REPORT OF AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY INTERNSHIP AT HARLOW COLLEGE, HARLOW, ENGLAND INCLUDING A RESEARCH REPORT ON HOW HARLOW COLLEGE CAN BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF WOMEN RETURNERS

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Report of an Educational Psychology Internship
at Harlow College, Harlow, England
Including a Research Report on
How Harlow College Can Better Meet
the Needs of Women Returners

by

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ABSTRACT

To fulfill the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in School Counselling, this report provides an overview of the Author's internship experiences and research at Harlow College in Harlow, Essex, England. The report is divided into two sections: The Internship and the Research Component.

The first section provides a rationale for an Internship in England, a description of the internship setting including: a brief history of Harlow Town; a description of Harlow College facilities; a discussion of experiences; and recommendations for future graduate students.

The second section is a summary of the Author's research at Harlow College. This research examined how Harlow College can better meet the needs women returners or re-entry women, as commonly referred in the English literature. The results of this qualitative research suggest Harlow College is meeting many of the needs of women returners, however, there are still areas where improvements could be made. Some of the suggested recommendations include: affordable creche facility on campus; better lighting in the parking lot and on campus; a mandatory session with a careers guidance person for all women returners (full and part-time); an orientation session for all mature returners; scholarships for women returners; alternate teaching and evaluation methods; flexibility and accommodations to students who may have to miss time due to family commitments; support groups for mature students; and counselling services.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is not only the culmination of my internship experiences, but the knowledge and experiences of two years of devoted study in the Master of Education Counselling Program at Memorial University. Completion of this report and degree would not have been possible without the continued support and encouragement of certain key people in my life.

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I wish to thank Ms. Sue Young (field supervisor), Ms. Jackie Barker and Ms. Marion Miller for their supervision and guidance at Harlow College. I also extend gratitude to Mr. David Ellerby, Principal of Harlow College, for accepting me as an internship student and permitting me to conduct research at his institution. Additionally, I would like to thank all the staff at Harlow College who openly welcomed my presence and assisted me during my stay.

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CHAPTER I

Internship

Rationale for Internship Experience

In partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Education in School Counselling a ten-week internship was completed at Harlow College in Harlow, Essex, England. The internship option was chosen because it was an excellent opportunity to synthesize the theoretical knowledge gained through the program with additional practical experience. The supervised internship provided an enhanced learning environment for furthering both personal and professional development.

A college setting in Harlow, Essex, England was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, throughout the interim of the Masters Program, the Candidate focused her research and practical experiences toward working with adult students at the college and university level. It was felt this internship would provide an excellent opportunity to continue study and gain further experience. Secondly, it provided an opportunity to experience and compare the Community College setting with the University Setting where a practicum had previously been completed at the Memorial University Counselling Centre. Thirdly, Harlow College is a Tertiary College consisting of both young adults (16-19) and older students (20 and over) which provided experience with students of varying ages. Finally, the international experience of living and working in another culture was also considered an invaluable learning opportunity. The Intern gained first-hand knowledge and experience of the British educational system and counselling practices. It also provided a unique opportunity to compare British practices with

Newfoundland and Labrador practices to expand the repertoire of knowledge and skills. The internship at Harlow College in Harlow, Essex, England was believed to be a wonderful opportunity to achieve both academic and professional goals.

The Internship Setting

This section provides information about the setting of the internship including not only the educational institution, but also the community as well. It was felt that a description of the College setting without some knowledge of the history of Harlow, and its present status, would leave the reader without a holistic view of the internship setting and experience. An understanding of the history of Harlow would also provide the reader with some insight and understanding of the town's current social and economic issues as they relate to women returners.

Harlow Town - The Past

Harlow Town is known as a "new town" being the first of its kind developed in England after the Second World War. During this war, the ruin of London and many industrial cities in Britain caused major disruptions in employment and industry. This, combined with overcrowding, poor living, and environmental conditions precipitated a policy of 'planned decentralization' from Britain's larger cities. In 1946, the "The New Towns Act" was proposed and development began soon after (Fisher, Harding, Knight, Board, and Brinson, 1997).

The following year a Development Corporation was set up in an effort to build the new town of Harlow and relieve overcrowding in North-East London. It was to be "a town designed for healthy living and industry; of a size that makes possible a full measure of social life but not larger..." (Fisher et al., 1997, p. 3). The town was designed to accommodate a population of

approximately 4,500, but in less than ten years it increased rapidly to 10,000 residents. The population of the town continued to grow and plateaued at approximately 81,000 in 1974.

Initially, many of the people who moved into Harlow New Town were young couples and the consequent high birth rate earned Harlow the nick name of 'pram town'. To ensure the success and prosperity of this New Town, it was essential to provide the new young residents with employment. Therefore, as part of the master plan, two major industrial estates were erected. Most factories in these estates were built by the Development Corporation. Few, with the approval of the Development Corporation, were built and leased by private industry. The types of industry varied from engineering, printing, electronics, to glass, food and furniture manufacturers. Employment rates were high, with 36.2% of the population employed in electrical engineering firms, 15% in mechanical engineering firms and thousands of others in various other industry (Fisher et al., 1997).

In addition to providing virtually unlimited employment opportunities and housing, all of the public service and necessary services were provided for in the plan for Harlow Town. Such facilities and conveniences as schools, welfare, police, health care services, recreational facilities and parks were integral components. Virtually all of the developments in Harlow, including housing, were owned and managed by the Development Corporation until it and all related assets were transferred to the Harlow District Council in 1978 (Fisher et al., 1997).

The development of Harlow New Town was a success. It was a perfectly planned, well-designed town with all of the necessary commodities and services. Employment rates were high and the town thrived.

Harlow New Town - The Present

More than fifty years later with a population of approximately 80,000, the picture

of Harlow town is, unfortunately, not so positive.   High rates of unemployment,

underemployment, domestic violence and poverty paint a very different picture from that the

prospering Harlow New Town of the 1950's. According to the *Harlow 2000 Initiative: Trends &*

Issues document (1993/94) "poverty, unemployment and homelessness are key areas of concern

in Harlow" (p. 20). Statistics show Harlow has five of the ten most deprived electoral wards in

Essex (Marlow, Teemon & South, 1998). Almost a third of the population of Harlow are living

below or near the margins of poverty.

In 1995, unemployment of Harlow residents was significantly higher than the national

average with approximately 3,050 people either out of work or claiming unemployment benefit.

These numbers appear to have been significantly reduced with recent statistics reporting about

1,597 unemployed in 1997 (Marlow et al., 1998). Improved employment rates are likely the

direct result of the influx of a couple of new manufacturers to the area as well as an increase in

social programs assisting unemployed individuals with back to work or re-training programs.

Even with unemployment rates declining to the national average, there remains major concern of

prolonged unemployment (i.e., individuals who have been unemployed for more than six

months) and women's inability to enter the workforce. Statistics show that those individuals

who remain out of work for a period of six months often remain unemployed for a year or more

(Marlow et al., 1998). "Over half of the unemployed population have qualifications which would

achieve National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) equivalence and only 21% are qualified above

level 2" (Marlow, et al., 1998, p. 55). Chronic unemployment combined with low qualifications,

makes the transition back to work that much more difficult. Presently new government programs, such as the *Welfare to Work* project are being piloted in Harlow to assist the unemployed to make a successful transition back into the workforce.

It is interesting to note that there has been a significant increase in the number of full time jobs (915) compared to part time jobs (152). This suggests a move away from the temporary nature of employment. Of all the jobs in Harlow, 51% are held by men and 49% by women. A further breakdown reveals that 74% of these jobs are full time, leaving the remaining 26% in part time positions. Men hold 62% of the full time jobs, while 81% of the part time jobs are held by women. The lower numbers of women in full time employment suggest that gender bias in the different sectors continues largely to exist (Marlow et al., 1998). Manufacturing still employs twice as many men than women in Harlow. Conversely, Health and Social Work, Community Work, and Education employ proportionally far more women than men (Marlow, et al., 1998; Harlow 2000 Initiative: Trends & Issues document, 1993/94).

Even though there has been a significant increase in the number of jobs in Harlow, the employment rate of Harlow residents may remain relatively unaffected. There are presently a large number of people (close to 15, 000) who commute regularly into Harlow to work each day and statistics suggest this number is steadily increasing. Over the last two years the number has increased by 5.5%. Approximately 43.7% of all jobs in the area are held by non Harlow residents. Of the new jobs available it appears that 98.8% have been taken by non Harlow residents (Marlow et al., 1998).

Other areas of concern relevant to this paper, identified in the research on Harlow, include the identification of skill shortages by employers, a high degree of domestic violence,

and high unemployment rates of single mothers (Marlow et al., 1998; Harlow 2000 Initiative: Trends & Issues document, 1993/94). These issues are particularly relevant to women who may be attempting to return to training or work.

Employers surveyed indicated areas such as communication skills, customer care skills, computer literacy, management skills, practical skills, and technical skills which required improvement among employees. However, 35% of companies still do not provide any staff training to address needed skills. Generally, the companies not providing such training are smaller companies unable to afford the time, effort and expense involved in such an undertaking (Marlow et al., 1998).

Statistics from Council's Welfare Rights and Advice Service reports a high degree of domestic violence recorded by the police in Harlow in comparison to other English towns. Harlow Police recorded 1040 incidences of domestic violence in 1992-1993, an alarming statistic considering it is estimated only every 14th incident is reported (Marlow et al., 1998) . This suggests a serious problem in Harlow that has numerous implications for women attempting to return to education, training, or the labor force, as well as for counselling and personal support services for women.

Another disturbing statistic is that 62% of single mothers in Harlow are unemployed. Of those employed only a small number are working in full time jobs. It is expected that the high levels of unemployment and the fact that the majority of those employed are working only part time, is related to the high cost and lack of available child care facilities. Many women have little or no qualification or training and are only able to find employment in low level jobs (Marlow et al., 1998). Consequently, their salary is not enough to meet basic needs and cover the

cost of child care.

The town history and the current statistics help clarify the content of the Author's internship. While this information has little to do directly with the research question, it may provide insight into the issues faced by women returners in Harlow, Essex, England.

