional Factors

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Questionnaire Items	f	%	f	%
The overall quality of the program was high				
Strongly Disagree	2	3.8	1	6.7
Disagree	5	9.4	--	--
Agree	25	47.2	11	73.3
Strongly Agree	21	39.6	3	20
The instructors were helpful and supportive				
Strongly Disagree	2	3.8	3	20
Disagree	4	7.7	2	13.3
Agree	27	51.9	6	40
Strongly Agree	19	36.5	4	26.7
The instructors valued my experiences				
Strongly Disagree	2	4	3	23.1
Disagree	6	12	3	23.1
Agree	30	60	3	23.1
Strongly Agree	11	22	4	30.8
The counselling staff were helpful and supportive.				
Strongly Disagree	3	8.1	--	--
Disagree	4	10.8	2	16.7
Agree	16	43.2	7	58.3
Strongly Agree	14	37.8	3	25
The instructors respected me as an older student.				
Strongly Disagree	1	2.3	1	7.1
Disagree	6	13.6	4	28.6
Agree	23	52.3	6	42/9
Strongly Agree	14	31.8	3	21.4
The college has supportive services for students.				
Strongly Disagree	2	4.8	2	14.3
Disagree	5	11.9	5	35.7
Agree	26	61.9	5	35.7
Strongly Agree	9	21.4	2	14.3
The instructors used a variety of teaching techniques*				
Strongly Disagree	3	5.8	2	13.3
Disagree	6	11.5	6	40
Agree	30	57.7	3	20
Strongly Agree	13	25	4	26.7

* $p = .023$

No significant difference emerged on the academic factor variable between those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew. The majority of students in both categories agreed or strongly agreed that they were prepared for class, completed assignments on time, and studied at least two hours each night. They also agreed or strongly agreed that they were good students. It appeared that those who voluntarily withdrew were less sure of their ability to compete with other students and those who graduated appeared more confident in this area. More graduates expressed frustration with lack of computer skills than those who withdrew. Results are further explained in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20
Perceived Academic Factors

Questionnaire Items	Graduate f	Graduate %	Voluntary f	Voluntary %
I was always prepared for classes				
Strongly Disagree	--	--	--	--
Disagree	5	9.4	2	13.3
Agree	17	32.1	8	53.3
Strongly Agree	31	58.5	5	33.3
I worried about my ability to compete with other students.				
Strongly Disagree	13	26	2	13.3
Disagree	18	36	3	20
Agree	14	28	6	40
Strongly Agree	5	10	4	26.7
I completed assignments on time.				
Strongly Disagree	--	--	1	6.7
Disagree	2	3.8	1	6.7
Agree	12	23.1	5	33.3
Strongly Agree	38	73.1	8	53.3
I studied at least two hours each night.				
Strongly Disagree	4	7.5	--	--
Disagree	7	13.2	1	6.7
Agree	18	34	6	40
Strongly Agree	24	45.3	8	53.3
I always was a good student				
Strongly Disagree	2	3.9	1	6.7
Disagree	3	5.9	--	--
Agree	27	52.9	8	53.3
Strongly Agree	19	37.3	6	40
I was frustrated with my lack of computer knowledge				
Strongly Disagree	12	24.5	4	26.7
Disagree	17	34.7	4	26.7
Agree	10	20.4	2	13.3
Strongly Agree	10	20.4	5	33.3
I was not prepared for the amount of work expected of me.				
Strongly Disagree	12	24	3	20
Disagree	15	30	3	20
Agree	16	32	5	33.3
Strongly Agree	7	14	4	26.7

The only significant difference ($p<0.05$) on personal factors was the inability to balance home responsibilities and studies. As indicated in Table 4.21, only 5.9% of graduates perceived this as a problem, while 33.3% of those who withdrew indicated "strongly agree" on their ability to balance home responsibilities and studies. Neither group appeared to have major problems with day care, transportation, or any major medical problems, however, both groups rated financial problems among the high personal factors. When asked if they were certain they would obtain a college diploma or certificate, 14 or 93.3% of the voluntary agreed or strongly agreed that they would. While their expectations were high, it appears that was not sufficient to continue in the program.

Table 4.21

Perceived Personal Factors

Questionnaire Items	Graduate f	Graduate %	Voluntary f	Voluntary %
I missed classes because of lack of day-care.				
Strongly Disagree	18	75	6	66.7
Disagree	3	12.5	1	11.1
Agree	1	4.2	2	22.2
Strongly Agree	2	8.3	--	--
Transportation each day was a problem for me.				
Strongly Disagree	26	57.8	7	53.8
Disagree	13	28.9	4	30.8
Agree	3	6.7	2	15.4
Strongly Agree	3	6.7	--	--
I had medical problems which interfered with studies.				
Strongly Disagree	21	58.3	4	50
Disagree	12	33.3	2	25
Agree	1	2.8	--	--
Strongly Agree	2	5.6	2	25
I had great difficulty with financial problems.				
Strongly Disagree	11	22.4	1	7.7
Disagree	18	36.7	5	38.5
Agree	16	32.7	5	38.5
Strongly Agree	4	8.2	2	15.4
I was certain that I would obtain a college diploma/certificate				
Strongly Disagree	1	1.9	--	--
Disagree	4	7.5	1	6.7
Agree	12	22.6	8	53.3
Strongly Agree	36	67.9	6	40
I consider myself a confident person.				
Strongly Disagree	--	--	--	--
Disagree	9	17	1	7.1
Agree	29	54.7	9	64.3
Strongly Agree	15	28.3	4	28.6
I could not balance home responsibilities and studies.				
Strongly Disagree	24	47.1	4	26.7
Disagree	19	37.3	5	33.3
Agree	5	9.8	1	6.7
Strongly Agree*	3	5.9	5	33.3

*p =.036

Social integration was the final factor examined in this section (Table 4.22). Both graduate and voluntary found college stressful yet both felt that they fitted in well. As previously indicated in Table 4.13, job interference was not a problem since few students at the college were employed.

Table 4.22

Social Integration

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Questionnaire Items	f	%	f	%
I made a number of new friends at the college.*				
Strongly Disagree	1	2	--	--
Disagree	2	3.9	--	--
Agree	19	37.3	11	78.6
Strongly Agree	29	56.9	3	21.4
I never felt like I "fitted in" at the college				
Strongly Disagree	24	49	6	40
Disagree	16	32.7	5	33.3
Agree	6	12.2	3	20
Strongly Agree	3	6.1	1	6.7
I found college very stressful.				
Strongly Disagree	7	13.7	2	13.3
Disagree	20	39.2	3	20
Agree	16	31.4	5	33.3
Strongly Agree	8	15.7	5	33.3
My job interfered with my studying and attending classes.				
Strongly Disagree	12	52.2	5	55.6
Disagree	8	34.8	2	22.2
Agree	3	13	--	--
Strongly Agree	--	--	2	22.2

* $p = .053$

Summary

The preceding data analysis provided information from the first three sections of the questionnaire including background and demographic characteristics, academic and employment history and reasons why students entered the College. These sections also contained data analyses on factors relating to college experiences including social and academic integration, academic readiness and general satisfaction with the College and services provided.

Overall significant differences were not evident between graduates and voluntary as per background/demographic characteristics, gender, age, martial status, home community size or place of residence. Differences between graduates and voluntary were borderline in comparing students with dependents and those without. This is further examined in the qualitative analysis conducted in Phase II.

An examination of the academics indicated a high correlation between high grade point average (GPA) and student success. The higher the GPA, the more likely the student graduated. No other significant difference was found in the academic history of the students.

While the study indicated that the main reason students entered college was due to job satisfaction/better employment, significantly more graduates (75%) than voluntary (46.7%) listed improving employability skills as a major reason for entering the College.

When exploring academic integration, social integration, academic preparedness, support of significant individuals and satisfaction with college experiences, graduates were more likely to agree that course instructors provided support. This was evident in

both the satisfaction students experienced with the College and with the perceived assistance from significant others including college personnel. All students believed they were academically prepared for the program. However, those who voluntarily withdrew strongly agreed in their inability to balance home responsibilities and studies. These specific factors were further examined in the interviews.

Following is an examination of the open-ended questions found in the final section of the questionnaire. These questions were asked to permit the students an opportunity to further explain some of the data already included in the previous section. As with the first three sections, the research questions have been re-recorded for ease of reference.

Open-Ended Questions

Introduction

Research questions four and seven were answered in the final section of the questionnaire that consisted of open-ended questions. Results of these were tabulated and were grouped into categories as determined by the answers. Each question was considered separately and where possible some attempt has been made to compare and contrast graduates with those who self-terminated.

Research Question 4

Are there differences among students older than average as per reasons for: (a) graduating, (b) voluntarily withdrawing, (c) academically terminating?

Question 47 - "If you graduated, what do you feel is the main reason for your success?"

All 53 graduates answered this question and provided 100 responses. As can be seen from Table 4.23, 28 graduates attributed hard work as the reason for success and 26 listed determination/ preservation. Support of staff and assistance from classmates in this study rated at 24% when combined. Twelve percent listed support of family and friends as the reason for their success. It is evident from the responses below that many factors contributed to success.

- "determination, hard work, support of two of my fellow students, self-discipline, wonderful support and encouragement of college staff."

- "maturity - I knew this would probably be my last chance at an education. I also knew better than the younger students what I wanted to be when I 'grew up'."
- "determination, being mature. It was something that I really wanted to do."
- " a lot of work at home and the help of a good friend I met, study group."
- "wanted it badly enough to complete, have never quit anything in my life."
- "plenty of help from fellow classmates and instructors."
- "commitment and hard work."

