STUDENT SATISFACTION:

THE VIEW FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE IVORY TOWER

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<u>STUDENT SATISFACTION:</u>
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By

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of Sociology
Memorial University of Newfoundland
December, 1992

St. John's   Newfoundland

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the perceptions and satisfactions of 43 senior students in the Faculties of Arts and Science at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). It identifies those factors that affect student satisfactions and recommends ways to make the university experience more satisfying and rewarding for students.

Higher education scholars have paid little attention to student satisfaction as an educational outcome. Much of the data are quantitative, American and designed for use in conceptual models of attrition or retention. These models suggest that students who are integrated into the social and academic domains of university life express higher levels of satisfaction than those less socially and academically integrated. However, while this research has added to our understanding of how the 'degree of fit' between students and their environments may affect educational outcomes, there is still a significant gap in our knowledge as to how the interplay of students' entry traits, thei. institutional experiences and the characteristics of the university affects student satisfaction.

This study suggests that an important part of the integration process involves the pursuit of goals in the organizational setting. To achieve these goals students require certain resources - monetary support, cultural capital, institutional rewards, social support networks and

lay referral systems. The unequal distribution of these resources and the inability to define goals in an organizational setting ultimately account for variation in student satisfaction levels. Furthermore, student satisfaction is an emotional state oriented toward future expectations. Satisfied students appear much more optimistic than dissatisfied students that their education will prepare them for the limited opportunities after graduation.

Undergraduates at MUN expressed dissatisfaction with the following aspects of the student experience: teaching, administrative procedures, student loans, social support and advising and counselling for students. At the same time, the majority of students appear to have reconciled themselves to the more adverse conditions of university life. They maintain unexpectedly high levels of satisfaction by adjusting their aspirations to current economic realities.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Introduction

What we are doing here at university is determining our
future - not simply taking courses. In my three years
here, I have experienced professors who should not have
been allowed to enter a classroom much less teach a
class. I guess the lack of empathy on the part of some
professors can be attributed to the large numbers of
students. But a person should be able to teach
regardless of how big a class is! You leave a
comforting, supportive environment such as high school
and enter into an environment where everything is bound
by red tape and nobody seems to want to take time to
help, much let alone care. I do have a lot of
frustrations concerning university, so much so that
questioning if this is what I really want to do is
almost a daily occurrence. If this system was made a bit
more personal, the effect would be unbelievable.
Hopefully, the administration will start taking a better
look at the reasons why they are here (students and
their money) and implement changes that reflect this
realization.

Overcrowded classrooms and libraries don't make for good
learning. It creates isolation and a feeling of
powerlessness and helplessness.

This university is severely overcrowded. Many days I am
unable to find a place to sit down and eat my lunch.
Student Aid is terribly underfunded and resources
allocated unfairly. Food services are too expensive and
of poor quality. Regarding course loads, most profs
treat their courses as if it's the only one the student
is taking. This attitude is unrealistic, irritating and
places tremendous stress on the student in trying to
keep up with the work load.

These selective quotes from undergraduates at Memorial
University of Newfoundland do not represent the experiences
of all university students. However, their remarks do capture
very well some of the major concerns felt by today's
undergraduates - concern about the quality of teaching at
universities; concern about the allocation of scarce
university resources; and concern about the quality of

various institutional services. Unfortunately, students'
experiences, opinions and perspectives on such important
issues have been underutilized, unsolicited or completely
ignored in the debate over quality in Canadian higher
education.

Students of the 1990's are the unfortunate heirs of a
postsecondary educational system that has been badly battered
after a period of rising enrolments and after more than a
decade of financial restraint. In the past 15 years general
operating revenues at Canadian universities have dropped by
almost 18 percent in constant dollars while full-time
enrolments have increased by 50 percent (Association of
Universities and Colleges of Canada, 1990). In Newfoundland
full-time university enrolments have nearly doubled over the
past decade while government grants per full-time enroled
student have dropped by nearly 25 percent (Memorial
University of Newfoundland, 1991).

Under these conditions, large classes, campus crowding
and overtaxed resources (libraries, gym facilities,
counselling programs and the like) have become the norm for
most universities across the country. The effects of these
adverse circumstances on the clients of the university system
are poorly understood, however. There is surprisingly little
information available on what it is like to be a university
student in Canada in 1992. It is not really known, for
example, whether or not students are satisfied with the

quality of their education or what makes them satisfied or dissatisfied. Yet, this type of information is urgently needed if universities are to upgrade the delivery of their educational services and meet the needs of their clientele more effectively.

In an effort to shed some light on the problems and challenges faced by university students at present, this thesis examines data from a study focusing on the quality of the academic experience for undergraduates at a medium size postsecondary institution in eastern Canada - Memorial University of Newfoundland. The purposes of this thesis are twofold: to describe student perceptions and satisfactions concerning the quality of various institutional services at Memorial (teaching, administration and student loans for example) and to identify those factors that affect or determine student satisfactions and perceptions.

This first chapter begins by tracing the current debate over quality in higher education back to macro-social changes that have affected universities over the past several decades. It then examines in greater detail some of the main issues and challenges Canadian universities must confront in their quest for quality and excellence. Next, student satisfaction, as a subjective measure of educational quality, is examined in the context of integration into work organizations. The chapter concludes by considering why

student satisfaction is important for undergraduates, for universities and for society in general.

Background to the Debate

The Growth Period for Canadian Universities

While there is no doubt that the 1960's marked the beginning of an impressive period of growth for postsecondary education in Canada, there is less certainty about the reasons for this growth. Demographic, social, economic and political factors account for part of the explanation.

Human capital theory, which advocates the development of human potential through education as a means to social and economic progress, was used to rationalize calls for the expansion of Canada's educational system. This, combined with increased concerns for social justice and equality, provided the impetus for the impressive growth and proliferation of Canadian universities. High fertility rates following World War II (with the baby boomers entering the 18-24 year segment in the late 1960's) and the growth in participation rates since then have managed to increase student numbers even more. All of these factors have ripened postsecondary education in Canada for change (Gomme and Gilbert, 1987).

Postsecondary enrolments expanded rapidly from the 1960s to the 1980s. Full-time enrolment more than tripled between 1962 and 1976, from 197,000 to 605,000. The average annual

increase in the sixties was a remarkable 11-12 percent. It fell to around 4.5 percent in the early seventies, and by 1976 had decreased to 2.0 percent. The 208 percent enrolment gain between 1962 and 1976 resulted from a 75 percent jump in the size of the 18-24 age group and a rising enrolment rate among part-time students (Statistics Canada, 1983).

Educational funding during these two decades attempted to keep pace with Canada's vision of an accessible educational system that would fuel economic growth. In 1950 only 2.4 percent of the Gross National Product was allocated to educational spending. By 1961 it had risen to 4.9 percent and in 1971 educational spending had reached 8.8 percent of GNP. Since the early 1980's the percentage hovered somewhat below this level (Statistics Canada, 1983).

The greatest proportion of the increase in expenditures occurred at the postsecondary level. University expenditures, for instance, increased at an annual rate of 16 percent between 1950 and 1978. The burden of these expenditures was increasingly borne by the government. In 1950 tuition fees accounted for 26 percent of university income and private financing accounted for an additional 15 percent, so that only three-fifths of the total expenditures came from public sources. In 1961 the combined share of tuition and private support had dropped to 30 percent, in 1978 to 17 percent (Statistics Canada, 1983).

Government policy sought to ensure a place at university for every qualified student no matter what the student's class, gender or ethnic background. To meet this worthy objective, postsecondary education was subsidized at the taxpayer's expense and a Canada student loans program was implemented to remove financial barriers to university attendance (Schaafsma, 1990). At Memorial University of Newfoundland, the administration even experimented for a time with a tuition-free policy for any students who were qualified to enter the institution.

The Period of Decline for Canadian Universities

Educational policies characterized by the welfare liberalism of the 1960s have undergone a shift since the 1980s. The fiscal crisis that began to emerge in the late 1970s with rising inflation and increased unemployment brought a greater concern with deficit reduction and economic efficiency. Consequently, reductions in government expenditures on postsecondary education have threatened policies promoting accessibility and mass education.

University funding in Canada has declined relative to the number of students now enroled. In current dollars, total university revenues grew from $3.2 billion to almost $7.6 billion between 1977-78 and 1987-88. However, when inflation is taken into account, revenues per full-time equivalent enrolment (FTE) were actually 10 percent lower in 1987-88

than a decade earlier. General operating revenues (which universities use to provide instruction, support unsponsored research, and meet various related expenses) dropped even more drastically - by almost 18 percent in constant dollars (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 1990). Unfortunately, this downward spiral of decreasing expenditures on higher education shows no sign of letting up in the foreseeable future. As a result of an on-going federal freeze of per capita cash transfers to the provinces in support of postsecondary education, Canadian universities and colleges are anticipating a loss of $250 million in 1993 (University Affairs, April, 1992).

Decreasing financial expenditures on higher education combined with an unanticipated growth in student enrolments have placed enormous pressures on Canadian universities. From the vantage point of the 1970s, it seemed clear to many observers that universities should brace for major enrolment declines in the early 1980s. A decline in elementary and secondary enrolments was expected to lead to similar drops at the postsecondary level, as the baby boom generation advanced beyond 'university age'. These projections proved to be inaccurate, however, as higher participation rates among 18-24 year-olds, the aging of the student population (students of the 1980s were older, on average, than their counterparts in the 1970s) and the huge increases in female participation resulted in the steady expansion of student enrolments. In

1987-88, 486,000 students were enroled full-time at Canadian universities - over 50 percent more than in 1972-73. The number of part-time students increased by an incredible 94 percent over the same 16-year period (though enrolment in diploma and certificate programs and in courses not leading to a degree account for most of this growth) (Association of University and Colleges of Canada, 1990).

Faced with tighter operating budgets, universities have been enormously challenged to deliver high quality services to the growing number of students entering the system. Overcrowding and underfunding at Canadian universities have resulted in hiked tuition fees, increased class sizes, greater numbers of part-time faculty, limited library and equipment acquisitions, restricted course selection, program cuts, reduced student services, salary freezes for faculty members, a demoralized professoriate, and an escalation of union unrest on campus. Of course, these problems do not appear uniformly across all universities (Gomme et al., forthcoming).

Universities have also come under fire because of their apparent failure to produce the kind of highly qualified people needed to ensure the country's social and economic well-being. Concern for declining standards in education especially in the areas of reading, writing and computing is widespread and has led many employers to question whether university graduates are equipped to meet the new demands of

the workplace (Gilbert and Gomme, 1987; Westling, 1988).
Provincial and federal reports have also expressed concerns
about quality in higher education and emphasized room for
improvement in Canada's postsecondary education system
(Segal, 1987; Secretary of State of Canada, 1988).

Current Challenges Facing Universities

The wide recognition given to the perceived failings of
universities and colleges has not been without consequence.
In the United States, for example, best selling books like
Bloom's The Closing of the American Mind (1987) and Sykes'
Profscam (1988) have awakened the American consciousness to
the malaise afflicting higher education. Many state
legislators are responding to their constituents' demands for
quality and educational excellence by insisting on greater
accountability and proof of cost effectiveness from colleges
and universities. Student outcome assessments have been
advocated as the principal tool for achieving these
objectives and are being widely implemented across the United
States.[1] In fact, over 40 U.S. states now require an
accounting for the practices, policies and outcomes of their
postsecondary institutions by state law or policy (Davis,

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[1] The necessity of using student outcome assessments to
measure performance and success in higher education has
been emphasized in reports for the National Institute of
Education, 1984 and the National Governors' Association,
1988 as well as The American Association of Higher
Education's annual assessment forum.

1989). At the most recent annual meeting of the Education Commission of the United States, legislators and educators even considered a bill that would allocate a large portion of a college's budget through incentive and performance rewards. To receive state support, each campus would have to report annually to the public on its performance and how it is spending state money. Additionally, colleges would be eligible for competitive awards to create programs that would address "major public priorities" such as restructuring undergraduate education or strengthening the reward system for good teaching (The Chronicle of Higher Education, August 12, 1992).

In Canada, similar questions are being raised about both the quality and the value of a university education. In 1990-91, the Association of Canadian Universities and Colleges (AUCC) sponsored a Commission of Inquiry on University Education to determine "how well the universities were carrying out their educational mandate." Stuart Smith, who headed the Commission, examined such issues as relevancy, teaching performance, quality of student learning, accessibility and the role of university education in Canadian society more generally (Smith, 1991). Shortly after the release of the AUCC report, Maclean's magazine issued its first annual ranking of Canadian universities based on its own 'measures of excellence' scale. Maclean's expects the annual rankings issue to be a hot seller to a Canadian public

hungry for information about universities (<u>University Affairs</u>, October, 1992).

It is difficult to gauge what kind of impact these controversial reports have had on Canadian universities, but on the surface, at least, a number of interesting developments have occurred since the release of both the AUCC report and the notorious <u>Maclean's</u> issue. Stuart Smith's scathing criticism of some current university teaching practices, for example, has undoubtedly influenced the latest round of public relations initiatives coming out of universities. St. Thomas University has already begun plans for a multi-million dollar development campaign aimed at promoting teaching excellence (<u>University Affairs</u>, April, 1992) and other universities, Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) included, are working hard to polish their images as 'student centered' institutions.[2]

University policy makers face real challenges in an era of financial restraint and at a time when university services, products and spending practices are under the

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[2]   Incentive and performance rewards, similar to those employed in the United States, are also being used to influence university policies in Canada. For example, the Royal Bank of Canada, Xerox Canada Ltd., and the Power Corporation along with the Canadian Association of University Business Officers have sponsored 'Canadian University Productivity Awards' to go to universities that have come up with the most effective cost-saving techniques or revenue generating ideas. In 1993, the awards program will look at expanding its criteria to include projects that raise morale or maintain quality of service in the face of funding cutbacks (Tausig, 1992: 2).

watchful eyes of taxpayers, students and their parents, employers and government representatives. Perhaps the greatest challenge universities face at present is how to maintain policies promoting universal accessibility without sacrificing quality. With most institutions caught in a funding crunch, questions are being raised as to whether the federal and provincial governments can any longer afford to continue providing quality higher education to such large numbers of students. Policy makers think they must choose between two goals: teaching fewer, more highly qualified students who may be able to accomplish great things or giving a larger student body about equal amounts of attention, even if it means a decline in overall academic standards. One observer described the apparent dilemma this way: "...now the country's oldest and most successful institutions say they are being forced to decide whether they will provide quality education for the elite or enriched high school programs for the many." (Cruickshank, 1992: 4). Institutions like Memorial University have chosen to go the route of more restrictive admissions on the assumption that fewer students will reduce the strain on the university's resources and allow for improved services for the remaining smaller clientele (Bennett et al., 1992).

What is remarkable with all of these radical policy developments that ostensibly aim at improving the quality of university education is the "...absence of specifications of

just what is meant by 'quality'" (Webster, 1990: 7). For example, American industry executives surveyed in one 1984 study stated that such qualities as leadership, integrity, motivation, hard work, good manners, and individual responsibility were important predictors of career success (Dence, 1991:12). Some marxist writers, however, have argued that such qualities as good manners and deference are 'middle class' and are promoted by the educational system to shape young people in such a way that they readily fit into the existing relations of production.[3]

Other critics have argued that the current 'assessment movement', with its emphasis on accountability and cost effectiveness, is part of a corporate agenda to restructure universities and colleges. Support for this theory can be found in the recent work of Janice Newson and Howard Buchbinder (1988) on the state of universities in Canada. They have examined the relationship between the corporate sector and universities and have described some of the ways in which this relationship has affected the administration and organization of universities. As Canadian universities have forged closer links to industry, they have become more business-oriented in their modes of operation - particularly in their approaches to strategic planning and management. Newson and Buchbinder cite some of the following consequences

[3]   See for example, Paul Willis's _Learning to Labour_ (1977) or David Hargreaves's _Social Relations in a Secondary School_ (1967).

of the new corporate agenda that has infiltrated the academy: scholarly research is judged according to its 'market value' as opposed to its 'social value'; the 'entrepreneurial professor' now maintains a position of power and prestige within the academy because of his/her ability to secure research funding for the university; and the 'President's Office' (comprising the President and the administration) now assumes direct control of the key institutional affairs, functions and policy directions of the university. As a result of these developments, Newson and Buchbinder imply that the current criteria used to signify 'quality' and 'excellence' in higher education have become both market driven and market relevant, favouring the more functional, technical aspects of education.

The use of student ratings and student satisfaction measures to evaluate faculty performance has become an especially contentious issue in the debate over educational quality. In the United States and Canada student satisfaction is being widely used to evaluate faculty members' teaching effectiveness and professional competence. At several American universities, for example, it has become mandatory for faculty members to receive 'acceptable' performance ratings by students before they can be hired or offered tenure (working definitions as to what constitutes acceptable performance for the faculty may vary across institutions) (Krueger and Heisserer, 1987). At some Canadian universities

(i.e. TUNS, Acadia) student ratings are called for in faculties' collective agreements (Smith 1991:46).

These developments may be encouraging in the sense of affording students more power in deciding the kinds of professors allowed into the classrooms or the standards that should be met in evaluating teaching effectiveness. However, problems still exist in the way that student satisfaction is conceptualized, measured and understood. In the research literature, for example, studies of student satisfaction have taken what Vaala and Holdaway (1989: 184) have called a "best-guess-at-the-moment approach." Aitken (1982) and Babbitt and Burbach (1985) have taken student satisfaction to mean student acceptance of academic programs and living conditions. Bean and Metzner (1985: 523) have described satisfaction as "the degree to which a student enjoys the role of being a student and reports a lack of boredom with college courses." Nafziger, Holland, and Gottfriedson (1975: 132) defined a satisfied student as one who is a "typical student at his college and [has] a personality pattern which is both consistent and well defined."

Using Memorial University as a case study, this thesis tries to present a more accurate assessment of the quality of the student experience in 1992 after a period of rising enrolments and after more than a decade of financial restraint. Some of the consequences rising enrolments and decreased expenditures have had on universities' practices,

policies and institutional services have already been discussed. At MUN, overcrowding and underfunding have resulted in tuition increases, larger classes, salary freezes for faculty, union unrest, program cuts and a more restrictive admission policy. One way of evaluating the quality of the student experience at MUN under these conditions is to measure student satisfaction, defined here as 'a pleasurable emotional state resulting from a person's enactment of the role of being a student' (Bean and Bradley, 1986: 398).

Much of the current research on student satisfaction has been influenced by Durkheim's original work on social integration (Knox et al., 1992). In the sociology of work literature the integration of individuals into work organizations has been recognized as an important factor affecting job satisfaction. It is important, therefore, to understand the effects of integration or the lack of integration on individuals working and living within organizations.

Satisfaction and Integration Into Work Organizations

Emile Durkheim was interested in the varieties of social integration and in social disorganization, the weakening of social bonds. In <u>The Division of Labor</u>, first published in England in 1933, Durkheim portrayed occupational specialization as the key element not just for economic

advance but for the development of civilization itself. Durkheim noted that as societies became increasingly complex and differentiated, specialized workers sometimes felt alone, isolated, unrelated organically to compatriots in other jobs, to the unknown consumers of their products, and to the society as a whole. He called this a 'state of anomie' and deplored it as an unnatural, pathological condition of the social organism. In The Elementary Forms of Religious Life Durkheim studied the contribution of religion to social cohesion and in another work, Suicide, he used rates of suicide as an index of social integration. Noting that suicide rates were higher for Protestants than for Catholics, higher for the unmarried than for the married, higher for soldiers than for civilians, and higher for noncommissioned officers than for enlisted men, Durkheim suggested that the degree to which an individual is integrated into group life determines whether he or she may be motivated to suicide. The individual can be motivated to suicide at either of two extremes: when he or she is highly integrated or only superficially integrated into society.

Research on job satisfaction has been informed by many of Durkheim's ideas and insights into social organizations. In particular, his description of the three types of suicide - altruistic, anomic and egoistic - and his analysis of occupational differentiation have helped focus attention on the personal disorientation of people who lack a sense of

belonging to social organizations. For example, studies in the sociology of work have found that individuals who are integrated into the informal structures of an organization and who belong to mediating primary groups develop more positive attitudes toward their work and to the organizations to which they belong. In addition, researchers have found that bureaucratic structures offer those at the higher levels of an organization a greater degree of autonomy and creativity than individuals who occupy 'hireling roles' within an organization (Locke, 1976).

Informal structures refer to the patterned interactions of individuals and groups within an organization (Spencer, 1985: 177-178). Individuals who are insufficiently integrated into these informal structures often find that they are unable to progress within the organization. One study found that women and minorities attracted fewer mentors, senior people whose support can help with promotion, compared to equally capable white males. Even when women and minorities were admitted to organizations, they had to be careful to adjust to the expectations and anxieties of others (Epstein, 1983).

Workers must also learn to abide by the informal norms of the workplace in order to become integrated into an organization. For example, workers informally agree about the amount of work that should be turned out. Individuals who deviate from these informal norms by producing too much or

too little risk isolation from their co-workers and develop feelings that they do not belong in their work situation. Informal norms also specify the conditions under which money or property may be taken and allow employees to engage in illegal behavior without loss of face (Altheide et al., 1978; Robin, 1974; Parilla et al., 1988).

Other studies have found that individuals develop more positive attitudes toward an organization when they belong to it through a mediating primary group. Primary groups bind their members firmly into a larger social structure in much the same way that the family mediates between the individual and the larger society (Spencer, 1985: 187). For example, studies of morale among American soldiers during World War II and the Korean War found that solidarity was high at the squad and the platoon level (Little, 1964; Shils, 1950, Stouffer et al., 1949). Combat soldiers in Vietnam, however, did not have the same sources of solidarity. Most soldiers served in Vietnam for only 12 months and were not sent there with the training group with whom they had formed strong bonds, thus limiting the formation of primary groups and fostering alienation. The soldier was "essentially private and self-concerned," especially near the end of his tour of duty (Moskos, 1970: 142-143).

The individual's position within the bureaucratic structure is another important factor affecting the degree of social integration and the amount of satisfaction derived

from work. On the one hand are professionals, managers, and highly skilled technicians, who enjoy considerable power over the timing, techniques and quality of what they do. Workers in this category can design and run systems, engage in research and development activities and innovate if they choose. On the other hand are the orderlies, sales clerks, file clerks, line workers, and other employees, whose jobs consist in following externally given directions (Spencer, 1985). For example, assembly-line and machine-tending workers have highly specialized jobs, must follow work methods devised by someone else, and must work at the pace set by a machine or conveyor belt. The work is repetitive, is closely supervised, and offers little room for initiative. Automobile and other assembly-line workers cannot leave their work station unless they are relieved by other assemblers. These lower-level employees are more likely than individuals occupying 'boss roles' to report feelings of powerlessness (feeling that things are beyond personal control), meaninglessness (lacking a sense of purpose), isolation (feeling that they do not belong in their work situation) and self-estrangement (a feeling of depersonalized detachment from work rather than involvement in the job) (Blauner, 1964; Seeman, 1959). Such cases of job dissatisfaction may lead to absenteeism, high turnover, wildcat strikes, sabotage, poor-quality products, and a reluctance of workers to commit

themselves to their work tasks (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1973).

In examining the relationship between social integration and student satisfaction, however, one must be careful to distinguish between the unique social conditions of university life that affect student satisfaction with the social conditions that affect job satisfaction in other types of organizations. In this regard, Tinto (1986) cautions against the application of theories of work organizations to explain student behaviors and perceptions.

> The application of theories of work organizations...must be carried out with care. The primary difficulty with such applications is that they make the implicit assumption that higher education organizations are essentially the same as those in the world of work and, therefore, that one can think of students in those organizations as one would of workers in factories or offices. While this analogy might be stretched to fit faculty and staff, it is doubtful that students would see themselves in the same light as would workers generally. Though the analogy of worker productivity and student performance is especially appealing... we must be careful not to push such analogies too far (p.377 quoted in Vaala and Holdaway, 1989: 173).

Higher education scholars who have studied student attrition or retention, as we shall see in our review of the literature on student satisfaction in chapter two, have hypothesized that students who are socially and academically integrated into university life express higher levels of satisfaction than those less socially and academically integrated. However, while this research has added to our understanding of how the 'degree of fit' between students and their environments may affect educational outcomes, there is

still a significant gap in our knowledge as to how the interplay of students' entry traits, their institutional experiences and the characteristics of the university may have an impact on student satisfaction.

Using qualitative data to flesh out the more subtle and complex effects of university life, this study will show that a student's 'institutional' or 'environmental fit' with the university is itself dependent upon students' abilities to define and pursue goals in the organizational setting of the university as well as their possessing the means to achieve these goals. All students, regardless of their social backgrounds or entry characteristics, must eventually fulfil institutional requirements (for declaring a major, obtaining core or required courses, and meeting degree regulations for example) if they are to reach the goal of graduation. Money, cultural capital, social support networks and lay referral systems, and institutional rewards (credits and grades) are the resources or means that are necessary to meet this goal. As the findings from this study will indicate, the unequal distribution of these resources and the inability to define goals in an organizational setting ultimately account for variation in student satisfaction levels. Furthermore, this study will show how student satisfaction is affected by students' perceptions concerning the link between their education at university and their anticipated experiences beyond university. In this context, satisfaction is an

emotional state oriented toward the future. As the findings will indicate, satisfied students express greater confidence that their educational experiences will be relevant and valuable for the limited structure of opportunities awaiting them upon graduation. Dissatisfied students, on the other hand, are not as confident that their education will prepare them for a competitive job market and for the demands of the 'real world' beyond university.

Applications of Research on Student Satisfaction

The sociological perspective used in this study will help to develop a critical understanding of students' problems, frustrations and dilemmas as participants in a complex organization. In addition to contributing to the knowledge about student behavior, this research has very practical purposes as applied sociology. Knowledge gained from this study can be used (1) to inform the university's institutional policies and (2) to evaluate existing programs and services that target students (teaching, administrative procedures and student loans for example).

The current knowledge base on the student experience is very narrow with respect to undergraduates' perceptions about the education that they receive or whether or not they are satisfied with the services administered by the university. This information is important if the university is to carry out its most important mandate of educating students.

Possessing knowledge about student satisfactions and the factors that affect satisfactions can allow concrete steps to be taken at the policy level, thus 'adding value' to the educational process. Data from studies such as this can make valuable contributions to students, to the university and to society in general.

Contributions to Students

One of the aims in writing this thesis is to sensitize students to the fact that their perceptions, experiences and opinions are important. Students should be empowered to exert an impact on university policy decisions that will directly affect the quality of their educational experiences. Government officials and university policy makers routinely devise policies to deal with such complex issues as (1) resource allocation, (2) fees, (3) student loans, (4) class sizes and (5) teaching without consulting students. There is little or no understanding of what occurs in the day-to-day routines of the university's most important clients - students. By providing students with the opportunity to share their experiences, perceptions, and opinions concerning their education, students can participate more meaningfully in the decision-making process. Government officials and university policy makers further removed from life at the bottom of the 'ivory tower' can then have a better understanding about the potential impact of their decisions.