Harlow College

The new campus of Harlow College was officially opened in March of 1998. The campus is accommodated within 27 acres of open land adjacent to Harlow Town Centre; previously, facilities were in two separate locations in the town. The College has an extensive road and public transport network serving the local surrounding areas, London and the South East. Stanstead Airport is approximately 20 minutes away and gives easy access to many European destinations. The proximity to the town centre and the excellent road, rail, and airport links, makes Harlow College accessible locally, nationally and internationally.

In addition to the main Harlow Campus, a Learning Centre is located in the nearby town of Bishops Stortford, a small community approximately ten minutes away. The Learning Centre is a joint venture between Harlow College and Dow Stoker Limited, a private training provider. This partnership allows Harlow College to run a range of part-time programs in a friendly and informal atmosphere away from the main campus.

Many British students complete their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs) and continue their academic study at the same school. In Harlow, education beyond GCSEs is completed at Harlow College, making it a tertiary college. The majority of Harlow College's 2000 full time students are between the ages of 16 and 19, having recently graduated from local area schools. These students are residents in the European Community and entitled to

free tuition. Students over 19 who wish to study full time often pay for their position at the college. Occasionally, alternate funding sources are available to certain students meeting specific criteria (i.e. receiving social security or unemployment benefits). Some full time students work towards achieving the academic requirements to enter Higher or Further Education institutions (similar to North American High School), while others are working towards developing skills, knowledge, and the necessary qualification to enter a specific type of career or Trade (similar to North American Trade School or Vocational College).

Full time students living in the Harlow area receive an application for Harlow College in their final year of studies. During year ten, students are invited to visit the college and in year eleven students are exposed to college presentations to identify opportunities Harlow College has to offer. Students who apply are invited for an interview either at the college or in their local school. Parents are expected to accompany their child so they understand the commitment their child is making to continuing education. During the interview, the student's application choice is discussed as well as alternatives in case the student does not receive their expected GCSE results. Based on the interview results, students are conditionally offered a place at the college and provided with information about required auditions, skills exams or portfolios. Students may attend a number of additional interviews prior to beginning college to ensure commitment and suitability to their program choice. Before beginning class, students join the induction program which introduces them to the college facility, the college staff and their program.

Although the entry process for full time students appears to be lengthy and labourious, it is necessary to ensure the student's success at the College. This commitment to student success is not simply a reflection of the College's student centred approach, but determines the funding

process for full time students between the ages of 16 and 19. Even though tuition is free to the student, the training provider (in this case Harlow College) only receives a small fraction of the cost of educating or training the student up front. The remainder and bulk of government funding is released to the college once the student has successfully completed the majority of his or her program. Therefore, careful placement of students into programs is of utmost importance, ensuring not only the individual success of the student, but the financial success of the institution.

Even though Harlow College functions primarily as a tertiary college it also has elements of further and higher education institutions, accommodating nearly 8,000 part time students. These students, aged 16 and over, can apply for a college place, but may have to pay fees. Similar to mature full time students, funding is available to some students meeting certain criteria (i.e. receiving social security or unemployment benefits). Unlike full time students, part time students generally do not require an interview, but students can and often do meet with one of the many Learning Link Advisors employed at the College.

Learning Link Advisors. The Learning Link Advisors provide students with free and impartial advice on aspects of the College and student life. Their primary role is to provide information concerning programs, courses and financial assistance available to potential students. Further, they assist students in planning their learning to fit into family and/or work commitments. They guide students towards the level of program best suiting their individual needs, explain program content, discuss how much time is needed to prepare work outside of the program hours, and inform the students of any special equipment or material required. The Harlow College Prospectus also suggests the Learning Link Advisors are available to give advice

on personal issues affecting individual student's studies (i.e., problems with money or accommodation). Older potential students expressing uncertainty about their long term career goals or considering a career change may be referred by the Learning Link Advisor to the Adult Guidance Advisor for an in-depth interview.

Adult Guidance Advisor. The Adult Guidance Advisor is available to mature potential students to provide current information on possible careers, job programs, voluntary activities, and leisure activities of interest. The latest computer-aided guidance system (Kudos) may be used to help analyse the potential student's likes and dislikes and identify suitable jobs or careers. The Adult Guidance Advisor is available to individuals weekdays and one evening a week during the academic term. It is her aim to provide mature individuals with a confidential, warm, informal, relaxed and friendly atmosphere to explore their academic and career prospects.

Personal Development Tutors. All full time students are assigned Personal Development Tutors who support the students' learning and personal development during their period of study at College. These individuals are generally instructors in the students' program. Together with their Tutor, students are expected to prepare and develop an individual action plan and meet regularly to discuss and assess their progress and/or difficulties or concerns. For example, a student considering terminating from a program or transferring to a different program is expected to discuss choices with his/her Tutor, who may in turn refer the student to the Senior Tutor (similar to a department head or program coordinator). In many regards, the Personal Development Tutor is not only an academic advisor, but serves a role similar to a school or college guidance counsellor.

Learning Support Services. Learning Support Services contain a team of individuals (i.e.,

teaching assistants, scribes, disability specialists) who provide a wide range of services tailored to meet the individual learning needs of students. Some of the services they offer include in class support, additional tuition, arranging adapted materials, access to specialized equipment, making special arrangements for exams and tests, and talking to other agencies and services on behalf of a student. Specialized services for students with hearing-impairments include: providing teacher of the deaf assessment and support, ensuring qualified communicators and note takers, and providing a portable hearing loop to enable access to lectures for students. In addition to providing support to students with learning disabilities, a number of specially designed part-time programs are available for learners with more severe learning difficulties and developmental disabilities that focus on developing independent living, vocational and employment skills.

"Drop-In " Learning Centres . Located around the college are a number of drop-in centres to assist students academically. Students are encouraged to use these centres for research and study, as well as to receive additional academic assistance. These centres are available in the areas of information technology, mathematics, science, and English.

College Library. The Harlow College Library offers a wide range of books, CD Roms, newspapers, journals and magazines to assist students with research and study at the college. Additionally, there were a limited number of computers available for reviewing electronic resources (i.e., CD's).

Careers Centre. The Careers Centre is a drop-in resource room for students (comparable to Memorial University's Career Centre). It contains resource and contact information about various careers, calendars and prospectus from post secondary institutions across the British Isles and Western Europe. This Centre is staffed by members of the Career Team and the Adult

Guidance Advisor. The Careers Centre and an adjoining room are also used by the Career Team staff members to teach Careers Lessons to all full time students; a requirement for all individuals enrolled in full time programs. The Careers Lessons include formal sessions on topics such as: career exploration, resume writing, how to find information about Higher Education Institutions, how to complete applications for Institutions of Further and Higher Education, and funding sources such as student loans.

Additional Facilities. Other facilities available to students and the community include training areas for students in various related programs at the College. Students are provided with practical training and skills in their field of study. Facilities include:

- *Questors Restaurant*

    This formal campus restaurant with a licensed bar, is "run by students who have reached a level in their training where they are able to operate in a "real life" environment" (Harlow College, 1999, p.8).

- *Beauty Therapy Suite*

    This suite "offers a whole range of beauty and complementary therapies from facials, waxing and body massage to aromatherapy, indian head massage, reflexology and body contouring" (Harlow College, 1999, p. 9).

- *Hair Salon*

    The salon provides "a full range of treatments from a cut and blow dry to perms and color treatments" (Harlow College, 1999, p. 48).

- *Floristry Shop*

    Student florists work daily in the floristry shop to create fresh and dried

flower arrangements for any occasion. Floral arrangements can be ordered from the shop by staff, students and general public.

- *Cafeteria Services*

  A small cafeteria is available for students to eat, snack, or just hang out.

- *College Shop*

  This small venue sells a wide range of materials from school supplies to college paraphernalia.

Programs Offered. There are an enormous number and range of programs available both for full and part time students of all ages. These programs are designed for every type of learner, from adults returning to learning, to students with learning and developmental disabilities, to students preparing for careers or entry into Institutions of Higher Education.

The primary role of Harlow College, as previously stated, is to provide youth between 16 and 19 years of age with college skills training or academic preparation for entry into further or higher education. For these students as well as adult returners or international students there are a wide variety of programs and courses to choose from skills based trade type programs to higher education (university) transfer courses.

To accommodate mature students, there are many part-time, evening and weekend programs and courses offered. As previously mentioned, Harlow College also offers a wide range of services and facilities to support students in their studies as well as encourage participation in college life.

Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of the internship experience was to further personal and professional development in the area of Educational Psychology and to increase confidence in one's skills and abilities in counselling. Working as a college counsellor under the direct supervision of experienced professionals provided an opportunity to experience the full range of activities and responsibilities associated with the role of college counsellor within the post secondary setting. The overall goal was to be attained through the following objectives:

Objective 1:   Gain further knowledge and experience in the field of career development.

Objective 2:   Gain further knowledge and experience in the field of personal counselling.

Objective 3:   Gain further knowledge and experience in the area of group counselling.

Objective 4:   Gain further knowledge in post-secondary education policy and procedures.

Objective 5:   Further develop skills in consultation.

Objective 6:   Further develop skills in assessment.

Objective 7:   Further develop skills in report writing and documentation.

Objective 8:   Further develop skills in case conferencing.

Objective 9:   Complete a research component which would examine the varying perceptions of the counsellor's role in a Further Education setting.

Evaluation

Self-monitoring and self-evaluation are integral parts of any internship experience. This was achieved through the maintenance of a personal journal detailing experiences, events, activities, as well as thoughts and reflections. Journaling assisted the Intern in monitoring progress, determining levels of development and assessing areas of competence. Regular contact

with faculty and field supervisors provided opportunities to discuss progress, receive feedback and assess performance.

Faculty and Field Supervision

Supervision throughout the internship was provided by a faculty and field supervisor. The faculty supervisor, Dr. Mildred Cahill, is a professor in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Regular contact was maintained with the university supervisor primarily via electronic mail. In addition, the Intern was extremely fortunate to have had Dr. Cahill visit during the seventh week of the placement. In recent years, it has been the policy of the Faculty of Education not to provide faculty supervision in Harlow, England for any of their graduate or undergraduate interns. Although brief, having Dr. Cahill visit during a stopover on her return to Canada from a business trip, provided an opportunity for the faculty supervisor to meet the field supervisor, examine the facilities of the College and meet directly with the intern to discuss all aspects of the internship to date.