Table 4.23

Graduate - Reasons for Success

Reason for Success	Frequency	Percentage
Hard Work/Study Skills	28	28
Determination/perseveration	26	26
Support of Family/partner/friends	12	12
Support of Staff	12	12
Support of Fellow Classmates	12	12
Commitment	7	7
Maturity	3	3

Question 48 "If you voluntarily withdrew, what was the main reason for leaving the college prior to graduation?"

Of the 68 who responded to the questionnaire, 15 students voluntarily withdrew. They listed 18 reasons why they withdrew prior to graduation. Since the number of respondents who voluntarily withdrew was low, the answers from those respondents will be more difficult to quantify. The responses (Table 4.24) showed there was no one reason for leaving the College. Personal problems rated the highest and accounted for 1/3 of the reasons why students withdrew. Academic reasons (22.2%) were the second most quoted reason for leaving the program and financial and institutional reasons each accounted for 16.6%. The variety of responses included:

- "my father passed away."
- "my back injury, couldn't sit or stand for long periods."
- "I was unable to justify leaving my child at home while I went to school."
- "family reasons."
- "found physics difficult, wrong course for me."
- "work load too heavy, very hard to keep up, lost interest in the program."
- "I was without doubt the most incompetent welder to have ever wielded a torch."
- "funding was rejected."
- "conflict with instructor."

Table 4.24

Voluntary - Reasons for Withdrawing

Reason for Voluntarily Withdrawing	Frequency	Percentage
Financial	3	16.7
Personal	6	33.4
Employment	2	11.1
Academic	4	22.2
Institutional	3	16.6

Research Question 7

Are there differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per their recommendations: (a) to future students older than average; (b) to the institution prior to students entering; and (c) to the college during the student's program?

Question 50: "Now that you look back, what if anything would you do differently?"

Results of the 15 who voluntarily withdrew were tabulated in Table 4.25. From the 18 responses provided, four (22.2%) gave no reason for withdrawing from the program. Three (16.6%) would have done more research into the programs and into related careers. Comments from some of the respondents included:

- "I would have researched the course in full and made sure of what career would be right for me."

- "start fresh, go to a counsellor and get some kind of assessment to see what was really for me."

Almost one quarter (22.2%) would have looked for assistance, two respondents commented that a support group might have been valuable to them. The same percentage would have either:

- "gone to a different school."
- "would have gone to another course for work that I would be able to do due to back injury".

Only 2 or 11.1% quoted funding problems as a reason for leaving the program prior to graduating, and one would have stayed and completed the program.

Table 4.25

Voluntary- What Would You Do Differently

	Voluntary	
What Would You Do Differently	f	%
No Answer	4	22.2
Do More Research	3	16.7
Look for Support/help	4	22.2
Would Not Have Enrolled in Program	4	22.2
Would Have Secured Funding	2	11.1
Would Have Completed	1	5.6

The results of question 50 as answered by the students who graduated have been illustrated in Table 4.26. Seventeen people (30.4%) reported that they would have done exactly what they did, and most were very satisfied with the results. Another 17.9% reported that they would have not waited until they were older, but would have gone straight from high school, although as one stated, "I also feel my success may not have been so great had I not been at this age and consequently more mature and ready." Six of the respondents (10.8%) wished they had studied harder, had acquired better study skills or been more organized. Another 10.8% would have conducted more research on the course more or were not satisfied with the course they had completed. As one noted, "I feel that I took a course that I have no interest in - not knowing anything about computers, I got into a course that I will never use." Only two (3.8%) of respondents felt that they should have had better computer knowledge.

Table 4.26

Graduates - What Would You Do Differently

	Graduates	
What Would You Do Differently	f	%
No Answer	7	12.5
Nothing/Same Thing	17	30.4
Gone Earlier/Right from School	10	17.9
Studied Harder/Better Study Skills	6	10.8
Better Knowledge of Course/ Not Satisfied with Course Taken	6	10.8
Completed Related Programs	2	3.8
Attended University/Other College	4	5
Better Computer Knowledge	2	3.8
Other	2	3.8

Question 51: "Would you or have you considered returning to the College? Why? Why not?"

Results of this question have been illustrated in Table 4.27. It was obvious from the response that the majority of voluntary (53%) would consider returning to the college at some point in the future, and one had already returned. Twenty percent would not consider returning to the College and appeared to have a negative experience as evident from this comment, "never, my experience has left me bitter toward CONA.".

Even though they had withdrawn from their program, many remained very positive as is evident from these comments.

- "yes, the College offers programs and services which still interest me."
- "yes would love to, but financial problems with student loan."

While 25 graduates indicated that they would not return in the near future, there was only one negative comment as to reasons why a student would not return. Some graduates planned to continue their education by pursuing a degree connected with their diploma program. Students who answered "no" indicated other valid reasons as to why they would not return at this time including:

- "would like to get more experience in the field."
- "because I am working full time."
- "I would love to return and am considering it when the opportunity arises."

Table 4.27

Consider Returning to the College

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Consider Returning	f	%	f	%
No Answer	1	1.8	3	20
Yes	23	43	8	53.4
No	25	47	3	20
Have already returned	4	7.5	1	6.6

Question 52: "What advice would you give to new students older than average who are interested in entering the College?"

Data as per advice to students older than average interested in attending the College have been illustrated in Table 4.28. Those who voluntarily withdrew said that students need to be prepared in advance of entering college. They commented on the stress involved, the hard work necessary for success, and the need to research programs and colleges before making decisions.

As can be seen from Table 4.28, answers to question 52 provoked a wide range of responses from those who graduated. The majority of respondents suggested that hard work and good study skills were essential for success. A second high response told students to "Go for it!" The wide range of responses also showed in their discussion of instructors. Many graduates made highly positive comments such as:

- "I also recommend CONA. It's an excellent course with outstanding personnel."
- "it is the best. The instructors are the greatest and if you show you are really trying they go the extra mile to help you."
- "get to know your instructors. They are much more open to older students since we are sometimes the same age and have more in common."
- "despite the disadvantage of going back as a mature student - you can succeed."

There were, however, a few negative comments from graduates such as the following comment, "be prepared for little or no help from instructors" It was apparent

that while most graduates had a positive experience, some believed that they succeeded, in their opinion, in spite of the college.

Table 4.28

Advice to New Students

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Advice to New Student	f	%	f	%
No Answer	6	11.3	2	13.4
Do It/Go For It	10	18.8	--	--
Research Program	4	7.5	4	26.6
Be prepared for hard work	14	26.5	4	26.6
Commitment to program	4	7.5	2	13.4
Instructors are valuable	5	9.5	--	--
You will get no help	3	5.7	--	--
Be sure to have family support	4	7.5	--	--
Do refresher courses	3	5.7	1	6.6
Use services	--	--	2	13.4

Question 53: "Is there anything the College could have done prior to entry into the College to be more supportive?"

Graduates appeared to have more advice for students older than average than those who voluntarily withdrew (Table 4.29). Thirty graduates or 56.5% and 12

voluntary or 80% gave no answer or said there was nothing the College could have done prior to entry. Comments from those who voluntarily withdrew were:

- "they did everything that instructors could do."
- "I wish that they had taken me aside halfway through the semester and advised me that help was available."
- "CONA instructors/administrators not at all supportive, need to learn how to be supportive."

Graduates did offer a variety of suggestions as to support the College could have provided prior to entry, including comments that were more applicable to support after entry such as:

- "to inform faculty advisors of everything that the student needs to know. Make sure the student can get an answer when a question is asked."
- "the support is needed more after entry into the College. Make registration day a little less stressful. Long lineups with younger students were very stressful for the more mature student."

Better course information seemed to be an issue with some of the graduates as can be determined from those comments:

- "I found it was very difficult picking a course to do. The course description with a list of subjects and course numbers didn't clarify much for me."
- "maybe better outlines of the courses, better explanation of the courses to a person with no computer experience."

Orientation for mature students was a concern for 13.2% while refresher courses was a suggestion from others.

- "yes, a formal welcome and a more thorough course outline including expectations of the workload entailed in the program. Perhaps in the form of a short seminar."
- "offer an introductory course in math and computers."

Table 4-29

Supportive Prior to Entry

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Supportive Prior to Entry	f	%	f	%
No Answer	11	20.7	5	33.4
Nothing	19	35.8	7	46.6
Not Sure	3	5.6	--	--
Better course information	4	7.5	--	--
Counselling	3	5.6	--	--
Orientation/consideration for mature students	7	13.2	--	--
Refresher Courses	3	5.6	--	--
Other	3	5.6	3	20

Question 54: "Is there anything that the College could have done during your program to be more supportive?"

Consistent with suggestions for the College to do prior to entry, 29 graduates or 54.6 % provided no answer to this question or answered in the negative. Eleven of the voluntary or 73.4% answered "no" or provided no answer. Although the numbers were small for both groups, voluntary and graduates commented on instructional qualifications. However, 6 or 11.4% graduates believed there could have been more supportive instructors/administrators. The findings have been recorded in Table 4-30.

Table 4-30

College Support During Program

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Support during program	f	%	f	%
No answer	12	22.6	5	33.4
No	17	32.1	6	40
More qualified instructors	2	3.7	2	13.3
Satisfied with support system		7 13.2		----
Improved courses for mature students	3	5.7	--	--
Supportive instructors /administrators	6	11.4	--	--
Improved communication	4	7.6	--	–
Other	2	3.7	2	13.3

Question 55: "Please use the space below to write any extra comments which you feel will be useful to the College in assisting future students older than average."