In part, this thesis engages in a form of client education to enable students to make more informed decisions about what to look for and what questions to ask when they seek out professional services at the university. Students seek out this type of 'consumer information' when they solicit the advice of fellow students or trusted professors about what courses to take, about whom to take courses from and about how to appeal a detrimental student loan decision. Nonetheless, some students lack access to the informal networks that would facilitate their avoidance of the inevitable pit-falls of university life. By simply identifying areas where students commonly experience problems and by describing to novices how veterans have dealt with them, neophytes may be able to avoid some of the same difficulties. Students may also benefit from knowing that other students share the same or similar experiences in dealing with the university bureaucracy, unfair professors and the myriad of rules and regulations that pertain to campus life. Armed with such knowledge, students may be encouraged to participate in student governments or to become more active in promoting and protecting their own interests.

Contributions to the University

Data on students' perceptions and satisfactions can provide important information for university administrators, faculty members, student services personnel and other professional

staff who want to meet the needs of students more effectively and who want to upgrade the quality of services to the client of the system. Northeast Missouri State University (NMSU), for example, annually distributes a questionnaire to its students asking, "How satisfied were you with the experiences, services, and facilities at NMSU?" Data from the questionnaire have been used successfully to identify ways to improve client services at NMSU's admissions office, registrar's office, financial aid office, career/placement office, student activities office, and library (Krueger and Heisserer 1987: 55). Data from this study could be used in a similar fashion to improve client services at MUN.

Demonstrating a concern for students' welfare and for the quality of their social and intellectual development is likely to instil greater institutional commitment and sense of belonging among students. If universities enhance satisfaction as a result of information gained in studies such as this, they will be better able to broaden their financial bases through private funding. University alumni who were satisfied with their social and academic experiences at Memorial can be a potential financial asset to a university currently strapped for funds. Private donors may be even more helpful to faculties such as Arts or Sciences that are usually overlooked by the private sector which seems to prefer investing in more business-oriented or vocational faculties.

Making the effort to determine students' opinions about the quality of the education that they receive is a worthwhile endeavour in itself. A number of the students participating in our study were encouraged that researchers from MUN were finally 'going into the field' to investigate the student perspective. Students in general want their universities to be more responsive to their needs and want to have input into the decisions that affect them. As two students who participated in our survey remarked:

> I think it is about time somebody attempted to assemble the opinions of those who really matter - the students. I sincerely hope some benefit will come of studies such as these. They are long overdue and are needed desperately if we are to have a creditable source of education.

> This is the first time that I have been aware of a survey of students at MUN. I think that more of this should be carried out so that the feelings and outlooks of MUN students can be heard and the possible improvement of some of their concerns and stresses [conveyed]. Furthermore, it enables the university to get feedback upon its 'work' to improve the education of the enroled body. Finally, I feel that more surveys should be carried out to give a clearer picture of the university's role and effectiveness as a perceived educator.

There is a need for a greater understanding between students and other members of the university community. Students, faculty, administrators and other organizational members can become separated into factions and even opposed to each other through the processes of 'typification' and 'stereotyping' that sometimes occur within institutions. Through such processes individuals learn to distinguish themselves from 'outsiders' and come to clearer definitions

about their own roles and agendas within the organization (Goffman, 1961). Such fragmentation within the university community is evident in the way that faculty and administrators haggle over power and different academic disciplines or departments engage in a kind of 'interdepartmental warfare,' battling for prestige and scarce resources (Boyer, 1987). Students often find themselves caught in the middle of such battles, unable to design for themselves an academic program of choice that crosses the boundaries of different disciplines. One student at Memorial only recently succeeded in getting academic regulations changed to accommodate her choice of a chemistry major and a philosophy minor -an arrangement that was previously forbidden under MUN's rules.[4] Memorial's faculty union (MUNFA) is reported to be strongly resisting administration proposals for greater accountability for teaching, another obstacle that, if surmounted, will likely benefit students (Sunday Express, March 24, 1991). It is important to find out how students feel about issues of teaching and learning and how they are affected since they too have a stake in their resolution.

Finally, a better understanding between students and faculty members is of the utmost importance since instructors are on the 'front lines' in the delivery of educational

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[4]   Comments made by the Dean of Arts, Dr. Michael Staveley, at a presentation entitled 'The University's Role in Economic Recovery' (October, 1991).

services and students are, of course, the prime recipients. Research has shown, for example, that when students have direct, personal knowledge of their instructors' grading practices (especially of the criteria they use in grading), students are more likely to perform at higher levels (Norton 1990: 440).

Too often, students and faculty assume adversarial roles or are ignorant about each other's approaches to teaching and learning. By knowing how different university students respond to different methods of instruction, faculty members will be in a better position to know what will and will not be effective in the classroom. Detailed feedback from students concerning teaching approaches, styles and methods can uncover the strengths and weaknesses in this vital area. On this point there is some evidence to suggest that students' evaluations of teaching and courses are congruent with teachers' evaluations of peers and courses (Prosser and Trigwell, 1990). This evidence lends credence to the claim that students' subjective perceptions of quality regarding teaching and courses are indeed valid measures.

Contributions to Society

A fundamental mission of the university is to educate students. In looking at the contributions that data on students' perceptions and satisfactions can make for society, three important questions must be raised. What are the

benefits to be derived from a university education? Who is to receive these benefits? How can these benefits be most effectively delivered in an equitable manner?

A number of benefits are derived from higher education. One human capital approach suggests that an investment in universities leads to social and economic progress since every person with the necessary intelligence and motivation has the potential to acquire skills and training through education that can subsequently be employed to benefit society economically and socially. Some authors have linked education to democracy suggesting that in order for democratic ideals to become a reality a society must first ensure that all citizens are able to participate equally and intelligently. Each citizen must have a thorough understanding of the world to make informed choices and decisions on social, economic and political matters (Dewey, 1966; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985). Education is portrayed as the key to realizing these ends.

In our society, education and social status are closely linked. People who hold educational credentials (university degrees, diplomas or certificates) have greater access to society's scarce social resources of wealth, power and prestige (Collins, 1979). A university degree is thus an important determinant of the social strata individuals will eventually occupy and the amount of economic and non-economic benefits individuals will acquire.

In Canada, educational policies have tried to promote greater accessibility to all classes, ethnic groups and gender groups to ensure that all Canadians have an equal chance to obtain the benefits of a university education. While these policies did manage to improve participation rates among these groups, by the late 1980's, women, ethnic minorities and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were still underrepresented in Canadian universities compared to white, middle class, Anglo-saxon protestant males (Gilbert, 1989). Universities, in Porter's classic analysis, served to reproduce Canada's 'vertical mosaic' (Porter, 1965).

To 'destratify' Canada's universities, more effective ways of servicing traditionally disadvantaged segments must be identified. Underrepresented ethnic and linguistic groups, women (particularly in science and engineering fields), and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds represent segments of society who should be benefitting more from a university education. If university policy makers and government representatives direct their efforts to upgrading the quality of services provided by the university instead of merely upgrading the quality of inputs by raising admission standards they can achieve these goals. To ensure that such students can compete on a more equitable basis, for example, ways can be found to improve the quality of remedial or support services. Knowing more about how students respond to

current services (i.e. how satisfied they are with
counselling centers, referral systems, foreign student
offices, student loans offices and so on), the university's
professional staff might be able to identify gaps or
weaknesses in services that target students from
traditionally disadvantaged segments. This discovery would
meet a third objective of ensuring that the benefits of a
university education are delivered in the most efficient and
equitable manner possible to as many people as possible.

Conclusion

In subsequent chapters, the quality of education at Memorial
University is examined from the clients' perspective. The
findings on student satisfactions and perceptions presented
in this thesis indicate that improvements are necessary at
MUN in the areas of teaching (especially in the first year),
administrative procedures, student loans services, so .al
support, and counselling and advising for students. It is
also evident that undergraduate students at MUN work and live
under a wide range of pressures and stresses that result
largely from overcrowding and inadequate funding. At the same
time, the majority of students who participated in this study
appear to have reconciled themselves to the adverse
conditions they must face and maintain unexpectedly high
levels of satisfaction. The reason behind this becomes

clearer when we consider how students adjust their aspirations to current economic and social realities.

Student satisfaction is an educational outcome over which universities have considerable influence. Despite the major challenges confronting Memorial University, it is within the university's power to change certain institutional structures and processes in order to reduce the stresses and pressures on undergraduates and make their time at MUN more satisfying and rewarding. In recommending ways to make the university experience more satisfying and rewarding for students, however, it should be pointed out that high levels of student satisfaction may not indicate that students have received a 'quality' education - however that term might be defined. Students' conceptions and definitions of quality are subjective and may differ from those of faculty, administrators, employers and others. Nonetheless, undergraduates' views and opinions about their educational experiences are important to document and can be used to inform strategies to serve better the university's most important clientele.

To begin our analysis, it is necessary to review the higher education literature on student satisfactions and perceptions. Factors that have been identified as affecting satisfactions are discussed in chapter two and the relationship between student satisfaction and quality in higher education is examined in greater detail. Chapter three

provides some important information about the social environment in which the study takes place - about the location of Memorial University of Newfoundland, its relation to society, and its organizational participants. Chapter four describes the methodology for the study. It outlines the research design, sampling techniques and instrumentation and it discusses the number of problems encountered during the data collection. Chapter five presents the findings of the study and chapter six identifies the causes and factors that account for students' satisfaction levels and perceptions. Finally, chapter seven discusses their policy implications in relation to improving the quality of education at Memorial.

THE LITERATURE ON STUDENT SATISFACTION

Alexander Astin, a noted higher education scholar, describes student satisfaction as one of the most important and significant outcomes of the higher education process. Unfortunately, as Astin points out, student satisfaction has merited little attention in the research literature.

> Current discussions of accountability or the 'outputs' of higher education frequently overlook student satisfaction. This area covers the student's subjective experience during the college years and perceptions of the value of the educational experience. Given the considerable investment of time and energy that most students make in attending college, the student's perception of value should be given substantial weight. Indeed, it is difficult to argue that student satisfaction can be legitimately subordinated to any other educational outcome (Astin, 1977: 164).

This chapter reviews the higher education literature on student satisfactions and perceptions. The first section examines the findings of several American and Canadian studies which have linked student satisfaction to social and academic integration variables, certain institutional characteristics and student perceptions. The second section explains why student satisfaction is an important subjective measure of 'quality' in education.

Research on Student Satisfactions and Perceptions

The research on college and university students is abundant as the literature reviews of Jacob (1957), Feldman and Newcomb (1969), Bowen (1977), and more recently Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) make clear. But as extensive as the

literature may be, there are also some significant gaps and
weaknesses that need to be addressed. Much of the literature
deals with outcome variables such as measurable changes in
cognitive skills and intellectual growth, psychosocial
changes (identity, self-concept, self-esteem, relating to
others and the external world), attitudes and values, moral
development, and economic and non-economic benefits of higher
education.[1] Relatively few studies have centered on students'
satisfaction with their university experience as a
substantive area of investigation (Bean and Bradley, 1986;
Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Knox et al. 1992).

A number of higher education scholars in the United
States have employed student satisfaction measures in
conceptual models of student attrition or retention.
Satisfaction is viewed as an intervening variable that
predicts the 'degree of fit' between the student and the
university environment (for example Bean, 1983, 1985; Howard
and Maxwell, 1980; Munro, 1981; Pascarella, 1980; Spady, 1970
and Tinto, 1975). The models are based on the conception that
student background variables (secondary school grades,
ethnicity, major, financial status, parental education)
affect the student's level of initial commitments to the
goals of graduation and to the particular institution
attended, which, in turn, have an impact upon the student's

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[1]   Non-economic benefits are typically subsumed under the
more general heading of 'quality of life measures'.

academic and social integration within the institution. For example, a student with excellent grades, a more positive academic attitude, and a firmer interest in his or her major would likely become more integrated into the university milieu and would stand a better chance of successfully completing a degree program. The relationship between academic and social integration and student satisfaction is discussed below.

Academic integration is viewed "...as a function of the extrinsic rewards of grades as well as the intrinsic rewards associated with a student's self perception of intellectual development." (Gilbert et al. 1989:4). Academic integration is hypothesized to have a positive influence on student satisfaction as well as a student's interest, motivation and confidence. Several studies have found college grades to be positively associated with academic satisfaction (Knox et al, 1992; Bean and Bradley, 1986). However, grades have been found to be virtually unrelated to extracurricular satisfactions. This has led to the general conclusion that payoffs in the form of grades have an impact on one's evaluation of the academic side of college life, but probably not on other aspects - social life and sports and recreation for example (Knox et al, 1992).

Morstain (1977) reported that students who were satisfied with their academic programs were more likely than less satisfied students to share with faculty similar views

about the "purposes, processes and power dimensions" of
education. Morstain found that moderately and highly
satisfied students expressed more preference for
formal/traditional modes of teaching (e.g. lectures), placed
more value on grades and external evaluations by faculty and
attached higher import to vocational/practical and a
"learning for its own sake" purpose of a college education.
Dissatisfied students, on the other hand, preferred more
informal and independent teaching-learning arrangements and
desired more of a "co-equal" role with faculty in educational
decision-making. These views were less congruent with those
of faculty, Morstain reported, who tended to prefer more
structured teaching-learning modes, emphasized the importance
of faculty assessment of student work and reported relatively
little preference for student-faculty collegiality in
educational decision-making (1977: 12). A study by Nafziger
et al. (1975) also found that a student's level of interest
with his or her major was a predictor of satisfaction. Bean
and Bradley (1986) found that academic difficulty, defined as
perceiving one's academic program as difficult and too
competitive, was another factor that resulted in
dissatisfaction with the college experience.[2]

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[2]   Bean and Bradley expand their definition of academic
difficulty as follows: "...difficulty is viewed not as
being challenging, but as being unpleasant (e.g. more
difficult than you like') [1986: 396].

Social integration is viewed "...as a function of student interaction with both peers and faculty, with both informal and formal student faculty interaction viewed as being of considerable importance." (Gilbert et al. 1989: 4). A number of studies have found social integration to be positively correlated with satisfaction. A study by Schmidt and Sedlacek (1972), for example, associated student satisfaction with the frequency of student-faculty interactions and to the number of professors with whom a student was acquainted. Studies by Astin (1974, 1977) and Pascarella (1980) have reported that faculty and peer contacts have substantial effects on overall student satisfaction.

Astin's 1977 study also found that the student's ratings of the undergraduate college experience and environment was strongly influenced by various forms of involvement. For example, being active in a social fraternity or sorority was reported to lead to a higher degree of satisfaction with the undergraduate experience, as well as to greater satisfaction overall with institutional quality. Students who interacted more frequently with faculty also reported a much higher degree of satisfaction with student-faculty relations than students who did not interact with faculty. At the same time, students who were heavily involved in their academic pursuits were much more satisfied with quality of the instruction, student-faculty relations, curriculum, institutional

reputation, and college administration. Involvement in athletic activities was also found to produce a high degree of satisfaction, particularly with student friendships (Astin, 1977).

Some of the characteristics of educational institutions appear to play some part in determining student satisfactions and perceptions. A study by Knox et al.(1992) that compared 1,509 different postsecondary undergraduate institutions across the United States found that college characteristics had significant effects only with respect to social life and sports and recreation facilities. Their findings indicated that the greater the student enrolment, the greater the effect on the odds of being satisfied with recreation and sports facilities. The higher the proportion of full-time students, the higher the odds of reporting satisfaction with social life: for each 10 percent increment in the proportion of full-time students, the odds of reporting this kind of satisfaction were 8 percent higher. A relationship was also found between size and social satisfaction. Speculating on why this was the case, the authors suggest, "Larger institutions probably not only have more recreational facilities, but they may have a greater variety of them. They may also contain students with a wider variety of interests, thus making it possible for students with similar leisure interests to pursue them together" (1992: 313).

Utility, defined as the usefulness of one's education for getting a job, for self-development or for other desired goals, has also been linked to satisfaction (Bean, 1983). Bean and Bradley (1986), after reviewing the literature on job satisfaction and employee turnover, hypothesized that satisfaction may be due to intrinsic or extrinsic factors, and utility was expected to be one such intrinsic factor for college students. Their study confirmed that a student's perception of educational benefits was highly correlated with satisfaction.

In Canada, student satisfactions and perceptions have received scant attention in the higher education literature. Virtually all of the data generated on Canadian students are quantitative and designed for use in multi-variate models of institutional retention or departure (Gilbert, 1989). Gilbert's application of the model at one Ontario university examined the process of university attrition during the students' first year at university. The results of the study confirmed the importance of institutional experience variables, particularly social and academic integration, but as Gilbert points out, further studies are necessary to identify the causes of different types of student withdrawals including transfers to postsecondary institutions, temporary departures and system leavers.

Most of the studies that have dealt specifically with student satisfaction have been small scale in-house projects

sponsored by departments of student services and only a few of these have been published. A study by Holdaway and Kelloway (1987) asked all 937 first-year students in the Faculties of Arts, Business, Education, Engineering and Science who had come directly to the University of Alberta from high school about their university experiences and the transition from high school. Holdaway and Kelloway reported that most students assessed that they were working considerably harder than at high school (on a scale ranging from 1 ['not nearly as hard'] to 5 ['much harder'], 72% of respondents chose a response of either 4 or 5), and many said that high school had not adequately prepared them for university. The greatest need to adjust occurred in the amount of work (mean of 4.0 on a five-point scale), stress (mean of 3.7), difficulty of work (mean of 3.6), and methods of instruction (mean of 3.5). In terms of enjoyment and satisfaction, 62% of participants chose 4 or 5 on the five-point enjoyment scale (with a mean of 3.7) while 53% chose 4 or 5 on the five point satisfaction scale (with a mean of 3.5). In a study at the University of Guelph, Benjamin (1989) noted that academic work suffered and grade levels dropped for first year students who reported being lonely and isolated and who had difficulty adjusting in their first year at university. Mahaffey et al. (1991), in an article on student dissatisfaction, simply discuss the utility of an abstract theoretical model called EVLN (exit, voice, loyalty

and neglect) to explain various student responses to dissatisfaction.

Vaala and Holdaway (1989) surveyed college transfer students attending the University of Alberta to determine which variables were associated with student success and satisfaction in their transfer from college to university. The authors concluded from their study that: (1) students tended to be more satisfied with the college experience than with the university experience; (2) students reported higher satisfactions from interactions with faculty and peers at college than with similar interactions at university (3) students reported more satisfaction with their intellectual development at college than at university and (4) positive faculty influences on students were perceived to be greater at college than at university. Vaala and Holdaway attribute the substantial positive influence of college faculty members on transfer students to the support and encouragement available to students within the college system. They also suggest that the lower satisfaction rates concerning intellectual development at university may be due to unrealistic expectations about university work. To remedy this, Vaala and Holdaway recommend that transfer students be given more transfer program information (i.e. by visiting the university campus before transfer and making contact with faculty) so that students can know more about what is expected of them at university.

A survey of undergraduates in the faculties of Arts and Science at Memorial University of Newfoundland gathered quantitative data on students' levels of satisfaction with various aspects of undergraduate life (Gomme et al. forthcoming). The survey found that over 60 percent of undergraduates were dissatisfied with the student loans program, with available work space on campus, and with the opportunity to evaluate their professors. Between 50 and 60 percent were dissatisfied with the amount of contact that they had with professors and with the university's administration procedures. The amount and quality of academic advising, the relevance of course content to the job market, and class size were indicated by between 40 and 49 percent as sources of dissatisfaction. Roughly a third of students were dissatisfied with the quality of contact with professors, the selection of availabe courses, the workload in courses, and the physical education facilities. Approximately a quarter of students expressed dissatisfaction with the interest levels and content of their courses, with their marks, and with the teaching performances of their professors and teaching/lab assistants. Interestingly, the study found that students were more favourably disposed toward the teaching of the latter over the former. Students indicated the least dissatisfaction with the following items: the amount being learned, the library resources, their social lives, and their accomodations.

The studies reviewed in this chapter offer a clearer picture of how college characteristics and student experiences affect satisfaction. Social and academic integration, the level of student involvement and students' perceptions about the utility of their education are all important variables that have substantial effects on satisfaction. However, two major problems are still apparent. First, much of the data on student satisfactions and perceptions are American and were collected during a period of student unrest in the late 1960's and early 1970's (Bean and Bradley, 1986). Second, the mainly quantitative data yielded from these studies have not really added to our understanding of how such an important educational outcome as student satisfaction is produced. After reviewing 2,600 studies in American higher education, one of the key recommendations made by Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) was that more qualitative studies be conducted to flesh out the subtle and complex effects of college. The type of qualitative analysis advocated by Pascarella and Terenzini would certainly aid our understanding of student satisfaction and of the factors that affect or determine this important subjective measure of quality in Canadian higher education.

Using Student Satisfaction To Measure Educational Quality

There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the definition and assessment of 'quality' in higher education.

Rankings of universities and colleges by popular publications like _Maclean's_ or _U.S. News and World Report_ have included such measures of quality as selectivity (entrance grades and acceptance rates of students), resources (percentage of tenured lecturers and overall PhD's, research grants, student-faculty ratios, operating budgets, etc.) and reputation as judged by university presidents. These conventional measures have been discounted by many higher education researchers in North America, however, as having little to do with the quality of students' educational experiences or outcomes (Astin, 1985; Bogue and Sanders, 1992; Evers and Gilbert, 1991; Millard, 1991; Gibberson, 1991 cited in Martin, 1992). Instead, quality is argued to be a direct measure of the 'value added' to students in terms of their personal growth and development. The concept of value-added is described by Osigweh (1986: 168) as "...the ability of the institution to influence its students favourably by making a positive and identifiable contribution to their mental as well as personal development."

The value-added approach clearly places a great deal of the responsibility for demonstrating quality or excellence in education on the university's educators and its institutional services (faculty, administration and student loans services for example). It is an extremely complicated endeavour, however, to determine how, and to what extent, the university makes an 'identifiable contribution to students' mental as

well as personal development.' First, the student's entering level of performance or competence would have to be determined. As Astin points out: "Without some assessment at the entering point, there is simply no way to determine whether and to what extent the college has actually added value to the student's competence at exit point." (Astin 1987:95) There would also have to be some form of post-assessment which could somehow isolate and identify the exact contributions made by the institution and by educators themselves.

Although it is an immense challenge to find some workable solution or procedure to determine just how much value a university education adds, some promising Canadian research has been conducted in this field. A study by Evers and Gilbert (1991) which examined data on educational outcomes from two independent research projects found that formal university instruction produced added value on a number of important dimensions of student development. These included: thinking and reasoning skills, problem solving skills, planning and organizing skills, time management skills, ability to conceptualize, learning skills and quantitative, mathematical and technical skills (university courses were rated as the most useful source of development by more than 40 percent of the students surveyed for these areas). However, on a number of other important dimensions of student development much less value is added by formal

university courses. These included: independence, interpersonal and social skills, supervisory skills, risk-taking, managing conflict, leadership/influence, and creativity/innovation. The primary sources for interpersonal, managing conflict and personal strengths were parents and peers. The primary sources for risk-taking, leadership/influence, coordinating, and creativity/innovation was students' work experience. Evers and Gilbert note that work experience even accounted for a surprisingly high proportion of students' written communication skills (1991: 65). Using a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (greatly), students also reported that university experiences contributed little in the following areas: social and political awareness (mean of 3.31), cultural and artistic sensitivity and awareness (mean of 2.74), global understanding: a sense of wider international and cultural contexts (3.44), historical consciousness (mean of 2.82), caring for others (mean of 3.21) and concern for others (3.32). Evers and Gilbert argue that these latter educational outcomes represent some of the more crucial characteristics which future university graduates will require.

While these educational outcomes are obviously extremely important as indicators of educational quality, student satisfaction should also be recognized as an important subjective measure of a university's effectiveness in servicing its clients. In fact, the study on educational

outcomes by Gilbert and Evers described above uses only 'subjective data'. It refers to what students think they have acquired in the university experience. Despite the authors' sensitivity on the 'value added' issue, their study tells us nothing concrete about how much students get out of their university education. The question remains as to how 'quality' and 'value' in higher education might be defined and measured.

Stuart Smith, the author of the report for the Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education, has recommended that Canadian universities should implement a shared system of quality control to measure their performance. He suggests that such a system might include polling of university graduates to find out their opinion on the education they received (Smith 1991: 131). Gielow and Lee also see a prominent place for student perceptions and satisfactions in the assessment of educational quality: "Although an affective measure, it may be argued that student satisfaction is one of the most direct tests of postsecondary success... Given that individual students are the primary beneficiaries of the college experience, asking them how satisfied they are with those experiences is an obvious way to measure this success. Student satisfaction is also an educational outcome over which postsecondary institutions have considerable influence" (Gielow and Lee, 1988: p.3 quoted in Knox et al., 1992).

Data on client satisfactions are widely used by the professions of law and medicine to determine how effective services are in reaching clients and achieving their intended purposes (Aday et al., 1980). We have already noted how data on student satisfactions and perceptions can contribute to students, to the university and to society in the previous chapter. Given the similarities between universities and health delivery services, for example, in terms of "...organizational complexity, disciplinary/professional heterogeneity, professional autonomy and self-governance, institutional independence and major public investment in financing," (Webster, 1990:79), it is both possible and desirable to use studies of student satisfaction to help upgrade the quality of services for university students. If this goal is to be realized, however, we must first recognize the unique character of the organizations of which university students are a part. It is to this task that we now turn - to learn more about some of the key characteristics of the particular institution under study, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) is located in a
particular social environment composed of other institutions,
organizations and groups that place certain constraints and
limitations on the university's activities, processes and
practices. For example, the provincial government provides
financial support for MUN and demands some accountability for
the university's expenditures and policies (and the
provincial government itself is dependent on federal transfer
payments). The private and public sectors of the economy
receive and judge the university's products. The university
must also promote a certain 'public image' that will retain
the favour of students, government representatives, corporate
donors, and other groups. That is why universities like MUN
spend considerable amounts of money on public relations
offices, attractive brochures, pamphlets and the like. MUN
should not, therefore, be seen as an organization isolated
from the rest of society and functioning on its own. Rather,
it must be sensitive to the perceived expectations of the
social environment in which it is embedded. Often these
expectations or demands are contradictory or unclear, perhaps
not even articulated.

Universities function within their social environments
to achieve certain ends or goals. While a university's formal
mission statement, written constitution or statement of
purpose may give the impression that the university is an

entity striving towards one unified goal or set of goals, this is not necessarily the case. Rather, organizational participants (faculty, administrators, other professional staff and students) pursue their own ends or goals either individually or collectively (Becker 1966: 15). Where conflicts and disagreements arise between or among participants, resolution occurs through largely 'political' means.[1]

Seen in this context, MUN is not only constrained and limited by its social environment but it also has to make adjustments and compromises for the competing demands placed on it by organizational participants. Whenever the administration or the faculty respond to the external pressures placed on the university by its social environment (for example, when the university is given a smaller operating budget) there is a 'trickle down effect' that reaches students. Invariably, the nature of these institutional adjustments and compromises affects the quality of student life.