During the internship the Intern was affiliated with the Careers Team and Guidance personnel at Harlow College. Supervision was provided primarily by Ms. Sue Young, Director of Training Services, with whom the Intern met weekly to discuss progress and receive feedback. Additional supervision was provided by Ms. Marion Miller, Head of Careers and Guidance and Ms. Jackie Barker, Adult Advice and Guidance staff member.

The Internship Experience

Completing an internship in England provided unique challenges. During the preparation and planning phase in the months prior to departure, many difficulties were encountered most of which predominately stemmed from the overall lack of information

available for Counselling interns. Although there were many resources about teaching internships in Harlow, there was virtually nothing for counselling graduate students. Likewise, there were few administrators, professors or staff, who could provide useful information on counselling internships. Since there was limited information and no established protocol, the Associate Dean's office took responsibility for making contact with Harlow College administration and making the necessary arrangements. This, unfortunately resulted in further communication breakdown, as neither the Intern, Faculty Supervisor nor Internship Supervisor, were adequately advised of the internship details.

During the preparation stage some of the issues that caused significant frustration for the Intern included: blindly writing a proposal for research without knowledge of the internship setting, uncertainty of approval of the desired internship setting -- Harlow College, lacking information about the details of the internship placement, and not having direct contact with any personnel from Harlow College by the Intern or the Intern's faculty supervisor. Unfortunately, the challenges continued upon the arrival of the Intern in England.

Upon arriving in England and in Harlow, the contact person, Ms. Sue Young, the Director of Training Services, was phoned and a meeting was arranged. However, due to unforseen circumstances, illness of the internship supervisor, it was almost two weeks later before the initial meeting occurred. During the first session with Ms. Young, the various components of the internship were discussed including: the goals and objectives, the intern's expectations, the supervisor's expectations, and the research component. It became apparent, that many of the goals and objectives, as well as the subject of research would not be achievable at Harlow College as it had terminated its formal counselling services two years earlier, a very

relevant and important point unknown to the Intern. The remainder of the meeting was spent discussing what areas of the college the intern would be best placed for the purpose of an internship as well as what would be a viable focus of research at Harlow College. After reviewing programs and services at the College the Intern's initial research objective of examining the varying perceptions of the counsellor's role was changed and it was decided that the Intern would examine whether or not Harlow College was meeting the needs of women returners.

During the first week a significant portion of time was spent meeting the various staff members of the College in the different departments, learning about the British Educational System (which is vastly different from the North American system), and assisting faculty in their roles with students. The evenings and weekends were engrossed with researching and writing a second, totally new proposal to submit, first, to the Ethics Review Committee, and then to Mr. David Ellerby, Principal, for permission and approval to complete such research.

After becoming familiar with various departments within the college and assessing services provided by each, it was decided the Intern would spend some time in a few different departments to gain related experience. In the first weeks at Harlow College the intern worked in the following areas:

<u>Training Services</u>

The training services department headed by Ms. Sue Young, Assistant Principal, was responsible for all internal and external training and development programs for both youth (16-25) and adults (over 25). The Intern visited and spoke with the team leaders of many of the projects and programs available at Harlow College.

Generally, the Intern assisted the staff with their duties with students which included a new role for training services at Harlow College, with the ongoing restructuring and reorganizing of numerous departments, was the responsibility of new initiatives for student development. To assist with this, the Intern was involved in the planning and implementation process of contracting a student counselling service to a local youth counselling organization -- Young Concern. Since the removal of counselling services two years prior, Harlow College had been without a counselling service for students. The Intern's role in the process was generally consultative as those involved, primarily Ms. Sue Young, Assistant Principal -- Training Services and Mr. Simon Claridege, Manager -- Young Concern, did not have a counselling, student services or psychology background. Information was provided on such issues as: the importance of confidentiality in the client - counsellor relationship, potential problems with the referral process, and the limitations of having a prescribed number of hours contracted if a student requires ongoing counselling and support. The Intern also expressed concern that the service was only provided to the youth (16-25) at Harlow College. This decision was based on the fact that the contract was negotiated and funding available was for a specified number of hours to students aged 16 to 25 at the Harlow College. It was decided that students using this service would have to be referred by Senior Tutors so as not to 'have students unnecessarily using the service'. This provided some difficulty as it did not allow for students to self-refer if they were uncomfortable disclosing with their tutor and senior tutor the problems and difficulties they were experiencing. Another difficulty noted, was the reporting procedure of Young Concern to Harlow College regarding the students using the service. As a part of this process, the Intern visited Young Concern Counselling Center, located in Town Centre, on a number of occasions to observe and

converse with counsellors and staff employed there.

Learning Support

The Intern spent a portion of time working with the Learning Support Team. She assisted with the assessment and planning of support requirements for students with special needs. Although there were no formal assessments required (they were already completed prior to the students' entry into the college), it was necessary to examine the types of learning supports needed by the individual student and develop a comprehensive plan to assist the student in his/her learning. Regular evaluation and modification of the support plans was required to meet the students ongoing progress needs. In addition to working with the Learning Support Staff and students in regular programming, some time was also spent supporting students with developmental disabilities enrolled in employability or life skills programs. Despite the prescribed curriculum for these courses, each student's program required evaluation and modification to reflect the individual strengths and needs. Evaluation and programming for students with special needs proved to be interesting and challenging.

The Careers Team

After becoming familiar and working with various areas of the College, the Intern began assisting the Careers Team. This team of individuals included four staff members who helped students with educational and academic issues, as well as an Adult Guidance person who provided career guidance (counselling) to adult members of the community. The majority of time was spent by the Intern in the Careers Centre informally counselling students with career and academic concerns. The counselling ranged from talking to students about future academic and career goals, helping locate information on careers and post secondary schools, to assisting

students with the use of a computer-assisted interest inventory (KUDOS) available in the Centre. The individuals who visited the Careers Centre consisted primarily of full time students in courses at the college. Occasionally, a non student or part-time student would phone or drop in looking for information about careers or other post secondary institutions.

The career centre was also used by members of the Careers Team to teach career lessons to classes of students. The career lessons were a required component of all full time programs at Harlow College. They consisted primarily of formal lessons on career exploration, how to use the careers centre and post secondary career calenders and skills regarding completing post secondary and financial assistance applications. After teaching of the formal lesson, the Intern assisted individual students in completing forms, locating specific information in post secondary calenders, contacting institutions to request information, or helping narrow their academic or career focus via informal career counselling.

Adult Guidance

In addition to working in the careers center, a great deal of time was spent working alongside Mrs. Jackie Barker, the Adult Guidance staff person. Her primary role was to provide non students with careers guidance through personal interviews and a computer assisted career interest inventory (KUDOS). In addition to these primary duties she spent a significant portion of time doing outreach work at various locations in the surrounding counties.

While working with Mrs. Barker, the Intern participated in a variety of activities that enhanced her knowledge and skill in a number of areas. Aside from assisting with the careers interviews conducted with mature potential students, the Intern had the opportunity to assist with delivery of presentations, college information sessions and progression and intake interviews.

Early in the internship experience, the Intern helped deliver a half day professional development workshop to the staff at Brentwood Library on the topic of interview and informal counselling skills. Additionally, time was spent visiting other centers to provide career guidance and college information to mature students involved in various community programs in the area. For example, the Kick Start program was designed to assist undereducated or underemployed adults develop the necessary skills to either enter a college program or find employment. During visits to such programs, information was provided about Harlow College's programs and entrance requirements, as well as job outlooks in fields of interest. Individual career counselling was also offered to those interested.

Discussion

Despite initial challenges, the internship experience at Harlow College was rewarding, informative and educational. Working at a college in England was vastly different from the Intern's previous experience at the counselling center at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). While the MUN Counselling Center offered the experience of clinical, medical model of formal counselling, the experience at Harlow college provided the Intern with diverse opportunities to experience varied facets of student services within a college setting.

It is the opinion of the Author that the Harlow internship experience for graduate students is a worthwhile and rewarding opportunity that should be encouraged and promoted by the staff and administration in the Department of Education. More information may have avoided many of the difficulties encountered early in the internship. To alleviate the stress of having to rewrite proposals and change internship goals with only electronic and phone support from the faculty supervisor thousands of miles away, the following are recommended:

1. Internship placement sites need to be researched and identified by a team of university personnel, including those who have a counselling background. This should be completed periodically in order to maintain current information. A short description of each site, including the opportunities available for an internship, website addresses and contact information should be provided to interested graduate students. The initial contact should be made by the Intern's supervisor to the appropriate administrator at the site.

2. A contact person should be identified within each site who would discuss the possibility of accepting interns on a regular basis; this may be someone previously identified and not necessarily the head of administration.

3. After these initial steps are in place, the faculty supervisor should make contact with the potential internship site to determine if a placement is possible at a given time. If this is a possibility, the graduate student with the assistance of the faculty supervisor should submit a request to complete an internship at a given location.

4. After preliminary approval has been granted, the graduate student, the faculty supervisor and the internship field supervisor should work together (via email, video conference, phone, etc.) to develop a practical, viable, suitable internship proposal and research component which satisfies the degree requirements and is acceptable to the internship supervisor.

5. The internship proposal should be completed, submitted and approved by the Dean and Ethics Committee at least one month prior to departure.

Although nothing is fool proof and there will most certainly be challenges and surprises

during the initial phase of any internship in another country, this team approach would significantly improve communication between the parties involved. It would further allow some connection with the field supervisor prior to arrival and alleviate many difficulties encountered during this particular internship experience.

Much was learned during the internship experience at Harlow College. Reflection of the experience during and immediately following the internship seemed somewhat disappointing. Due to lack of formal counselling services or counsellors at the College, the Intern's initial perception was that little counselling experience was gained. However, side tracked due to a serious illness, and having gained additional experience as a counsellor in a college setting, the Intern has come to realize there were significantly more benefits gained from the entire experience than initially thought.