Thirty of the graduate respondents did not answer this question. However, those who responded provided considerable comments that may be useful to the College when considering the students older than average. Most seemed to have had a positive experience and offered practical and encouraging advice to the College and to students older than average. One dominant theme of encouragement and positive reinforcement seemed to suggest that the student older than average would have a positive experience. Comments reinforcing this theme included:

- "don't be put off from attending because you're afraid of fitting in. Younger students tend to look up to the older student because we generally work harder and they always feel we have all the right answers."
- "enjoy the experience and don't be intimidated."
- "encouragement to stick with the program even though there are outside commitments."
- "be yourself. Treat others as you wish to be treated and all will be well."
- "as an older student you realize you're there to work."
- "College is very hard at times, but stay with it and never give up."
- "I feel College has a more "hands-on" approach and the program changes when technology changes. For example, my first year we did Autocad R12, by my third year, they were teaching Autocad R14."

Another major theme that emerged centered around individual problems. Comments reflecting these experiences included:

- "I feel I was very stressed out in the final weeks of my course because of my technical thesis partner. This person was very rude and not really a partner. The highlight of four years of hard work was ruined."
- "family commitments and financial pressure create tremendous pressure for mature students. Sensitivity and flexibility whenever possible would be an invaluable support throughout the program."
- "I feel that older students may often need some one-on-one help during computer studies especially during the first year. If it hadn't been for the help of fellow students after classes, I fear I would not have made it. Instructors cannot help everyone in the time slots allotted."
- "older students require a longer adjustment period when returning to school. Have more approachable instructors. Be more understanding when older students have problems at home."
- "policy and practice needs to shift from pedogological to androgological philosophy. More need now than ever since so many college students are adults (30+), not recent high school graduates."

Although some of the later comments concerned difficulties encountered in college programs, no responses from the student older than average discouraged others from entering the College.

The responses from those who voluntarily withdrew ranged from total dissatisfaction with the college to offering suggestions for the College in dealing with students older than average, as can be seen from just two of the responses:

- " I was not totally satisfied with the program. Some of the courses I felt were unnecessary. Some of the instructors lacked knowledge of the courses they were instructing and shouldn't be teaching. Most instructors were knowledgeable and helpful."
- "the best thing that the College could do for older students is to offer up-grading courses. Older students have been away from studying so long it's hard to get back to it. Knowing how and what to study is very important."

Summary

Some differences emerged on the data between those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew. Graduates attributed hard work, determination and maturity to their success while voluntary rated personal problems as the major reasons why they withdrew.

When asked what they would do differently, 17 or 32% of graduates would have done exactly what they did. This was considerably different from voluntary students. Over one quarter of these would have looked for support, the same number would have not enrolled in the program and 20% of them would have researched the programs more thoroughly.

Most students would consider returning to the College, and only three of the total

respondents reported having a negative experience. It was also evident from the advice to students older than average that most experiences were positive.

Students generally believed that the College was supportive prior to their entry and 35.8% graduates and 46.6% voluntary indicated there was nothing the College could have done prior to entrance. They believed, generally, there was nothing the College could have done during their program to be more supportive. The only area that seemed to indicate a need for improvement was in the instructional area where a problem with both the qualifications and support was highlighted by both voluntary and graduate students.

Since only 68 participants responded to the questionnaire, it was recommended that the researcher conduct a second data gathering phase. Twelve of the initial 68 respondents participated in semi-structured interviews. Data from Phase II of the study have been described in the next section.

Results

Phase II

Introduction

Phase II of the study, consisting of interview questions (see Appendix C) is described in this section. Included with the main questionnaire, mailed to 350 respondents, was a letter explaining the research as well as a consent form to be signed by those willing to participate in a follow-up interview should one be necessary. At the end of the questionnaire, there was space provided for name, address, and telephone number

of those who signed consent forms. This information provided the interview framework.

After the tabulation of the quantitative data, interviews were conducted using information from the twenty-two respondents who agreed to be interviewed. It was decided that 12 participants, randomly selected, would constitute a follow-up sample of the respondents. After the interviews were conducted, underlying themes from these interviews were then examined using content analysis (Berg, 2001).

The interview questions included the demographics that were obtained from the initial questionnaires with the participants' permission. Participants were asked to comment on the support or lack of support received from the College. Students were then asked to explain the factors that influenced their stay at the college under the following categories: institutional, personal, home. Students were asked to describe major adjustments necessary for them at the College, as well as how they perceived the College's support.

Demographics

The sample consisted of 7 males or 58.3% and 5 females or 41.7%,consistent with the main questionnaire sample of 55.9% males and 44.1% female as outlined in Table 4.1. Nine or 75% of those who were interviewed graduated, while 3 or 25% voluntarily withdrew again consistent with the main population. Five or 55.5% of those who graduated were male and 4 or 44.5% were female. In the distribution of those who voluntarily withdrew, 2 or 66.6% were male and 1 or 33.4% was female.

Table 4.31

Distribution of Interview Population by Category

	Gender		Graduate		Voluntary	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Male	7	58.3	5	55.5	2	66.6
Female	5	41.7	4	44.5	1	33.4

The data as per age of the interview respondents, presented in Table 4.32, showed no one age category as dominant. In the 25-29 category, 3 males and 1 female graduated. The four respondents in the age 40-44 group were evenly distributed between male and female, and all four graduated. Those who voluntarily withdrew were fairly evenly distributed over three age categories.

Table 4.32

Distribution of Interview Population by Age

	Male		Female		Graduate		Voluntary	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
25-29	3	37.5	1	20	4	40	--	--
30-34	--	--	1	20	--	--	1	33.3
35-39	2	25	1	20	2	20	1	33.3
40-44	2	25	2	40	4	40	--	--
45-49	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Over 50	1	12.5	--	--	--	--	1	33.4

The majority of respondents 7 or 58.3% were married. As shown in Table 4.33, data as per marital status showed no significant difference between those who graduated or voluntarily withdrew. Two of the 7 males or 28.6% were single/never married, 3 or 42.8% were married. In the female data, 4 of the 5 females or 80% were married. Table 4.33 also illustrated the distribution as per marital status of those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew. All who voluntarily withdrew were married and 4 or 44.4% of the graduates were married.

Table 4.33

Distribution of Interview Population by Marital Status

	Male		Female		Graduate		Voluntary	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Single/ Never Married	2	28.6	--	--	2	22.2	--	--
Married	3	42.8	4	80	4	44.4	3	100
Common Law	1	14.3	1	20	2	22.2	--	--
Divorced /Separated	1	14.3	--	--	1	11.2	--	--

The demographics as per dependents have been illustrated in Table 4.34. Three males and 3 females or 66.6% of the graduate respondents had dependents, and 2 or 66% of the voluntary participants had dependents. Four of the respondents had no dependents.

Table 4.34

Distribution of Interview Population With Dependents

	Graduate		Voluntary	
Dependents	f	%	f	%
None	3	33.4	1	33.4
Male	3	33.3	1	33.3
Female	3	33.3	1	33.3

Interview Data

All participants were asked 6 questions (see Appendix C). Most of the questions were general in nature and could be asked to both graduates and voluntary. However, since a number of those who voluntarily withdrew listed course instructors as one of the negative experiences, Question 2 was worded slightly differently for the two groups. Graduates were asked to explain the support they received, while voluntary were asked to discuss the perceived lack of support. Answers from each question were examined for similar themes and the responses discussed.

The first question asked during the interview was "Did you enter under the Mature Student Policy?" It was decided to include this question due to the lack of clarity on the questionnaire. All 12 interviewees answered no. They all had the required academic acceptance level.

Question 2 for graduate students read: **"A number of students listed support of instructors and staff as one of the main reasons for graduating. Explain further the help and support you received from the College."** The same question for voluntary was worded as: **"A number of students listed lack of support as one of the reasons for withdrawing. Explain further any support/and or lack of support provided by the College."**

All but one of the graduates responded very positively to the support received. However, even the participant who responded negatively spoke of the importance of help at "the front end". As can be seen from some of the comments, this assistance was evident in a variety of programs. A number of respondents provided specific examples of the kind of help received and the importance of initial contact such as:

- "they gave lots of encouragement in the class and in the garage and were very attentive to our needs. If you showed any interest at all they supported you and gave you extra help."
- "although I had two degrees, they were in English and humanities. First example that comes to mind is a particular much younger instructor whom I had to ask how to use a scientific calculator. My math skills were 24 years old. He was ten years younger than me and was extremely helpful." This kind of help was absolutely critical at the beginning of the program."
- "I did get a lot of help. Only for the help from them I would not have succeeded."
- " I found all the teachers really encouraging. First, you would say, 'I am

never going to get through'. They would say 'don't be so hard on yourself. Your are your worst enemy. Don't set goals too high for yourself'. If I did not have that encouragement, I don't know if I would have continued. I also used the resource centre all the time."

Responses from those who withdrew varied. All students who withdrew used this opportunity to explain why they withdrew. One respondent withdrew because of lack of funding. Another withdrew at the end of the first year because of an employment opportunity. The third explained that the reason for withdrawing had nothing to do with the College. Overall the perceived lack of support was evident in one third of the voluntary. Some of the comments included:

- "for me it was the household, being able to be a mom and a wife or a student. I had to decide what is my priority."
- "there is no support in place for older students or no evidence of it."

Students were next asked: **"Under the following categories, describe the factors that impacted on you during your stay at the College: home, school, personal."**

Responses to the ***home*** category showed clearly divided lines between genders and between the married respondents and the single. While there was no apparent differences between those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew, a major theme emerged between married and single students and between male and female respondents. Married students appeared to have more home problems, and female students showed the most difficulty balancing home and school. The single students responded with:

- "great support and encouragement."
- "positive support of parents."
- "really nothing, I had no children so there were no problems."