This chapter provides some general information about MUN and examines how certain organizational features of the university exert an influence on student perceptions and

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[1]   Those espousing the political theory of organization and
       administration of colleges and universities suggest that
       universities are 'political systems' characterized by the
       inevitable   and   irreconcilable   differences   among
       organizational participants. Under such a system, the
       resolution of conflicts take the form of bargaining and
       politics (Perrow, 1970; Bess, 1988).

satisfactions.[2] First, a brief historical sketch is presented of Memorial University College's early beginnings and its evolution into a large, modern university. Following is a description of MUN's location and geographical setting, its relation to society, its faculty and administrative and support staff, and its student body.

The Beginning

Malcolm Macleod, in his book <u>A Bridge Built Halfway: A History of Memorial University College 1925-1950</u>, recounts the twenty-five year history of Newfoundland's first institution of higher learning. According to the MUN historian, plans to build Memorial University College were nearly thwarted because of opposition from religious leaders of the day and from a lack of finances. However, several factors made the 1925 opening of Memorial University College possible: the national movement to find a suitable war memorial for the Newfoundlanders who had lost their lives on active service during the First World War, a considerable change in official Catholic attitudes toward nondenominational higher education, American financial aid, and the movement for university federation in the Maritime provinces of Canada (Macleod, 1990).

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[2]   Facts and statistical data are taken from the 1990-91 MUN Fact Book as well as the University's 1992-93 calendar.

In spite of the initial optimism surrounding the College's establishment, however, its development from 1925 to 1950 was disappointingly slow. In terms of student enrolments, for example, the average growth rate during the twenty-five year period was in the range of 12 to 15 percent. In seven of those twenty-five years, however, the number of students registered was actually less than the previous year (Macleod 1990: 255). As Macleod points out, the unfavourable economic, political and social conditions caused by the grea. depression, the Government's constitutional problems and the fractious nature of Newfoundland society (with cleavages caused by rural/urban and Christian denominational differences) impeded any significant growth for the College during this period.

When Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949, the first provincial government made the elevation of Memorial College to the full status of a university a top priority. Royal assent was given the Bill creating The Memorial University of Newfoundland on August 13, 1949, exactly one month to the day from the opening of the Provincial House of Assembly. The Board of Regents and the Senate were inaugurated in May 1950, and the first Convocation of the University was held on June 3, 1950, when the first degrees were awarded (MUN calendar, 1992). MUN had been cast in a leading role in Premier Joey Smallwood's ambitious plans to 'modernize' Newfoundland society (Macleod, 1990).

From early in its history MUN has maintained its status
as an 'open door' or 'public' university. The admission
standards it set were designed to admit those who had a
reasonable chance of completing a degree, but also to take
into consideration the social equity questions which
essentially revolved around the access of students from lower
socioeconomic backgrounds and those from rural areas (Bennet
et al, 1992). Subsidized tuition policies first implemented
by the Smallwood government helped to reduce the financial
barriers for Newfoundland students attending university. As
a result of these policies promoting universal accessibility
the range of the student body was broadened in terms of
cultural backgrounds, demographics, interests and abilities.

A Period Of Expansion

With university status, Memorial entered a period of rapid
growth that was to continue into the 1970's. In 1949-50,
there were 307 full-time students at the university; in 1961,
when the university moved to its present campus, the student
enrolment had reached 1745 full-time and 152 part-time. Ten
years later, 1971-72, the student population, including full
and part-time student rose to 10,980.

Meanwhile, there were other dramatic changes in the
variety and extent of academic programs. In 1949-50, there
were only two faculties (Arts and Science, and Education).
Today, there are six faculties - Arts, Science, Education,

Medicine, Engineering and Business Administration, and eight schools - Graduate Studies, Nursing, Physical Education and Athletics, Social Work, General and Continuing Studies, Music, and Pharmacy. In 1975, the University established a campus in Corner Brook where it . school of Fine Arts is now located.

In addition to its faculties and schools, MUN has established over the years a number of special divisions that are quite prominent and internationally renowned. Among these are the Archaeology Unit, the Centre for Cold Ocean Resources Engineering (CCORE), the school of Continuing Studies and Extension, the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), the Ocean Engineering Research Center (OERC), the Ocean Sciences Center (OSC), and the International Reference Center for Avian Haematozoa (IRCAH) (MUN Calendar, 1992).

<u>The St. John's Campus</u>

MUN's main campus is located in St. John's, the provincial capital, which is the core of a metropolitan area with a population of over 150,000. The economic foundation of the city rests primarily on its public sector. It accommodates most of the province's postsecondary education institutions including the Marine Institute and several private career colleges and community colleges. St. John's is also the site of the Provincial House of Assembly and the headquarters for its various government offices.

The university is some distance from the urban core of St. John's and is surrounded by relatively affluent suburban neighbourhoods. It is well situated to offer students, faculty and university staff access to a variety of urban amenities, however. Within walking distance of MUN is the St. John's Arts nd Culture Center, a large sports and recreation complex and a small shopping and commercial district.

The campus itself is spread out over 220 acres. It is bisected by Prince Philip Drive, an extremely busy four-lane arterial road. Much of the campus is windswept and open. The grounds require extensive landscaping to add some appeal to the university's large parking lots and boring architecture.

South of Prince Philip Drive are the university's older and temporary buildings that were erected in the early 1960's (though these are gradually being replaced as a result of MUN's ambitious construction plans), a large daycare facility, as well the nine residence houses and four apartment buildings that provide on-campus accommodation for students. The tight cluster of academic buildings accommodates the largest faculties of Arts and Sciences, as well as the schools of Social Work, Education, Physical Education and Athletics, General and Continuing Studies, Music and Pharmacy. The Thomson Student Center, which houses one of the largest and most profitable campus bars in Canada, is also on the south end of the campus.

North of the arterial road are the Health Sciences Centre, which incorporates the Faculty of Medicine, the School of Nursing, the School of Pharmacy and the St. John's General Hospital, several of the newer buildings which accommodate the faculties of Engineering, Earth Sciences, and Business Administration, and the church owned and operated colleges. These buildings are relatively spacious and attractive compared to the buildings on the south end of the campus. The National Research Council's Institute for Marine Dynamics, which is Canada's prime center for studies related to cold ocean resource development, is also located on the north side of the campus.

The Queen Elizabeth II Library, the largest of the campus' three libraries (the Health Sciences Library and the Curriculum Materials Center comprising the other two), provides a kind of focal point for the university. It is an impressive structure of 200,000 square feet on five levels, it has a seating capacity of 2,000 and it can hold 1.6 million volumes. The library's collection serves as a major information resource for the university as well as the province.

Many of the facilities available to students, faculty and other MUN employees are woefully inadequate for a university the size of Memorial. The Thomson Student Centre, designed for meetings, student offices, recreation and relaxation is usually cramped and overcrowded because of its

small size. Around mid day, it is not unusual to find
students huddled over railings or sitting on stairs eating
their lunches because of the cafeteria's insufficient seating
capacity. The fitness and recreation facilities that are
available at the Physical Education Building (weight room,
gymnasium, swimming pool, squash courts) are meagre and much
of its equipment is obsolete. Playing fields are equally
inadequate. Work and study space at the Queen Elizabeth II
Library can also be inadequate especially during the peak
midterm and final exam period.

Relations to State and Society

> The Objectives of Memorial University of Newfoundland
> are: to develop in the province an institution of higher
> learning deserving of the respect for the quality of its
> academic standards and of its research; to establish new
> programmes to meet the expanding needs of the province;
> and to provide the means whereby the University may
> reach out to all the people. (MUN Calendar, 1992)

These 'Objectives of the University' reflect MUN's mandate
from the province. The authority and functions of the
university and its parts are delineated under a legislative
act entitled An Act Respecting the Memorial University of
Newfoundland. The bulk of MUN's funding comes from the
provincial government.[3]

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[3] For the fiscal year ending March 31, 1991, 83.8% of
Memorial's operating fund came from the Government with
the remainder coming from student fees (13.7%),
investments (1.8%) and other sources (0.7%).

The highest governing body of the university is the Board of Regents responsible for the 'management, administration and control of the properties, revenue, business and affairs of the University' (University Calendar 1992: 24). The Board of Regents consists of three ex-officio members (the Chancellor of the University, the President of the University, and the Academic Vice-President of the University), six members elected by the Alumni Association of the university, seventeen members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council and two members appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council who are full-time students of the university. Below the Board of Regents is the University Senate, the Faculty Councils and the Faculties and Schools (see organizational chart - table 3-1). It is the President of the University, however, acting in conjunction with other academic decision-making bodies such as the Senate and the Board of Regents, who exercises power over Memorial's operating fund and who devises more general institutional policies.

A key institutional priority for Memorial and other Canadian universities that has evolved in recent years centers around the need for 'accountability' and 'fiscal responsibility'. Because universities have become overwhelmingly dependent upon government funding, governments have become more concerned to demonstrate that they are getting 'value for money' in what they fund (Cassin and

Morgan 1990: 3). This has brought increasing pressure on Canadian universities to demonstrate their worth both as institutions of education as well as of research. Pressures are also mounting on universities to gear themselves to the provision of employment related vocational training (Gilbert, 1989).

In order to respond to the external pressures posed by its social environment as well as the internal demands of its members, the President of the university and other key policy makers depend on an efficient flow of information up and down the hierarchy (Bess 1988: 7). The President and his administration rely on reports from committees composed of faculty, administrators and sometimes students; counsel from vice-presidents; recommendations from the deans of various faculties; and advice from a cadre of managerial experts who are responsible for the myriad functions of the university including everything from human resources and building maintenance to student registration. The generation and use of a variety of documents, forms, manuals, mission statements and so on meet this need for information and supplies university policy makers with the means to ensure that the institution functions in a cost effective manner (Cassin and Morgan, 1990).

One very important type of information that the university requires to carry out its mandate involves measures of student learning and performance. This

information is conveyed through a bureaucratically efficient system of grades, course credits and credentials. Grades, course credits and credentials are important communicants for students (telling them 'how well they did'; whether or not they can proceed to a higher level of learning; or whether or not they are 'qualified' to hold positions in the labour market) as well as for those who would admit students into the career market of graduate/professional schools or directly into the labour force. They are also essential for the administrative processes of the university (Dence, 1991). As we shall see later in the analysis, the university's use of these formal institutional rewards is an important factor that affects students' perceptions and satisfaction levels.

MUN Employees

When the university was established in 1950, there were 26 full-time faculty supported by a full-time staff of six (Macleod 1991: 255). Today, MUN is a much larger and more complex organization. At the time of our study in 1990-91, there were 2,571 permanent employees at MUN including faculty, administrators and various support staff (see table 3-2).

Faculty

MUN's permanent faculty consists of 1,030 people with the largest numbers in the Faculty of Arts (251) and the Faculty

of Science (268). Out of the total faculty (which includes part-time and full-time faculty), 657 hold PhD's, 227 hold master's degrees, 89 hold professional degrees, and 151 hold qualifications of other sorts (graduate diplomas, professional designations, bachelor's degrees, and unknown) (MUN Fact Book, 1990-91).

While it is difficult to measure the quality of MUN's faculty objectively and to compare it to other institutions, it is interesting to note what the most recent edition of the _Maclean's_ university ranking issue had to say on this subject. In terms of the reputation and quality of its faculty, the magazine took into account the percentage of those with PhDs or the equivalent, the number who had won national awards and the ability of eligible faculty to secure grants from each of the three major federal granting agencies, with a measure of both the number and the dollar value received last year (_Maclean's_, November 9, 1992: 31). On all three dimensions MUN came out near the bottom of the list of the 12 Canadian "Comprehensive Universities" chosen for the _Maclean's_ survey. It was number 10 out of 12 in terms of faculty with PhDs, number 8 for awards per full-time faculty, and number nine for both humanities and medical/science grants. Only in terms of the percentage of first-year classes taught by tenured and tenure-track professors did Memorial come out on the top half of the list:

number 4 out of the 12 universities chosen for this category.[4]

Administration

The university's fifteen administrative units employ 506 permanent employees. The largest of these units, the department of University Works, is responsible for such duties as building and grounds maintenance, security, parking and safety. The other administrative units - the Board of Regents, the Comptrollers Office, Computing Services, the Registrar's Office, University Relations, Labour Relations, the offices of the three vice-presidents, and Human Resources - provide a team of managers to work with the President. Under his direction, the administration is responsible for planning the university's budget, devising general institutional policies, carrying out various policy directives and maintaining the operations of the university.

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[4] Maclean's created the three categories for ranking Canadian universities: (1) Medical/Doctoral - universities with a major commitment to PhD programs and research. All have medical schools which set them apart due to the size of research grants. (Memorial, which has a medical school, was not included because its program mix was more comparable with the comprehensive universities.) (2) Comprehensive - institutions that offer a significant amount of research activity and a wide range of programs - including professional degrees - at the graduate and undergraduate levels. (3) Primarily Undergraduate - schools that are largely focused on undergraduate education with few PhD programs.

Support Staff

A large support staff of secretaries, librarians, accountants, clerks, technicians, security officers, maintenance workers, custodial workers and other personnel form a vital part of the university organization. The 1,035 people who hold such positions at MUN deal directly with many of the complaints and requests that students make, perform necessary administrative tasks, are responsible for the sanitation of the university environment and provide many other services to students, faculty and administrators. Without the active support and assistance of these workers, the university would not be able to carry out its duties and responsibilities.

Union Activity

The collective actions of employees have direct repercussions for the quality of student life at any university. The relationship between the university administration and the unionized workers it deals with is especially important in this regard. An effective working relationship between administrators and university employees is likely to create a more relaxed atmosphere under which students can live and work. At the same time, relations that are difficult or strained will likely create a more fractious and less harmonious environment that may adversely affect the quality of students' experiences.

At MUN, labour relations between the university administration and the unions representing faculty (MUNFA), library workers (CUPE), maintenance workers (represented by the Newfoundland Association of Public Employees or NAPE), custodial workers (NAPE) and security guards (NAPE) have been problematic over the past several years. Between 1987 and 1991, for example, labour disputes between the administration and unionized workers resulted in strike action from members of all three NAPE unions as well as CUPE. When these strikes occurred, students, faculty and other university staff had to deal with disruptions in cleaning, maintenance, library and security services.

In 1989, the university narrowly averted a strike by its 920 professors and librarians when MUNFA signed its first union contract. Since that time, however, relations between the administration and MUNFA have been marked by tension. In the first two years of their collective agreement, MUNFA filed more than 100 grievances and resorted to arbitration to resolve disputes at least 20 times. Of the 16 arbitrations in which there have been rulings, the union has won 14. The arbitrator sided with the university twice (MUNFA newsletter, February, 1991).[5]

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[5] Compared to other Canadian universities, Memorial stands out when it comes to fighting the administration. The University of Alberta, for example, which has twice as many faculty members as Memorial, was arbitration-free in the first three years of its contract. Since certification in 1982, there have only been two arbitration cases.

MUNFA has also been plagued by serious internal disputes arising from problems with its first collective agreement. About 300 faculty members have been affected by an on-going conflict over the issue of non-credited work-related experience. Under the new contract, faculty members can only claim credit for one in five years of their non MUN professional experience when salaries are calculated. For example, one professor - who was credited with five years of experience - was only paid for one. He has lost about $20,000 in the past four years. Others have lost up to $40,000. A number of disgruntled faculty members who fall into this category have recently formed a group called Memorial University of Newfoundland Association for Fair Treatment (MUNAFT) to influence decisions made by MUNFA (The Express, August 26, 1992).

The conditions under which employees at MUN work are not altogether enjoyable and satisfying. Faculty and other university employees are upset about having increased workloads for less pay. They are also upset about lay offs, pay freezes, and what many consider to be unfair working conditions. Relations between the administration and the unions have been less than congenial at times as a result of these tensions. The schism that has been created in the MUNFA union over salary disparities has resulted in some degree of dissatisfaction among faculty members. Students are affected by these circumstances because they are the direct recipients

of services delivered by faculty members, librarians, cafeteria workers and other staff members. Students also feel the effects of austerity measures that result in fewer courses being offered, reduced services and other forms of cut-backs.

Students

In 1949-50, Memorial University College had a total student body of 55. At the time of our study in 1990-91, MUN had a total student body of 16,444 (15,315 undergraduate students and 1,129 graduate students). Most full-time students were in the 16-20 year age segment (6,532 or 55%) and the 21-25 year age segment (4,381 or 37%). A small minority of full-time students were 26 years of age and older (969 or 8%). The trend was reversed for part-time students with 12% (397) of students between the ages of 16 and 20, 26% (901) between 21 and 25 and 62% (2,135) 26 years and older.

The majority of undergraduates were general studies students (6,946).[6] The next largest undergraduate faculties or schools were Arts (with 2,449 undergraduates), Education (1,263) and Science (1,065) (see table 3-3). In terms of gender, 3,084 students in general studies were female compared to 2,263 males, 1,107 in Arts were female compared

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[6]   General Studies students are those who have entered the university but have not declared a major.

to 953 males, 973 students doing education degrees were
female compared to 464 males.

A university's size has important implications for the
quality of students' academic and social experiences. For
example, the conditions under which students carry out their
work at Memorial's smaller campus in Corner Brook, Sir
Wilfred Grenfell College, would be much different than the
conditions students experience at the much larger St. John's
campus. Where students might get to know their professors and
fellow students better in the more intimate setting of a
small institution, they are less likely to do so at a large
university. Conditions at smaller universities are perhaps
more intimate and more conducive to closer personal relations
among students and between students and faculty. Larger
universities like the one in St. John's, on the other hand,
will likely be more impersonal and have to rely more on rigid
bureaucratic processes and procedures for dealing with
students and responding to their needs. In the same vein,
students are perhaps more likely to perceive these larger
institutions as more bureaucratic (filled with 'red tape'),
more imposing and more impersonal than smaller institutions.

The vast majority of students who attend Memorial are
native Newfoundlanders (see table 3-4). Figures available for
1989 show that over half of the full-time graduate and
undergraduate students at Memorial (nearly 55%) reside in the
St. John's metropolitan area (which takes in the populous

Avalon peninsula and includes Mount Pearl). Of course, not all of Newfoundland's young people choose to attend Memorial University. Some choose to attend universities or colleges on the mainland or abroad. Those who choose these options are probably of three types: students who come from upper-middle class families who can afford to send their children away; students willing to incur heavier debts from student loans as a result of attending mainland universities; and especially gifted students who are capable of winning scholarships (academic as well as sports scholarships) and awards to other universities and postsecondary institutions. As one recent study of students who attend universities in other provinces noted:

> The average score [high school average] of the out of province student was 79 percent as compared to 74 percent for Memorial students. This finding supports the argument that mainland universities, on average, are attracting better quality students than Memorial (Department of Education, 1990).

For the university, these students are a loss not only in terms of lost revenues but also because their presence would have added to the prestige and the reputation of the institution.

Only a small number - roughly six percent - of Memorial's full-time student body comes from outside the province (statistics are based on Fall 1989 figures and include graduate and undergraduate students). Of these, only one percent are foreign students who hold student visas from other countries (the majority from Malaysia, Hong Kong and

Singapore). Because Memorial has only a small number of students from outside the province, it is a relatively homogenous institution in terms of its student body and its culture.

The major cultural (and geographical) distinction among students at Memorial is a rural/urban one between 'townies' and those from 'around the bay'. 'Townies' refer to students who are associated with the more urbane lifestyle of St John's (in terms of dress, dialect and so forth). Students from 'around the bay', on the other hand, are associated with rural Newfoundland although the term generally refers to all areas outside St. John's.

Townies share a number of advantages over their rural counterparts and perhaps this accounts for some of the animosity that has traditionally existed between these two groups. First of all, townies experience fewer psychological adjustments because they attend university in their home town (Moores, 1987; O'Neill, 1977). For those students who come from smaller, isolated communities in the province, adjustment to 'city life' and to the new web of social relationships at university can be problematic. One study of 397 Nursing students attending MUN and nursing schools in St. John's found that urban subjects were "...less beset by recurring worries and emotional upsets, homesickness, excessive daydreaming and feelings of insecurity." (Sodhi and Moore, 1970). Second, townies are better situated in terms of

living arrangements because in many cases they have the option of living at home with their parents, thus allowing them to reduce their general living expenses. The cost of living for students who choose this option can be significantly lower compared to students from outside St. John's who must find apartments to share, pay for university residences, pay their own bills and take on larger debts to finance their education. Furthermore, those students who live at home and who have much of their living expenses offset by parental contributions are also more likely to have more money to spend on entertainment and leisure activities. A third advantage students from the St. John's area have over rural students relates to the quality of their secondary education. Prior to 1983, Newfoundland used a Grade XI rather than a Grade XII graduating year. The Grade XI system put many rural high school graduates at a disadvantage, and their performance on the public examinations reflected this. While the inequality between rural and urban schools on public examination results has disappeared since the introduction of the re-organized high school system, students from sparsely settled rural communities may still attend secondary schools that are ill-equipped in terms of lab facilities, computers and other materials that are necessary for the provision of a high quality education (Department of Education, 1991).

Conclusions

Memorial University of Newfoundland grew from a small college, which offered postsecondary education to a few members of the elite, to a modern public university that offers a complete range of degree courses, with its own engineering school and medical schools and a branch college at Corner Brook. Today, MUN is the largest university in Atlantic Canada and is the only university in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The main campus in St. John's, with its wide open spaces and dull concrete buildings, is physically unattractive compared to the picturesque surroundings of many other universities. Many of the university's facilities (Physical Education Building, Thomson Student Center) are also quite inadequate for the large student body and staff at MUN.

The university is embedded in a particular social environment which places certain constraints and limitations on the way it operates. In an era of severe budget deficits, decreased financial revenues and major spending restraints on the part of the provincial and federal governments, Newfoundland's only university is enormously challenged to meet its mandate of providing quality education to its students. These pressures that are external to the university also have internal consequences in the way that organizational participants choose to respond.

At the top of the organizational power structure, the President of the university and the S̲e̲nate have implemented policies that they believe will make MUN more 'cost effective' to ensure that the government is getting 'value for the money' in what they fund. Some critics have argued, however, that the administration has adopted a corporate or business model for running the university. This has resulted in the elimination of personnel, cuts to programs such as Extension Services, faculty salary freezes, tuition increases, and reductions in the number of students admitted to the university. The driving force behind all of these 'cost effective' measures has been deficit avoidance and budgetary restraint. Unfortunately, some critics argue, the quality of education has been given a 'back seat' to the administration's emphasis on economic efficiency.

Of course, students have very little influence on the actions that the administration may take. Though they may hold demonstrations and sit-ins on campus, sign petitions or take other such measures, their power is actually severely limited in terms of devising and implementing institutional policies and practices. Other organizational participants (faculty for instance), who possess more power than students for exacting certain institutional changes, are also affected by the manner in which the administration responds to the external pressures placed on the university. For the faculty, cost effective measures have translated into larger teaching

loads, bigger classes, reduced time to spend on research — all of which may affect the quality of life in the classroom for students as well as the overall quality of students' experiences at university.

Given these adverse conditions, it is perhaps not surprising that there has been a significant amount of union unrest at MUN in the past several years. Some of this unrest has occurred after unions have tried to have wages increased and working conditions improved to a level satisfactory to their members. In a few cases, the unions have resorted to strike action, disrupting the delivery of vital services to students and impeding the operations of the university. In the case of MUNFA, some members are upset with their representatives' handling of current salary proposals. Such dissatisfying working relations among employees at MUN would likely create a more unpleasant environment for students in which to carry out their work.

Other organizational features of the university have a direct impact on the way that students experience their education. While a fair number of tenured faculty teach undergraduate classes at Memorial, a significant number of its faculty do not hold PhD's. It should be pointed out, however, that many of those faculty members who possess only undergraduate or graduate degrees were hired before changes to Newfoundland's secondary school system had been made. Prior to 1983, Newfoundland students who had completed grade

11 at high school entered the Junior Studies Division at MUN. This was basically the equivalent of the mainland's grade 12 and many of the Junior Studies instructors who were hired to teach first year students were not required to possess graduate and post-graduate degrees. Many of these "sessional" instructors are asked to teach the high enrolment classes in first year English, Math and Psychology at a cost to the university of $5,500 annually (Bennett et al., 1992). It is important to note the potential impact on first year students in these cases. In effect, they lose access to tenured faculty who are presumably more knowledgeable and experienced than their non-tenured counterparts.

The characteristics of the student body are also important to consider when looking at how students might perceive the overall quality of student life at Memorial. We have seen that the vast majority of MUN students reside in the province. Because of this, students at Memorial draw a clear line of distinction between townies and those from 'around the bay'. Students from 'the bay' or the rural parts of the province often have to sacrifice more to be educated at Memorial. Some have come from schools that lack adequate lab equipment and training in science and other areas, the cost of attending university is perhaps greater, and many have to make greater psychological and social adjustments to attend university away from home. This is not to say that all students who live outside of St. John's do not adjust well to

their new environments or fail to do well in their academic work. As we shall see, many students 'from around the bay', especially those who live in campus residences and who share housing with other students in St. John's, are often better situated to receive much needed social support and friendship.