The experiences of working with the Learning Link Advisors, Special Needs Teachers, Careers Team and Adult Guidance Advisor in Harlow has prepared the Intern to work as a counsellor in a post secondary setting. Formal in-depth personal, career and group counselling is only part of the role of a counsellor in a small post secondary institution. A great deal of time is spent working with various teams and departments to assist students in varied ways, some of which do not involve formal counselling. Although the objectives of gaining further knowledge and experience of personal and group counsellling were not obtained, the remaining objectives were met. Working with the various departments provided an opportunity to gain knowledge and experience in career development, post-secondary educaiton policy and procedures as well as develop skills in consultation, assessment, report writing, and case conferencing. This knowledge and experience has proven to be very useful. As much was gained from the internship experience at Harlow College as was gained from the MUN Counselling Center -- it

was just very different.

Every challenge is an opportunity. Interestingly, it sometimes takes both time and experience to realize and appreciate these opportunities.

CHAPTER II

Research Component

Summary of Relevant Literature

Introduction

At no other time in history has there been more widespread concern over employment and education. Changes are occurring in the workforce comparable to those experienced during the Industrial Revolution. Farm foreclosures, factory shutdowns, and large-scale corporate takeovers of the past two decades have resulted in the elimination of millions of jobs as well as the creation of jobs in other areas (Matthay, 1995). Labour market developments and technological advances have led to large and increasing demands for opportunities and advances in adult education and vocational training. Occupations of today and the future require a better educated population with a diverse set of skills to draw from. The days of a single lifelong career into retirement are virtually non existent. Adults are moving between work and education and having multiple careers in a lifetime.

In addition to the changing labour market, social changes have made it necessary to develop marketable skills through education and training. The traditional *Leave it to Beaver* family with a mother, father, children and one wage earner is being replaced by the non-traditional family ranging from single-parent families to blended or same sex parent families. Most families with two parents are not afforded the luxury of having one parent at home to raise the children as two incomes are often a necessity to meet the cost of living demands (Matthay, 1995; Brubaker, 1993). Such social changes have led many adults, particularly women, in search of new or improved skills to either enter or remain in the workforce (Matthay, 1995; Tomlinson,

2005).

Lifelong development and lifelong learning are a growing social phenomenon (Belanger & Tuijnman, 1997). Dramatic family and labour market changes have created a society of lifelong learners. This new society sees the value in education not only for career development and financial necessity, but also for personal growth and productivity. It views learning as a continuous process that begins with life and ends with death.

Adults are returning to post-secondary education and training in record numbers. Close to 45% of all college students are at least twenty-five years old and the majority of these are women between 25-34 who are married and working full time (Matthay, 1995). Studies suggest that most of these adult returners are usually in some sort of family or career transition. For women, the foremost trigger for returning to school is family transitions, with career transitions coming in second. The reverse is true for men (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980 cited in Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering, 1989).

"Women have been entering further and higher education in increasing numbers for over a decade, and their take up of general adult education opportunities invariably exceeds that of men" (McGivney, 1993, pp. 2). During the eighties and early nineties there was a push toward education and training for woman who had been out of the labour market for some time due to child care responsibilities. Courses were designed specifically for women and focused on issues such as confidence and self-esteem building, as well as refreshing or developing skills to assist these women in returning to the work force. Initially, these programs were poorly received by the male dominated administrations of Further Education institutions. Feminist educators stressing the need for women's education were blocked by lack of interest and funding (McGivney, 1993). However, as unemployment rates fell and the number of school leavers declined in Further

Education, a new market for women's education was opened. This, combined with the availability of funding from providers such as the Manpower Services Commission and the European Social Fund were a driving force in the establishment and development of courses for adult women returning to education. "The changing demographic circumstances then, have looked very promising for an expansion of women's training, though it remains to be seen if this will be the case now that unemployment is rising again" (Sheridan, 1992, p. 214).

Unfortunately, the abundance of innovative advancements for women in education and training does not seem to be reflected in the British labour market. Despite the continual rise of women in the work force since the Second World War and the Sex Discrimination legislation of the 1970's, women are nowhere near achieving equality in the labour market (Sheridan, 1992; McGivney, 1994). Even with the Equal Pay Act of 1974, women still earn less than men and tend to work in a narrower range of jobs. According to McGivney (1993), 52% of British woman are in or seeking paid employment, five million of whom are in part-time employment, associated with low paid, less skilled, gender segregated jobs. Thirty-seven percent of women in full time work are in clerical or secretarial jobs and over 60% of women are in traditional female jobs. This does not mean that women in such jobs do not have skills. A Labour Force Survey in 1981 reported that amongst women in part time low skill 'personal service' jobs, 5.9% had teaching, and 7.9% nursing certification.

Compared with me, women have less accessibility to training schemes in the workplace. Payne (1991) argues as discrimination continues and the responsibility for training costs shifts to employers women will be even far less likely to receive training. Furthermore, since women are concentrated in occupations of lower pay, they will be unable to invest financially in their own training. In recent years opportunities for women in education appear to be dwindling. In adult

and community education, a sector in which women traditionally comprise the majority of learners, public expenditure cuts, and structural changes are taking their toll. According to the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, some Local Education Authorities have been forced to reduce, cut, or operate their adult provision on a full cost recovery basis in order to change the balance of courses offered, increase fees and reduce fee concessions (Powell and Winkless, 1992). As previously discussed, these changes will affect mostly women. "Just when the needs of women seemed to be recognized; when many of the arguments seem to have been won, we are faced with the need not just to build for the future but to battle for our own survival" (Coats, 1992, p. 258).

Definition

Adult women returning to education after an interval since completion of compulsory education are broadly referred to as adult learners; more specifically, as women returners or re-entry women. A concise definition of 'women returners', or 're-entry women' is difficult to formulate. Research (Clayton, 1996; Lewis, 1988) has revealed a wide variety of definitions. These vary from narrowly-based definitions of women who have been totally absent from education for a minimum period of at least two years due to family commitments, to broader and more widely encompassing use of the term, including any women entering or re-entering education after a period of absence for a variety of reasons. Additionally, these terms may also refer to women returning to the labour market as well. Generally, definitions include women over 21, the majority between 25 and 50, who represent diverse groups of people including: employed women seeking new skills or updated skills, women seeking employment or career change, women preparing to return to the labour market, women preparing for entry into higher education, and women preparing for retirement (McGivney, 1991).

Characteristics of Women Returners

The main characteristic of women returners is their diversity. Variables such as age, social class, race, educational background and attainment, economic circumstances, health, disability, marital status and sexuality create huge differences between women. Different groups -- women with disabilities, black women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, single parents, rural and isolated women--inevitably experience problems and constraints in relation to education or training that are specific to their respective situations. There may also be significant differences in terms of attitudes, concerns, aspirations, and needs among women with pre-school or school-aged children and women whose children no longer dependent on them (Coare & Thompson, 1996; Lewis, 1988). These women carry a vast range of personal circumstances and a wealth of life experiences. Each individual participates in education with a wide variety of motives, purposes, aspirations and expectations, often with multiple roles and commitments.

To acknowledge a difference, however, is not to deny the commonalties based on gender. Adult women usually come to college after having had experiences that involve responsibility (Committee on the College Student, 1990). They have multiple demands in terms of time, energy, emotions and roles (Matthay, 1995). They may be juggling full or part-time work, as well as family and domestic commitments. These added responsibilities often cause significant conflicts and interfere with studying and may limit their opportunity to participate in extracurricular college activities.

The multiplicity of roles and responsibilities of the women returners makes it difficult for them to attend college full-time. Therefore, the majority of these women often choose part-time enrollment and programs allowing schedule flexibility (McGiviney, 1991, 1993 & 1994;

Tomlinson, 2005). For some, it may be choosing evening or weekend courses, while others prefer daytime classes coinciding with their children's school day.

In addition to the demands of school and family, research suggests the majority of women returners are often working part or full-time while attending school (McGivney, 1990, 1993; Lewis, 1988). Even when these women receive some financial support to supplement their educational costs, it often falls below the actual costs of attending school and supporting a family. Single parents who return to college are especially likely to be working.

Often women returners experience a lack of confidence in their ability to learn. This may also be associated with lower self-esteem. Various reasons for this insecurity about learning have been proposed. Commonly, it is associated with past, often negative, experiences of school as well as the length of time the person has been away from formal learning experiences. Returning to an academic life of reading and studying can be quite challenging; these students often need extra assistance with reading and study skills to boost their confidence to enable them to succeed (McGivney, 1990, 1993; Lewis, 1988).

Mature women students are looking to gain knowledge and skills that will assist them in gaining higher academic qualification, propel them into the work force, or advance personally. They want a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. With them, they bring an array of life experiences and knowledge of the world in which they live. Even though self esteem and confidence issues are present, they are generally highly determined individuals with a vast repertoire of skills and information to draw on. They have often overcome many hurdles in their lifetime and view the return to school as one more in the race of life (Clayton, 1996; McGivney, 1993).

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Motivations for Returning to Education/Training

Individual motivations for returning to education or training are diverse. Often, there is not just one factor but several overlapping factors that contribute to a person's decision to return to school. Many times, the motivations are not completely clear until a person becomes involved in learning. According to research (McGivney, 1993, 1994; Coare &Thompson, 1996; Lewis, 1988) in this area, the most commonly cited motivations of returning women in education include: a need or desire to return to work after a period of absence, obtaining or upgrading skills for present occupation, contemplation of a career change, an awakened pleasure of learning, or the need to get out of the house and meet new people. Very commonly, a renewed interest in education is related to the growth of one's children; women want a new identity, a sense of purpose and wish to become a different sort of person. The one motivation all individuals who choose a return to education appear to share, although not always articulated, is the desire to change oneself in some way (Coare & Thompson, 1996).

Unfortunately, even though large numbers of women are returning to education, research suggests their employment aspirations are still low and that their chief objective is to obtain work allowing them to prioritize domestic and family responsibilities. These aspirations are generally incompatible with higher level jobs, where men predominate. Higher level employment with higher-level entry requirements usually requires lengthy, often full-time training which is incompatible with the needs and requirements of many women returners. "There is at the outset then, incompatibility between intentions of educators and funders, the requirements of the students and the demands of the industry" (Sheridan, 1992, p.215).