For the married males responses were fairly positive. While some were more positive than others, they did indicate some problems. Those married with dependents mentioned home factors such as:

- "it was very positive influence. I did have two small kids and my wife worked. Because of that I received more help. They were very supportive if I had to leave or came in late." (Graduate)
- " was fully supported by my spouse." (Voluntary)
- "still having to come home with all the responsibilities was very hard. Stuff like your car breaking down and having to go to your children's school all took time." (Graduate)

Home factors elicited the greater number volume of responses from the married women. During the interviews, married women expounded on all the problems associated with the multiple role of wife, mother and student. Comments indicating the difficulties associated with trying to juggle all the responsibilities were eloquently expressed by these women:

- "where to begin? For the year previously, I had been the at-home parent. When I returned to school, the whole responsibility shifted form me to my husband. My studies now took anywhere from 60-70 hours every week. The kids had to learn to help more and become more responsible. When a

mother goes back to school, the whole family goes back to school." (Graduate)

- "Home! Oh my God! Three children. At first it was a nightmare. After three weeks, I had to get a system in place. The kids had to come first, then I would do my work late nights and on weekends. My spouse was very supportive. My children had to know right up front that things were going to be different." (Graduate)
- "my son told my husband, my mommy doesn't love me anymore. My husband was very supportive but there were still major adjustments to be made. In the end it was just too much. I would go back tomorrow if I knew I could still be a mom and be successful." (Voluntary)

While many students commented on the home factor and the problems associated with home and school, not all were negative. A number of the women seemed to take something positive for their children from their attendance in college as can be seen from these comments:

- "my kids thought it was neat that I was going to school. When I got into the program, they learned it was important to me." (Graduate)
- "once I learned how to study, it made things easier for me. Now I am passing on the same things to my children. If I got nothing else out of this course, I feel I can help my kids more." (Graduate)

Married women also appeared to have an appreciation of the difficulties a single parent would have as evidenced from these comments:

- " I don't know how single parents managed."
- "I am not sure a single parent could do this with the workload that is expected."

How did respondents differ on the ***school*** category factor? Those who withdrew did not seem to have a positive experience at the College. A common theme seemed to centre around instructors. According to those students, a few negative experiences as outlined below, coloured their outlook on the College. However, they were quick to point out that there were some positive points as well.

- "because I had been employed in the work force for many years, the work ethic of some of the instructors left something to be desired. Lack of punctuality (instructors) was a major problem for me. Having been in the work force I was not impressed. There were some good instructors who treated older students with more respect. The good instructors were good, the bad instructors bad. I did get a lot of help through peer tutoring. I would never have survived so long without that help."
- "never assume because I am a mature student I had to write a test to get in. I got in because I had the marks from school. I found this attitude very disrespectful."

Graduates offered a variety of factors relating to ***school***. The responses ranged from the school did not impact in any way to discussing counsellor's roles to assistance from peer tutors and libraries. Most graduates, like those who withdrew believed that a humanitarian approach by the instructors was a major factor. Unlike those who

withdrew, the graduates experience was much more affirming as seen in the following comments:

- "I had a couple of really good instructors."
- "I mentioned before the counselling service."
- "they had a lot of helpful teachers. The equipment was very good."
- "instructors are an important part of this course."
- I really enjoyed going back to school. I don't know how they managed to get all good teachers under the same roof. Student services staff was extremely important. I often told other students not to be too proud to seek help."
- "it was everybody. I can't think of one part of the system or support that I didn't use. Instructors had an open door policy. When they were not in their classrooms, you knew they were in their office and available to students."

Not all comments were positive. Some graduates believed the College could have computers and labs open for student use during the day to enable them to write reports. However, the major theme with school factors appeared to be the age difference between the older student and the younger student. Two students mentioned problems associated with sharing classes with younger immature students and felt that the college should do more to accommodate the older student. They felt they needed to get as much information as possible during class, but it was difficult with the disruptions from younger students. Another respondent felt intimidated sharing classes with younger

students who knew exactly what they were doing. Finally, one identified group work as a stress source. When there are children involved, it is not always possible to meet evenings or weekends when the group work was done. As an older student, there was no need to show an ability to work in groups. This had already been accomplished in the work force. It was evident from some of the comments that these were problems identified as unique to the older student. One respondent summed up the problem this way, "combined with the gender factor, the age problem was another problem I had to deal with. I felt that I was going around with so many labels on my forehead, there was no room for wrinkles. I was the oldest in class."

While these students identified problems with younger students, they appeared to appreciate students of their own age group. The majority of graduates specified the support of others as an important factor in the school environment. Two mentioned still keeping in touch with former classmates, while others spoke of the benefits of a student support system and working in study groups. Some of these comments are noted below:

- "peer support group were very important."
- "the two girls that I worked with were an enormous help. We helped each other during lunch and on weekends plus a scattered phone call during the night."
- "I started to meet other people in class who had similar situations to mine. I also found out I wasn't the oldest which helped."
- " we would go after class and help each other. Talking to someone on your own level was very good especially when they were your own age."

When asked to identify the ***personal*** factors that influenced their stay in college, the respondents were less vocal. While they spoke volumes about the school and home factors, there appeared to be more reluctance to give themselves the same credit. The majority of graduates, as can be seen from the comments below, attributed their drive, stubbornness, and desire to do well and succeed as the most important personal factor.

- "I am not a quitter or I would have quit in the first month."
- "tendency not to quit although I wanted to many times. Perseverance."
- "I wasn't there because my parents made me go. I wanted to learn something."
- "God bless stubbornness. The first day two instructors made a big to-do about seeing 'all these women' in the technology class. I looked around and saw four women. They pointed out that only one in three students would finish if the class followed true to norm. Three of the four women finished!"
- "I like challenges. I am still taking courses."

An examination of the voluntary showed a common theme in the discussion of the personal factors. The struggle adjusting to the school environment seemed to have a major impact. All respondents mentioned balancing home responsibilities with school responsibilities. Their comments included:

- "I had a hard time adjusting to the schedule of working day and night and having no time for anything else. Also maintaining your marks to the level

that you would like them was a full time job."

- I couldn't be the perfect mom, wife, housekeeper and student."

Question four asked students to: **"Describe the major adjustment you feel is necessary to achieve in the programs at the College."** For those who voluntary withdrew, their comments attested to the struggle they had with adjusting and balancing their work. The stress they endured may have contributed to their withdrawal from the program, as evidenced in these comments:

- "for mature students you may be used to stress in your work environment because of jobs over the years, but this is a totally different kind of stress. It is all mental and you have to find ways to deal with that stress."
- for an older student maintaining your marks. Also I found it stressful feeding back to the instructors the textbook knowledge because some of them are not interested in anything more than that."

Graduates mentioned a variety of adjustments they felt necessary for achievement in college. Although there were no major themes, a few comments reflected the uniqueness of their own adjustments. One noted the difficulty accepting someone telling you that you are wrong, while another noted similar difficulty with having someone else in control. Two people noted the difficulties working with others in an environment that was unfamiliar to them. The majority, however, expressed comments similar to those who voluntarily withdrew on to the difficulties of adjusting to and balancing all factors of their life. However, as noted above, the majority of graduates mentioned the value of working with a support group of peers. Those who voluntarily withdrew, at no time

during the interview, mentioned any support from peers. The graduates experienced the same problem as is evidenced by these comments:

- "I was used to having control over my schedule, my time, my decisions."
- "total commitment. If you are going to start a course you have to be totally committed."
- "Good-bye life!!! If you were not at your courses, you felt that you should be. It was seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day."
- "there was a discipline issue involved realizing that education didn't take place during school hours only."

Question five stated: **"A number of students felt the College could have been more supportive to students prior to entering the College. Define the ways the College could have been more supportive."** All respondents who voluntarily withdrew felt the College was as supportive as they could be. Graduates responded in the same positive manner. Most of the respondents found the opposite in their treatment by the College prior to their entry as is evident from the following comments:

- "I found the opposite. Prior to coming in they were totally supportive. I had excellent dealings with administration prior to coming in." (voluntary)
- "that wasn't my experience. I turned down the program I had applied for only to ask two weeks later to be re-instated. The administration bent over backwards to get me in." (graduate)
- "I got a lot of assistance prior to entering the College. I went in one day

and asked to see a counsellor. She was so accommodating and convinced me that I could do it." (graduate)

- "when you want to go back to school, you are not sure what you want to take, you get a book with a number of programs and short descriptions, but it still doesn't come close to letting you know the work entailed. I spoke to a counsellor prior to coming in and really wanted to take another course. The counsellor explained the different courses to me and I was really glad that I had the information up front to make the right choice." (graduate)

The final question asked: **"Are there further comments you feel will be useful to the College or to other students older than average?"** Those who voluntarily withdrew had few comments to make to the College or to students older than average, except to comment on the difficulty encountered. Graduates were more inclined to provide very positive feedback to students older than average, including:

- "you shouldn't feel that as an older student you can't do it or as a mature student you shouldn't feel that you are too old to go to school. Don't be afraid to go."
- "biggest thing, for me and my life. I always wanted this career and I am glad I went back and did what I always wanted to do. Some people are in jobs that they don't like. I love getting up and going to work each morning. Don't be trapped in a job that you don't like."
- "never think you are too old to go back to class. Most of the older ones I saw seemed to be the higher achievers because they were going for

themselves. When you do go back, you have to get used to letting things go, pass on some of the responsibilities and learn to say no."