Table 3-1

Memorial University of Newfoundland
Organizational Chart
As at March 31, 1991

President

Vice-President
Admin. & Finance
and Legal Counsel

- Director Budgets, Audits & Instl Analysis
- Comptroller
- Director Computing and Communications
- Director Human Resources
- Special Adviser Labour Relations
- Director Technical Services
- Director University Services

Vice-President
Academic

- Dean Faculty of Arts
- Dean School of General & Cont. Studies
- University Librarian
- Director School of Nursing
- Dean Faculty of Education
- Principal SWGC
- Registrar
- Director School of Pharmacy
- Director Division of Cooperative Studies
- Dean Faculty of Science
- Director School of Music
- Dean Faculty of Business Administration
- Faculty of Engineering & Applied Science
- Director Laboratory of Northern Studies
- Dean School of Graduate Studies
- Director School of Physical Education & Athletics
- Dean Faculty of Medicine
- Director School of Social Work

Assoc. Vice-President
Research

- Director Animal Care

Dean
Student Affairs &
Services

- Director Counselling Services
- Director General Student Services
- Director Student Health Services
- Director Housing & Food Services

- Director Alumni Affairs & Development
- Director University Relations
- Director Art Gallery
- Director C-CORE

Prepared by:
Dept of Insti Analysis

TABLE 3-2 *

PERMANENT POSITIONS BY DEPARTMENT (INCLUDES VACANT POSTS)
as of March 31, 1991

	Faculty	Staff	Total
FACULTY OF ARTS			
Dean of Arts	1	5	6
Anthropology	16	5	21
Classics	6	1	7
Economics	16	1	17
English	59	4	63
Folklore	11	3	14
French & Spanish	25	3	28
German & Russian	9	1	10
Geography	22	8	30
History	28	4	32
Linguistics	9	1	10
Philosophy	10	1	11
Political Science	13	1	14
Religious Studies	10	1	11
Sociology	16	1	17
Language Laboratory	0	1	1
Maritime History Archive	0	4	4
TOTAL	251	45	296
FACULTY OF EDUCATION	86	32	118
FACULTY OF SCIENCE			
Dean of Science	0	7	7
Biochemistry	19	18	37
Biology	40	28	68
Chemistry	33	34	67
Computer Science	15	13	28
Earth Sciences	27	26	53
Mathematics & Stats.	50	9	59
Physics	27	22	49
Psychology	47	8	55
MUN Botanical Garden	0	6	6
Ocean Sciences Centre/NICOS	10	34	44
TOTAL	268	205	473
FACULTY OF BUSINESS			
Business Administration	28	19	47
P. J. Gardiner Institute	0	4	4
TOTAL	28	23	51

TABLE3-2 - CONTINUED

PERMANENT POSITIONS BY DEPARTMENT (INCLUDES VACANT POSTS)
as of March 31, 1991

	Faculty	Staff	Total
FACULTY OF ENGINEERING	50	40	90
FACULTY OF MEDICINE	159	147	306
SIR WILFRED GRENFELL COLLEGE	64	87	151
SCHOOLS			
Gen./Cont. Studies	4	45	49
Music	11	4	15
Nursing	3.	10	41
Pharmacy	10	3	13
Physical Ed. & Athletics	13	7	20
Social Work	18	6	24
TOTAL	87	75	162
STUDENT SERVICES			
Bookstore	0	17	17
Counselling Centre	4	7	11
General Student Services	0	6	6
Student Affairs & Services	0	5	5
Student Health Services	0	3	3
Student Housing and Food Services	0	16	16
Thomson Student Centre	0	8	8
TOTAL	4	62	66
ACADEMIC SUPPORT			
Animal Care Services	0	16	16
Co-operative Education	0	16	16
Educational Technology	0	29	29
Graduate Studies	0	12	12
Library	32	102	134
Technical Services	0	85	85
TOTAL	32	260	292
RESEARCH			
ISER	0	4	4
Ocean Studies Task Force	0	1	1
Office of Research	0	10	10
TOTAL	0	15	15

TABLE 3-2- CONTINUED

PERMANENT POSITIONS BY DEPARTMENT (INCLUDES VACANT POSTS)
as of March 31, 1991

	Faculty	Staff	Total
ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS			
Administrative Services	0	0	0
Alumni Affairs & Development	0	8	8
Board of Regents	0	1	1
Budgets, Audits & Inst. Analysis	0	8	8
Comptroller's Office	0	82	82
Computing Services	0	46	46
Human Resources	0	36	36
Labour Relations	0	4	4
President's Office	0	5	5
Registrar's Office	0	39	39
University Relations	0	20	20
University Works	0	249	249
Vice-President (Academic)	0	2	2
Vice-President (Admin. & Finance)	0	5	5
Vice-President (HS & PS)	0	1	1
TOTAL	0	506	506
COMMUNITY SERVICES			
Art Gallery	1	12	13
Extension Service	0	28	28
LINS	0	4	4
TOTAL	1	44	45
GRAND TOTAL	1,030	1,541	2,571

* - All academic administrative positions above the level
of department head are designated as staff positions.
Professional librarians who are members of MUNFA are
listed as faculty.

TABLE 3-3

TOTAL ENROLMENT BY FACULTY/SCHOOL - FALL SEMESTER

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
TOTAL

Faculty/School	1990	1989	1988	1987	1986
Arts	2,449	2,353	2,182	2,035	1,912
Business	699	680	666	576	593
Education	1,263	1,333	1,191	1,309	1,490
Arts and Education	460	429	390	340	382
Music and Education	36	34	44	39	35
Science and Education	116	110	123	131	143
Physical Ed. and Educ.	58	66	71	76	109
Engineering	423	416	391	391	362
Fine Arts	77	57	32	0	0
General Studies	6,946	6,099	6,158	6,077	5,528
Medicine	230	227	226	225	218
Music	67	75	64	57	54
Nursing	225	240	252	247	283
Pharmacy	94	125	88	59	26
Physical Education	57	40	50	53	56
Science	1,065	1,076	1,225	1,349	1,583
Social Work	163	131	140	144	131
Unspecified	887	826	1,219	1,261	1,052
Total	15,315	14,317	14,512	14,369	13,957

GRADUATE STUDENTS
TOTAL

Faculty/School	1990	1989	1988	1987	1986
Arts	149	145	131	136	131
Business	136	135	104	106	110
Education	370	396	429	435	450
Engineering	71	59	59	56	54
Nursing	27	29	31	29	29
Physical Education	3	4	7	8	7
Science	283	267	252	236	246
Social Work	41	41	39	35	32
Medicine	49	48	42	44	37
Total	1,129	1,124	1,094	1,085	1,096

TABLE 3-4 - DISTRIBUTION OF ENROLMENTS
FULL-TIME GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE

BY REGION - FALL 1989

Postal Code		Total
AOA	St. John's Area #1	1,475
AOB	St. John's Area #2	494
A1A-		
A1G	St. John's	4,142
A1N	Mount Pearl	738
AOC	Clarenville North	228
AOE	Clarenville South	605
AOG	Gander Area	714
A1V	Gander	193
AOH	Grand Falls Area	492
A2A	Grand Falls	223
AOJ	Springdale Area	167
AOK	Deer Lake Area, Labrador and Northern Peninsula	640
A2N	Stephenville	137
AON	Stephenville Area	212
AOL	Corner Brook Area	136
A2H	Corner Brook	629
AOM	Channel - Port aux Basques	187
AOP	Goose Bay	82
A2V	Labrador City	169
AOR	Churchill Falls and Wabush	82
	Other	711
	TOTAL	12,456

NEWFOUNDLAND DISTRICT
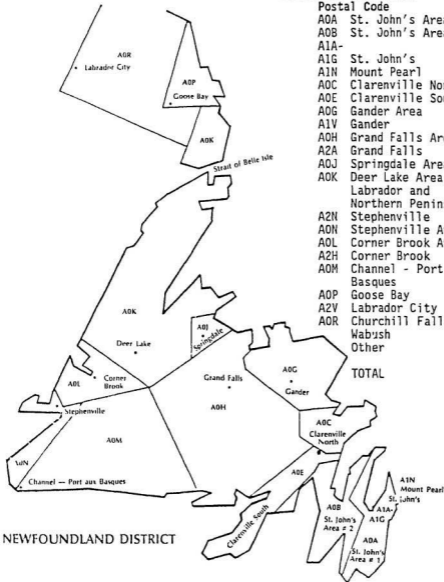
The research project which supplied data for this thesis was designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative information on the academic experiences, perceptions and opinions of undergraduate students at Memorial University of Newfoundland. The data referred to in this study relate specifically to students' entry traits, their reasons for attending university, their interactions with and evaluation of faculty, their levels of satisfaction with institutional services and related aspects of university life, stressors, their finances - including student loans and paid work, and their educational and career aspirations and expectations.

This chapter describes the study's research design. It also outlines the variables and dimensions that were measured and describes in greater detail how they were operationalized.[2] Finally, the chapter discusses the problems encountered during the research and how they were resolved.

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[1]   Data for this thesis are drawn from a research project conducted by Dr. Ian Gomme at MUN. The project itself was funded by a grant from the Dean of Arts. Mary Hall, a graduate student in Sociology, and I served as research associates.

[2]   The actual conceptualization and operationalization of these variable sets was an ongoing process in which careful refinement of items and their wording as well as the content of the various instruments (the interview schedules and questionnaire which will be discussed in greater detail) occurred over all three stages of the research. Input was solicited from undergraduates, graduate students and interested colleagues over the latter part of November, December, January and February.

Research Design

Research for this project proceeded in three stages during the fall semester of 1990 and the winter semester of 1991.

Phase 1

During the fall semester of 1990, exploratory unstructured interviews were carried out with a purposive sample of 12 undergraduate students. All of the students who participated in this phase of the study were volunteers. Most of the subjects were selected from several lists that were generated in the classes of interested faculty in the Department of Sociology. The few other students who participated in this phase of the study were friends or associates of the interviewers themselves.

Participants were recruited by means of phone calls in which they were asked to give an hour of their time for a confidential interview about their experiences as students at MUN. Since all of the subjects were volunteers, few problems were encountered in arranging interviews.

Before each interview commenced, participants were reminded that their anonymity would be safeguarded - that any information which could identify an individual would not be reported publicly. They were also informed of the purposes of the research and told that their participation was voluntary and that they could refuse to answer certain questions or withdraw entirely at any time during the interview.

The interactions lasted, on average, one hour. Because interviews were unstructured, there was a general plan of enquiry but no specific set of questions were asked in particular words and in a particular order. Instead, the unstructured interviews proceeded as 'directed conversations' between interviewers and respondents (Babbie 1986: 247). This allowed the students being interviewed to raise specific issues and topics that were of greatest concern or interest to them. Interviewers then pursued these issues and concerns in greater detail. Notes were taken during the interviews and later written up as detailed reports.

Phase 2

On the basis of what was learned from the exploratory interviews about the student experience at MUN, we were able to construct a more refined interview schedule to be used during phase two of the research project. Beginning in February 1991, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a random sample (actually a systematic sample with a random start) of 40 senior students majoring in Arts and Science. The sample itself was derived from a list of fourth and fifth year students enroled in Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science programs (thus eliminating all students pursuing joint education or professional degrees). The list was obtained from the Registrar's Office and included students' telephone numbers and local addresses.

Senior students were chosen because we felt that as 'veterans of the system' they would be most familiar with the 'ins and outs' of the undergraduate experience and thus could provide us with insights into the sequence of statuses through which students pass in their academic careers (in terms of status changes from first year to senior year, career contingencies and so forth). Initially, we randomly selected 10 male and 10 female students from each of the two faculties (10 males in Arts, 10 males in Science, 10 females in Arts, 10 females in Science). Because the majority of female science students in our sample were clustered in biology we decided to add to our sample all female respondents in the 'hard' sciences (math, physics, chemistry and biochemistry). This purposive sample consisted of only a handful of students. In addition, we compiled a list of 'alternates' for each individual in our total sample (two alternate names for each name on our sample list) in the event that students refused to participate.

Again, participants were recruited by means of phone calls in which we identified ourselves and described our connection with the project. Students were informed of the purposes of the project, who the principal investigator was (Dr. Ian Gomme) and how their names were selected at random from a list of fourth and fifth year students. Students were also informed that their anonymity was guaranteed and that this series of interviews would be followed up by a larger

survey of undergraduate students at MUN. Every effort was made to convince students in our original sample to participate in the project before moving on to our list of alternates in order to avoid the problem of students 'opting into the study'. Fortunately, many students seemed to be amused by our reference to them as 'veterans of the system' or as 'the most important clients of the university' and so warmed to our persistent requests.

Interactions during the semi-structured interviews usually lasted one and a half hours, often longer. Before the interviews commenced, students were asked to sign a letter of consent which outlined the aims of the project and informed them of their rights as subjects (as outlined under the university ethics committee guideline for research using human subjects). Interviewers further emphasized to respondents that their participation was voluntary and that they could refuse to answer certain questions or withdraw entirely from the interview at any time. Respondents were also informed that student records would contain only a code number and that any information that could identify an individual would not be reported publicly.

Students were requested to come to our offices in the Sociology department to be interviewed (the Sociology department at that time was located at Queen's College, a relatively remote part of the campus). Despite the distance of our offices from the main campus buildings and the

bitterly cold weather during the winter months, the majority of the students who had been contacted did make the extra effort to come to our offices to be interviewed. We believe that this fact was very significant and reflected respondents' desires that their voices be heard and that their perspectives on the challenges facing Memorial University be given serious attention.

The interview schedule itself consisted of set questions and probes for open-ended questions. However, respondents were not discouraged if they chose to emphasize and develop topics or areas of interest not directly related to the question set on the schedule. All of the interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The response rate for the interviews was 92 percent.

The analysis for this study is based only on the qualitative data yielded from the interviews. The interviews provided information on the following aspects of the student experience at Memorial.

1. Student Traits and Characteristics - their social, economic, and educational backgrounds.

Students were asked to indicate their major(s), faculty or school, grade point average, and the number of courses they were taking for the academic year (Spring 1990, Fall 1990, Winter 1991). The following information was also recorded: sex, region of origin and number of years lived there and highest level of education for both parents. In

addition, students were asked to describe their parent's work, to estimate their parent's combined income, and to describe their current living arrangements.

2. Students' Reasons for Attending University.

Students were asked to indicate the single most important reason why they decided to go to university as well as the main reasons for attending MUN rather than some other university.

3. Students' Interaction With and Evaluation of Faculty.

Students' perceptions concerning the quality of instruction for the courses they were taking were recorded. Students were asked to estimate the number of courses taken during the Spring 1990, Fall 1990 and Winter 1991 semesters and then presented with a list of statements (e.g. A student who had taken 10 courses was presented with the following statement: In how many of these courses out of the most recent 10 can you say that the professor went out of his or her way to help students?). The exact number of courses to which the statements applied were then recorded. In many cases our list of statements prompted further comments about professors' roles as researchers, their teaching styles, and their interactions with students both in and out of class. These comments were also recorded and later transcribed.

Students were asked whether they had any contact of five minutes or more with a faculty member outside class and for what purposes. We asked students who replied in the negative

how they felt about not having contact with professors outside class and whether they had any such contacts at MUN at all.

4. Student Satisfaction.

Respondents were asked the following open-ended questions: (1) what do you find most satisfying about the university experience? (2) what do you find most dissatisfying about the university experience? (3) Are you satisfied overall with your learning experience at MUN? Students were asked to elaborate on the last question by explaining why they were or were not satisfied overall with their experiences at MUN. Responses to these questions were grouped into different categories (i.e. for question #1 above the responses "being able to choose my own courses" and "picking subjects I'm interested in" were placed in the category "freedom or ability to choose"). Percentages were calculated by dividing the number of cases that applied to each category by the total number of cases in the interview sample and multiplying this figure by 100.

5. Stressors/ Levels of Stress Students Experience at University.

Students were asked the following question. Is there anything about the university experience that places you under too much pressure or stress? Interviewers then probed on the following points: finances, getting good grades,

living arrangements, making new friends on campus, and workload.

6. Finances - Student Loans and Paid Work.

Interviewers asked students whether or not they were working at a part-time or full-time job, how much they earned per hour, and how many hours they worked in an average week during the term. In addition, students were asked whether or not they enjoyed the job and whether or not the job interfered with their academic work in any way.

Students were also asked whether or not they had a student loan. Students who did have loans were asked the following questions: (1) was it difficult to get the loan? (2) is the loan adequate for your needs? (3) does going into debt for your university education concern you? (4) do you anticipate any difficulty paying off the loan? (5) how much do you estimate you will owe by the time you graduate? Students also provided information about the proportion of total costs of attending university for the current semester based on several different sources (family, student loans, paid work, scholarships, savings, other).

7. Educational and Career Aspirations and Expectations.

Respondents were asked what type of work they desired upon leaving university and what they thought their chances were of finding such work. Respondents were also asked whether or not they thought the topics and skills covered in their courses were relevant to their future careers.

The problems encountered during this phase of the study were relatively minor relating mainly to contacting students, arranging and scheduling for interviews and dealing with non-responses or evasive answers during the interviews themselves. A brief discussion of each of these problems follows.

In terms of contacting students from our random and purposeful samples, there were relatively few problems. In a few of the cases, however, students' local addresses or local phone numbers had changed so we had to call students' parents to see if they had this information. Almost all of the parents contacted were extremely helpful and supplied interviewers with the phone numbers and local addresses of their sons and daughters without hesitation. Other respondents were quite difficult to reach and required a number of telephone calls before we were finally able to ask them to participate in the study.

We did encounter some problems with students who failed to show up for their scheduled appointments (absentees). At least three attempts were made to arrange interviews with those students from our original sample but if students failed to show up for three interviews in a row we moved to our alternate list. In total, we interviewed 12 students from our list of alternates mainly because of absentees or because students agreed to be interviewed but later changed their minds.

Finally, we faced some minor problems during the interviews themselves, although these problems are perhaps common for this method of research. Non-responses or limited responses, typified by simple 'yes/no' answers to open-ended questions (Is there anything about the university experience that you find stressful?) did pose some problems but the use of probes or prods usually facilitated a more detailed response in most cases. Some students were also inclined to make generalizations about the student experience or to present 'hear-say evidence' based on conversations with friends and fellow students. Comments like: 'I have not had any problems getting a student loan but my friends sure have...' or 'I think most students would agree that a lot of professors can't teach at this university' are indicative of these problems. To rectify these problems, interviewers would ask more pointed questions aimed directly at the respondent: 'but what about <u>your</u> experience with student loans? I would like to know how <u>you</u> felt' or 'could you tell me what <u>your</u> opinion is on that matter?'

The in-depth, taped interviews produced detailed qualitative data both to be analyzed in their own right and to guide the development of a survey questionnaire. The construction and administration of the questionnaire to a sample of students taking courses in Arts and Sciences marked the beginning of phase 3 of the project. Only a small portion of the survey data was used in the thesis.

Phase 3

Students included in this study's population were full-time undergraduates in the Faculties of Arts and Science. Part-time students or students outside the Arts and Science faculties (professional schools - nursing, education, medicine, social work, physical education) were not targeted intentionally for study although some of these students did show up in our sample due to our choice of a sampling frame.

The sampling frame for the survey segment of the project comprised the entire list of classes in Arts and Science offered during the most heavily subscribed time-slot in MUN's timetable (slot 11). The class list was stratified by year level allowing for adequate representation from students at all stages in their academic programs. Nineteen classes - about one third of the total number of classes offered during slot 11 were selected for our sample. By the time of analysis, 388 questionnaires were returned in usable form. The overall response rate was 60%.

The questionnaire was developed by the research team. Some questions were adapted from instruments utilized in other studies. A covering letter outlined the intended purposes of our research and stressed that participation in the study was voluntary. Students were also informed that confidentiality was insured by assigning code numbers to the questionnaires after they were returned. The instrument was reviewed a number of times by the principal investigator, his

research associates and several colleagues. Modifications in format, wording, length, and scales were made as a result.

The conceptualization and operationalization of variables and dimensions was part of an ongoing process throughout the entire course of the research and culminated in the construction and administration of the questionnaire. All of the items and measures covered by the instrument reflect refinements and modifications made during the previous stages.

The instrument contained 220 questions related to the student experience. In addition to the information collected from the in-depth interviews of senior students, the findings for this study were also supplemented by the following data from the questionnaire:

1. Students' Reasons For Attending University.

A question on the questionnaire listed a number of possible reasons for attending university and asked students to rate these reasons on a likert scale of 'not at all important' at one extreme and 'very important' at the other.

2. Finances - Student Loans.

Students were asked whether or not they had a student loan, how much they would owe to the loans program by the end of the current semester, and how much they would owe, in total, by the time they would graduate. Students provided us with information on the proportion of total costs of attending university for the current semester from several different

sources (family, student loans, paid work, scholarships, savings, other) and how essential to staying in university was the income from each of these sources.

At the end of March 1991, questionnaires were distributed to all students in attendance on the designated day of classes. While the questionnaires were being distributed, a short 'sales pitch' was made to students emphasizing the importance of such research for informed policy-making on issues of vital importance to students (student loans, admissions standards, overcrowding etc.). The entire process of 'making the pitch' and distributing up to 150 questionnaires consumed only several minutes of classroom time (despite the assertions of several faculty members teaching classes in our sample that it would take much longer!).

Students were asked to complete their questionnaires and have them ready for the next class. We returned to each class on subsequent days to collect completed questionnaires and to hand out instruments to those absent during the initial distribution.

Given the length of the instrument (220 questions) and the fact that it was distributed late in the semester (just before final exams) we were satisfied with our response rate of 60%. However, the fact that in some classes 30-40% of the students were absent on the day the questionnaires were distributed was a significant problem. It may be that

absentees represent a unique subset of students with particular characteristics in terms of motivation, ability, paid work commitments and the like.

CHAPTER 5

Perceptions

In this chapter, students' responses to the interview questions are outlined to describe their perceptions of the educational services that have an impact on their personal and intellectual development. The key points to be developed are satisfying experiences, unsatisfactory experiences, perceptions of the quality of teaching, and perceptions of student loans. Before this information is presented, however, it is important to examine some of the characterisitics of the students in our sample.

Student Characteristics

Forty percent of the sample are male and sixty percent are female. The vast majority (95 percent) are single with only five percent married. Almost all (98 percent) of the sample are full-time students. Forty five percent are enrolled in Arts and 55 are enrolled in science. Fourteen percent of the sample also indicated that they are pursuing joint education degrees. The majority of undergraduates report taking four or five courses (83 percent). Thirty eight percent report grade averages in the C range and 46 percent indicate grade averages in the B range. The remainder (16 percent), in roughly equal proportions, identify themselves as D or A students.

In terms of living arrangements, 16 percent live in residence, 45 percent reside with their parents, 25 percent live off campus alone or with friends, 12 percent live off campus with a spouse or partner, and 2 percent have other forms of accommodation.

For almost half of the students, their parents' education is limited to high school completion or less (42 percent of the fathers, 48 percent of the mothers). Twenty eight percent of the fathers and 27 percent of the mothers have at least some experience in college if not a college certificate. Twenty nine percent of fathers and 26 percent of mothers have received at least some education at the university level. In terms of total parental income, 18 percent report less than $25,000, 33 percent between $25,000 and $44,999, 18 percent between $45,000 and $59,999, and 31 percent over $60,000.

Satisfying Experiences

When asked what they enjoy most about going to university or what they find most satisfying, most of the students responded with more than one answer. In total though, five areas of student life were deemed 'most satisfying'.

A. The Opportunity to Learn.

For 37 percent of our respondents, learning about new things or 'becoming educated' was the most satisfying aspect of the

university experience. Becoming more informed about politics, the arts, science and other subject areas was a worthwhile endeavour in itself and was enthusiastically endorsed by a number of students.

> Learning is very exciting. You get to know so many things and learn so many things. When I have to leave university, I would still like to go to a night class or do a few courses because university keeps you in contact with the present. But once you leave university and do something else you lose what's going on. So I think in that way, in university you learn what's going on in the future or the present or the past.

> What I enjoy most is learning. I enjoy going to class and learning new things and understanding them. Political Science and Sociology has really contributed something to my life. They have really opened up my mind to how big the world really is. My education has really given me a lot of insight. I question whatever is told to me and I can see another point of view extremely easy. It's really cool.

> I really enjoy learning. I find it really satisfying to be in an environment where I can read and learn.

> University is furthering my knowledge of things. I'm more aware of things. I know more. Where I'm doing nutrition, you look out for things now. You pick up things. Say the TV has some commercial or something, you pick up and say 'oh, that's what we learned today.' So you think more about the field you're studying and you relate it to your everyday activities more.

In addition to the formal learning of the classroom, lab or lecture theatre, a number of students described the informal learning that comes from personal contact with other students and faculty as constituting an important part of their university experience.

> There's so much other learning that takes place outside the formal system · learning from people that I've met from other parts of the world. I remember sitting at a table in the dining hall once. It was in the summer and we were all there sitting down because we were all

tired. And there were planes flying over the houses that night. We were all bitching essentially about how inconvenient it was to have these awful planes flying over our house when we were trying to get to sleep. And one student, who had been from Iran said 'well, you think that's something. You should have them flying over your house like that, only they're dropping bombs instead.' The whole table stopped. Like my God, what is it like to live in a place where something like that happens?

You learn so much about all sorts of things - about life, about all sorts of different areas. All my friends are doing different majors and you learn. You just talk and ask questions about all sorts of things and you are encouraged to learn about everything out there. Even in the department, we sit around and talk. I'm talking to people from India and the Middle East and Israel and places like that and it's so fascinating. You learn so much about the world. And you learn the different perspectives people have on all sorts of subjects - even about science. It's just amazing.

When I see profs outside of the class for academic reasons it has a great significance on the work that I do - sometimes more than what some of the classroom stuff can be because I have specific needs and interests that I want met with or discussed. Or sometimes we just discuss things outside of class that are not addressed in class. For example, after my seminar the other day I went back to a prof and I discussed with him afterwards about the theory stuff. That discussion one on one was incredibly beneficial. I mean all of a sudden I had more references and more readings. I got the extra that I didn't get out of the seminar. Usually, the academic time I spend with profs outside [of class] meets my academic needs directly. It's very beneficial to what I do.

Some of the students interviewed commented that the desire to learn merely for learning's sake was something that was cultivated at an early age in the home environment. Nurtured on a steady diet of books, films and other educational tools from youth and encouraged to develop their intellects and skills, many of our respondents already

possessed the 'cultural capital' that would place them ahead
of many of their peers (Bordieu and Passeron, 1977).

> I was curious when I was growing up. I had never been
> thwarted in any of my questions. When I asked my parents
> what something was, they would tell me. They bought me
> an encyclopedia set so that I could find things out on
> my own. I had been exposed to a lot of different things
> growing up so when I came in here I was probably
> advanced on that scale.

> In our house when we were growing up, we were brought up
> to love books and reading. We always had enough reading
> material on hand for us to explore whatever subjects we
> wanted. And when we spoke, dad would always correct our
> speech and teach us that when we didn't agree on
> something — no matter what - we should always present
> our case coherently, assertively and logically.

B. Social life/ Opportunities to Socialize

As we have already seen, social integration into the
university environment is a critical factor in determining
student retention or withdrawal as well as levels of student
satisfaction (see chapter 2). For 28 percent of our
respondents, Memorial's social life was rated as the most
satisfying aspect of their university experience. Student
residences, various types of student organizations (mostly
societies and clubs) as well as organized campus social
events offered some of the greatest opportunities for
students to socialize among their peers.

For many of the students from outside St. John's, the
living arrangements provided by campus residences proved to
be an invaluable form of social support. One student
describes how the friends she made in residence eased her

transition into an unfamiliar city and the initial
intimidation of attending university away from home.

> I remember first when I moved into residence there were
> 97 girls there. Automatically, we had 96 friends. I
> really enjoyed that because university can be a very
> lonely place. And just walking through the tunnels and
> seeing a face you know, and being able to say 'hi' to
> that face helped me a lot.