Barriers Woman Face in Returning to Education/Training

Literature and research identifying the barriers affecting women's educational and career

development is extensive (McGivney, 1993 & 1994; Saunders, 1996; Sheridan, 1992).

Regardless of race or class many women wishing to return to education or training are often

faced with a number of obstacles. For the purpose of this paper the most commonly cited

barriers have been organized into three themes: physical barriers, psychological barriers and

institutional barriers.

Physical Barriers. Practical and material barriers face women attempting to return to

education and weigh heavily on their decision to return. Some of these barriers include:

Financial constraints. Often the most common obstacle returning women face is the

availability of funds to support their educational pursuit (McGivney, 1993,1994; Lewis, 1988;

Watkins, 1988). Regardless of personal circumstances, most returning women do not have a

large disposable income to use for education. In fact, most re-entry women are at the lower end

of the socioeconomic scale and are looking toward education as a means to improve their

financial situation and quality of life. The availability of funding for mature students,

particularly women, appears to be improving. Yet, there is still a great need for funding

opportunities for this student population. Even if a mature woman receives financial support for

her education which covers the cost of tuition and books, support for living expenses is generally

limited. Financial constraints are especially significant for single parents or low income families.

Single parent issues. Single mothers are faced with significant additional responsibilities

and burdens. Before entering school, many of these women are working full or part-time and

struggling to make ends meet. In choosing to return to school, these women are faced with many

practical barriers including financial difficulties and lack of flexible, affordable, quality child

care. "Although many of the resulting difficulties are practical ones, the mixture of

responsibilities can have an emotional impact as well" (Committee on the College Student, 1990,

p. 116). Even with the progressive attitudes of most academic institutions, single parents may still experience difficulties on the basis of their marital status. Additionally, these women are often unable to participate fully in the experiences of college life that occur after class hours.

Lack of suitable creche facilities. One of the most prominent concerns of returning women is the availability of affordable, accessible, good quality creche facilities, or child caretakers (Tomlinson, 2005). One study reported that "one third of the women students who were dissatisfied with their childcare arrangements said they would increase their course loads an average of 3.6 credits per term if they could resolve childcare problems"(Creange, 1981, cited in Lewis, 1988, p. 9). The fact that women with child care issues are taking fewer courses means they will have to take more time to complete their program, therefore, incurring additional costs and prolonging their entry into the work force. Furthermore, this group appears to have a higher attrition rate in programs than their full time, childless counterparts.

Lack of eldercare facilities. An aging population of baby boomers has brought with it the need for caretakers and care facilities for the elderly. Increasingly, more and more women are spending a significant amount of time looking after elderly, sick and disabled family members. Recent studies (Collins, 1986; McGivney, 1993; Watkins, 1988; Tomlinson, 2005) suggest women will spend more time looking after their elderly parents than they spent raising their own children. "Britain's poor record on public provision for pre-school children is well known and there is even less support for women who care for dependent adults" (McGivney, 1993, p. 12). Similar to single parent and childcare issues, eldercare can also have a negative emotional impact.

Transportation. Although transportation issues do not seem to be as significant as the

aforementioned constraints, it is often cited as a significant barrier to returning women. Many re-entry women do not own or have access to a personal vehicle during the normal work day. Even when public transportation is available, it is time-consuming and does not fit well the women's families and class schedules. The rigid schedule of public transportation makes getting children to school and getting oneself to school very difficult. Additionally, choosing evening classes are often not preferred because of personal safety concerns (McGivney, 1991 & 1993)

Psychological Barriers. The physical barriers existing for women returners are often deepened by the many psychological hurdles they must overcome in order to succeed in a post-secondary setting.

Lack of confidence. In recalling their experiences of returning to education, women talk about their fears of going back to school (McGivney, 1993; Maccoby & Jacklin, cited in Lewis, 1988). Many women are returning to school after an extended absence from an academic environment. Having married right out of high school , some of these women have never experienced further education, while others have not even completed high school due to pregnancy or negative past school experiences. Interestingly, even those women who were successful in high school or post-secondary still express concerns about rusty skills, or the ability to keep up with the curriculum (Maccoby & Jacklin, cited in Lewis, 1988). Women disclose a great deal of uncertainty and self-doubt about whether they will be able to handle the workload and write and pass tests; they are concerned about not knowing how to study and having to speak in front of people. Ultimately, they fear that they will fail. Unfortunately, their intense fear of failure provides a reason not to return.

Some returning women also express concern about their physical appearance. Perceptions of educational institutions for out of high school aged youth creates apprehension of

not fitting in and relating to the younger population (Lewis, 1988; McGivney, 1993; Edwards, 1993; Hull, 1998).

Lack of support from male partners and families. Lack of support could also be characterized as a physical barrier as it could determine whether financial support is available. In many cases, the woman of the house is responsible for the majority of childcare and household tasks. If a woman's partner refuses certain support (i.e., attending to children, picking children up from school, helping with cleaning or grocery chores) to assist in the woman's transition to school, it becomes very difficult for the woman to maintain a balance between school and home. The resentment some women experience from their partner and family may cause a great deal of emotional stress as well as stress on the couple's relationship. Feelings of guilt experienced when women have to put a child in a creche facility or the reduced amount of time available to spend with the family because of study and school work, may cause family tension and emotional stress (Lewis, 1988; McGivney, 1993).

The common fears and emotional stress experienced by most women returners are a reality which academic institutions need to consider. The availability of educational supports is essential for helping women succeed in further and higher learning institutions.

Institutional barriers. There are many obstacles imposed either knowingly, or unknowingly, by the academic institutions and/or programs themselves. These can be as powerful a deterrent as the physical and psychological barriers many women encounter.

Scheduling and timing. Although the availability and diversity of part-time and evening programs appear to be increasing, academic institutions still tend to encourage full-time enrollment. Most full-time programs operate during a regular work day, and do not accommodate women with children. Unfortunately, post-secondary institution's work hours do

not coincide with children's school hours, making it impossible to get children ready for school and be home when they return. Women accepting this schedule are burdened with the financial responsibility of after school childcare (Watkins, 1988; McGivney 1993,1994; Edwards, 1993)

School policies. Rigid attendance and lateness policies often add to the difficulties of juggling school and family responsibilities. Parents, particularly single mothers, may have to miss school to attend children's medical appointments, school meetings or look after an ill child. To accommodate family responsibilities, women may choose to attend part-time. Part-time students and students who are regularly absent are often perceived by faculty and staff as less committed and less serious than their full time counterparts (McGivney, 1993 & 1994).

Admissions policies may also be a perceived or real barrier to re-entry women. Since many women returners are entering without the prescribed academic qualification necessary for their program choice, they are required to write a mature student admission test. This is usually a lengthy achievement test assessing the individuals reading, writing and math skills. Such examinations can be very intimidating for a person who has been out of school for a long time. Additionally, these assessment tools may not be a valid indicator of the mature student's learning potential. For example, a person who has been out of school for some time may not have had the need to multiply or divide fractions, decimals or percent and may not remember specific rules to apply these operations. However, a review of these math concepts may yield a different result on an entrance exam. Interestingly, despite initial trepidation, women returners often earn higher grades when they go back to school.

Some schools may require references for admission. For many women returners this may be equally frustrating and limiting since they feel they do not have anyone to write such a letter. Because women may have been out of school and the workforce to attend to family

responsibilities for such a lengthy period they feel appropriate referees may not remember them.

Lack of counselling or support services. Research comparing returning women with other non traditional students, suggest these women are less likely to use support services (Bell, 1996; Matthay, 1995; Safman, 1988; Bandenhoop & Johanser, 1980 cited in Lewis 1988). Women returners tend to shy away from the services provided because they feel the services are for the traditional student, or that they should be able to handle problems themselves. They may feel their problems and issues are unique to their situation of returning to school after an extended absence. Many institutions do not have specific information, support groups or programs targeted toward re entry or part time students. "Lack of funds, the absence of a dedicated position to assist reentry students, and the absence of literature on returning can contribute to a lack of awareness about and under use of support services" (Lewis, 1988, p. 13).

Physical, psychological and institutional barriers are interrelated and often arise from societal and cultural attitudes, assumptions and expectations. According to the literature (Lewis, 1988, McGivney 1993, 1994; Cassell & Walsh, 1993), women most restricted are mothers and homemakers. It is further evident that women's freedoms and choices are severely constrained by cultural processes that do not apply to men, including sex role socialization, sex discrimination, identification by marital/family status, role conflict between home and career, and occupational stereotyping (McGivney, 1994).

Conclusion

This literature review has focused on women returners and the need to attend to the special needs of this population as a whole in our academic institutions. Characteristics of women returners and challenges have been examined. The review is not meant to deny or denounce the needs of their male counterparts as returners to education. However, it is intended

to acknowledge and accept that differences do exist between the genders. Differences need to be celebrated and explored in order to promote, enhance, encourage and facilitate the success of mature women students in learning environments.

Rationale for Present Study

During the past two decades institutions of further and higher education have seen an increase in the number of adult students returning for education and training. More than half of these returning mature students have been women (McGivney 1993,1994; Lewis 1988; Saunders, 1996; Tait, 1993). To facilitate this changing student demographic, many courses were developed specifically for 'women returners', while government and other agencies provided financial support for students and program development. Paralleling this drive for 'women's education' was an abundance of research concerning women's education and training needs. Research included: motivations for returning to education, the difficulties and barriers women returners face, factors that impede access, participation and progression, and the inequalities of women in the labour force.

Even though over a decade of research concluded that women returning to education do in fact have unique needs, different from their male counterparts, there has been no comprehensive attempt to adapt further and higher education and training to women's requirements. There has been little attempt to understand and analyze women's position and experience in relation to the field of education and training where women students predominate (McGivney, 1994).