- "if anybody is in their middle years or looking for a career change, they should really do themselves a favour and take a long look at what is being offered through the public college system. I spent three wonderful, challenging and intellectually rewarding years. By the time I was finished, I had a twenty-two year old mind to go along with the twenty-two years of work experience. And God forgive me, I'd do it again."

While they commented on the heavy course load and the work necessary to pass the courses at the College, the majority of the graduates interviewed had a positive experience at the College. Included in the comments on the heavy workload were remarks from graduates and voluntary, comparing the college to University such as the following:

- I went to University and was on the Dean's list. When somebody learned I was going to the College they said you shouldn't have a problem. That was not the case. College demands a lot more time. At the College, if you miss a day, you are in trouble right away. College is definitely harder than university." (voluntary)
- Three of the eleven who graduated from this course had University degrees and were at the College to get practical (hands-on) skills to go along with their degrees." (graduate)
- "One of the things I did was utilize the intercession to get a course

completed to reduce my work load during the second year. If I had known, I would have done this up front. I was really surprised at the workload." (graduate)

Advice to the College or remarks about the College varied from very positive as seen above to repetition of remarks concerning the treatment of students older than average. The responses from both graduates and those who voluntarily withdrew reflected a similar theme on the College's treatment of students older than average, as evidenced from these comments:

- "as much as the support was there, I was not use to the top-down culture. As a mature student, I was nor recognized for the expertise and the experience I bought to the classroom. We were all taught as 20-year-olds."(graduate)
- "some instructors in the system do not know how to deal with mature students. The mature student may not have a degree, but he does have years of accumulated knowledge. This knowledge deserves some respect from professionals. Also, I have family commitments just like they do. There is no allowance made for this either." (graduate)

Summary

The interviews provided an opportunity to examine graduate and voluntary responses and to seek elaboration and clarification on the preliminary data. Those interviewed represented a random sample of the respondents. A significant difference

from Phase I emerged through the Phase II data. The interviews provided more insight into the different experiences of male and female students in particular on the difficulties women face when returning to college. It was evident from the responses of the female married population that they had experienced great difficulty balancing all the home responsibilities and the school responsibilities.

A number of major themes among graduates did emerge from the interviews including: support for students older than average; the difficulty with the age difference; the necessity of peer support; and their tenacity. For those who voluntarily withdrew, similar themes of stress and difficulty adjusting to college life emerged. Both groups felt the College could be more sensitive to the older student. Overall, the experiences of all students were fairly positive. Those who withdrew seemed to indicate the least preparedness for the College and experienced the more negative aspects of the College.

In Chapter 5, findings from both phases of the study have been discussed. Recommendations emanating from this discussion have also been suggested.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose of this research was to examine the barriers to or supports for students older than average attending the College of the North Atlantic. The study involved students from the four campuses in the St. John's area as well as the Corner Brook campus registered at the College from 1998-2000. The study focused on students who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew from the college. Personal, institutional and academic factors that contributed to or impeded the success of the older student were examined to determine if there were significant differences between the two groups. Data were collected using a mail-out questionnaire followed by semi-structured interviews with twelve randomly selected respondents who had completed the questionnaire.

When examining the results of this study, one of the first considerations must be the size of the sample. Although 350 questionnaires were sent out in self-addressed stamped envelopes, the response rate was not anticipated. Another problem centered around the fact that of the 68 respondents, only 15 had voluntarily withdrawn. There was also no response from those who had academically terminated. These factors combined with the perceived difficulty in identifying the number of students in the various categories from the information provided by the College, may have influenced the results of the study.

On the gender distribution, the results showed that of the 15 who voluntarily withdrew, 66.7% were male and 33.3% were female. This is consistent with another study completed in 1990 at the Prince Philip Drive campus (Byrne, 1990) showing

similar results. However, due to the small sample size in the voluntary category, it would be difficult to hypothesize as to whether males are more likely to withdraw then females. A further examination of the voluntary showed a similar borderline difference between those who had dependents and those with none. From the data collected, it appeared that a student may be more likely to withdraw if he/she had dependents. The significant difference ($p = .097$) may have been greater if a larger sample had been available and the same trend continued. The same results were noted when students were asked about the services at the College they found helpful. Voluntary were more likely to consider the counselling services useful than the graduates. However, it was not significantly different at $p < 0.05$. A final examination of borderline results were recorded in the section "the instructor valued my experiences". If a larger sample were available, following the trend indicated, ($p = .064$), a significant difference might have been found. It is apparent from these examples that a larger sample might have shown different results or verified differences already indicated from the literature search.

It was evident from this study that students older than average faced many barriers to success. Many of these barriers were common to both graduates and those who withdrew. What is necessary to examine is the difference indicated by the respondents in attempting to determine why some people graduated and others voluntarily withdrew. A literature review (Brookfield, 1986; Belanger & Mount, 1998; Davis, 1990; Herr & Cramer, 1996 Kerha, 1995; Padula, 1994; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989) revealed that institutional barriers included schedules, attitudes of professors, campus friendliness, lack of satisfaction in the student roles and non-recognition of prior learning

experiences. Poor study skills, difficulty with course load and prior academic levels were some of the academic barriers older students faced when returning to school. Personal barriers included: home responsibilities, financial, child care and transportation problems; and job commitments. Psychosocial barriers such as attitudes, beliefs and values of significant others influenced these students.

During the research it was apparent that personal, institutional and academic factors had an impact on the older student, and in some instances on whether the student graduated or voluntarily withdrew. Most students in this study did not appear to have child care and transportation problems or interference from work commitments. They both listed financial problems among the high personal factors that caused them some concern. One significant difference emerged between those who withdrew and the graduates on the balance between home responsibilities and studies. It was not clear from the subsequent interviews why some students were able to juggle the responsibilities and others withdrew because of that conflict. Further research is necessary in this area. Academic and institutional factors have been addressed later in this discussion.

The literature review revealed that adult students differed from the traditional students. However, it also indicated a lack of research on these non-traditional students. Different development theorists (Chickering & Reisser, 1997; Cote & Levine, 1997; Evans et al., 1998; Jarvis, 1987; Knowles, 1978; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Squires, 1993; Super, 1975) viewed the adult learner as different from the adolescent learner in terms of the experiences that older students bring to the institution. Some of the characteristics the older student brought to the educational situation included: tendency to

be more self-directed; established attitudes, patterns of thought and fixed ways of doing things; a poor response to being told what to do; and a lack of confidence in themselves, but an expectation to be treated with respect and equality.

From the questionnaires and the subsequent interviews, the participants in this study exhibited most, if not all, of these characteristics. They disliked being told what to do, they expected respect from the instructors, and expected their experiences to be acknowledged. From the research it was apparent that the respondents felt more could be done to make life easier for the older student. While they did not necessarily mention prior learning, some felt that their experiences were not acknowledged, another identified group work as non-essential for the older student. It was evident that the adults surveyed had fixed ways of doing things as acknowledged in their comments in the open-ended questions and during the interviews. Several mentioned the difficulties encountered with trying to adjust to attending school and keeping everything else running on schedule. A number of the participants, especially the voluntary, appeared to lack confidence in themselves. Graduates felt that if they were not encouraged at the beginning they would not have continued. Last but not least, a major complaint of both graduates and voluntary was the apparent lack of respect for them as mature adults. Comments ranged from difficulty with being treated as a twenty- year old to problems with instructors treating all adults as not having the required skills to enroll in the programs. Knowles (1978) in his theory of adult learners noted that experiences help to define the adult. In any situation where an adult perceives his experiences to be rejected, he also feels rejected as a person. This seemed to be reinforced by the older students who were interviewed, as well as

reinforced by some of the comments from the other students. The students who had the most difficulty with this lack of respect appeared to be the ones most likely to withdraw. This is important information for the educational institutions to consider when enrolling students older than average. With the changing demographics in the College population, it is essential that administration and staff become familiar with adult development theories and to bring in policies that will recognize the experiences that adults bring with them into the institution.

Demographics

In this study a number of demographic and background factors were examined for differences. A study completed by Martaugh, Burns and Schuster (1998) showed that attrition increased with age and decreased with higher GPA. These findings were not replicated here. According to Solomon and Gordon (1991) older students lacked sufficient preparedness and had lower grade point averages then their younger counterparts because of the length of time since last returning to school. This did not seem to be the trend with the students who responded to the survey. An examination of the number of years students had been out of formal education prior to registering with the college was also completed. While research (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Nelson et al., 1993) indicated that poor academic performance was the most single important factor contributing to attrition, a relationship to prior academic performance could not be established from this sample.

Together with the highest average high school mark, the grade point average

(GPA) while attending the College, was examined. The results showed a significant difference ($p<0.05$) between those who graduated and those who voluntary withdrew, indicating a high correlation between high GPA and student success. The higher the GPA the more likely the chances of graduating. This is consistent with previous research (Murtaugh et al., 1999).

Most adults returning to school are either in a career change or family transition (Breese & O'Toole, 1995; Kaplin & Saltiel, 1997; Schlossberg et al., 1989). The single most important reason why adult students enrolled in post secondary courses, according to Ashar and Skenes (1993), was career enhancement needs. Changing labour force demands also necessitated changes for the adult, as an individual no longer can train for a career that will last a life time (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). It is not surprising, therefore, that the main reason why students entered the College and graduated was to improve employability skills. This differed significantly from the voluntary group. Equal numbers (about 50%) of voluntary students and graduates listed "job satisfaction, better employment" as a reason for entering the College. However, those who voluntary withdrew did not rank improving employability skills as a main reason for entering the College.