The trend towards 'commuter universities' where the vast
majority of students live off campus and commute to
university, compared to an earlier college era where living
in on-campus residences was the norm, may pose some
challenges for policy makers aiming to integrate students
into the social fabric of the modern university. Indeed,
students' living accommodations, especially during the
critical first year, appear to be a major factor in
determining the degree of social integration as this
student's comments suggest:

> I'm the type of person I really don't like being alone.
> I don't think I'd be able to handle living in an
> apartment with a couple of people. When I was a frosh',
> I lived in an apartment with a couple of girls who were
> three years older than me. I found that really bad. I
> was lonely. They had their own things to do and they
> were old enough to go out and go to clubs and stuff like
> that. Meanwhile, I was only 17 years old. I couldn't go
> out anywhere and I used to get left alone in the night-
> time so I really didn't like that. I moved out in my
> second year... I've been living in residence [ever]
> since. I think that's the main part that I enjoy because
> I know a lot of people. And now I get to go to lobby
> parties and things like that. That helps a lot as far as
> adjusting and being able to get along and not being
> lonely.

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[1] A 'frosh' is a slang term used at Memorial which refers
to a first year student.

Being involved in student organizations such as faculty societies and various student clubs not only enables students to make friends, but valuable information pertaining to students' careers are also exchanged in the process. Advice about which professors to take courses from, which courses are interesting or dull, and how to wade through the university bureaucracy all prove to be invaluable information which students have access to as a result of their affiliation with student organizations and clubs. The following comments illustrate the advantages of being connected to these social networks.

> Our department is fairly small. Everyone knows each other and we have a little network. I know exactly what I'm going to get into. I find out from somebody else 'what's this course like? what's this teacher like? what's the work load like? is he a very strict marker? does he have a lot of readings? does he expect too much?

> There are all kinds of societies and stuff - like the biology society and things like that where you can actually get in there and do things that interest me. It's really good. You can get to know people that are interested in what you're interested in too.

C. Sense of Accomplishment.

For 23 percent of the students who were interviewed, surviving four or more years of university, obtaining a degree, getting good marks, completing difficult courses, and meeting the costs of university expenses independently led to a feeling of accomplishment. The following comments were typical of the responses on the whole.

> When I do well, I really feel like I accomplish something. When I get my transcript and I look at my

marks I say 'oh, this is great. I did good,' and I just feel very accomplished and it gives me good self-esteem.

I'm paying for my education so it's not like my parents are on my back to study. Because it's my money and it's up to me what I do with it and if I choose to fail, that's my own fault. I think because I'm working and paying my own way that has a lot to do with the study aspect and the marks and so on. Because you work so hard all summer to make the $2,000 or $3000 to go back to school you're not just going to waste it away by not studying and playing around all term. You have to spend it all on school. You're going to make it worth it for sure. If my parents were handing me money to go to school I would probably be in there playing around all term and not bothering to study. I know people like that where the parents are paying. They're just wasting their years away.

I get much satisfaction from doing the work and getting some decent marks for it. Then at the end of the term you can say 'hey, I got three A's and I've worked real hard for them.' I worked and I got what I wanted. Then come December when I graduate, that's going to be the best part I think, saying, 'I made it through four and a half years of university. It was a tough road and I stuck with it and now I got a degree.' That's going to be nice. That's going to be a big break I think and I'm looking forward to it a lot.

In one case a student derived a sense of satisfaction at having repudiated a teacher's prediction that he would never graduate from university and would be ill-equipped to succeed in higher education.

When I was in school, my teachers told my parents that I would never graduate. They said 'he's a polite boy. He's a very polite boy but he's not smart enough to graduate from high school - certainly not with the rest of the class. He'd be in remedial class. Get him into auto mechanics.' And I found out that my teachers told my parents that in grade 11. And it feels good now that I'm in university and I'm going to graduate. It's really nice to know that I've accomplished that.

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D. Freedom or Ability to choose.

For 16 percent of our respondents, the freedom to choose and
design one's own academic program as well as the freedom to
choose individual faculty members provided an important
source of satisfaction. Of lesser importance in this category
was the freedom to design one's own time schedule. For
several students, this new found freedom was a refreshing
change from high school where there was very little choice in
the matter of courses, teachers or time schedules. The
following comments reflect these views.

> I like university because I get to plan my own hours. I
> also get to choose the courses I want to do. In high
> school, we had to do English, Newfoundland Culture and
> so on. So it's the choice that's good.

> I like my classes. I like the scheduling compared to
> high school or trades school where you're gone all day.
> You get to pick your own schedule and sometimes your own
> professor depending on how many slots and courses are
> offered.

> In high school these are the courses you had to do and
> there is no two ways about it. Now I get to pick what I
> want, when I want it and my schedule. That is really
> free and I could pick here and there unlike in high
> school - do the studying and do the work. If I don't
> want to study now I don't have to. Granted, I'd probably
> fail but that's my choice.

> I find it satisfying having the freedom here. I'm just
> focusing on the kind of work that I'm interested in
> doing. I've somewhat designed the program to meet my own
> needs. That's the most satisfying thing - to be able to
> do the kind of work that I want to do.

E. Contributions made to a future career.

For a small minority of students (5 percent of our

sample), the expectation that a university education would lead to a desired future career was the most satisfying aspect of their university experience.

> The fact that I've actually accomplished this and that at some point in my future this is actually going to be important to me gives me a sense of fulfilment. Right now I'm doing a course and I might say 'well, it's not that important right now.' But five or ten years down the road it might actually have an impact on what I'm teaching. That's basically what I find most satisfying about it.

Unsatisfactory Experiences

When asked the question what do you enjoy least (or find least satisfying) about going to university, student responses indicated that nine aspects of the student experience caused particular difficulties or induced some level of stress. These nine problem areas made it more difficult for students to achieve their goals of getting good grades, designing an academic program that suited their needs, preparing for a future career or further studies and graduating with a university degree.

A. Course Selection and Availability of Courses.

The least satisfying aspect of the university experience for students in our survey concerned the selection and availability of courses (28 percent). The main source of dissatisfaction in this regard was that students were unable to choose courses that were interesting and relevant to their future plans, formed a coherent and logical design or pattern

and fulfilled the institutional requirements for degree programs.

One of the major problems underlying student dissatisfaction was the lack of courses available in any given semester and the availability of faculty members to teach them. One student complained that some of the courses that appeared attractive in the calendar description simply were not available and in some cases were never offered during her entire time at university.

> I really wanted to do two courses the whole time I was in university but I can't remember the last time either of them were offered. They are there in the calendar - the descriptions and everything and they say 'not offered in 1991 or not offered in '89-90 or whatever. And it's not only that year that they weren't offered. It's happened quite a bit.

The problem with courses not being offered is a sore point for many students as failure to get courses, especially those required to fulfil degree regulations (core courses), often led to delays in graduation, added expenses and the disruption of personal plans.

> I have a hard time getting the courses that I want. I should have graduated in April and I have been delayed until December. This is because I'm waiting for a four thousand level course that I need to graduate. The one that I wanted was not offered. There are other ones that were available but I don't have the prerequisites for those. The only one that's good for me, I have to wait until September. I've got to hang around until then and I will now graduate in December.
>
> I'm trying to get five courses for the summer. I'm on a waiting list and I don't have my courses. I had to come in and go knocking door to door to get the courses I needed. It was crazy. But besides that, courses like 4092 that take 15 people... how am I supposed to get into that? It's my last semester at school and I have to

do both 4000 level courses for my major in the same
semester plus three other courses. That's crazy as far
as I'm concerned. They don't offer enough courses and
they don't offer enough classes. The ones you need for
your major like 3040 and 3150, they offer one class with
30 people in the class. That's it each semester. And
there are God knows how many majors out there? It's
crazy. That really, really bothers me.

Because access ɔ courses is based on a merit system at
Memorial, where the number of course credits and the
student's grade point average determine registration times,
students with lower grade point averages (GPA's) and fewer
credits often find themselves in a quandary when choosing
courses for their programs. Similar problems arise where
students are forced to choose from a very limited course
selection and are often unable to get the required courses
for their programs.

I work hard for what I get but with this low average –
60-65 percent, you try to register for courses and you
can't get them – especially the core courses required to
graduate. This semester when I register I couldn't get
any of them. I've been trying to get genetics now for
the past two years and I just don't have the average to
get it. I was number 36 on the wait list last semester.
I never got genetics and I think that there should be
something made there to change it.

I try to choose courses that are going to be relevant to
what I want to be working at when I finish. I was
looking this term and I was sort of choosing - this one
will be useful if I've got to work with people if I get
into counselling and things like that. But my grade
point average wasn't that high so I didn't have much
choice. It was whatever I could get when I called in.

The fact that students with declared majors and minors have
first priority when it comes time to choose courses at
registration is an additional aggravation for students
competing for an already limited course selection. One

student describes her unique strategy of switching minors to gain an advantage in the scramble for courses.

> I'm a sociology major and a history minor. I registered for my history and then I went and I changed my minor to English so then I could get my English course. I got that. I had to change my minor back to history again this semester so that I could get my history courses. Then I couldn't get my English course. It's usually the minor that I've been changing. It's confusing. I thought the telephone [registration system] would eliminate that but it hasn't at all. It goes by grade point average so if you keep your marks up you'll be all right. In your last year, I believe you get to register before anyone else. Even then, I still couldn't get my sociology course. I still couldn't get it. I tried them all. Basically, I haven't been able to pick what courses I wanted to do in sociology. I just got to pick what courses I could get into.

All students at Memorial must take core or required courses in order to fulfil the requirements of a degree program. For several of the students in our sample, having to take core courses often meant being stuck with what they perceived as incompetent professors because they were the only ones in the department who taught these courses. For other students, degree requirements which limited the number of electives they could take prevented them from dabbling in other subject areas of interest and often confined them to 'narrow strips of learning.'

> There are certain courses that you have to take. Some of them, you have no choice. There's only one prof who teaches it so you do that. You close your eyes and do the course.

> I'm doing a history minor and I'm taking the exact history courses that I like. Once you get to pick your own courses then you really enjoy the classes but the crap that you've got to do to get there is really, really stupid. I like English so that's fine for me but I know lots of people that have a really hard time with

English. And why do you have to do English if you know
you're going to have to do biology or whatever?
University, as far as I'm concerned, should allow you to
do exactly what relates to what you'll do when you're
finished.

I don't have time for anything except this narrow little
field of biology. I can only focus on five courses. I
can't learn how Beethoven lived or how Mozart lived or
how someone else lived. I don't know history. I want to
know my little narrow field of learning but I don't want
it to be everything I know.

B. Quality of Teaching.

For 26 percent of the students in our sample, the quality of
teaching at Memorial was the most dissatisfying aspect of the
student experience. This topic is developed more thoroughly
in the next section to give a more detailed description of
student ratings for various dimensions of teaching
performance.

C. Feelings of Isolation and Alienation.

For 14 percent of the students interviewed, the most
dissatisfying aspect of the student experience was the
feeling of being isolated or alienated in the university
environment.[2] In most cases, students described this
alienation in terms of being 'treated like numbers,' or that
they felt 'anonymous,' 'lost,' 'powerless,' or found
themselves 'wandering through university' with little or no

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[2]   Although only 14% of students identified feelings of
        alienation or isolation as the 'most dissatisfying aspect
        of the university experience,' the majority of the other
        students we interviewed did register similar complaints
        about isolation - particularly for the first year.

direction from other students, faculty or university staff. Essentially, the problem for those students who fell into this category was a lack of social and academic integration into the university community and a general detachment from the decisions that affected their academic careers.

The pattern that emerged from the interviews on this point was that feelings of alienation or isolation were most intense at earlier periods in the students' careers (typically first and second year) and were gradually alleviated as students became more integrated into the university community. The transition from high school to university was particularly difficult for many students because they were separated from their friends and lost the personal contact they enjoyed with their high school teachers. Stripped of their social ties and herded into an enormous body of first year or 'general studies' students, new undergraduates experienced a loss of identity and became 'just another number' in the university bureaucracy. For students from outside the province and for those with no family or few friends within easy travelling distance of the university, their sense of isolation could be even more intense.

> I think it was a big adjustment when I came in here because in high school you're Dave or whoever your name is. Here, the atmosphere is very cold sometimes. You're just a number. I find that really hard; really strange.

> First year was intense. The university system is so much different from the high school system. I moved in pretty much on my own. There were four or five people here that

I knew but four or five in 5,000 isn't really a lot. Also, living on my own and living away from home — moving in with 60 people in a residence that I never knew before was nerve-racking at times.

At first, I wasn't too hot on the idea of being around such a big crowd of people. I was always used to the idea of being on a one to one basis with teachers. In here there's such a difference between students and profs and stuff. Most times, you really don't get on a one to one basis with them. It's almost like being a number. My high school experience, being from a small place, you could get to know your teachers well — feeling that you could talk to them about anything.

Alienation for other students was experienced as a feeling of powerlessness and lack of control, particularly when it came to designing their academic programs in the first year. Not knowing much about the university system, course prerequisites, degree requirements and other rules and regulations, students often found themselves subject to the benevolence of the faculty advisers assigned to them. As a consequence, students complained that they were funnelled into particular course 'streams' that later caused problems in their academic programs.

The university is set up in some ways so that you get the feeling that you're too alone. You're too on your own. You feel like you've got no direction. You've got no real contact from an adviser unless you physically go see him yourself. There's no real involvement. I remember I had one adviser. I actually went to him and said 'I think you're my adviser this term.' He said 'so.' In your first and second term there should be definite appointments where you go see someone and ask them about the system itself. I don't mind learning on my own but when it comes to what courses you've got to do to get out of here; what things you've got to do; how many credits and things like that - I have problems. You end up doing these things on your own and doing courses that you find you don't like. I found that when I first came in here psychology and math were just pushed on everybody. Everybody in their first year decided to do

psychology and math and nobody really knows why. I came
in here and I didn't even realize that I didn't have to
do math if I didn't want to. I ended up doing math twice
and failing it twice. It's a let-down and a waste of
time. Doing courses like psychology, I really didn't
like it that much. I think these courses were pushed a
lot.

When I came in first year, my adviser said 'well, this
is what you should sign up for - english, math,
psychology' - the five courses that you usually take. I
signed up for it but I hated it. They told me the next
term again that I should retake it. I just hated that.
Somebody should have known that we didn't have to take
math. It ended up that I didn't have to do that for an
arts degree or for a social work degree.

In addition to Memorial's formal faculty advising
system, the informal networks of social support built among
students or what Eliot Friedson (1960) calls 'lay referral
systems' also provide essential information for students.
These systems provide students with information, leads and
evaluations about courses, professors, administrative
procedures, and other aspects of university life that are
vitally important to the student's career. In fact, for many
students, these informal networks seem to play a much more
important role than the formal mechanisms for advising and
assistance already in place. Not having access to these
systems due to alienation and isolation leaves students with
little information with which to make informed choices about
such important matters as which courses and professors to
take and which ones to avoid and how to design an academic
program that would meet the individual's needs. These
students describe how lay referral systems play a part in

helping them to carry out their academic work and to make more informed choices.

> When you choose courses you ask another student who has taken the course before. In our department, for example, if I had to choose between two professors and I mentioned two names to another senior level student and say 'which one is better?' I might not have to ask another question.

> I talk to other students. I'm in the linguistics faculty so I kind of have an idea of who the profs are and that sort of thing. But taking English courses - I don't know much about the English department so I'll ask friends of mine who are English majors 'what's the prof like, what kinds of things did you do?' That kind of thing.

> It's good to have the same people in your class year after year. It makes it a lot easier doing work. When you've got assignments it's a lot easier to call people and get together. And talking to people in class, it's easier to ask somebody a question. When I was in first semester nobody asked any questions because nobody knew each other. Now, you're not embarrassed about asking a stupid question with all of your classmates. There have been times when I was doing assignments and didn't have a clue how to do them. You see somebody from your class and you can ask them. First semester, I wouldn't have done that because basically I didn't know anybody.

> In our department, there's one particular prof that I've heard about that was supposed to be really bad news. My friends said he came in and he made you feel like you were an idiot and sort of shunned you if you didn't answer or if you answered incorrectly. If I find out that a prof is not my type of prof then I won't take his course. I've learned to ask students for recommendations.

For senior students who have built up more extensive social networks in their departments, faculty members themselves may become an important part of their lay referral systems as these students describe.

> I haven't seen my faculty advisers since my first year. Now, I just ask people that I know I can trust. I had an English professor in the second year so when I had problems in English I would go and ask him. I know

another professor from outside and if I had a problem I can usually ask him. Within history, there is a number of professors that I've had I can usually ask them. There is a sort of gang of people that you sit down and have coffee with [and] gripe and discuss things. But when I'm in my fifth year there aren't too many more students around. Most of the students who are more experienced than me are gone on and graduated so it's usually professors. In my experience, the profs are fairly easy going. They'll agree if someone is a bit dry for your taste or perhaps this course isn't exactly what you're looking for.

I might have gone to see my adviser once. I usually go to professors I'm fond of instead of going to advisers I don't know. Other times I would just go and ask questions of somebody who taught me and that I really like and I have a high opinion of and that I think they know what they're doing and stuff like that.

A number of studies have shown that making friends is a key factor in the transition to university life (Benjamin, 1989; Bean, 1980; Vaala and Holdoway, 1989). Students who find themselves separated from their peers may suffer from a sense of anonymity and isolation and may even experience a drop in their grade level. In more severe cases of loneliness, students may commit suicide or alcoholism may result. In the case below, one student describes his frustration after repeated efforts to join university clubs and become more involved with campus activities had failed. This sense of isolation and loneliness, combined with poor faculty advising and a poor academic performance in his first year, were critical factors that almost led to a voluntary withdrawal from university during his third semester. By examining this case in some detail, we can gain a greater appreciation of how the alienating conditions of student life

at Memorial can have an impact on the quality of one student's experience. We can also witness the impact that one caring and sympathetic professor had on this student's personal and intellectual development.

> I felt real uncomfortable in Newfoundland when I first came here. I hated my first year and every day I wanted to quit... My dad's in the service. We move around a lot and I've always found it hard making friends. It took a long time before I made any friends because I didn't know how to talk to people. In high school, I was a swimmer and I was good at it and I was good at water polo. All my buddies in high school were the swim team and water polo guys and we hung around together like glue. I tried to get into the university swim team when I first came here. It might sound like a small issue to you but I was calling and nobody knew how I could get on it or anything. And I finally got on it. The practices were at 6:00 in the morning. I didn't have a car and the bus didn't run that early. I went to two practices and I had to get up at 5:30 in the morning. I ended up dropping it. I couldn't handle it. I didn't have the time to do it. I look back at it now - as a place where I could have fit in...I'm not a Newfoundlander and I felt out of place, I really did. I felt really out of place. If you can imagine this, I felt that in high school I had all my clothes on. And if someone picked you up and threw you into a snowstorm with bare underwear on - that's how I felt. It was a horrible feeling.
>
> I heard about this isolation thing in high school. I never really connected with it. But when I came here to MUN it was just like concrete, just like a walk..boom.. and I hit it. It really shook me up. I had no social confidence. I couldn't fit in here. When I couldn't be with the swim team I went to the political science society. The political science society is probably about as big as the office [where the interview was being conducted] and you had five people there and I didn't know them and I felt awkward sitting there and I didn't know what to say. I felt really self-conscious. I didn't have very many friends. I ended up dropping out of that. I was in theatre arts in high school and I was real good in it so I said 'great, I'll go for that.' I tried to get involved in that and ended up dropping that too because there were so many people involved in that and it was really disorganized. So basically after that my life was..I woke up in the morning, came and studied,

went back home, ate supper, went to sleep. That was my life for a whole year.

I went to my faculty advisers. I needed to ask some questions about what a BA was. I didn't know what a BA was. I didn't know what Arts was really. I thought they were supposed to help me like in the high schools but they didn't. They were really ignorant. I just got fed up with that and I had no one I felt I could go and ask a question about. I had a chemistry faculty adviser and I was really interested in doing marine biology. That was my life dream to do marine biology. So I needed this chemistry and I thought 'this is great. Things are finally turning around.' I asked him what courses would help me to do this and his outright answer was, 'I don't know. Go ask someone else.' I said, 'but you're my faculty adviser,' and he says 'but I don't know how to help you.' And that was after class and so I just walked out and I never talked to him about it again. My other faculty adviser for my first semester, he basically said 'I don't really know.' He came out and said it 'I don't know what my job is as faculty adviser. I don't know what I'm supposed to do. So if you have any questions you can ask me and if I can answer them I will.' I didn't really have many questions in the first year. I was just sort of getting out of university when the day was over and not coming back.

My second year university, I hated it about 50 percent less but I still hated it. I was doing bad in school. I wasn't used to the marks and I was frustrated. I had a business minor at the time. I was really happy to get the business minor but I ended up dropping this minor because of accounting. I got a 50 on it. Then I got into the political science faculty and I came across one of the best profs I ever came across. He really talked to me like an individual. I was going to drop out of university in my second year. He was really sympathetic and he really talked to me. I sat down and he said '****, you don't look very good,' and I said 'no sir.' I mean, I was depressed. I bought a motorcycle and I just didn't give a shit about nothing. I just wanted to drive off and I was just thinking about going away to B.C. and working as a lumberjack or something - getting away from it all. And he just started talking to me. He asked how my courses were going and he went through my courses, course by course. He had a row of five people waiting for him and they were really impatient. I talked to him for 45 minutes. I can honestly say it was something I went into not expecting. I was expecting 'yeah, I'm going to tell you what courses I'm taking and I'm going to walk out.' I had failed a French course. I was really pissed with that. He told me the routes I could go about to get my mark and he told me about some

of the attitudes of profs and the way some of them are - the way they treat you and how they view the marks they give out. And I was telling him about how frustrated I was with this accounting.. and this is something I'm always going to remember. He said '***, sometimes people just don't think like accountants. Maybe you're one of them.' And he said that about three and a half years ago and I remember it to this day. I apply it to a lot of things now. I remember it and I said 'you know, you're right sir.' I ended up dropping my business and I took sociology. I never took a sociology course in my life and it's a great bunch of courses and I love it and I'm glad I did it. But that man, just sitting down and talking to me like a civil person and giving me just that line, 'maybe you just don't think like an accountant,' was real important to me. He was really one of the pegs who held me in university.

D. Financial Difficulties.

The financial difficulties attached to being a student at Memorial were cited as the most dissatisfying aspect of the university experience for 12 percent of the undergraduates interviewed for the study. When questioned about the stressors attached to finances, the data from all of the interviews suggested three main reasons why the financial aspect of attending university was a source of dissatisfaction and stress for many students. First, students who faced difficulties in meeting the costs of attending university (to pay for books and tuition fees) as well as basic living expenses experienced high levels of stress which interfered with their abilities to concentrate and cope with the rigors of their academic work. Students who fell into this category tended to be from outside St. John's, dependent on student loans for most, if not all living expenses, and received little or no financial support from parents and

family members, other relatives, spouses and common-law spouses, or friends.

> Finances have been difficult. Sometimes I feel stress at [not] being able to pay bills. I find that running out of money at final [exam] time is distressing. If I'm really worried about paying bills or next month's rent, it just seems to cut into my concentration.

> I think the thing I enjoy least is the financial aspects of it - not having a good supply of money. If I'm low on money, it bothers me. I'm not comfortable with anything then. I have a hard job. If you're wondering how you're going to get all of your bills paid and how you're going to afford everything and here you are going to try studying with all these other pressures as well...you come to university and you say 'God, I can't afford to go into the cafeteria and buy lunch and stuff today because the money is tight.' It just puts you under amazing pressure.

> You cannot fulfil academic requirements to your greatest ability nor can you enjoy university life (to some degree) when you are worried about not having enough food to eat or a place to live.

Secondly, students who were dependent on parental contributions for paying for their university expenses experienced stress because of the control parents were capable of exercising over their choices, activities and affairs. Also, several students felt uncomfortable about the prospect of placing financial burdens on their parents and not being able to pay for university expenses independently.

> My parents pay for university but I have to pay them back. I can't get enough money together before semesters but over time I pay them back so much every week. I'd feel a lot more comfortable getting a student loan than paying my parents because my parents always have that little thing over my head... My father is a pharmacist and he really wanted me to become a pharmacist. So for the first couple of years I tried pharmacy but I didn't like it but I still did it because he wanted me to become a pharmacist.

> I can always get money. I just have to call home for it.
> My parents paid for it in previous years and I know that
> they'll pay for it again this year if I want to. But I'm
> 21 years old and I don't want to be calling home for
> money. It is a stressor because I have to. I have no
> choice. My father is retired now for a couple of years
> and he's got a severance pay. I don't want to take that
> from him. I don't want to take it! I always make ends
> meet with a couple of dollars left over to go out
> myself. But it's always conserve on this, conserve on
> that.

> Everybody is in the financial dilemma. Everybody is in
> it except for the people who live at home. But where our
> home is on the west coast and we're living out here it's
> very hard especially when you don't want to ask your
> parents. I mean you're 22 years old right. I mean,
> you're an adult now. You should be your own burden. You
> shouldn't be throwing your own financial problems on
> your parents. They've got their own problems. Why should
> they be chucking out money for you? I'm an adult now. I
> should have to pay for my own way.

Third, for students who had been accustomed to a regular
income and a secure financial status prior to becoming a
full-time university student, the difficulties in readjusting
to a student lifestyle and coping with a considerably reduced
cash flow were indeed dissatisfying. Students who experienced
this sort of relative deprivation tended to be older and had
been working for a period of years prior to entering
university on a full-time basis.

> I've always worked and I always had money for things
> that I wanted. Coming back, that was the toughest thing
> - to lose my source of income.

> I've always worked and I always had money for things
> that I wanted. At a fairly young age I was independent
> and making my own money. I mean I graduated when I was
> 21 and six weeks after I graduated I was working. I have
> been financially independent ever since. I was quite
> secure. I had a very good job. By the time I resigned I
> had a very good salary. Now, I'm in a position where I
> am financially insecure and that's very hard for me. It
> was incredibly difficult when I came back to university.

I didn't think I could make the adjustment and I didn't actually. After one full academic semester at MUN, I thought I was going to lose my mind. Being financially vulnerable was certainly a part of that readjusting to a completely different way of life with no income.

E. The Difficulty of Academic Work.

For 14 percent of our respondents, the difficulty of academic work was the most dissatisfying aspect of the university experience. Having to do boring and tedious work for certain courses, coping with the pressures of deadlines and straining to do difficult or large amounts of work for proportionately fewer marks were the most common complaints on this dimension.

Some courses I'm interested in and I enjoy finding out the information. Others, I'm groaning from the time I start to the time I finish because what I have to read and research and learn for the course is incredibly dull.

What I find bad is when your work piles up. A couple of weeks ago, I had four midterms in one week and it was just too much.

I find that many science courses, especially those like genetics, which have labs related with them are really like two courses in one. Often, labs are a course in themselves. There is not enough time in the week to do all the lab reports, write-ups, assignments and study for tests at a relaxing pace.

It's the odd course that I get into that is really frustrating and difficult. One course, there's a lot of work involved for very little marks. Like this particular course, the labs are very, very lengthy. It takes days to complete them and there's only five or six to begin with and the total marks are worth 20 percent of your term mark. So you kind of stand back and look at it and say 'well, is this really worth 20 percent given the time you put into it?'