Many institutions claim and may even genuinely believe they are doing everything in their power to meet the needs of returning women. Yet, the research and personal accounts of women in education suggest otherwise (see Coare & Thomson, 1996). Hester and Florence

(1992) noted that within general adult education research, there is very little in depth gender awareness. An analysis of both British and American journals by McGivney (1993) revealed that gender is rarely considered significant, although up to two thirds or more of the subjects of the studies and articles are women.

Even though many of the findings of adult education research are based on studies of women, researchers fail to acknowledge or consider this fact and its impact on the research results (Hayes, 1992). It is suggested that the reason for such an omission may stem from a "deep seated resistance to opening up the issue of gender and education because of the striking social and economic inequalities and the process it would inevitably reveal" (McGivney, 1993, p. 6). Alternatively, Hester and Florence (1992) suggest it could:

> reflect an outmoded universalizing approach in which human subjectivity is unified and unproblematic, with social groups commonsensically supposed to have broadly compatible aims and aspirations. This fits with the long established tendency to explain educational underprivileged mainly in social class terms. (p. 19)

Preliminary review of Harlow College's 1998-1999 student statistics revealed that 40% of the total number of withdrawals from all of the college programs (part-time and full-time) have been women over 25 years of age. Key staff at Harlow College agreed that this appeared to be quite a substantive number of withdrawals and questioned whether or not the needs of this student population were being met.

The goal of this research was to gain insight and further understanding of women's experiences and satisfaction with Harlow College in an effort to determine how the institution could better meet the needs of this student group. To achieve this goal, 15 randomly selected

women from Harlow College were interviewed. Seven of these women had withdrawn from programs at the college throughout the 1998-1999 year and eight had remained in their program of study. Since student experiences and satisfaction with their program and provider have been shown to be related to retention and perceived academic performance (Knox, Lidsay & Kolb, 1992; Pike, 1990; Bean & Bradley, 1986; Pike, 1993) at least some of the interview questions focused on student satisfaction with various aspects of the college.

Research Question

How can Harlow College better meet the needs of women returners?

Operational Definitions

Women Returners . For the purpose of this study women returners will refer to any female twenty-five years of age or over who has returned to Harlow College for education or training. The 25-year-old age starting point was chosen for a number of reasons. With the exception of students in the postgraduate Journalism Program, one of the main reasons was that women in this age group are returning to education after some period of absence. The other reason is to reflect funding schemes available in Britain which are often divided into the 25 and under and the 25 and over categories.

Sample Population

For the purpose of this study 20 female students, aged 25 and over, were randomly selected. Of the 20 women contacted, 15 were available and/or willing to participate. Seven of these students were selected from a list of students who had withdrawn from programs at the college in the last 12 months (1998-1999 academic year). The remaining eight students were selected from students who remained in their respective programs.

Instrumentation

Internship Research Interview Questionnaire:

I am interested in finding out about your experiences at Harlow College in an effort to determine how the College may better meet the needs of returning women.

A.   Why did you decide to return to College?

B.   How did you find out about Harlow College?

C.   Who suggested that you return to College?

D.   What made you decide on Harlow College?

E.   What was your first contact with Harlow college? Was this a positive experience for you? Elaborate.

F.   In what ways did Harlow College assist you in making the transition back to school?

G.   Women often talk about a number of difficulties that they had to face or overcome in returning to education. Can you tell me of some of the difficulties you have had to face?

H.   What program are (were) you enrolled in at Harlow College?

I.   Why did you decide on (name of program)? Were there any other reasons?

J.   What were some of the best aspects of your program?

K.   What were some of the worst aspects of your program?

L.   Based on your experiences at Harlow College, how do you think the training could be improved to accommodate women like yourself?

M.   Is there anything else about your program that you would like to comment on?

N.   What were some of the services that you utilized while attending Harlow College? How satisfied were you with these services?

O.   How do you think the services available at the College could be improved to help

students like yourself?

P.   Did you seek any advice or guidance from anyone at Harlow College?

Q.   What type of advice or guidance did you seek? From whom? How satisfied were you

with the advice and guidance you sought?

R.   What do you think are the three most important issues facing women that return to

education or training?

PART II

Now I would like to ask you a few questions for statistical purposes.

S.   Are you presently working? What is your job title? What are some of the duties you

perform? How many hours a week do you work?

T.   Prior to returning to college, were you employed? What was your job title? What were

some of the duties you performed. How many hours a week did you work?

U.   Prior to returning to college, what was the highest qualification you had achieved?

V.   What do you plan to do after completing your program?

W.   What is your present marital status?

X.   Do you have any children? What are their ages?

Y.   How was your education/training financially supported?

Z.   Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences at Harlow College?

Procedure

After receiving the approval of the Ethics Review Committee, a letter of request was sent

to Mr. David Ellerby, Principal of Harlow College seeking permission to conduct research at

College. Practice interviews were conducted with three colleagues to assess and improve the Interviewer's technique and ensure continuity between interviews. Colleagues were asked to provide feedback on the interview style, pace, and general flow of the interview questions. After receiving the permission of the principal of Harlow College to conduct the study, the Researcher identified through student files potential interview participants and randomly selected 20 for possible participation (half of the sample consisted of students who had withdrawn in the past year). Twenty participants were chosen in an attempt to ensure that at least half (10) would agree to participate. Letters requesting participation in the study were mailed to the 20 candidates. Each potential participant was contacted by telephone to discuss her interest in participation. Arrangements for the time and place of the interview were made with those interested in participating. Fifteen respondents expressed interest in participating in the study and were interviewed.

Prior to beginning each interview, participants were provided with a letter of consent; the components of the letter were discussed with the researcher and each participant was asked to date and sign a copy of the duplicate form. One copy remained with the researcher and the other with the participant. Interviews took approximately 30-40 minutes to complete and were conducted both in a closed room at Harlow College, and in three cases at the interviewees' homes. This option was given to provide flexibility to women with transportation, or child-care issues. Following completion of all the interviews, a thank-you letter was mailed to each participant.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was qualitative in nature. Transcripts were made of each interview. The

participants' opinions and impressions of Harlow College were categorized into common themes and compiled into descriptive summaries and response frequencies for use in this report.

Limitations

This study was conducted as part of the requirement for Master's Degree completion and was conducted concurrently with an internship placement. Since the participants for the study were chosen from a mutually exclusive group - women aged twenty-five and over in programs at Harlow College, Essex - the external validity is compromised. The results of this study will not be generalized outside of the Harlow College context. It may, however, provide valuable information to the staff of Harlow College, assist them in understanding and meeting the needs of women returners as well as increase retention rates of this group.

Results

Martial and Family Status

All but two of the fifteen women interviewed were married. Of the remaining two women one was recently separated and the other was single. Additionally, all participants, but one, had children. Two of the women had grown children living away from home, while the others had pre-school to school aged children (4 – 17 years). The single participant was six months pregnant.

Present Employment Status

Seven of the participants were currently employed in part-time work between 10 and 25 hours per week. Six of these women were working in either retail, clerical or child-care positions in the local community. The other woman worked as a health care support worker at the local hospital. Two women were employed full time -- one woman worked at home maintaining the

paperwork and books for her husband's sales business. While the expectant single participant was employed on a temporary contract as a Statistics Administrative Assistant in London, and expressed significant concern about the uncertainty of her working status after her baby was born. The remaining six participants were not employed outside the home.

Past Employment Status

Prior to commencing school at Harlow College, eleven of the participants were employed in either part or full-time employment. One woman changed from full-time to part-time hours in order to return to school while two others were displaced from the workforce contributing to their decision to return. The four women who had not worked prior to returning to Harlow College had never been in the workforce, having started families while in or just after completing tertiary college.

Future Plans

The future plans of all the women interviewed, except two, included finding part or full-time employment. Three of the women planned to set up their own business in the field of beauty services. Two of the women intended to continue on to higher education institutions to complete four or five year professional degree programs (one in Social Services and the other was uncertain). Three of the women planned to look for full time employment and the remaining five intended to find or remain in part time employment until their children were older.

Funding for Education

The majority of women who had returned to school indicated either they or their husbands were paying for their courses. Five of the women were funded through the European Social Fund or some other social organization.

Decision to Return

As the literature suggests (McGivney, 1991, 1993, 1994; Lewis, 1988), the reasons for

each woman returning to education were varied. Three of the women interviewed had enrolled at

Harlow College to train in a new career. One had felt it necessary to retrain as her position was

deemed redundant, while the others were tired or bored with their jobs and decided a career

change was necessary. Other reasons indicated for returning to education included being

unemployed for a period of time (1-2 years), needing something to focus on besides home and

family duties and responsibilities, wanting to become self-employed, requiring upgrading in

computer and technology skills in order to maintain current position and self interest.

Source of Information

Most of the women knew of Harlow College as they grew up in Harlow or lived in the

area for a number of years. Some of the women had completed GCSE's or their A levels

(equivalent to high school courses/program) several years' prior. In terms of the specific

programs available at the college, many of the women had read about courses and programs in

the local paper. They obtained more detailed information about programs of interest by attending

the Open Day at the College or speaking with the Adult Careers person or a Learning Link

Advisor.

Idea to Return

Only one of the women interviewed stated someone other than herself suggested that she

return to College. Another woman indicated her husband suggested she return to college as her

children were in school full-time and it would help pass the time. She further stated she chose the

Beauty Therapy course out of interest, but mainly because it fit with her children's school

schedule. This allowed her to walk them to school and be home before they returned. Although

not asked directly, a number of women spoke of opposition to returning to school from spouses

and family members. One woman in particular recalled receiving grief not from her husband but

from her husband's family (mother–in–law and husband's siblings). She further added that even

though her husband did not verbally disapprove of her enrolling in College courses, he never

defended her decision to his family. She attributed her premature withdrawal from her program

primarily due to this pressure, stating it was less stressful on her to stay at home.

Why Harlow College

All of the women said they chose Harlow College predominately because it was

convenient and close to their houses or flats. As Harlow College was close to the Town Centre,

there were many buses available for transportation. Additional reasons for choosing Harlow

College, included European Social Fund (ESF) funding, reputation and the number and types of

programs available.

First Contact

Approximately one third of the women interviewed previously attended Harlow College.