When questioned on the reasons for choosing to enter the College, "potential job prospects" rated very high for both graduate and voluntary respondents at 30 or 56.6% for graduates, and 9 or 60% for those who voluntarily withdrew. This is consistent with research on adults and the need for changes in a technological world (Kaplin & Saltiel, 1997; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Throughout the research and from the questionnaire results and the information from the subsequent interviews a number of themes emerged in terms of differences between the two groups studied. The most significant theme that emerged was the difference between graduates and those who voluntarily withdrew as to their perception of course instructors and the support received. Another common theme was the difficulty women returning faced returning to college in comparison to their male counter-parts.

Instructor Attitude

Questions relating to course instructors were asked in different sections of the questionnaire. A significant difference was found between the responses of the graduates and those who voluntarily withdrew. Graduates generally believed that instructors were supportive although many in the interviews and in the open-ended questions did not think they were treated with the respect that should have been afforded them as older students. Those who voluntarily withdrew did not believe that course instructors were supportive. This theme dominated through several of the questions and was also evident from the follow-up interviews. This certainly appears to validate research (Ashar & Skenes, 1993) on Tinto's model of integration which suggests that universities and colleges that are socially and academically integrated will better retain student. If students feel course instructors do not support them, academic integration will not take place and the chances of persistence is reduced. The more validated a student feels the more he/she persists (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Mutter, 1992, Tinto, 1998).

The data as per support of family, friends or college personnel also noted a

significant difference ($p<0.05$) between graduates and voluntary with respect to the support from instructors variable. Graduates (31 or 58.5%) were more likely to agree that course instructors provided support, while among those who voluntarily withdrew only 3 or 20 % cited that support.

Students were asked which service at the College they found helpful. It was interesting that the only significant difference ($p <0.05$) was again with the course instructors. As noted previously, this is extremely important (Tinto, 1998) for academic integration. As well, the attitude of instructors was rated as one of the most influential factors for student satisfaction with an institution (Graham, 1998; Rogers 1993). Graham (1998) found that the greater the satisfaction with the educational climate, the greater the reported outcomes. His findings showed that faculty's respect for students, their availability, concern and contact with students and the quality of instruction impacted on the students' evaluation of their intellectual and academic development. This study certainly replicated those findings.

According to previous research (Brookfield, 1991; Tice, 1997; and Zemke & Zemke, 1995), good classroom facilitators use a variety of teaching techniques, use questioning techniques and do not need to be in control or continually lecturing. Again, a significant difference ($p< 0.05$) was found in "The instructors used a variety of teaching techniques". Those who graduated, 30 or 57.7%, strongly agreed that a variety of teaching techniques were used, while only 3 or 20% of those who withdrew strongly agreed that instructors used a variety of teaching techniques. In this study those who voluntary withdrew appeared to have a very different experience in their interactions with

instructors. These experiences combined with the other issues with instructors, according to researchers (Brookfield, 1991; Tice, 1997; and Zemke & Zemke, 1995) impacted negatively on the students' success.

The open-ended questions and the interviews confirmed the findings in the quantitative study. The majority of the graduates found the instructors extremely supportive. Although the response from the voluntary was not quite as negative as in the previous responses, they did not find the College and its staff as supportive during their attendance as the graduates.

Interestingly, both those who withdrew and the graduates rated the support of other College personnel extremely high. Questions on the mail-out as per support received prior to entering the College were responded to in the affirmative by both groups. Some indicated on their questionnaire examples of the kind of support they received from administrators and student services personnel. A similar interview question received the same positive response. Respondents were very clear in their indication of whom at the College they found supportive and those they didn't.

Women and College

Research (Home, 1998; Padula, 1994; Schlossberg et al., 1989) showed that adult women students face difficulties more than any other population, thus making them more vulnerable to strain and the possibility of exiting before graduation. While no attempt was made to cross reference male and female population during the quantitative analysis, a comparison between married respondents and single respondents and between male and

female respondents was completed. While married respondents noted more difficulties with balancing home and school, the group with the greatest adjustment was undoubtedly women. They spoke of having to be superwoman and having to juggle children, home responsibilities and an extremely heavy (in their words) work load. It appeared, from the study, that those women who successfully managed school and home were also the ones who graduated. The respondents in this survey did not list child care or transportation as a major problem. One could assume from this that the women in this survey did not visualize this as a problem. However, the sample population consisted of the two large urban centres in Newfoundland, both with bus systems. As well, two of the main campuses have child centres that are open to children of students. This may have alleviated this problem for this sample.

Persistence and Retention

Considerable research (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Bray, Braxton & Sullivan, 1999; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Parscarella, & Terenzini, 1998; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1998) has been completed on student persistence and retention as well as the development and modification of a theory explaining the process that caused students to leave post-secondary institutions prior to completing their program. Much of this research (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Berger & Milliem, 1999; Bray, Braxton & Sullivan, 1999; McKeown, MacDonell & Bowman, 1993; Mutter, 1992) has focused on Tinto's model of student persistence and withdrawal.

When asked what factors contributed to their completing the program, 49% of graduates listed hard work as the main reason they succeeded. Determination and perseverance were noted by 43% of the graduates. They also attributed their success to the support of instructors. The follow-up interviews provided further proof that graduates persevered. They also attributed the instructors with assistance in helping them reach their goals. These graduates exhibited considerable persistence in completing their course. Conversely, those who withdrew, found the work too hard, weren't sure the course was right for them and believed they did not receive the necessary support from instructors. From this research, it is difficult to determine if those who withdrew did not have the characteristics attributed to persisters, or if the characteristics of persisters contribute to their success.

Both graduate and voluntary found college stressful, both felt that the fitted in, and as previously indicated, since most students at the college were not employed, job interference was not a problem. If one examined Tinto's model of persistence (Tinto, 1987), social and academic integration is considered an important ingredient to retaining students in post-secondary. This model focused on both the background of students prior to college and their experiences during their attendance. Students in two year programs were more likely to socialize only in the classroom (Pascarella et al., 1996, Tinto, 1998). However, the only significant difference ($p < 0.05$) between the graduate and the voluntary student was in the number of friends they made at the college. Voluntary appeared to make more friends then those who graduated. This would appear to contradict previous research (Tinto, 1998) that showed a high correlation between social integration and

retention. Further research may determine whether social integration is a factor for students older than average.

Research on student persistence (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Mutter, 1992; Tinto, 1987) showed that students who were academically integrated (socially with peers and had a good relationship with instructors), were more likely to be successful. As already indicated, those who withdrew cited lack of support from instructors as a major detriment to their completing the program. Graduates, on the other hand, indicated the opposite. The degree to which this was reported would seem to indicate that aspect of academic integration was vital to the success or failure of these students.

Another facet of academic integration centered around socialization with peers. It appeared that those who were most successful were those who became part of a support group or had some system in place that provided support. Graduates often mentioned the value of working with a group of their peer or forming working support groups. In some cases, as noted in the study, these students attributed this peer support as the difference between them staying or leaving. It was interesting that neither of the respondents who voluntarily withdrew appeared to have any support system in place or did not mention it if they did. This is consistent with earlier research completed by Tinto (1987, 1998).

Recommendations

Recommendations pertaining to barriers to and supports for students older than average have been suggested in this section. These recommendations relate to issues including personal, institutional and academic factors that influence the older student.

Recommendations for further research are also included.

College Tracking System

The raw data released by the College supposedly contained only those students who were 25 years and older, had graduated, voluntarily withdrawn, or were academically terminated. However, even after several attempts to correct the spreadsheets, the information was not accurate. Students are registered and identified by semester. A student who had registered six times would be found on that data sheet six times. As well, all students 25 years and older were included in the mix. Therefore, questionnaires were sent to students who were still registered in the program. The College should develop a student tracking system that would provide accurate statistics for all research. Every attempt should be made in future research to include those who were academically dismissed. A three way comparison would have provided further information as to the factors that impeded or aided the student older than average.

Survey Method

One of the problems identified by the researcher during the compiling of the questionnaire was the difficulty of receiving sufficient responses from a mail-out questionnaire, thus reducing the sample size. Since the researcher believed a mail-out would be more efficient and less time consuming, the decision was made to do a mail-out. However, permission for a follow-up interview was included with the questionnaire as a means of more in-depth analysis and to obtain more information should the sample

be low. It is ***strongly*** recommended to future researchers that a telephone survey be completed rather than a mail-out. The low response rate to the study may have influenced the final results as indicated previously in discussions concerning the borderline statistics.

Institutional Barriers

The issue of instructor support was a main theme identified throughout this study. Those who voluntarily withdrew did not believe they had the support of instructors. They reported instructors did not value their experiences. Voluntary also indicated that their instructors did not use a variety of teaching methods. Both groups identified lack of respect as a major problem they coped with throughout their stay at the College. However, the graduates listed instructors as an important source of support, even rating them higher than their spouses.

Throughout the literature review, considerable research in adult development and adult learners (Brookfield, 1986; Cross, 1981; Graham, 1998; Knowles, 1978; Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989; Zemke & Zemke, 1995) discussed the needs of the adult learner in terms of their experiences, attitudes, and their confidence, among others. All of these factors influence how successful the student will be and whether the student will withdraw or graduate. These factors also influence how students perceive their identified needs and how those needs are addressed by significant people at the College. Chickering and Reisser (1997) identified seven key environmental factors that influence student development including: institutional size, curriculum, teaching, and

student-faculty relationship. One of the principles they identified was a recognition and respect for individual differences. While their student development theory was not age-related, it certainly is evident from the results of this survey that one of the key environmental factors, student-faculty relationship, influenced the decisions of some students who withdrew. It is important to note, however, that there were other less identified factors that contributed to the student withdrawing from the programs at the College. To foster a more hospitable learning environment as it relates to faculty-student relationship, the College should encourage instructors to adapt a more adult development approach to the teaching of students. Instructors not familiar with adult development theory should be supported, through professional development, in their pursuit of higher learning themselves. With changing demographics and the possibility of more students older than average, the instructional attitude toward this non-traditional population must be more adult-oriented to ensure positive the reinforcement necessary for success. Further research in this area is necessary to determine why the graduates perceived the instructors as important supports, while the voluntary did not.