F. Administration and Bureaucracy.

For 12 percent of the students interviewed, the university's handling of administrative procedures as well as dealing with the university bureaucracy itself were the most dissatisfying aspects of their experiences as undergraduate students. The lack of communication between different departments, the slow pace of getting things done and employee relations were all sore points for students who fell into this category.

> What I don't like is the lack of organization in this university. There's a lack of communication and you have to go through so much red tape for anything. Every time I go to the registrar's office I have to come back again and again for different things.

> I've worked here at Memorial during my summer, and I know the red tape that you have to go through to get things done. A lot of times I find that really exasperating in that if you wanted to get that filing cabinet moved down the hall-way it might take you at least a week and probably four forms with probably five copies of each form to be passed around to six or seven different offices before one guy in a pushcart comes in and moves it.

> MUN seems to have such a terrible time dealing with its employees. I've been here four years and out of those four years I think there has been at least a threat of, if not indeed a strike at least once in every single one of those years. Some of them aren't major — for instance, the Marriott thing last semester.[3] But the cleaners or the professors are always on the verge of striking. They never seem to be happy with what they're doing.

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[1] The student is referring here to a dispute involving cafetaria workers at MUN and their employers, the Merriott Food Corporation which provides food services to the university. In 1989, cafetaria workers employed by the Merriott Corporation went out on strike for higher wages and better working conditions.

G. Overcrowding.

For 10 percent of our respondents, the general issue of overcrowding was the most dissatisfying aspect of the university experience. The strains placed on the university's resources by a large student body (i.e. libraries, classrooms, physical fitness facilities) caused discomfort for many students and was a major contributor to feelings of powerlessness and isolation.

> This university is severely crowded. Many days I am unable to find a place to sit down to eat my lunch.

> I don't like the general stresses of living with thousands of people around you. There is stress in trying to find a place to park; where to find a place to study and sit down; eat your lunch without somebody blowing smoke in your face. There is nowhere to study in the library. You can't sit down anywhere without people chatting or banging books. It drives you nuts!

> Also, overcrowded classrooms and libraries don't make for good learning. It creates isolation and a feeling of powerlessness and helplessness.

H. Career Prospects.

For a small number of the students who were interviewed (7 percent), the prospect of finding a rewarding career upon graduation was a major source of stress and the most dissatisfying aspect of the university experience. After spending four or more years at university and in some cases going into heavy debt to pay for their university bills, the reality of high levels of youth unemployment was disconcerting for these senior students. Being painfully aware of the effects of the current economic recession on the

job market, these students found it difficult to stay motivated and in the case of the student quoted below - the prospect of finding a job she truly desired seemed far out of reach.

> When I start to think about the long-run, which I don't think about often, I say to myself 'what am I going to do with this?' I'm doing all this work. A chemistry and math degree is a lot of work. I just say 'what am I going to do with it when I get out?' That is highly discouraging because I don't know...There's not a lot out there for people like me and that's what's disappointing me most because I feel like I'm doing this for nothing. I like the work and that's why I'm doing it but I really feel like there's no more I can do with it and that's what I dislike the most. Doing the work doesn't bother me because I feel like it's part of me and I like to do it. But the outcome - I just feel like I'm doing this and I feel 'what will my outcome be?' I really feel sometimes like I'm doing it for nothing and that's very discouraging and it makes me want to quit sometimes. Many times, my finger has hovered over that number nine button on the phone.⁴ I really just wanted to drop out because what is this going to get me? There's so many people - many of my friends are finished university. They have their degrees - their chemistry and math and they're doing nothing. They can't get a job and it's so discouraging. That's very discouraging and sometimes, like I said, it makes me want to just drop out.

> I just finished my degree last term. I'm doing education as a second degree now. I wish that I could get a job that I didn't have to do education as a second degree because I never wanted to be a teacher. I shouldn't say this but I'm doing it because I need a job and I can't get a job with just a biology degree. I wish it was possible to get a job with just that degree because that's what I want to do. I don't want to move away to Ontario to get a job in a lab somewhere for $10 an hour. It's just not me. I want to be outdoors. I know that teaching is not going to satisfy that for me but I need a job.

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⁴ On Memorial's telephone registration system, the number nine allows students to withdraw from university.

I. Sense of Inadequacy/ Poor Academic Self-Concept.

For a couple of the students interviewed (5 percent), the experience of failing courses in university resulted in feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem. Although this topic deserves much greater attention, the data available from the interviews makes any kind of informed analysis virtually impossible. However, as can be seen from these students' comments, some of the factors already mentioned such as the quality of teaching, the difficulty in adjusting to university from high school, and the isolating and alienating conditions of first year university appear to be key contributing factors that partly explain the sense of inadequacy that these students developed.

> There were a lot of times that I felt like I was a real idiot because there were other people succeeding in courses during the first year and I wasn't. I certainly had a sense of inadequacy when there were people in my class pulling off nineties in math. It was a big shock to me being an A student and all that sort of stuff in high school. Even in math I didn't do too badly. It really surprised me to be brought down to earth like that. And the professor wasn't much of a help either. He said 'well, you can't expect to do well. You're a first year student.' He sort of took it as a loss I guess.
> The other thing I thought was ridiculous... I suppose it was a punitive move... they used to have a class in the first year for people who failed for both [math] 1010 and 1011. They stuck everybody who flunked into the Friday afternoon class that meets during the last slot. It meets 4:00 to 5:00 on a Friday afternoon and other times later in the afternoon. So they stuck 300 stupid people who had problems with math in the same class. They jammed you all in there and had some guy way down there in the bottom berating you for getting 34 percent on your exam. I couldn't understand how someone could teach in an atmosphere like that. I suppose the teacher got pissed off as well because they were in a no-win situation. They were getting 300 mathematically

inept students thrown at them in less than ideal circumstances.

My confidence level took a bit of a beating when I failed out of commerce and I took a beating when I did so poorly in my math courses. That sort of carried over all through my university career.

Perceptions of the Quality of Teaching

On the basis of total courses taken during the past three semesters, undergraduates who were interviewed were asked to indicate the exact number of courses where the professor's performance met certain specified criteria. The percentages were then calculated and averaged across all students who provided responses to these questions.[5] Percentages represent the proportion of courses taken that met each criterion.

According to our respondents, professors went out of their way to help students in 56 percent of the classes that they had taken. The willingness of professors to offer extra tutorials for students having difficulty with course material was an example cited by several students in this regard.

We're all coming from different backgrounds. The high school system is not as good as it should be but that's no excuse to deprive somebody of a university education. So we come in here and we try our best to learn. I know I have been trying. I have been working sometimes straight for days on end getting two, three hours sleep a day for as much as weeks - working [and] trying to get through on my own. Sometimes, that cannot be done. If the material is that foreign, sometimes there has to be extra help. Dr.*** in the *** department gives extra

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[5] A limitation of our data is that it fails to survey students' ideas about what professors actually do and what they are expected to do. Future research in this area would render a more balanced view of student perceptions and satisfactions.

tutorials in his own time. At the beginning of the lecture at the first of the term he will collect a schedule from everyone. He will sit down and on his own time he will figure out three periods of the week when everyone can go to at least one of those periods. And he will give an extra tutorial covering material that is difficult; material that he has seen students have trouble with in the past; material that causes problems on final exams. And he will do that on his own time. There should be some part of the university system that allows for that so that all of the professors can do that. There should always be extra help for people who are willing to go and learn to take the time out of their schedule to go and sit down and figure things out and come and ask questions about the material that they don't understand.

One prof is having tutorials. It's free. Anybody who wants to go can go. He's not having one, he's having three because it's a huge class. You can ask anything you like in them and he tells you how to tackle the problems and things like that. He's spending his time having these classes which is extremely good.

The professor put a lot of effort into his or her teaching in 66 percent of classes. A number of students shared the view that research and outside work commitments were mostly responsible for the inadequate performances of professors on this dimension.

I would say you're probably looking at 20 to 30 percent of the faculty as not giving a shit basically. A lot of these people are hired on to teach us and if they have more time for their own research and their own personal contracts, which is happening a lot in our department, and class is cancelled because of it I think they shouldn't have their jobs. One of their prime responsibilities is teaching and if they don't give a shit about that then they shouldn't have the job.

There are professors I've had that were hideous. They were really nasty people. One guy I had was teaching 300 people in a lecture hall and he would wait until the last minute of class or the last two minutes of class and say 'are there any questions?' You wouldn't have time to look through your bag to find questions that you had the night before. If somebody didn't say anything in the first ten seconds after he said that, he'd say

'Fine. I don't want to see you in my office this afternoon.' And he actually refused to answer questions if we didn't ask questions right away. I remember walking down after class and it was still within the 10 minute period before the next class. The person ahead of me asked him a question before the next class and he [the professor] turned his head and snapped 'No, I won't answer your question now because I asked you just then so I'm not going to answer your questions now and I don't want any of you to come to my office this afternoon.' To me, that was appalling. That's not what a university professor is. If he wants to be like that, then he should be a researcher. He should be locked off in a room by himself where he can't be exposed to people who are coming in and being scared because they don't know what stats is or they don't know what English is or they don't know what essentially is involved in the work that they're doing. Someone like that is so discouraging. I dropped that course and it was because of him. And there are people like him in other courses who just keep piling up the work and leaving you to do it on your own and expecting it done and expecting you to know these things. And when you say 'I don't understand this. I don't know how to do this,' that person in particular would often say 'well, that's not my problem. That's your problem. You figure it out.' You look at this person who has their PhD, who knows the answers to your questions like I know the alphabet, and he refuses to tell you because he thinks it's your problem or because he wants to go to lunch or because they want to do some of their own research. That's absurd. They should not be allowed to teach in university. If they cannot teach, I don't give a damn what qualifications they have! If they cannot teach, they should not be here. Above all else, this is a learning institution. Research will be done and from the research, people will learn. But the learning has to be the key and to learn, there must be teachers. And I don't think there are enough teachers at MUN. There are a lot of professors. Some of them have good names and some of them have bad names but there aren't enough who are teachers along with being professors.

In 53 percent of the classes, professors valued student

opinions. Students stated here that the nature of some

courses precluded the expression of student opinions due to

the fact that some courses dealt only with absolutes or 'cut

and dried facts'. Students in the 'hard sciences' and some arts courses were most likely to express this view.

> Where I'm so science oriented, you can't have an opinion because it's not right or wrong. Like math, you can't have an opinion. You can have proofs... I did two proofs two days ago and I went to him and said 'look, are these right?' and he said 'no.' But technically, what I had done made sense. It's just that proofs are so formatted. Biochemistry - you've either got a protein or you don't have a protein. You can't have an opinion about it. But evolution you can. I did a research paper and there are so many different opinions out there. If my professor believes that a big explosion erased them - fine - but he should allow my opinion if I said 'no, predation got rid of them.' So you really don't see a lot of opinion stuff unless you're talking about history or arts or other courses.

Professors who fail to respect student opinions could make the classroom experience boring and more intimidating according to some students. Others argued that unless students were encouraged to develop their own opinions instead of 'regurgitating facts' or 'spitting back what the professor said', independent thought could not be developed.

> I have a professor in English who just stands up there like he's giving a sermon or something. There's no room for discussion at all. As soon as he comes into the class, he starts giving a lecture until the end of the period and that's it. It makes the class really boring. Not that I would say a whole lot anyway but it just makes the class boring even if you wanted to say something. And I feel sometimes that I would want to and I feel a little intimidated by that.

> You get some professors whose attitude towards learning is that you spit back exactly what they give you and that's it. I find that really frustrating. I've started taking courses from people and dropped them because of that - because I didn't like the way they stand up in front of the class and lecture you. I can think of a specific prof. I started to take one of his courses twice and dropped them both times. He's the kind of prof who will give you fill in the blank questions on the exam and he wants word for word out of the book. You can

know the information but if you don't present it the way that it has to be presented - the way they think it has to be presented - then you don't get anything for it. You're not going to present something exactly in somebody else's words.

The professor showed interest in students' academic development in 49 percent of the cases. Respondents identified two important factors that might affect the interest shown towards students and their academic development: class size and the initiative of individual students.

[Professors show interest in students' academic development] moreso in classes that were small. The classes that are big, they don't bother with you. They don't seem to care one way or the other. You're just a number unless you [have] the incentive to go to them.

I'm always pretty sure that the professors would be there if I had to go looking for them. I just never went looking for them. And if you don't go looking for them, they're not going to go looking for you to make sure everything is going well. I think that's more my need than anything else and I didn't need them.

Respondents report that in 41 percent of their classes, the professor provided extensive feedback on work submitted by students. The advantages of having some sort of feedback on the work they do is described by these two students:

Feedback from professors tells you what you're doing - at least if it's right or wrong. I like it before we actually do a work project instead of after. After you've done it this way, it's too late. It's done. I think it's very valuable. Even when you do things wrong on your assignment it's good. It's better to have comments than just circles or x's. When you see what you've done wrong you can see how you can improve. When you see what you've done right, you can know what to keep doing.

If he's just going to pass you back a midterm that you've just spent 20 hours on and just say 'you got a B

> or an A,' it makes a poor comparison to someone who's
> actually going to stand up and go through the test -
> take a period after the test and say 'this is what I was
> looking for.' It makes a lot of difference.

Another student states that the quantity and quality of
feedback often depends on students' willingness to demand it
from their professors but of course, not all students are as
assertive as this one.

> Overall, I would have to say I'm satisfied because if
> they don't give me feedback I force it. If I'm not clear
> on what they wanted on an exam or if I'm not getting
> enough feedback, I'll take the initiative. I'll ask the
> questions and I'll basically disrupt the lecture until
> he gets sick of hearing it and we get a satisfactory
> answer.

The undergraduates in our sample rated their professors
as outstanding in 29 percent of their courses, as competent
in 62 percent, and as unacceptably poor in 12 percent.[6] In
addition to the criteria described above, students also
mentioned several other qualities that they take into
consideration when assessing their professors. First, a
professor is expected to be knowledgeable about the subject
area he or she is teaching. Professors who are able to draw
on their personal experiences and research experience are
valued most in this regard, while professors who rely on
textbooks and outdated notes are valued least as these
comments reflect.

> I'm satisfied with a professor who knows his material;
> basically a trade-off between a good researcher and a

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[6]   In calculating percentages, missing cases were excluded
thus accounting for the error when the three items are
summed.

good lecturer because it's very hard in the science faculty to get someone who is a good researcher which is half their job and a good lecturer...A lot of professors have their 'pet lectures'. They have been teaching their courses for so long they just come in and it's garbage in, garbage out.

I took a boreal ecology course. It was a pathetic course. I don't think the professor was qualified as a boreal ecologist. He was an entomologist. He knew about insects but he wasn't a boreal ecologist. He had the general knowledge and everything to teach it but there were a few courses where he came to class and he had this photocopied thing with him and all he did was read it off. It was so boring. MUN should have a special person to teach that course.

When a professor looks at me and says 'this is how you catch an alligator' and reads it from a book, I think that's bullshit. When the professor says 'when I was up to my neck in mud with this alligator in my arms...' then that means something because they've done it. Or my German professor was telling me that when they escaped and crossed the wall to get from the oppressed Germany to come to Canada where her father had been held as a prisoner of war and loved it so much while he was in prison that he decided to come back - something like that means much more to me than conjugating a verb or something formal that we're supposed to be learning. You can learn what's being done in the text on your own. What the professor can offer you outside of that, to me, that's what lectures are for... I find that professors who have done research are much more comfortable when they've done it themselves and when they're offering material that they know. They're much more realistic too. When you sit down and you read something from a textbook, you're getting the ultimate example that almost never happens. That's inaccurate. I think learning is much more accurate when it's done from someone who has done the work themselves and who can say 'this is the way it's supposed to happen. This is the way that I did it because it couldn't be done the other way.' Every situation is different. The textbooks we get are not Eastern North American textbooks. They are global texts. You get people who have done all their research in Africa saying that observation shouldn't be made when it's foggy because you can't be sure of what you're seeing. When is it ever not foggy at Cape St. Mary's when people are doing a different type of research on a different type of animal? There has to be some influence of realism in the work and you can't get that from the book. You're getting realism that applies

somewhere else but you're not getting it as it applies to you specifically in your field. I think that's probably one of the most important things that a professor can do is share things with you that you have learned - things that are not in the book.

Second, professors are expected to award grades in a fair and equitable manner so that grades reflect the amount and the quality of work performed in the course. For science students especially, the grades awarded for time-consuming and difficult lab work were perceived as disproportionate to the amount of effort that it took students to complete it. The time and effort it took to complete this work cut into the time that could have been spent on regular course work which was worth more in percentage points.

A lot of times, proportionately, the marks are not in sync with the work. There are a lot of courses that you do that have a lab component worth 10 or 20 marks and you're spending 20 hours a week to write them up. There's a few of those I've gone through. You get little reward out of it. There's a course I'm doing now, there's two major term papers. One is a presentation and they want professional quality stuff but it's not there in the marking scheme. They're only worth 10 marks each. I think that's out to lunch.

A number of students commented on the 'grading strategies' used by some faculty members. According to these students, grades are not only used as a means for evaluation but they also seem to be instrumental for bribing students to attend class and to mask teaching incompetence.

I find that a lot of profs who are incompetent won't give any bad marks. They're all at least 65 percent and above. That's exactly what happened in one of my classes. People were handing in their papers two weeks late and there was supposed to be five percent [deducted] each day and they were getting 65's. I'm sure this is so that nobody goes to complain about them. I

could swear on it. Nobody goes to complain about them and they got that little curve that they're happy with and everything goes cool.

But the problem I don't like about a lot of the profs is they don't get to know the student. They don't get to know the names, especially when they talk participation marks. That's crazy. Guys who say 15 percent for participation and they don't even know anybody's name. How can that do? The only thing with that is to save your own butt with the Dean by having a margin to score you on so that they can hit the curve. That's the only thing I can see that for. I've taken a lot of courses like that - especially in the business faculty - 10 percent, 15 percent, and they don't know your name.

The professors that are a bit dry and boring and just basically a real bore to listen to in class are the ones who have so much for class attendance. But usually I find that the good professors - the interesting ones - they don't really care if you want to show up or not. You show up if you want to learn which I think is a wonderful thing.

I did a course as a fulfilment for my honours. I walked into the room and she said 'there are 10 marks in this course being given to you to go to your labs.' That's 10 marks because you go to your lectures. I was astounded. I couldn't believe that. You're given marks for being here when most people in my other courses won't give me marks on a 40 page paper that I've written them without trying to begrudge me wherever they can. And that department was giving me marks for showing up to class! I thought that was very novel and very strange and at the same time almost unethical because I could go and sit in the back of the room and not know a damn thing and still get 10 percent.

Third, students expect some professors to possess some degree of personableness and 'approachability'. Two of our respondents describe the differences between professors who are 'human beings' and those who are not, while another refers to faculty members possessing this quality as 'people persons'.

The kind of professor I get along with best I term 'human beings' because a lot of them aren't. They don't

come across with much understanding or compassion about where you sit. I like someone who is understanding - basically someone who is easy to talk to [and] not someone who is up on a pedestal like some profs want to be - Doctor this, Doctor that.

I don't expect the prof to be your buddy but I do expect them to behave like human beings. No, I don't expect him to be running to help 'Oh, can I help ya, huh, huh, can I?' No, I don't expect that at all. I just want 'hey, just talk to me like a civil human being' and give an aura like 'you're an individual.'

I always find that the professors that make students feel comfortable are the ones that are basically people persons. The professor should be someone that can speak to you. If you approach him outside of class, he will remember your name or at least your face to say hello. These are the kinds of professors who actually make the students feel comfortable presenting an idea. Some professors don't respond well or they don't relate to people well. They seem to be more at home with their books or with their texts than they do with people themselves. Academics they can handle. Writing they can handle. But when you're talking with them, well, we'll see.

Student Loans

Fifty one percent of the respondents who participated in the study have student loans either from current or from past semesters. The loans are rated as hard to get by 14 percent. The criteria used to assess financial need were questioned for two groups of students in particular: dependent students who had to rely on a greater level of parental contribution and mature students who were ineligible in many cases for financial assistance from the government.[7]

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[7] A 'dependent student' under the Canada Student Loans Act is defined as a student who has been out of high school for less than four years.

It's damn hard to get a loan. It's ridiculous. The only time I got it is because I've been out of high school for four years. That's why they gave it to me. I applied all the time. I applied the first year I was here. The first year I applied I got $600 for the year so it would be $300 for the first semester, $300 for the second semester and no grant. They're the ones I was denied. And I appealed it. And I just got nothing. They said my dad makes too much money. The trouble - it was amazing. I guess they go by their little graphs and stuff but we didn't fit in. We are a small family and my dad has two kids. I know there's a lot of pressure on my dad. He wanted to be able to support me through university but he just couldn't. Really, it's disheartening to my father more than any of us.

It's not difficult [to get a student loan] this year because I'm four years out of school and I'm 21. I'm classified as an independent student. Before that, yes it was [difficult to get] because they base too much on your parent's income. A lot of times you don't want to depend on that. Not only that, they don't take into account what bills they have themselves. And then I have two older brothers as well and they both go to school. I don't think it's fair. I don't think your parents should have anything to do with your education. I really don't. If they want to contribute fine. I never would have been able to get through without my parents but they couldn't give me either what was specified of them. I always worked two jobs and they never wanted me to but I had to. This year I'm down to one.

If the government wants mature students to come back and get an education they're going to have to find some way of funding them. I don't qualify for anything and that's really a shame. I really think that is unfair. I can't qualify for student loans, unemployment insurance, stuff like that. You know if your spouse makes over x amount of dollars you don't qualify for anything. If they want people to come back and go into university then why aren't these people the same as people who go to trades school and spend 40 hours a week out there and get a couple of hundred bucks a week or even $50 a week. I really think it might turn a lot of people from coming into university.

Loans are seen to be insufficient to meet financial needs by 62 percent of our respondents. Students trying to finance their education amidst rising tuition fees and a general rise

in the cost of living find that loans are not adequately indexed. The following comments serve to illustrate this point.

> I've always had a loan and a grant since I've been going [to university]. And the tuition increases and the residence increases and book increases and everything else. It's getting to the point where it doesn't even cover the cost that I have let alone spending money for the term. I'm 23 years old. I don't want to be dependent on my parents now. I need the money. I know my parents understand and I'm in school and I can't afford these things but it's still...it's been that way since I was born. You get to this point where you just don't want to take any more. It's really difficult.

> I get the top loan but tuition has gone up so much and the loans haven't really increased. It's strange. I'm getting the same loan now that I got in my first year at MUN and my expenses have increased a lot but my loan hasn't.

For students who find that their loans are not adequate to finance their education and basic living expenses, financial assistance from family members and other sources is often needed. For several students in our sample, having to reach out to parents and other family members during lean periods was very stressful. This student's comments illustrates in a dramatic way the stress some students must deal with in attempting to make ends meet.

> The major stress of university is money - bigger than anything else. I get a full loan. I didn't in the past but I do now. It's so bad and it's very, very stressful. At one point in time, I thought I had to drop out of university because I had no money. The government wouldn't give me any money and I appealed it many times and they wouldn't give me a cent. And my father is very ill and a lot of his money goes towards medical expenses and he had no money. I couldn't approach him for money anyway because my parents had financial problems as it was. My parents have always been in a hard financial state so the thought of even having to go to them and

asking them for money when they have no money themselves... I would rather starve than ask them for money because they would sell everything they've got and give me all the money that they had to keep me in university. That's what they're like.

One incident in particular was so stressful. I cried the whole semester it was so bad. I never had a stain of money. I never went outside the door and my social life is very important to me because I think that you have to have a balance of social activities and work. And I was just stuck in the house the whole time and that was stressful because I didn't get out and you know you have to have money to get out. I couldn't get out and I had no money and I was just broke, broke, broke. Not a stain. For the whole term, I was struggling through eating flour, water, eggs. The money situation was so bad that a couple of us who were living together, we didn't have enough money to buy food and all we had was flour in the house - flour and macaroni. I had to call my parents to ask them for money. I had to. They cried on the phone. They had no money to send me. They had to go out and take out an $800 loan to put me through. And it broke my heart. I didn't know what to do. It was more of a stress for me because I had to take it from them. It's very hard especially when you don't want to be asking your parents for money. You're 22 years old. You should be your own burden. You shouldn't be throwing your financial problems on your parents. They've got their own problems. I'm an adult now. I should have to pay for my own way.

The inadequacy of student loans was also highlighted in several cases where students had to seek out additional sources of income and take other measures in order to meet their financial needs. These students admitted that their student loans were only adequate as long as they worked part-time, accepted financial assistance from others (i.e. from parents as in the case above or from other family members, relatives, friends, spouses and common-law spouses etc), or gave false information on their applications for student loans.

I quit smoking six or seven months ago so that's one expense that I no longer have and I don't go out that much any more. I had to borrow my money for March rent so I owe my roommate now when I get my rent tomorrow. I don't like doing stuff like that but when you're depending on student loans, sometimes you just have to.

The loan pays for my tuition and luckily, most of my books I use mostly just for reference. If I bought all my books brand new it might cost me about $60 a book. But I don't do that. That way it is adequate. It leaves me with no money though. If I wasn't working, I wouldn't have any pocket money. I wouldn't be able to use my loan as my regular source to go to the bank once a week to take out $20.

I'm cheating a little bit on my student loan because I'm telling them that I'm not living at home. So for me it's doing fine because I'm cheating but if I wasn't cheating it wouldn't really help enough.

By graduation, of respondents with loans, roughly a quarter (26 percent) estimate that they will owe in excess of $20,000. On the other end of the scale, a quarter (26 percent) will owe $10,000 or less. The remainder, 48 percent estimate their debt at between $10,001 and $20,000. When asked whether their debt was a concern, 38 percent of our respondents admitted that it was. The amount that students owed and their expectations about finding work after graduating from university were two important factors influencing their level of concern. For students who were confident about their futures and their ability to repay the loans, the debt they incurred at university was not a major concern.

Somebody put it in perspective for me once. Just think - $20,000. You'll spend so many million times more than that during your life time and I wouldn't make that kind of money if I wasn't spending it on my education. So I think this money is well spent.

> The loan is an investment in the future. It's not like you're throwing money away. I imagine it will be small payments for at least 20 years. I remember when I was in high school, the teachers were still paying off their student loans. To me, these teachers were still really old. Now I can understand it.

For other students, however, the prospect of facing a large debt upon completing university was a 'harsh reality' as one student put it.

> It's going to be a harsh reality when it hits. You never really appreciate it now. You know you owe $19-$20,000 but it's almost fictitious. You don't realize that you're going to have to start paying out $200 or $300 a month for God knows how many years in order to pay it off. I imagine it's going to be a major draw on your salary. The degree of difficulty depends on how much money you're making. If I end up with a poor wage job then it's going to be a big difficulty. I'm just going to have to deal with it when it happens I guess.