Therefore, women were asked about their initial contact with the college prior to returning to

their current or most recent program. The women's first contact with Harlow College varied

from meeting tutors and staff at Open Day, visiting the college and speaking to the Adult Careers

person or Learning Link Advisor, or telephoning and speaking with a Learning Link Advisor. All

of the women recalled this first contact with the school as a positive experience, stating the

individuals they met or spoke with were helpful and enjoyable. One woman stated she was able

to find out everything she needed to know about her course and she was even able to pay for it

over the phone. Another participant indicated while the Learning Link Advisor she had dealt with

was very friendly and helpful, he did not seem to know much about degree courses. She felt he

should have known a great deal more since Harlow College is affiliated with some other

universities and Colleges (Harlow College, 1999).

Transition to College

The staff at Harlow College assisted a number of women in the transition back to school

in various ways. They suggested courses to enroll in and identified available benefits (funding).

Many tutors at the college were held in high regard by some women returners. These

individuals assisted the returners with preparation for tests and studying and helped them

alleviate the women's concerns and fears after due to being out of school for such a long time.

Harlow College was acknowledged for assisting women in this transition through the number and

scheduled times of program offerings. Women stated the variety of courses offered allowed

them to pursue interesting programs in a time frame that fit with work and family commitments.

They also felt that being able to start in a program part time made the transition back to full time

school much easier for them.

Although most of the women stated Harlow College assisted in their transition back to

school, three women indicated the College did not help in their transition to school. Each felt

this was mainly because they were attending part-time and their respective courses were offered

outside the regular day schedule (evenings and weekends). Even though the time frame was

suitable for their situation, they felt there was very little direction or support, and many of the

services available to day time students were closed evenings and weekends. One woman stated

she received information with a diagram of the buildings but had to locate the buildings on her

own.

Difficulties in Returning to Education

Some of the difficulties the women interviewed indicated they faced or overcame in returning to education included: feelings of being the oldest person in the class, feeling like everyone else in the class 'gets it', but me, availability of creche facilities, or play groups for children, no creche facilities on campus, stress of meeting people, ensuring husbands would be home from work when children arrive home from school, the amount of homework and finding time to do homework/study with work and family responsibilities, procuring money for creche or home childcare, and course strategies for note taking, studying and effective public speaking.

Program

The women interviewed were previously or currently enrolled in a variety of programs, all of which were either part-time or short courses (2-10 weeks in duration). Interestingly, over half of the women were enrolled in one of the Hair and Beauty (i.e., hairstyling, body massage) or Complementary (i.e., aromatherapy, reflexology) Therapy Programs. The remaining women were engages in a range of programs including Access Planning, Social Sciences (i.e., A Level Sociology), and Business Administration and Management (Association of Accounting Technicians Foundation).

Program Decision

The reasons for choosing a particular program were varied. They included: displacement from a previous job, wanting a career change, desire to start own business, ambition to work in field of beauty culture, and interest in a particular subject. Notably, four of the women interviewed decided on their program after talking to a tutor, or careers advisor.

Best Program Qualities

The best aspects of programs in which participants were enrolled fell mostly into three categories: flexibility, sociability and learning. The most frequent 'best aspect of program' talked about by many of the women was the flexibility their particular program offered. The availability of part-time program offerings during convenient times was a major factor in their decision to return to education. One woman explained that part of the reason for chosing Harlow College was the convenience of attending school in the mornings -- leaving her available in the afternoons to complete family responsibilities. The second most referred to 'best aspect of program' was meeting new people, many of whom fell within the same age range as themselves. A couple of women emphasized how much they truly enjoyed adult conversation. Another woman spoke of friends she made while at school and despite leaving the program early had maintained these friendships. The third aspect identified was the learning component of returning to school. A few women said they really enjoyed new learning and gaining new skills. One woman explained her surprise in enjoyment of assignments, essays, and group projects, while another mentioned how she really liked learning how to use a computer. Another best program aspect included the fact that a program was fully funded or that specific program components (i.e., waxing, massage), or particular subjects (i.e.,Computers, Sociology) were funded.

Worst Program Qualities

There were a number of worst program qualities identified. At least three women listed tests, assignments, homework and public speaking as the worst aspects. Additional negative qualities or aspects were mentioned by only one individual interviewed who indicated that the

worst aspect of her program, and the reason she withdrew prematurely, was the change from a male to a female tutor midway through her program. She expressed her dismay in not being told earlier in her program of the possible change. She felt having a male instructor in a Beauty Therapy Program was significant especially for the older women in the class. Other specific negative program components were identified regarding data base and business classes, insufficient computer time and necessary software in the computer suite. One woman felt the class size was too large and would have preferred fewer students and more individualized attention. Ironically, the flexibility that was the most common positive aspect identified, by the majority of women, was for one woman the worst aspect. She felt that the 33-week time limit on her course made it difficult to complete course requirements and she needed a longer time period to complete the program.

Improvements to Help Women Returners

In response to the question concerning how the services could be improved to accommodate women returners, the majority of women felt that an on site crèche was a necessity. The second most common improvement suggested was parking facilities closer to the campus with more lighting. More manageable timing of courses, a drop-in computer suite and scheduling that fit better with children's schedule were also suggested. One woman felt that services could be improved if the Learning Link Advisors were more informed about facilities and programs of higher education, especially those affiliated with Harlow College.

Services Utilized and Satisfaction with Services

Interestingly, a number of the women reported that this particular question did not really apply to them as they were attending part-time or during evenings, or weekends. They felt most

of the services offered at the college were for full-time students attending during the day time. Although many of the women utilized things such as the library, computer suite, coffee shop, college shop, and restaurant, less than half said they had accessed such facilities or services as the careers workshop, adult guidance person, or learning link advisors.

Advice or Guidance and Satisfaction

Most of the women interviewed did not seek the advice or guidance of anyone from Harlow College. Four of the women sought assistance from their tutors and only one woman visited the careers workshop for assistance. Of the women who received assistance, all were very satisfied with the assistance and/or information they received.

The Most Important Issues Facing Women Returning to Education

When women were asked to identify the three most important issues they felt women returners, like themselves, faced in returning to education they indicated a variety of responses. Their responses are presented here in the order of most to least frequent responses.

Childcare. It was felt that finding adequate, affordable, child-care was a major problem for women, especially single mothers. One woman stated that women with childcare problems really miss out on education and training opportunities.

Timing of Courses. Many women felt courses needed to be offered during appropriate times throughout the day to accommodate family and work schedules. They viewed programs that did not offer this flexibility as less inviting to most women who want to return to school. One individual noted that if women have to choose between returning to school and family and/or work demands, they would not attend school because it would not be worth the trouble of inconvenient timing of courses.

Confidence. Almost all of the women interviewed suggested that self-confidence was a major issue and possibly a barrier to women who want to return to school. The confidence required to initially enroll in school was seen as one issue while the confidence in one's abilities to succeed once in school was also noted. Many women shared some of their issues of entering school. They cited their fear of failing, uncertainty of their ability to study and write papers, keep up with homework, use computers and balance school with other responsibilities.

Financial Support. The ability to financially support returning to school was also viewed as a major issue for women returners. Although programs do exist for students over 25, there are only a limited number of individuals who meet the necessary qualifications. It was also observed that even with funding for school, most women with pre-school children would be unable to afford childcare if it were not provided free.

Personal Support. A number of women suggested that lack of support from family and friends could be a key issue for some women. Having to deal with family problems without any help could seriously affect a person's studies and ability or desire to remain in school. 'Seeing it through' would be very difficult without some help with household chores and children.

Information. Appropriate information and guidance were needed in order to choose to return to school and to determine programs and job location. Unless a woman contacts the school about returning she may not get the information elsewhere. It was suggested information about returning to school should be provided at their children's schools or places where potential women returners frequent.

Building Relationships. Overcoming shyness and meeting people was mentioned as an issue. Some women may be uncomfortable in a class of younger students or find it difficult to

communicate with individuals with whom they feel they have little in common. Additionally, it was felt that building relationships with lecturers and tutors is also difficult and could potentially be an issue for some women returners.

Discussion

Returning to education is a big step for anyone who decides to take the plunge. However, the demands and obstacles for returning women seem to provide even more significant challenges. Only, with the support of family and friends, flexibility, quality service and an inviting, warm, and friendly learning environment can the experience be positive and rewarding.

The women interviewed in this study were characteristically very similar to the women returners referred to in the literature. Virtually all were in some sort of family or career transition (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980 cited in Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989) that precipitated their return to education. As with any group of women returners, this group was very diverse in their personal circumstances, financial backgrounds and range of life experiences. Consistent with the research they all appeared to have multiple demands on their time, trying to juggle school with family, work and other personal commitments (Matthay, 1995) that made it quite difficult for them to attend school. The challenges they experienced as women returners, including lack of self confidence, personal support, lack of affordable quality child care facilities, timing of courses and financial support were also cited in the literature.

Based on the findings of this study, it appears that Harlow College is doing a satisfactory job in meeting many of the needs of women returners. Harlow College appears to be providing a warm, friendly, flexible environment for their students. However, while many of the women interviewed for this research were generally very pleased with the facilities, services, delivery

and staff of Harlow College, they were quick to offer the following suggestions on how the college could improve to better meet their needs.

Facilities

The new campus at Harlow College offers most of the amenities and services of any post secondary institution. However, some of the women interviewed felt the facilities at the campus could be improved to better accommodate women returners. Consistent with the research, the majority of participants felt that a creche facility on campus would make it much easier for women to return and/or attend college. It was also suggested that this facility be affordable to students attending school. Such a facility on campus may allow more women returners with children to attend college full time during the day. This would potentially permit parents to check on their child (children) during the day as well as provide some time during the day to spend with their child (children). This could potentially reduce the stress and worry and alleviate much of the guilt many women returners have when they decide to return to school.

Another area of facility improvement mentioned in the interviews was the poor lighting, particularly in the parking lot at the college. Since many of the women returners choose to attend part time in the evening to accommodate their work and family commitments, they explained it is very important to feel safe in all aspects of the college. Having to walk from the parking lot to class or between buildings on campus in poor lighting could potentially deter students from attending classes. Although, poor lighting was not cited by the women as a reason for leaving college, this could easily be a contributing factor, not easily identified by research. It is important for women to feel safe in their environment to facilitate learning.