Persistence and Retention

Why are some students able to balance home responsibilities and school responsibilities while others are not? According to McClusky's theory of margin, adults are constantly seeking to balance the amount of energy needed and the amount available for learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). He believed that for adults to engage in learning, there must be some margin of power available for the learning situation. If there

is not sufficient energy left after trying to juggle work, family responsibility and others while studying, that student may withdraw or become terminated. It was evident from the study that students who could not manage that balancing act did withdraw. While this study seemed to support McClusy's theory, it still did not provide any further information as to what is different between the two groups. Further research is necessary to determine why one student can balance the various roles while others cannot. Another question that is raised by this theory would be how the energy levels relate to persistence in students.

What makes some students persisters and others not? According to Tinto (1987) a student's success or failure was influenced both by the background characteristics that students brought into the institution as well as their experiences during their attendance. Academic and social integration during attendance was also considered to be a major factor in whether the student dropped out or graduated. Subsequent research (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Bray, Braxton & Sullivan, 1999; Cleveland-Innes, 1994; Eppler & Harju, 1997; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Kasworm & Pike, 1994; Parscarella, & Terenzini, 1998) on Tinto's model has been completed on traditional students. Do these same factors apply to the non-traditional student? Research in the retention of students (Bean, 1980; Berger & Braxton, 1998; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994) indicated that initial success relating to academic demands can be crucial to student retention. This was indicated in a number of instances by the graduates in this study. Having support and encouragement during the initial weeks were crucial for many of the graduates. Social and academic integration can be identified through faculty-student relationship as well as having a study group that provides a supporting network. As

earlier mentioned, those who voluntarily withdrew made no mention of a support group either on the questionnaire or in the subsequent interviews. Is this an important factor in determining if a student withdraws or succeeds? Do students who withdraw not seek out support from instructors as well, and is there a correlation between the faculty support and their lack of student support? A study that examines just these factors would be beneficial to both the College personnel and to future students older than average.

Women and College

This study concentrated on the significant differences between those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew. The data gathered may have been used to cross reference male and female respondents, but the researcher did not explore these demographics in relation to the various factors examined. However, the interviews provided some insight into the problems faced by women entering the College environment. It was apparent from this brief research, that women, especially those with dependents, face many barriers that are not evident in other populations. College administration should be aware of these barriers and be sensitive and supportive to this student population. As well, another extended study should be completed to determine if significant differences exist between male and female respondents that graduated or withdrew. Another study could be completed comparing the smaller campuses with the larger campuses that comprised the population for this study.

Summary

Overall this study has shown there are some significant differences between those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew from the College in terms of barriers and/or supports for the student older than average. The study noted a number of factors common to both graduates and voluntary with regard to barriers and supports. Both groups identified heavy workloads, problems with lack of respect in view of their age and experiences, and both chose to enter the College for 'potential job prospects.

While prior academic performance was similar for both groups, the grade point average results showed significant differences between those who graduated and those who withdrew, indicating a high correlation between high GPA and academic success. No significant differences were noted in age, home community size, living away from home or length of time since formal education. Both groups indicated their displeasure with the lack of respect for their age and experiences. They also indicated problems identifying with the younger students in the class, and could not relate to the attitude and maturity levels of some of the younger students.

The major differences noted in this study centered around the perceived support from instructional staff and how that influenced the success or failure of the student older than average. This support or lack of support was evident in all sections of the questionnaire and was reinforced through the interviews. Graduates listed support of instructors as vital to their success, while voluntary attributed the treatment from instructors as one of the important reasons for withdrawing. Without further study into instructor support, it is difficult to conclude that the College faculty contributed to the

success or failure.

This study has implications for the College's students older than average. The College needs to identify perceived or real institutional barriers to success for the student older than average. If instructors are not knowledgeable about adult development theories, steps should be taken to ensure the professional development of staff and administration. It was evident from the study that some students who withdrew had considerable difficulty with instructional staff and not with other personnel. Whether it was the students's perception or not should be explored through more in-depth analysis of this factor.

This study left a lot of questions unanswered that could be explored through further research. A major finding of faculty support to student older than average needs to be re-examined. Another area requiring more study is women and college. It was impossible to consider all the variables possible in this research. An examination of male versus female demographics could be completed on this sample population. These and other recommendations for research were evident from the preceding discussions.

Last, but not least, it is important to have a sufficient sample to clearly delineate between the major themes identified within the two groups. It would be worthwhile to take the same study and complete it on a larger sampling of students older than average. Likewise, to determine major differences between traditional and non-traditional students, the same questions could be asked to a sample consisting of those two populations.

Further research on the factors identified through this study would provide more support for the College and to students older than average attending the College. As

supported by the literature review and this study, there were identifiable barriers to and supports for students older than average attending the College. There were clearly defined differences between those who graduated and those who voluntarily withdrew.

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APPENDIX A

CORRESPONDENCE

(1) Letter Requesting Permission to Access Student Data Files at the College of the North Atlantic

(2) College Consent Form

(3) Letter of Informed Consent

(4) Questionnaire Consent Form

Mr. Dorm Chipp, Director
Student Services
College of the North Atlantic
P. O. Box 5400
Stephenville, NF
A2J 6Z6

Dear Mr. Chipp:

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland. As partial fulfillment of the requirements of my Master of Educational Psychology Degree, I would like to conduct a research study in the barriers to and supports for success for the student older than average at the College of the North Atlantic. Dr. Mildred Cahill has agreed to supervise on behalf of the Faculty of Education. The study will consider the personal, institutional, and or academical factors which contribute to or impede the success of the older student. A questionnaire (attached) has been developed and will be mailed to students older than average enrolled at the College from 1997-1999 at the four campuses in the St. John's area and the campus in Corner Brook. I will have sole access to these questionnaires once completed and all materials will be securely maintained during the study, then destroyed.

The study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Are there significant differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw, or academically terminate as per the following background/demographic characteristics: (a) gender; (b) age; (c) martial status; (d) dependents; (f) home community size; and (h) place of residence?
2. Are there significant differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw, or are academically terminate as per: (a) "mature student" status; (b) highest schooling completed; (c) years since last formal education; (d) employment during attendance at College; (e) school average; and (f) grade point average during attendance at College?
3. Are there significant differences identified by students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw, or are academically terminated as per reasons for: (a) entering the programs at the College; (b) choosing the specific program at the College?
4. Are there differences identified among students older than average as per reasons for: (a) graduating; (b) voluntarily withdrawing; or (c) academically terminating?
5. Are there significant differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw, or academically terminate as per factors relating to the following College experiences: (a) academic integration; (b) support of family, friends, or College personnel; (c) social integration; (d) academic preparedness; (e) satisfaction with College experiences and services; (f) financial concerns; and (g) self-esteem?

6. Are there differences in attrition rates among students older than average who voluntarily withdraw or academically terminate as per the choice of programs?
7. Are there differences among students older than average who graduate, voluntarily withdraw, or academically terminate as per their recommendations: (a) to future students older than average; (b) to the institution prior to students entering; and (c) to the College during the student's program?

In order for the study's client sample to be representative of the College student population, I would need the names, addresses, phone numbers and program registration of all students 25 years and older who registered at the respective campuses from 1997 - 1999. In considering this request, please be assured of the following:

(a) Participation in the study will be completely voluntary on the part of the client.
(b) Confidentiality will be strictly maintained, client names will not be recorded and client personal information will be used in aggregate form only.
(c) Client participation will be limited to the completion of mail-out questionnaires or telephone calls; no conversations will be electronically recorded.
(d) Clients will be informed of the purpose and nature of the study and treated respectfully and anonymously.
(e) The College has the right to withdraw approval at any time.
(f) Research results will be available to participants upon request.

I am requesting your permission to proceed with this study. It is expected that the survey will be conducted during June and July 2000. Should you have any questions regarding this study or this request, please feel free to contact me at 686-5727; my supervisor Dr. Mildred Cahill at 737-6980 or Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean Graduate Programs and Research at 737-3402. The results of this research will be made available to you at your request. If this request meets with your approval, please sign the attached form. Thank you for you assistance.

Sincerely,

Bessie Merrigan

Attachment

Consent Form

I D. Chipp hereby allow **Bessie Merrigan** access to names, addresses, telephone numbers and program registration in order to conduct research on students older than average registered at the St. John's and Corner Brook campuses of the college from 1997 to 1999. I understand that all data provided and collected is strictly confidential and that no individual will be identified nor will any phone call be tape recorded. The College reserves the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Signature: D. Chipp Witness: Helena Boultois

Date: June 08/2000 Date: June 8/2000

Dear Student:

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education , Memorial University of Newfoundland. As partial fulfillment of the requirements of my Master of Educational Psychology Degree, I am conducting a thesis research study in the area of barriers to success for the student older than average entering the College of the North Atlantic. The study will consider the factors from a personal, institutional, and academic perspective which contribute to or impede the success of the student older than average.