> The debt does bother me. My husband and I are coming out and it must be above $50,000 now. So when you leave, you have this little piece of paper saying 'okay, you're a teacher or you're a pharmacist,' or whatever. Then you need a new car, a house, plus you have your loans to repay. It's going to take you the next ten, fifteen years just trying to get over the last five which is a lot.

> I worry very much, very much... You hear so much about no work and stuff like this that you're thinking God, you're going to have all this loan. I try to rationalize and say 'well, maybe it will be the same as a really nice car or something but I just won't have the car to show for it.' And you see so many people getting out and they don't have work in the first six months and they have the collection agencies after them trying to pay it back.

Students must weigh these various factors - the amount of money they owe on student loans, the likelihood of getting a job, and how much money they can expect to earn in a new job - in sorting out their feelings about the dollars and cents issues of attending university. This last quote is perhaps

indicative of many of the concerns that university students face after spending much time, effort and money on an education that offers no sure guarantees in today's world.

> When I first came in here I was getting a student loan and I was going into debt. That was a new concept for me because I've never been in debt before. At first, it was stressful because I wasn't familiar with that and I had not had debts. Well, I never had money. But then to be in a position where I had less than money - $5,000 less because I owe someone. Now I owe someone $13,000. But I've stopped being concerned by that... Last year, I sat in my room and decided...well, what are they going to do ... confiscate me? I don't owe anything. What can they possibly do to me? They could take back my books but my books went on sale for $1 each after I paid $60 for them a year or two before. I don't have anything for them to take. I'm getting a good education. I'm qualified to do what I say I can do and I'm confident that I'm going to get a job. If I don't get a job, I'll do something else. I can work in a supermarket if anything and pay something on the loans. The system is tough enough as it is. I refuse to be worried about the money. If they're going to give it to me then fine. It's their problem. I need it. I'm glad to have it and I'll do everything within my power to pay it back. I'm ready to work and I'm willing to work and I'm qualified to work. But if the system that they've sent me through and the system they're sending me into won't allow me to do that then I'm sorry. That's not my problem.

Conclusions

The interview data indicate that students at MUN enjoy their opportunities to learn, to engage in the social life on campus, to accomplish their goals, to freely choose what they want to study and who they want to study with, and to look forward to the fruits of a rewarding career. However, their comments also reflect the fact that Memorial University does not make it easy for all students to enjoy these benefits and rewards. For a sizeable minority of respondents, the sheer

lack of courses that are interesting and enjoyable and that also meet degree requirements, the poor quality of teaching among Memorial's faculty and the isolating and alienating conditions of university life are three major problem areas that prevent students from adjusting to university life, meeting institutional requirements for graduation and enjoying a positive learning experience. Senior arts and science students were also dissatisfied with their lack of financial support, the difficulty of their academic work, clumsy and insensitive bureaucratic and administrative procedures, and overcrowded working conditions on campus. Finally, bleak career prospects and the sense of personal inadequacy that derived from a failure to meet institutional standards were also cited as important factors that detracted from the overall quality of their experiences as students at Memorial.

In rating their professors' performances, respondents judged 29 percent of their professors to be outstanding, 62 percent as competent and 12 percent as unacceptably poor. The majority of professors went out of their way to help students (56 percent), put a lot of effort into their teaching (66 percent), and valued student opinions (53 percent). On the other hand, a minority of professors showed interest in students' academic development (49 percent) or provided extensive feedback on work submitted by students (41 percent). In addition to these criteria, professors were also

expected to be knowledgeable about their subject areas (with knowledge gained through personal experience and research valued most), to be fair and equitable in awarding grades, and to be personable and approachable when they interact with students.

The majority of students in our sample has student loans. While the majority of respondents find the loans easy to get, dependent students who must rely on high levels of parental contributions as well as mature students who fail to meet the 'needs criteria' defined under the Student Loans Act find it difficult to get a loan. For most students (62 percent), loans are seen to be insufficient to meet financial needs. Students who find the loans to be inadequate might be forced to turn to other sources such as family and friends, work part-time, or cut back on general living expenses (food, clothing, transportation, recreation, books etc.). Other students choose to violate Loans regulations by supplying false or misleading information in order to receive enough money. A sizeable minority of students (38 percent) admit that their debt is a source of concern when they consider the amount of money they owe, their likelihood of getting a job, and how much money they anticipate earning in a new job.

Factors Affecting Student Satisfaction

The picture that emerges from the interview data is of
a student body with high levels of satisfaction despite being
in a learning environment suffering from the ills of
overcrowding and underfunding. When asked whether they were
satisfied overall with their learning experience at Memorial,
16 percent of our respondents stated that they were
dissatisfied, 67 percent were moderately satisfied and 17
percent were very satisfied. How might this variation in
satisfaction levels be explained?

Based on a comparison of cases with high levels of
satisfaction and cases with moderate to low levels of
satisfaction, three factors can be identified as affecting
student satisfaction with the quality of education at
Memorial: (1) the ability to define and pursue goals in an
organizational setting (2) access to the means or resources
to accomplish these goals and (3) students' perceptions of
the link between higher education and their post-
undergraduate experience.

Setting Goals At University

The survey data suggests that students come to university for
a number of different reasons. For most of MUN's students (84
percent), finding challenging, high paying or interesting
work upon graduation were the most important reasons for

attending university (three separate items). The next most important reasons for attending university was getting a good general education (81 percent), obtaining a university degree (79 percent), developing the ability to think for themselves (58 percent), and finding out the nature of their interests (54 percent). Of lesser importance were finding out what they were good at doing (42 percent) and learning purely for learning's sake (41 percent).

Whatever the reason students might decide to attend university, their success will ultimately depend on their abilities to pursue goals in an organizational setting. In this context, all students are subject to certain rules and procedures, defined principally by the decision-making authority of faculty and administration, that regulate student activities and behaviour and govern their choices. Whether students have come to university to get a good job, obtain a degree or whether they have come with the sole intent of learning purely for learning's sake, all students are expected to abide by the same institutional norms in the pursuit of their goals. All students are expected to declare majors in accordance with a standardized set of rules outlined in the university calendar; they must take core courses within their major area of study and satisfy other course requirements; they are expected to abide by a system of prerequisites; they must receive passing grades in order to stay in university and receive high enough grades to gain

access to various institutional privileges (in registering for courses or qualifying for an honours degree for example). Strict adherence to these institutional norms will allow the student to progress through the system while violation of these norms may cause the student to spend prolonged periods in particular statuses (i.e. the third year 'general studies' student who fails to declare a major) or lead to other difficulties (i.e. 'failing out' of university due to poor grades).

Students who expressed high levels of satisfaction were able to narrow their interests to specific goals that could be achieved within the institutional structures described above. Furthermore, they were able to do this early in their academic careers - sometimes even before starting university, but in most cases by their first year or early into their second. In short, they knew what they wanted from their education and how to get it. Given these advantages, students were able systematically to design an academic program that could achieve the personal goals they had set - they had narrowed their interests to a particular field of subjects; they had declared a major; they found out which courses they had to take to meet degree requirements; and they became quickly acquainted with the modus operandi of the university.

Students who were able to accomplish these feats had access to information about institutional procedures, degree programs and other pertinent information. They were also able

to consult other resources to help them further define career goals, intellectual goals or other personal goals that could be realistically achieved in this institutional context. Highly satisfied students were fortunate in the sense of having family, friends, high school teachers and effective first year faculty advisers who were able to supply this type of information. Or, where these contacts were not able to supply the right kind of information, they were able to refer the student to other sources that could (i.e. a faculty adviser who was not comfortable with career advising but referred a student to the career counselling center to obtain more information). The student quoted below is a case in point. He had decided on a firm career goal even before he started university. He had prior knowledge about institutional procedures for declaring a major and registering for courses and he had established a comprehensive plan that would allow him to realize his goal of getting an education degree and becoming a teacher.

> I was motivated in that I knew exactly what I was doing. My first year, all my friends came in and the first thing they had done was say 'oh, I'm in general studies. See, on my little card it says general studies.' It was nothing to me. I had 'arts' on mine. I had already declared it coming in. It was only a matter of picking up the requirements for it. I had decided beforehand exactly what I was going to do. I was fairly well motivated because I knew exactly what my endpoint was going to be. I'm aiming to be a high school english teacher. Part of the reason that I came to university was because my mother is a teacher. If I had come in with no idea I would probably be lost. I have friends who are here four years and they're still changing faculties and trying to figure out what they're doing. So if you know what you're doing when you come in and

you have an endpoint to reach I found that motivated me
a lot more than if I had no idea what I was doing.

Students who expressed relatively lower levels of
satisfaction, however, experienced much greater difficulties
in defining goals that could be achieved within the
organizational setting of the university. They had very vague
notions about what they wanted from their education in terms
of a career goal or personal or intellectual goals. Many of
them floundered in the abyss of general studies for years,
dabbling in a potpourri of courses that later proved
difficult to transform into a coherently designed degree
program. They remained undecided about which degree programs
to pursue - arts or science - or which subjects to declare as
majors. Instead of pursuing subject areas of interest to
them, many of these students chose courses they perceived as
having greater 'market value'. Students who may have had a
greater interest and aptitude for arts subjects chose science
subjects instead or they chose professional schools over
science faculties because they thought that's where the jobs
were. Business was chosen over political science, commerce
over psychology, engineering over mathematics. These ill-
fated choices often resulted in a loss of motivation, failed
courses, wasted time, energy and money and loss of self-
esteem. These students commented on the inadequate advising
they received at university and their struggle to define
tangible goals that could be accomplished through the system.

I remember I had an advisor assigned to me the first day I went to MUN and that was it. I remember I went in and he said 'so, what do you want to do?' I said 'commerce I guess.' He said 'all right.' I think everyone wants to do that these days. And that was it. There was a minimal amount of guidance. When I first went in I was just doing a bunch of courses. I wasn't looking to fill the requirements of any certain program. I was just taking this, that and the other thing which was my own immaturity. But when you come in here and you're 17 years old it's a whole new experience. You have a certain lack of focus and need help.

I found it really frustrating in my first couple of years [at university]. I was there two and a half years and still undecided on what I was going to do. My advisers - they were there just to say 'this is a course and this is a slot.' That was it. I left one semester and went to nursing school but I didn't like that at all so I came back again in the following semester. I was really undecided. It's like I changed my mind every day - I'm going to do this and I'm going to do that...In high school we didn't have anybody to come in and talk to about stuff. My brother, he's in grade 12 now and he's [attended] career fairs and all these things. He's into math and he knew what he was going to do from the start like bang. It's a big jump from high school to university. It's so different when you come in. I think it's a new adjustment that you have to make for yourself.

These comments underscore another important point about setting goals at university - the fact that goals can change as students mature and become more cognizant of their own abilities, interests and aptitudes. One respondent, who returned to university as a mature student after a professional career, described the differences in his perceptions about university after returning with more realistic expectations about university work and a set of long term goals that were more compatible with his personal interests.

I turned 16 in my first year university and I then went straight into medical school after my second year. I turned 18 in my first year med school. I think that was far too young to be in a professional school. The actual undergrad, turning 16 or 17, I don't think that's necessarily a problem but being barely 18 years old in first year med school was definitely a problem. You're far too young. You don't know what you're doing at that stage. You could get totally absorbed. You don't really have a good perspective on life and what it's all about when you're that age in med school. For me, it was very detrimental because I started off submerging myself into it and I developed a very pathological attitude towards it so by the end of it I couldn't really stand what I was doing. So I did medicine because I thought that's what I wanted to do. And I was quite interested in linguistics and I decided to come back and do linguistics after doing my own reading and stuff. It was something I was far more interested in doing and pursuing a career in. I declared that as soon as I came back. I didn't come back and hunt around for courses. I knew that when I applied that I was coming in to major in linguistics and that was it.

But going back and making a conscious decision to go back afterwards was completely different. After already having one degree and after having been out working and making my own living, to make a conscious decision to go back to university again as a more mature student, the university experience is totally different. You know what you're doing. You know why you're there. You've made a choice to be there. You're more committed to what you're doing. You know what studying is all about. You know what you want to get out of it so you know what you've got to put into it. There's that much more stick-to-it-ness to actually sit down and study stuff. You have to learn but you might not want to. You have more of a feeling of freedom in terms of picking electives and that type of thing. You have your core courses set out for your degree of [you know] what you have to have. All around it, you have a bit more of an idea of how to package yourself in the long-run so that you can build a better degree program. It just made all the difference in the world.

Possessing the Means to Achieve Goals

In addition to being able to set or define goals in an

organizational setting, students must also possess the means

or resources to achieve these goals. The following resources
are indispensable in this regard: money; the possession of
institutional rewards (grades and course credits); lay
referral systems and social support networks; and cultural
capital.

Money

All students must pay some of the costs of attending
university. They must pay for tuition and books as well as
general living expenses. Students who were dependent on
student loans as the main source of their income and students
unable to draw on financial help from family, kin, friends
and others were particularly susceptible to money-related
stress. Finances could be particularly stressful for rural
students who were not able to live with their parents and had
to pay the high costs of rent, food, entertainment and other
expenses.

Students with adequate financial support, however,
experienced much less stress in having to meet the costs of
everyday living expenses as well as the costs of tuition
fees, books and other university expenses. These students
tended to come from families whose parents were able to
provide for their financial needs (parents of high
socioeconomic status) or they earned enough money from part-
time work or from scholarships and other sources of income to
alleviate the costly burden of attending university.

The Possession of Institutional Rewards

Memorial's registration system offers a greater degree of choice in the selection of courses for students with more course credits and higher grade point averages. Based on the availability of courses, the possession of these two institutional rewards - grades and course credits - determines the pecking order for selecting courses at registration times.[1] Students with lower grade point averages and fewer course credits are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to choosing the courses and professors they want. Because students with greater institutional rewards have first access to courses at registration times, students who possess fewer institutional rewards must settle for the courses and professors that higher performing students did not want. Inevitably, the consequences of such a merit system are poorly designed programs consisting of 'left over courses' for students with lower grade point averages and fewer course credits while more highly rewarded students are able to design programs more responsive to their needs and their goals.

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[1] The reader will be reminded that the lack of courses - particularly core or required courses - offered at registration times is a sore point for many students. No matter how many courses are available in any given semester, however, the merit rule still applies where course credits and grade point averages determines who gets first choice of courses.

Lay Referral Systems and Social Support Networks

While it is important for students to obtain advice about careers, degree programs and other information in order to **define** their goals in an institutional context (i.e. in choosing a degree program, declaring a major and selecting courses that would fulfil degree requirements), it is equally important for them to have continued access to lay referral systems and other networks of social support throughout their academic careers. Answers to questions such as what is the course content like in this particular course, what are the methods of evaluation, is the course relevant to a particular career, is the professor a 'fair' marker, what does the professor look for in a term paper or a project, is the professor interesting or dull - all provide important consumer information about courses and the professors teaching them. While some of this information may be obtained through the official mediums of the faculty advising system, counselling centers, the university calendar and so forth, much of it must be obtained from other sources. Lay referral systems, the informal network of students, family, friends and in some cases, faculty members, are best situated to provide this sort of information. For example, if a student wants to 'suss out' whether Prof. X is worth taking a course from or whether she is a fair marker, he is much more likely to seek out leads, evaluation and advice from a fellow student or other more intimate relation than he is from a

faculty adviser with whom he has had limited contact or from university publications which do not offer evaluations of institutional services. Unfortunately, students who find themselves cut off from lay referral systems often find themselves at the mercy of these official information sources that do not always present accurate information - at least from the consumer's point of view.

> There was one course that I shouldn't have taken. The course description [in the university calendar] was beautiful. I thought it was going to be the greatest course that I ever did in my life. The prof was boring as hell. He talked about one species of animal. It was called applied animal biology but at the end of the semester we had renamed it 'applied codfish biology' because all the man talked about was codfish. It didn't matter if it was freshwater ecology or saltwater ecology. He'd always get back to codfish before the lecture was over. It was baffling and really scary. If I had my time back, I would have done anything other than that course. It was a useless credit. It was a waste of $175. The only thing I was grateful for was that he didn't prescribe a textbook. If I had, I might have learned something from it.

Undergraduates who have easy access to lay referral systems are much better situated to achieve their goals than those who find themselves isolated from other students, faculty and other contacts who are familiar with the 'ins and outs' of the university system. They have more 'inside information' with which to make informed consumer choices about courses and professors and they can receive assistance in dealing with the bureaucracy and meeting institutional requirements so that goals can be achieved. But more than that, students who have a close network of family and friends around them are able to benefit from encouragement and advice

when they face difficulties in their academic careers or personal lives or even when they need extra money to help them out of dire financial straits. These students describe the kind of assistance these networks can provide.

> I haven't really gone to my professors to get a lot of advice. Most of my advising has been from my parents. Both my parents being university graduates - I've found they've helped me a lot. I find that they're really open. They listen to me and try to encourage me based on what I've said.

> My uncle is paying $100 towards my rent. Rent is absolutely essential. If he wasn't doing that I'd have to get some more hours in working. I'd have to move to another place to get hours. It's absolutely essential. My rent is $187. I'm sharing a house with three other people. But right now, my uncle and my grandmother are the only ones contributing to my finances. It's absolutely essential that I have that and I'm so glad that they're doing that. My uncle thinks it's wonderful that I'm in university. He's got a grade 8 education. He's the one paying my rent and he really wants me to get a degree. He wants it as much as I do I think. But if I quit today, it would be no problem. There would be no backlash from anybody and I know that. I know my family wouldn't say 'what are you doing that for?' They're not going to say 'C'mon, get your ass in gear and do it!' They're really supportive - especially my uncle because he really values an education because he didn't obtain one.

Cultural Capital

A well known study by French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977) suggests that educational systems do not promote social mobility but invariably favour advancement and success for upper and middle class children. To explain their findings that the sons of high-status French managers were 80 times more likely to go to a university than were the sons of farm workers, Bourdieu and Passeron advanced

what they called a 'cultural capital' argument. This argument suggests that the differences in success patterns cannot be explained in terms of inborn differences in talent or intelligence but only in terms of the cultural capital that youths acquire from their families. This 'capital' includes verbal ability, writing skills, knowledge about 'high culture,' and information about the school system itself. While to some extent this capital is available to everyone through libraries, museums, theatre, and books, Bourdieu and Passeron maintain that only those families with the right cultural background will encourage their kids to take interest in such activities and pursuits in the first place. Not only that, but upper and middle class families can also afford to engage in such activities (many of which do require fees) and they can send their kids to better schools. The end result, according to Bourdieu and Passeron, is that upper and middle class kids are better equipped to compete for high marks in school thus enabling them to win positions of higher prestige, wealth and power in society.

The cultural capital thesis is validated by the experiences of a number of students in our study. Students whose parents had higher levels of education and a higher socioeconomic status reported being better prepared for university level work on a number of dimensions. They had been encouraged to read books from an early age, to use grammatically correct language in conversation (or 'standard

English'), and motivated to learn new things. For such students, higher education was a mere continuation of a learning process that began even before they were enroled in the schooling system. Not only were these students often more motivated to learn, but they were also able to afford many of the activities and past-times that contributed to their social and intellectual development (attending concerts, the ballet, purchasing books, travelling, etc.).

Students from lower class families, on the other hand, more often lacked the cultural capital that would ease their entry to university. For these students, reading was more of a chore than a pleasing pastime; learning an act of compliance that satisfied the minimal demands of teachers. Placed in a learning environment that demanded much higher levels of individual responsibility to learn and acquire new skills and knowledge, many of these students found themselves at a great disadvantage when they entered university. Because these students were poorer, they were often not able to participate in 'high culture' activities that cost a considerable amount of money. The result was a widening gap in performance between the more sophisticated students from upper and middle class families and those with lesser cultural capital.

<u>Higher Education and Post University Experiences</u>

A third factor that appears to affect satisfaction levels involves students' perceptions of the link between higher education and their post undergraduate experience. Reflecting back on four or more years at Memorial, students must weigh the costs and benefits of attending university. They must ask themselves whether their university training has helped them to achieve their goals and whether or not these goals, once achieved, will be useful or relevant to them in the world beyond their undergraduate years.

Highly satisfied students expressed greater confidence that what they had learned at university would be useful and relevant to them in their post undergraduate experiences. For them, university was no waste of time and the money and energy they had invested in obtaining their goals were worthwhile in terms of preparing them for a future career or further studies. One student, who attached great intrinsic value to his goal of learning purely for learning's sake expressed satisfaction with his learning experience even when prospective employers told him his education was irrelevant to the positions he was seeking.

> I consider my courses to be relevant but the people that
> I talk to - the police, the armed forces - said 'listen
> man, you're not going to use it. It's just a
> prerequisite, you know.' And so if it's going to get me
> in the door then I'm willing to have it. But hey, I'm
> enjoying it while I'm doing it so it's rewarding in
> itself. But I'm told that by a lot of people - I'm never
> going to use it. It's just the degree that they want.
> But like I said, I'm satisfied with my education.

Students who expressed low levels of satisfaction, on the other hand, were more likely to express concerns about the relevance of their education to future careers, further studies and other personal endeavours. They saw fewer links between what they had accomplished at university and what they anticipated doing upon graduation. Students who lacked the resources or means to design academic programs that conformed to their personal interests or career plans were particularly dissatisfied in this regard (this included students who lacked grades and course credits as well as enough information on which to make informed choices). The most common complaints centered around the irrelevance of higher education to everyday life and the lack of marketable skills taught in students' respective disciplines.

> I don't think it's practical enough [referring to her education]. I don't think they have enough courses geared towards the industry - you know, practical work. What I'm doing here I'll probably never see again so I don't think it's very practical at all...If I had my time back, I would do just a basic degree - just get a degree and get out and look for something practical. That's what I would have done. I can't speak for the other faculties but I don't think the science faculty is really practical - not really. I don't think calculus is going to help me very much. Important things aren't developed at university: the ability to cope with real life - family life, stress management, dealing with people. I did learn how to deal with people but not directly through course content. I think everything is mostly theory. I don't think there's anything practical about university. You don't use any of your theory and I think it's a bunch of hog wash. I think that it should be more practical - things that are going to be more useful to you when you get out. I don't think I'll ever use any of what I got in here.

A number of respondents begrudgingly commented on the fact that Memorial's professional schools took better care of their students in terms of supplying valuable work experience compared to the faculties of arts and sciences. Co-op programs, professional work terms and similar programs that enabled students to apply the skills and knowledge they had learned in the classroom to the marketplace were sorely missed by students in those faculties that offered no such opportunities.

> I'm very jealous of business and engineering with their work terms. I'm very jealous of that. I think work terms are important because the people are actually out there working and they do their proposals and have their field work. I think that's good.

Another student, who had left a professional school and gone into the science faculty, regretted the fact that he could no longer participate in such programs.

> When I first came here I wanted to do geology but I decided to do engineering instead. It wasn't to get away from a degree in geology but I figured with that engineering degree and with that co-op program especially, I could go through, not use student loans and pretty well have a guaranteed job after I go through. I miss that co-op program. That was good.

For the majority of students who expressed 'moderate satisfaction' with the quality of their education at Memorial (67 percent), several suggestions can be offered to explain their assessments. First, many students rationalized that Memorial offered a relatively inexpensive alternative in the higher education market to the more prestigious universities on the mainland and elsewhere. For the majority of students,

the prospect of moving to another university with even higher tuition fees and perhaps higher living expenses was a strong disincentive for abandoning their choice to attend Memorial. Second, students were also able to maintain close ties with family and friends by remaining within the province to attend university. This was especially the case for younger students fresh out of high school who were more likely to resist the idea of leaving the comfort and security of home. Third, given the increasingly intense competition for jobs in a recession battered economy and the rising demand for a credentialed work force, many students appear to have reconciled themselves to the fact that their undergraduate degrees may serve only a perfunctory role in admitting them to graduate or professional schools or, if they are fortunate, to an entry level position with a public or private company or firm. Based on this logic, Memorial seems as good a place as any to pursue that first important credential. On this point in particular, there appeared to be a conscious attempt on the part of students to reconcile their aspirations with current realities. This finding is consistent with the aspiration/adjustment thesis first proposed by Campbell and his researchers at the University of Michigan (Campbell et al., 1976) and explained here in a study of life satisfaction by Felt and Sinclair (1991: 16).

> There is considerable evidence that individuals attempt to reconcile over time their expectations with current realities...The contention is that aspiration level gradually adjusts to a person's circumstances. Such an

adjustment process is probably necessary, it is argued, for humans to function as they do; otherwise, fulfilment of a set of goals would lead to what Campbell has called 'satiated mobility.' Adjustment between expectations and situation takes place slowly with downward adjustments occurring more slowly than upward ones. Over time, however, most people are thought to bring their aspirations and situation closely in line.

While it is not possible to assess this thesis in the way Campbell presents it given the limitations of our data, a pattern consistent with the aspiration/adjustment theory does appear in the way that students come to express satisfaction with their university experience under economic conditions that they do not expect to improve significantly. This is especially evident in the way that students assess the value of their undergraduate degrees in the labour market many of them are about to enter. Rather than seeing their undergraduate training as a sure fire way to interesting, high paying or challenging work, many students begin to view their education as a mere stepping stone to further educational pursuits or as a minimum requirement necessary to get their foot in the door to government jobs or private corporations. This realization intensifies as students approach the completion of their undergraduate programs and look outward to the narrowing opportunity structures confronting them.

You're not going to use much of what you learn anyway. You just got a bit of basic, general biology knowledge. If you get a plain biology degree or even an honours degree you still start from scratch anyway. Personally, I don't think it matters anyway because the jobs nowadays are so scarce. You're sort of gonna take whatever you can get.

The way I look at is that a bachelor of science or your
first degree is just a stepping stone. And if you want
to do really well you're going to have to do more than
just a bachelor degree. This is just my first step so
that I can get into an MBA program or whatever. That's
basically all it is.

Conclusions

In terms of overall satisfaction, it would appear as though
the majority of the senior students in our study have
reconciled themselves to a less than ideal learning
environment and made the most of their current situation at
MUN. The majority of the senior students interviewed stated
that they were satisfied overall with their university
experiences. On the surface, this finding is somewhat
surprising given the difficult and stressful conditions under
which many students work. However, it is clear that students
adjust their aspirations to suit the narrow opportunity
structures confronting them. MUN students seem to compare
their undergraduate degrees favourably with degrees acquired
at other universities on the mainland and elsewhere when they
consider their chances of finding a job in an intensely
competitive marketplace (i.e. 'a B.A. or a B.Sc. is just a
'stepping stone' anyway'). Students are able to arrive at
high overall satisfaction levels by down-playing negative
experiences (overcrowding, financial difficulties and so on)
and highlighting what they perceive to be the positive
aspects of attending MUN (the fact that MUN is a cheaper
alternative to mainland universities and that it is close to

home and family). An alternative explanation is proposed by Gomme (forthcoming). Gomme's theory regarding the relatively high satisfaction levels is two dimensional: 1) by comparison, high school is so oppressive that anything is better and 2) students do not have a 'high quality postsecondary educational experience' with which to compare their current experiences in university.