Course Schedules

Harlow College offers a large number of full and part time programs in varied time slots, including evenings and weekends, to accommodate the needs of their students. Although, it was suggested by at least one participant in the study that class times could be improved to coincide with their children's class schedules, a review of the schedules of many of the schools in the community and those of the classes at Harlow College, suggests that aligning schedules could be very difficult to attain. This problem seemed to occur predominately with full time programs requiring students to be in classes full days during the week. Due to the fact that the number of class hours per week of most college programs was longer than the children's school hours, to accommodate this problem by extending the program is unlikely as it would potentially lead to increasing the cost of the course. It would probably be easier for the grade school system to change their schedule to fit within the schedule of most full-time College classes. Another option would be to create individualized or competency-based programs to suite the individual needs of adult learners.

Staff

Having a full time staff member dedicated to providing career guidance to "mature" potential applicants is also very beneficial to the College because it provides an opportunity for potential women returners to recieve career counselling prior to entering the college. The few participants who availed of career guidance were very pleased with the service. This step in the re-entry process can be beneficial, providing mature returners with the confidence necessary to determine an academic and career path and to follow through with enrollment in a program. Provision of career guidance is also a very good marketing tool for the College to attract older

students considering a return to education. The fact that this service is available one evening a week, is advantageous to potential women returners who may be working or looking after children during the day time hours. Although very beneficial, this service is only available to pre-entry returners and is not extended to students enrolled in programs who may not have availed of it prior to entry into the College.

Given the significant satisfaction expressed by the women who used the career guidance service, it may be useful to offer this service to all women returners of the College. The College could identify all mature women who enroll and contact them within the first couple of weeks of classes to invite them to talk to the career guidance staff member. This would provide these women with an opportunity to confirm their career choice and discuss with the advisor some of their concerns about returning to school after a potential extended absence. The Adult Career Advisor could also direct the student to the appropriate services and personnel in order to receive assistance in any areas that may be of concern to the student (i.e., financial, study skills, time management, etc.).

Additionally, the connection full-time students have with their tutors appear very positive, it provides students with not only a connectivity with an individual staff person but with the College as well. Extending this service to part-time students may also be beneficial in assisting women returners with their transition back into the post-secondary system. If part-time students were assigned a tutor whom they could meet and call regularly, this may provide them with more connectivity to the College as well as to a person whom they could talk to and express difficulties they may be experiencing. A women returner who feels that she has no one with whom to express her concerns, and does not have the support at home, may believe that dropping

out is the only option.

Connectivity with an instructor or staff person has been shown by the research to increase student satisfaction with an institution (Bean & Bradley, 1986; Aitken, 1982). Providing such services as mentioned above could potentially improve the significant attrition rate of this group of students.

Services

Many of the women returners interviewed expressed study skills, computer skills, and test-taking as causes of stress and anxiety. In order to assist mature returners with these issues as well as issues firmly established in the literature of women returners, there are a number of possible recommendations including: having an orientation session for all mature returners, providing weekly lunch seminars on topics of interest and relevance to re-entry women, providing a mature student support group and counselling services.

Harlow College had terminated its counselling services for students two years ago. Interestingly, even though it was identified as a nonessential service, the administration was in the process of establishing a contract for counselling with an external provider, Young Concern. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints this service was only being contracted for full-time students who were under 25 years of age. Although none of the women interviewed had mentioned the availability of counselling services, or lack thereof, as an area for improvement, it is felt by the Researcher that many of the women interviewed could have benefitted significantly from counselling. Counselling could have addressed many of the concerns identified by the participants including: feelings of being oldest in the class and "not getting it", difficulties with time management, study skills and test anxiety, fears of public speaking, guilt of returning to

school and relationship issues at home. According to a study by Clayton (1996) "there was a consensus that impartial vocational guidance and counselling could help some women to escape the trap of low- paid, low status, insecure work, and that, at the very least, it can help them start to rebuild confidence and give them information about education, training and the process of job seeking" (p. 41).

Many of the women interviewed suggested that returning to education was difficult for women because of this group's lack of funding. Unless women receive benefits and qualify for funding it is very difficult, especially for a single mother, to fund returning to school. Although, this issue is possibly outside the scope of the College, Harlow College could consider the possibility of offering more scholarships to entice and assist women returners financially.

In addition to improving the services for mature female students enrolled at the college, more publicity about the services provided at the College for students, particularly to re-entry women, may be beneficial. This may be accomplished in the form of a pamphlet directed specifically at this student population and circulated throughout the community and surrounding areas. One of the recommendations from a participant was to include such information at creche and playgroup facilities or health and assistance offices where this group may frequent. The information could also be provided to all women returners as part of their orientation to the College.

Conclusion

In summary, it appears from the interviews conducted that Harlow College is meeting many of the needs of women returners. However, the high attrition rate as well as the comments of the participants suggest there is room for improvement. A review of the improvements that

could be made to better meet the needs of women returners at Harlow College include:

- an affordable creche facility on campus

- better lighting in the parking lot and on campus

- a mandatory session with the careers guidance person for all women returns (full and part-time)

- having an orientation session for all mature returners

- providing weekly lunch seminars

- scholarships specifically for women returners

- altering the method of teaching and evaluation to accommodate needs of mature students

- flexibility and leniency for students who may have to miss time due to family commitments

- providing a mature student support group

- providing counselling services for this student population.

Harlow College appears to offer a variety of programs available at different times, including evenings and weekends, to accommodate their students. All students at the campus seem to be provided with a variety of supports, but different supports are not available for mature students, particularly women returners. Likely there is much being done to help the individual mature woman who may seek out assistance. However, as a special population with unique needs, additional services could be provided to assist this group and improve retention. Given that many of the women in this category often lack confidence and self esteem, they may already be a drop out statistic before it is noticed they are experiencing difficulties. Interestingly, if

maturity were a physical disability, there would likely be a great deal of attention devoted to

providing assistance.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Institution Letter of Request

Ms. P. Allison Lomond, Graduate Student
Masters of Educational Psychology Program
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada

Mr. David Ellerby, Principal
Harlow College
Velizy Avenue, Town Centre
Harlow, Essex
England, CM20 3LH

Dear Mr. Ellerby,

Please accept this letter of request to conduct research at Harlow College. During my internship at the College I would like to conduct research surrounding the views and experiences of woman over twenty-five who are or have been enrolled in programs at Harlow College during the past year.

Central to my research is interviewing women concerning their experiences of returning to education or training at Harlow College. In order to carry out this task I will require your permission to access student files to identify and contact a random sample of these students to participate in this research. The interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes in length and will pertain to such things as: your satisfaction with your chosen program, the difficulties you may have experienced, and your motivations for returning to education. To ensure accurate detail of the interview, I would also like to audio tape the interview. The audio taped recordings will only be heard by myself and will be erased upon completion of the study.

In addition to interviewing, past and present students, I would also be interested in compiling and analysing existing data on women returners who have withdrawn from programs in the past year (reason for withdrawal forms). Findings of my research will be compiled in an internship report and will be available upon request.

All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential and at no time will individuals be identified. Participation of students is voluntary. This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee.

Attached you will find a copy of my proposal. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me during the day at 279 868162 or during evening hours at 279 639161. My supervisor is Dr. Mildred Cahill and can be reached via e-mail

<mcahill@morgan.ucs.mun.ca> or by phone at (709) 737-   If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean, Graduate Programs and Research.

Thank-you for you consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

P. Allison Lomond

Appendix II: Individual Letter of Request

Ms. P. Allison Lomond, Graduate Student
Masters of Educational Psychology Program
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada

Dear _____,

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland, Newfoundland, Canada. I am conducting research surrounding the views and experiences of woman over twenty-five who are or have been enrolled in programs at Harlow College during the past year.

Central to my research is interviewing women concerning their experiences of returning to education or training at Harlow College. The interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes in length and will pertain to such things as: your satisfaction with your chosen program, the difficulties you may have experienced, and your motivations for returning to education. To ensure accurate detail of the interview, I would also like to audio tape the interview. The audio taped recordings will only be heard by myself and will be erased upon completion of the study. Findings of my research will be compiled in an internship report and will be available upon request.

All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential and at no time will individuals be identified. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to refrain from answering any questions you choose. This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee. The results of my research will be made available to you upon request.

This letter is to ask you to participate in an interview. I would appreciate your help, but you are certainly not obliged to give your consent. I will be contacting you via telephone, within the next couple of days to discuss whether or not you are interested in participating in an interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me during the day at 279 868162 or during evening hours at 279 639161. My supervisor is Dr. Mildred Cahill and can be reached via e-mail <mcahill@morgan.ucs.mun.ca> or by phone at (709) 737-   If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean, Graduate Programs and Research.

Thank-you for you consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

P. Allison Lomond

Appendix III: Letter of Consent

_____,

Thank-you for agreeing to participate in an interview involving women's experiences of returning to Harlow College for education/training. It should take approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. Once again, I would like to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice at any time or refrain form answering any questions you choose. All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential and at no time will you be identified.

I would also like to remind you that our interview will be audiotaped for the purpose of ensuring accurate detail of the interview. The audio taped recordings will only be heard by myself and will be erased upon completion of the study. The results of my research will be made available to you upon request.

This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee as well as the principal of Harlow college, Mr. David Ellerby.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me during the day at 279 868162 or during evening hours at 279 639161. My supervisor is Dr. Mildred Cahill and can be reached via e-mail mcahill@morgan.ucs.mun.ca or by phone at (709) 737If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean, Graduate Programs and Research.

Thank-you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

P. Allison Lomond

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I, _____, hereby agree to be interviewed for the research project examining women returners views and experiences of returning to Harlow College for education/training undertaken by Ms. P. Allison Lomond. I understand that participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw from the interview at any time. No individuals will be identified, and I give my permission to be audiotaped and quoted in any research article produced.

Date:_____   Interviewee's Signature _____