The enclosed questionnaire is a major part of the research. As a former student, your response to the questionnaire would provide me with critical information for my research. It is hoped that information provided through this research will be valuable information for future program and service development for students older than average. Please be assured of the following:

(A) Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and you have the right to answer only those questions you choose to answer.
(B) This study has been reviewed and approved by the Ethics Review Committee of Memorial University and the Faculty of Education.
(C) This study has been approved by the College of the North Atlantic and the College has released the names and addresses of students to assist in this research.
(D) Confidentiality will be strictly maintained; client names will not be recorded and no information will be used which would identify the individual student.
(E) Research results will be available to participants upon request.
(F) Only I will have access to the questionnaires; and upon completion of my survey, these questionnaires will be destroyed..

If you decide to participate in the study, you may keep this cover letter, return the questionnaire in the self-addressed, stamped envelope that is provided. Please do not put your name anywhere on the survey ***except the last page if you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview.*** If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at (709) 686-5727; or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Mildred Cahill, at (709) 737-6980. If, at any time, you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact the Associate Dean of Graduate Programs and Research, Faculty of Education, Memorial University at (709) 737-3402.

I would appreciate it if you would return the completed questionnaire to me by **June 30, 2000.**
Thank you for your time and valuable input into my study.

Sincerely,
Bessie Merrigan

Consent Form

(To be signed prior to completion of an interview)

I_____ hereby consent to take part in *Barriers to and Supports for Success for Students Older than Average Attending College* being undertaken by Bessie Merrigan. I understand that participation is voluntary and that all information is strictly confidential. No individual will be identified nor will any recording device be used should I agree to an interview. Results of this survey will be available to me upon request. I understand that only the researcher will have access to the completed questionnaires and all materials will be strictly maintained during the study, then destroyed.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____ Witness: _____

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. All information will be confidential. Do not place your name anywhere on this questionnaire unless you agree to an interview. Provide your name *only* if you wish to participate further.

Campus: _____ **Program:** _____
(Specify: e.g. Business Administration: Accounting)

Section A: Please circle the answers that apply to your program.

1 Did you ?

1. graduate 2. voluntarily withdraw 3. academically terminate

2. Were you admitted to the College under the 'mature student policy'?

☐ yes ☐ no

3. Indicate the highest level of education achieved prior to entering the College.

1. less than high school
2. high school diploma
3. a. general
   b. academic (matriculation)
   c. advanced (honours)
4. Adult Basic Education (ABE) or GED
5. some college
6. college diploma or certificate
7. some university
8. university degree
9. other (please specify) _____

4. What approximate average mark did you receive for the last high school or equivalent completed? _____

5. Prior to enrolling in the program, how long had it been since you last attended formal education?

1. less than 1 year
2. 1 - 5 years
3. 6 - 10 years
4. 11 - 15 years
5. 16 - 20 years
6. more than 20 years

6. What was your overall grade point average during your college program? _____

7. In the year prior to attending the College, I was: (Circle all answers that apply.)
    1. employed full time
    2. attending another post-secondary institution
    3. enrolled in another program at this college
    4. unemployed
    5. working part-time
    6. at home with children
    7. seasonally employed
    8. self-employed
    9. other (please specify) _____

8. While at College my main source of income was:
    1. student loan
    2. sponsorship
        (a) partial
        (b) full
    3. parent
    4. spouse
    5. other (please specify) _____

9. The reason(s) I entered the program include: (Circle all answers that apply.)
    1. job dissatisfaction, better employment
    2. job loss
    3. to improve employability skills, increase job opportunities
    4. need for employment
    5. to change careers
    6. children grown, left home
    7. children older, school age
    8. financial problems
    9. to increase self-esteem
    10. to become self-supportive
    11. self-satisfaction in accomplishments
    12. to meet social expectations
    13 need to re-examine martial and family roles
    14. divorce
    15. single parenthood
    16. dissatisfied with present educational level
    17. boredom
    18. other (please specify) _____

10. The reason(s) I choose this program include: (Circle all answers that apply.)
    1. recommended by friend, family member, or acquaintance
    2. potential job prospects considered high
    3. interest
    4. could not get into program of choice
    5. looked easy
    6. length of program
    7. didn't like university
    8. maintain sponsorship benefits
    9. other (please specify) _____

11. Prior to entering the program, which of the following people positively influenced your decision to attend by providing support and encouragement?(Circle all answers that apply.)
    1. spouse
    2. children
    3. parent
    4. other family member
    5. friend(s)
    6. college counsellor
    7. role model
    8. other(s) (please specify) _____

12. During my stay at the College, the following were important sources of support. (Circle all that apply.)
    1. spouse
    2. children
    3. parent
    4. other family member
    5. friend(s)
    6. college counsellor
    7. course instructor
    8. other students
    9. college administrators
    10. other (s) (please specify) _____

13. While at the College, I found the following helpful. (Circle all answers that apply.)
    1. counselling services
    2. career employment services
    3. peer tutoring
    4. course instructors
    5. program coordinators
    6. library services
    7. orientation seminars
    8. student services personnel
    9. other (please specify) _____

Section B: Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 - 5 by circling the appropriate numbers as they apply to you.

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree 5 = Not applicable

14. I was certain that I would obtain a college diploma/certificate.	1	2	3	4	5
15. The overall quality of the program was high.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I made a number of new friends at the college.	1	2	3	4	5
17. My job interfered with my studying and attending classes. 1	2	3	4	5	
18. I was always prepared for classes	1	2	3	4	5
19. I consider myself a confident person.	1	2	3	4	5
20 I was not prepared for the amount of work expected of me.	1	2	3	4	5
21. The instructors were helpful and supportive.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I was sure of my educational goal.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I completed assignments on time.	1	2	3	4	5
24. The instructors valued my experiences. 1	2	3	4	5	
25. The counselling staff were helpful and supportive.	1	2	3	4	5
26. I could not balance home responsibilities and studies.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I had great difficulty with financial problems.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I worried about my ability to compete with other students. 1	2	3	4	5	
29. I found college very stressful.	1	2	3	4	5
30. The instructors respected me as an older student. 1	2	3	4	5	
31. I never felt like I "fitted in" at the college.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I missed classes because of lack of day-care.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Transportation each day was a problem for me.	1	2	3	4	5
34. The college has supportive services for students.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I studied at least two hours each night.1 1	2	3	4	5	
36. I always was a good student.	1	2	3	4	5
37. I had medical problems which interfered with studies.	1	2	3	4	5
38. The instructors used a variety of teaching techniques.	1	2	3	4	5
39. I was frustrated with my lack of computer knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5

Section C: General Information Please Circle the answers that apply to you.

40. Are you? ☐ male ☐ female

41. On July 30, 2000 my age will be:
    1. 25 - 29
    2. 30 - 34
    3. 35 - 39
    4. 40 - 44
    5. 45 - 49
    6. Over 50

42. Marital Status:
    1. single/never married
    2.. married
    3. common law
    4. divorced/separated
    5. widow

43. (A) How many dependent children do you have? _____

    (B) How many of these dependents require child-care? _____

44. Did you reside in your hometown while attending College?
    ☐ yes ☐ no

45. While a student at the College how many hour a week were you employed?
    1. not employed
    2. less than 10
    3. 11 - 20
    4. 21 - 30
    5. 31 - 40
    6. more than 40

46. The population of my home community is:
    1. less than 500
    2. 500 - 2,000
    3. 2,001 - 5000
    4. 5001 - 10,000
    5. 10,001 - 20,000
    6. more than 20,000

Section D: Answer the questions which are applicable to you.

47. **If you graduated,** what do you feel is the main reason for your success?

48. **If you voluntarily withdrew,** what was the main reason for leaving the College prior to graduation?

49. **If you academically terminated,** what do you feel was the main reason for your academic problems?

50. Now that you can look back, what, if anything, would you do differently?

51. Would you or have you considered returning to the College? Why? Why not?

52. What advice would you give to new students older than average who are interested in entering the College?

53. Is there anything that the College could have done prior to entry into the College to be more supportive?

54. Is there anything that the College could have done during your program to be more supportive?

_____

_____

_____

55. Please use the space below to write any extra comments which you feel will be useful to the College in assisting future students older than average.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

****

If you would consent to an interview for clarification on some of the above questions or wish to add anything you feel is important and may not have been addressed in the questionnaire, please fill in the following information. Again, all information in this study will be kept strictly confidential. That is, no way will you be identified in the report of this study.

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

Phone: _____

E-Mail _____

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please place it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope provided and return to me by June 30, 2000.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Preamble: Hi, my name is Bessie Merrigan. A few months ago you completed a questionnaire for me on Barriers to and supports for Students Older than Average attending the College of the North Atlantic. You indicated on the questionnaire that you would be willing to participate in an interview for further clarification. You also returned a signed consent form. Is it convenient for you to participate in that interview now? I have six questions to ask you which should take approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

May I have your permission to access the demographic data from your questionnaire for the interview analysis?

Program_____

Campus_____

Age _____ Marital Status_____

Number of Dependent Children _____

Highest Grade Completed _____

Did you? Graduate_____ Voluntarily withdraw_____

1. Did you enter College under the "Mature Student Policy" Yes___ No ____

2. (A) **Graduate** - A number of students listed support of instructors and staff as one of the main reasons for graduating. Explain further the help and support you received from the College.

   (B) **Voluntary** - A number of students listed lack of support as one of the reasons for withdrawing. Explain further any support and/or lack of support provided by the College.

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Under the following categories, describe the factors that impacted on you during your stay at the College: home, school, personal.

Home

School

Personal

4. Describe the major adjustments you feel is necessary to achieve in the programs at the college.

5. A number of students felt the College could have been more supportive to students prior to entering the College. Define ways the College could have been more supportive.

6. Are there further comments you feel will be useful to the College or to other students older than average?