When we probe beneath the surface of high overall satisfaction levels it is apparent that not all students enjoy their social and academic experiences at university. Recall from our earlier discussion on job satisfaction that individuals who belong to an organization through primary mediating groups and who are integrated into its informal structures report higher levels of satisfaction than individuals who are socially isolated within the organization. Individuals who occupy positions at the top of the bureaucratic structure also enjoy more autonomy and creativity in their work compared to those who work 'in the trenches' of the organization. In the case of university students, scholars have suggested that satisfaction levels are derived from the amount and quality of involvement in the academic and social domains of university life. For example, students who are actively involved in extracurricular activities, who enjoy interactions with other students and with faculty and who are interested in their majors develop more positive attitudes about their work and find their

university experiences more satisfying and rewarding. Conversely, students who are less integrated into the social and academic domains of university life - who do not participate in campus activities, who are socially isolated from other students and faculty and who are bored with their studies, for example - report lower levels of satisfaction.

Proponents of the social and academic integration model, however, have not adequately explained the micro-dynamics of the integrating processes that produce the outcome of student satisfaction. Our data suggests that an important part of the integration process involves the pursuit of goals in an organizational context. Students who were able to define their goals early in their academic careers according to institutional norms (by declaring a major, meeting prerequisites, and fulfilling academic requirements) reported that their university experiences were more satisfying compared to those who were unable to define their goals under conditions dictated by university regulations and procedures. Satisfied students also possessed the means or resources to achieve their goals. They had sufficient monetary support and cultural capital, they had access to lay referral systems and social support networks and they possessed the institutional rewards (course credits and grades) that made advancement and progression in the organizational setting possible. Furthermore, satisfied students were able to express greater confidence than dissatisfied students that their education

would be more relevant to their experiences beyond the undergraduate level. Satisfied students were more confident that what they had learned at university would serve them well for further academic studies or would make them more competitive for an increasingly tight job market. Dissatisfied students, on the other hand, were less optimistic that their education and their credentials would bear fruit 'on the outside' - that their acquired skills, competence and knowledge would enable them to cope with everyday life or prepare them for their future careers.

CHAPTER 7

Improving the Quality of Education at MUN

Summary

The circumstances that spawned the current crisis facing
Canadian universities can be traced back to larger social
changes affecting Canadian society and institutions of higher
learning that began in the 1960's. As we have seen, the birth
of the baby boomers, a resurgence of human capital theory and
increased concerns for social justice and equality all
converged to precipitate a shift from elite to mass education
that affected Canada's postsecondary education institutions.
Growth in participation rates expanded these numbers even
more so that students with a wider range of ability levels
and with more varied social backgrounds have gained access to
university.

Policies promoting accessibility and mass education were
not, however, matched by the financial resources necessary to
ensure the high quality of education believed characteristic
of more elitist (and smaller scale) approaches. By the
1970's, government expenditures on higher education began to
decrease in real terms leaving universities with a fiscal
crisis on their hands. One of the effects of this crisis was
to push the activities of administration and budget
management to the forefront of institutional priorities. This
propelled university administrators to a central position in
the institutional decision making structure. As Newson and

Buchbinder point out: "Academic institutions were seen to be cumbersome, indecisive and unconcerned with financial matters. The demand was for a professionalized, centralized efficient management. Only such leadership could steer the university through hard times" (Newson and Buchbinder, 1991: 9).

Against the backdrop of these changes, we can better understand the enormous challenges facing higher education today in Canada and Newfoundland in particular. In 1992, Newfoundland is facing one of the most difficult periods in its economic history. With a crumbling fishery, decreased government revenues and large budget deficits, the province's public services are being scrutinized for any excess 'fat'. Education, the second most expensive item on the province's budget next to health, is being pared unmercifully in an attempt to gain 'more scholar for the dollar,' as one former education minister put it.

The situation at MUN is a microcosm of these larger trends. MUN's President, Dr. Art May, and the rest of his administration stand in the unenviable position of having to distribute finite resources in response to the competing demands of the faculty and administration, support workers and other personnel, not to mention students. So far, faculty salary freezes, staff reductions, tuition increases, various program cuts and other rationalization measures have left no group unscathed.

To date, one of the most controversial decisions made by the administration that affects students centers around its new admission policy, which is expected to come into effect by September of 1993. The main thrust for this initiative comes from a report by the University Task Force on Admission Policy. Among other things, the report shows that students who enter MUN with a 60 to 69 per cent average fail more courses, attend more semesters and are more likely to receive a 'conditional' or a 'required to withdraw' status. The authors of the report go on to conclude:

> These students meander or muddle through to less than mediocre degrees and then only in very small numbers. The scarce resources of the university would be more productively used if applied to the medium risk group (70 to 79 per cent average in high school), where improvement is possible, and the low risk group (80-89 per cent average) where excellence is possible. (Bennett et al. 1992).

By restricting entry to the institution on the basis of prior academic performance, the university hopes to save millions of dollars and polish its image by providing better quality service to a smaller clientele. The savings are expected to come "...in the form of reallocation of resources and reduced numbers of sessional instructors...If 75 percent of the 'sessional' and 'extra' teaching were eliminated, a savings of 2 million dollars would accrue, even after the loss of income in the form of fees deducted" (1992: 48). The report also suggests that "...better students will choose MUN if it is more selective because of the prestige associated

with being accepted to a university that is more difficult to enter" (1992: 42).

While many administrators and professors may embrace higher admission levels as a means to promote better quality at universities, critics have pointed out two major problems with this 'solution'. First, universities can easily ensure high quality outputs simply by raising admission standards. Quality of intake obviously impacts upon quality of output independent of the quality of the institutional experience itself. If we can use an analogy here, a hospital does not upgrade the quality of its medical care simply by refusing the sickest patients and accepting healthier ones. By passing on the same institutional services (teaching, administration, student loans, library services etc.) to a group of students already skilled and talented to begin with, the university can hardly claim credit for any favourable improvement in their performances. Ironically, despite Memorial's apparent movement towards a more restrictive admissions policy, the President of the University has gone on record as recognizing the inherent contradiction of upgrading quality through inputs as opposed to outputs. Responding to the 1991 _Maclean's_ ranking issue which gave MUN a relatively low rating, Dr. May had this to say in defense of the university:

> "...We ranked lower on issues which were irrelevant or inappropriate in our context...because we are this province's only university, we accept all qualified students. We disagree emphatically with the notion that this ranks us 46th in measures of quality of our student body...Next time look for measures of output rather than

input as indicators of the quality of undergraduate education." (<u>The Evening Telegram</u>, October 24, 1991: p.40)

The second dilemma is an old one. Limiting accessibility to high achievers runs counter to former commitments to social justice. Raising entry qualifications will inevitably further limit access to postsecondary education. Disadvantaged groups will be shut out from this important mechanism of upward mobility even more than is now the case. The real challenge for MUN, especially as the province's only university, is to maintain the socially desirable objective of accessibility without sacrificing the quality of education.

Improving the quality of education at MUN requires that changes be made to institutional services rather than the students who enter the system. Instead of attempting to upgrade the quality of students by raising admission standards, the university should be attempting to upgrade the quality of teaching, administration, student loans, library resources and other institutional services that impact on students' intellectual and personal development. But before university policy makers are able to make constructive changes to current university structures and processes they must first have a more accurate picture of what it is like to be on the receiving end of institutional services. Applied sociological research which clearly outlines what satisfies and dissatisfies students as clients of the university system

and what their perceptions are concerning those who deliver educational services would meet this objective.

It is impossible to discuss ways of improving the quality of education at MUN without addressing the problem of how to finance much needed change. To restructure the institution in a way that will benefit students would require a significant increase in university revenues. Where will these revenues come from? Additional state funding? An increase in student fees? Other sources?

In the remainder of this chapter, some policy recommendations to improve the quality of education at MUN will be discussed. Options that are available to solve MUN's underfunding problem will also be examined. But first, some issues pertaining to student satisfaction and 'client service' must be addressed.

Is the Customer Always Right?

We have all heard the common adage used in business circles that 'the customer is always right.' In other words, any service that is extended to a paying customer should include only what is pleasing and satisfying according to the customers' subjective evaluations while those aspects of the service that are not satisfying and pleasing in the customer's eyes should be eliminated or conformed to customers' wishes. But is it wise to adopt this philosophy in the area of higher education?

It has been suggested that satisfaction levels and perceptions might be affected by students' abilities to pursue goals in an organizational setting. Of course, students are ultimately responsible for such tasks as choosing their major(s), selecting courses and meeting all of the institutional requirements for graduation. However, not all students are equally prepared to accomplish these goals. Some have access to the necessary resources - money, cultural capital, institutional rewards, and social support networks and lay referral systems - that afford them a better chance of graduating from university and acquiring a credential. But these are not the only conditions that affect satisfaction levels. Student satisfaction must be situated in an even broader social context which takes into account the structural changes in our economy and in our institutions of higher learning. In this regard, we must take into account the fact that the supply of jobs in modern bureaucracies (what Collins [1979] calls 'sinecures') and other sectors of the economy has not kept pace with the growing number of credentialed workers in the past decade or so. In Newfoundland, this is especially the case with more and more degree holders competing for fewer jobs in our recession battered economy.

What has been the impact of these changes on the way that students perceive the quality of their education? It is not within the scope of this study to offer any definitive

answer to this question but some suggestions or postulates can be offered. Given the current realities of high unemployment (and especially unemployment in middle class occupations) among newly credentialed cohorts, we can reasonably expect that students will experience some degree of anxiety or stress about future career prospects especially as they near the completion of their degrees and prepare themselves to move out into a harsh 'real world' of limited opportunities. Of course, there may be a number of different responses to these impending conditions - some students may be motivated to work harder and learn more to make themselves more marketable for the few openings in the lucrative professions; others might retreat into a student subculture of fun and frivolity in order to escape the pressures of the outside world; and still others might resort to more expedient measures designed to give them high grades and a credential via the quickest and easiest route possible. An example of the latter response can be seen in several studies of academic dishonesty conducted between the 1960's and the 1990's which show a marked increase (from 50 percent in 1964 to upwards of 80 percent in 1990) in the numbers of university students who admit to some form of academic dishonesty in their student careers (whether plagiarism, crib notes, turning in someone else's paper and so forth). This disturbing trend towards deviant behaviour is partly a consequence of the intensified competition among university

students for the grades and credentials that are necessary for further career advancement.[1] As long as credential holders have an advantage in terms of entering middle class occupations under such restrictive economic conditions, we ⌐ n reasonably expect that these trends will continue with more and more students pursuing blatantly illegitimate means of obtaining their grades and credentials or for students to pursue other strategies that will expedite their certification (i.e. by developing what Becker et al. [1968] call a 'grade point perspective' and actively hunting out easy course credits or undemanding teachers who are known for giving out easy marks). Given this possibility, the question arises whether 'satisfaction' with the quality of education, where satisfaction is defined simply as a pleasurable emotional state, may in fact be a form of approval for a mere certifying process carried out by the university. To put it more bluntly, some students may express satisfaction with their 'learning experience' as long as their credentials are in hand and their grades are acceptable. It may not matter for some students if they gain a substantive, in-depth knowledge of their field of study or become a more critical thinker. As one student in our survey put it, "As long as I get my 70's and 75's I'm happy." On the other hand, for

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[1]   For studies of student dishonesty in the 1960's see Bowers (1964). Recent studies at Rutgers University have estimated that 80 percent of students admit to some form of academic dishonesty (The Evening Telegram, October 11, 1991).

students who place a greater premium on learning purely for learning's sake, a preponderance of slack courses and easy professors at university may prove to be a source of great dissatisfaction. The intrinsic value of developing intellectually and personally may outweigh the extrinsic value of inflated grades and easy course credits. For such students, the pursuit of grades, course credits and credentials is not an end in itself. Rather, they provide the means to progress to more advanced stages of learning in the organizational setting of the university. This view is reflected in the comments of this student:

> A couple of courses, I've felt like I've come out with nothing from it. I've gotten A's in a couple of courses but I think it was just marked on the curve or something because everyone found the course hard and the marks were so low. They put them up. I don't think that I have the knowledge from these courses to have gotten those marks. I don't feel that the mark reflects what I've learned from the course. If I do get a good mark in it, I'd like to be able to show that I know what it's about. But when I get a mark that looks good on a transcript but I have little understanding from the course, it bothers me. If anyone ever asked me something from it, I might be able to say a little bit about it but I wouldn't be able to give a good understanding of it to anyone.

By deconstructing the concept of satisfaction in this way, we become more aware of the implications of taking student perceptions and satisfaction reports at face value. We are forced to inquire about the specific criteria that students use to evaluate courses and professors and to balance students' 'consumer preferences' (possibly for 'slack courses' and easy grades) with other higher education

objectives (i.e. for teaching courses that are intellectually challenging and demanding).

The value of student preferences should not, of course, be discounted; nor should student ratings be ignored. Rather, student perceptions and satisfaction measures about the quality of education must be properly understood in the context of these larger changes affecting the opportunity structures confronting students. Clearly, further research is warranted in this area to uncover the social conditions and circumstances that produce and affect student preferences and subjective evaluations.

How, then, can student perceptions and satisfactions be used to evaluate various institutional services and facilities and upgrade 'quality' in higher education? Sell (1989) suggests that a diversity of evaluation methods can enable institutions to be more responsive to a range of problems and clientele. With regard to teaching, for example, the use of peer reviews as well as student ratings would offer a more balanced and comprehensive form of evaluation - taking into account the personal and professional qualities of instructors that may be deemed very important by students (such as availability outside of class, sensitivity, 'approachability') but under-emphasized or possibly ignored by an instructor's peers. Students are best qualified to assess whether the university's services and facilities (libraries, student loans services, administration

procedures, counselling centers for example) are adequately
designed to meet _their_ needs and responsive to types of
problems and difficulties they encounter as direct 'users' of
the system.

As applied sociology, the findings from our research can
be used to make university policy makers more aware of the
problems, frustrations and dilemmas that students experience
as participants in a complex organization. The findings can
also be used to effect certain institutional changes that
will make the social and academic experiences of
undergraduates more rewarding and satisfying. Following are
recommendations for practice as well as for theory and
further research.

Policy Recommendations

While it is perhaps not surprising that MUN students report
working and living under a range of pressures and stresses,
it is nonetheless apparent that some students are much better
equipped than others to handle the rigors of university life
and meet with success. For those students who have clearly
defined goals and the means to pursue these goals, the
university experience appears to be more satisfying and
rewarding. Students who lack these advantages, however, may
find MUN to be an inhospitable place that merely paves the
road to an equally inhospitable future.

Policy initiatives aimed at improving the quality of undergraduate education should remain faithful to MUN's commitment to "provide the means whereby the University may reach out to **all the people**" as outlined in its present mission statement (see 'Objectives of the University in chapter 3). Clearly, the administration's inclement steps towards higher admission standards runs counter to this commitment to universal accessibility and equality. A better approach to solve the problems caused by oversubscription and underfunding at MUN is to restructure the institution and its services so that all students are able to compete on an equal basis for the social and economic rewards that accrue from a university education.

MUN obviously faces greater challenges than institutions with a more elitist student body because it accepts both high and low performing students. Institutional structures and services should be equipped, therefore, to address the needs of a student body with diverse social and economic backgrounds. But little has been done so far to conform institutional practices to the needs of a substantial segment of students who lack the resources to succeed at university. Instead, current institutional practices reflect a laissez faire approach towards servicing the student: a policy of virtual non-involvement. Of course, this problem is not unique to Memorial University. The university system in general is structured in such a way as to demand that

students be responsible (and rightfully so) for designing their own programs and meeting institutional requirements for graduation. At the same time, many students are making important decisions and choices pertaining to their academic careers without much support and assistance from faculty, administrators and other staff members. The necessary level of individual responsibility, interest and motivation that predisposes individuals for success at university is especially undermined by the lack of cultural capital that families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are able to cultivate in their children. In effect, little has been done **from within** the institution to assist students (1) who are socially isolated, (2) whose parents and family members are unable to provide the kind of advice and guidance necessary for students to adjust to the university experience and (3) who lack the kind of information and the resources that are necessary for making informed choices about courses, degree programs and so forth. To compensate for these disadvantages, active, interventionist policies that target students who are unable to define their goals in an institutional context and who lack the means or the resources to achieve their goals are necessary if MUN is to be successful in servicing a student body with diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, interests and abilities. Several broad policy strategies can be implemented to achieve these objectives.

A. Front Loading Strategies

It is an unfortunate fact that many students find the university experience enjoyable only in the latter stages of their academic programs. Of course, for all students, the first year at university and even the second year is a time of adjustment, a time to 'acclimatize' to new social conditions. For many students, however, it is the first time away from home and it is a struggle to try to make new friends, adjust to a more demanding work schedule and handle greater amounts of personal freedom. Adjusting to university life can be particularly difficult for those students who have no clear career goals or personal goals in mind. Not knowing what they are striving for and with no endpoint in mind makes it difficult for students to stay motivated about their work and to experience progress in their university careers.

Ironically, many of our respondents expressed some regret at having to leave university since they had just figured out how the system worked and how they could get the most out of their education. Of course, several explanations might account for this. In the first place, senior students are more likely to qualify as 'independent students' under the Student Loans Act and are therefore able to receive more financial support from the government and less from parents and family. This greater financial independence helps to alleviate some of the pressures associated with having to

rely on parents who have their own financial problems or parents who may try to influence their childrens' decisions about university because 'they are the ones footing the bills.' Second, senior students are more likely to have established a broader network of social contacts that could be used for lay referrals and social support. They would have had more first hand contact with faculty members in their own departments and would have been exposed to many of the same students through smaller classes and seminars. Third, as compared to those in first year, students at the senior level would possess more course credits in addition to having a declared major and minor, thus giving them greater institutional privileges (i.e. priority when choosing courses for their core courses and electives). Because of this set-up junior students often wind up with 'leftover' courses that were rejected by senior students at registration times.

To alleviate the adverse conditions that many undergraduates face early in their academic careers, members of the university community (including student government representatives, faculty, and administrators) might target the following areas in order to make the university experience more rewarding and satisfying for students:

(1) MUN should collect data from its undergraduate students on an annual basis to determine the degree of student satisfaction with teaching, administration procedures, university housing, recreation and other university services

and facilities. These data can be included in an information kit or package to be disseminated to all students applying to or currently enroled at the university. This would enable newer students, in particular, to develop more realistic expectations about the university experience. This type of data might also provide the administration, the faculty and other professional staff with useful information about how to better serve the university's student clientele.

(2) Students should be provided with effective formal advising (especially in their first year) to assist them in declaring a major, designing a degree program and identifying achievable goals. Students should meet on a regular basis with their advisers each semester. Senior undergraduates in their final year could be trained for advising students and hired as part of MUN's current MUCEP initiative (Memorial University Cooperative Employment Program) to assume this responsibility. Academic advising could also form a more extensive portion of graduate students' Teaching Assistant (TA) responsibilities.

(3) Members of the university community should promote greater opportunities for students to socialize with peers and with faculty with the objective of facilitating the expansion of students' networks of social support and lay referral systems (through organized 'meet the prof' functions, departmental mixers, student societies and so on).

(4) More effective referral systems should be implemented so that students can become more aware of the resources available to them on campus (ie. writing centers, counselling services, career counselling, time management courses, test anxiety counselling and so forth). Much of this responsibility would necessarily fall on faculty and teaching assistants who evaluate and assess students' performances and who are likely to be more exposed to students' academic and personal problems. Faculty and staff would also have to become more knowledgeable about the various resources on campus that are available to assist students.

(5) The university should review its current housing and accommodation policies to take into account the fact that affordable, comfortable living arrangements are vital to student retention and success at university. This should apply not only to on-campus residence housing but off-campus housing as well.

(6) The university should increase its emphasis on teaching basic student 'survival skills' (decision-making, time management, organizational ability etc.) through 'University 101' or Freshman Year Experience courses or Transition Year courses.

B. Talent development

A great deal of controversy still exists as to what constitutes excellence or quality in education. What exactly

are the attributes of an 'educated person'? The general
consensus is that students should be competent in at least
the following (cognitive) areas: independent thinking,
creativity, time management, organizational ability, desire
to continue learning, reading, writing, oral communication,
decision making, computational expertise, understanding and
appreciating science, greater appreciation of art, music,
literature and an understanding of global issues (Boyer,
1987; Evers and Gilbert, 1991).

Excellent instruction, meaningful faculty-student
contact and a stimulating curriculum are important
contributors towards the development of such highly desired
educational outcomes (Gilbert, 1991). A broadening of the
academic reward structure to recognize the scholarship of
teaching would go far to meet these goals as would regular
assessments of teaching and research competence for all
members of the faculty. Power over such matters as the hiring
of new faculty and the rewarding of tenure and promotion
should be dispersed so as to include more input from
students. The use of student ratings should figure
prominently in such decisions. Ratings of instructors'
teaching performances should also be made available to
students to help them make more informed choices about
courses and instructors. As Stuart Smith points out in his
report for the AUCC: "As to the publication of evaluations
done by students, there seems to be no reason why this type

of information should not be available to students who are in the process of selecting courses" (Smith 1991: 460). MUN's CSU (Council of the Students' Union) might assume this responsibility.

Students in our survey also mentioned the value of their volunteer experience in the development of skills, competence and knowledge. Some creative and innovative initiatives could be taken on this front to complement and further enhance the formal classroom experience. For example, requirements for graduation might include a volunteer component that is related to a student's particular discipline (i.e. students interested in foreign cultures might be required to volunteer a certain number of hours each semester with organizations like the Association For New Canadians; biology students for volunteer work with the environment). Not only would this be beneficial for students in terms of building character and enhancing their skills and intellects, but the university could also forge stronger links with the community.

C. Paying the Cost: Enhancing University Revenues

The cost of implementing such policies represents the greatest challenge to policy makers at MUN. Faced with a tighter operating budget, the administration would have to cut back on services and programs, redistribute scarce funds and/or charge higher fees to make these changes. What is the

solution to MUN's underfunding problem given such fiscal constraints?

An increase in the amount that governments invest in postsecondary education represents one solution to the problems faced by universities. At present, MUN students pay 13.7 percent of the university's operating costs making it the most highly subsidized university in the country (Smith 1991: 18). Increasing government grants on student loans and further subsidizing the cost of tuition would alleviate many of the financial burdens already placed on students. Such measures may continue to improve pariticipation rates among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who cannot presently afford the high costs of attending university. However, solutions involving further government subsidies for postsecondary education that were widely accepted in the 1960s and 1970s may draw political opposition today given the prevailing policy emphasis on deficit reduction and economic efficiency.

A second option to address the underfunding problem is to shift the costs of university education from the public sector to a more user-pay arrangment. Stuart Smith, in his report for the Commission of Inquiry on Canadian University Education suggests that student fees should be increased gradually to cover 25 percent of general operating costs. However, Smith also states that raising student fees should be contingent upon changes to the Student Loans Act so that

repayment schedules are adjusted to the income levels of university graduates in the workforce.

> The Commission strongly recommends that the Federal Government institute an Income-Contingent Repayment Student Assistance Plan, whereby student loans would be widely available and would be paid back as a surtax on the federal income tax once the recipient's income rose above a certain level. Alternative arrangements could be made if necessary, as is now the case for Quebec and the Northwest Territories (Smith 1991:96).

While Smith's proposed changes may reduce the excessive burdens placed on individuals trying to repay their student loans, an increase in student fees runs the risk of restricting access to those who can pay even more than is the case at present. Shifting more of the costs of university education onto students may also result in added pressures and worries for students who will end up with even higher debt loads when they graduate.

Another option that is available to university policy makers to address the underfunding problem involves alumni giving. The AUCC report on Canadian university education recommends that universities cultivate better relationships with its students to enhance alumni giving: "Keeping in touch with alumni to monitor their satisfaction with their university education and to solicit their views and advice...could also serve to maintain a sense of loyalty on the part of graduates." (Smith, 1991: 22). At present, MUN's annual giving fund accounts for roughly 0.2 percent of the

university's operating fund revenues.[2] While modest increases in alumni giving would hardly correct some of the more serious systemic problems of the university, offering alumni a choice as to how and where to invest their money might pay for some of the initiatives discussed above. For example, graduates might be more willing to offer private donations if they knew their money would pay for 'student centered' initiatives such as scholarships, the publication of student ratings or an information kit supplying information on areas of student satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

It is important to recognize that implementing such policies may draw some potential sources of opposition from within the university community. The faculty union (MUNFA), for example, has publicly stated its opposition to teaching evaluation and would likely resist any attempts to publish student ratings.[3] Of course, this potential for opposition stems from a larger systemic problem where students hold very little power in the bureaucratic structure of the university. It also stems from an academic tradition that emphasizes research at the expense of teaching. Considering these disadvantages, sociological studies such as this are all the more important as a resource for helping students to

[2]   In 1990-91, $2,51°,175 was contributed in MUN's Annual Giving Fund. Of that, $1,048,557 came from alumni (MUN Factbook, 1990-91).

[3]   Information based on discussions with Dr. Ian Gomme, a member of MUNFA.

understand their position within the organizational
structure. In this sense, research on student satisfaction
can be applied "...to return to the subjects their own
definitions of what is wrong in a way which makes it easier
for them to see how to effect social change" (Himelfarb and
Richardson 1979: 35). Armed with such knowledge, students
might be empowered to bring about some of the changes that
will improve their present condition.

Implications for Theory and Research

Further studies on student satisfaction should continue to
isolate the contributions made by institutional
characteristics (their size, selectivity, number of
facilities, student-faculty ratios etc.), student experiences
and students' entry traits (age, sex, class, etc.) in the
formation of satisfactions and perceptions. In particular,
further efforts should be made to identify the dimensions of
faculty influences on undergraduates' decisions and choices
at different points in their student careers. For example,
what is the nature and intensity of this influence with
respect to the choice of degree programs, majors and courses?
Are faculty equally accessible to senior students as compared
to first years? What factors are associated with advising
effectiveness?

In attempting to refine current conceptual models of
social and academic integration, particular attention should

to be paid to the possible impacts on satisfactions made by institutional decision-making structures, student subcultures and various socializing agencies (such as students' faculties and majors, peer groups, dormitory residences and so on). This kind of data can be best attained through more qualitative and microanalytical approaches such as participant observation and ethnography. Comparative studies of Canadian universities using more qualitative data might also be able to identify some of the influences of institutional cultures on student satisfactions and perceptions.

Studies of job satisfaction have also suffered from a long-standing failure to distinguish between satisfaction, which is present-oriented, and expected utility, which is future-oriented (Mobley et al., 1979). In this regard, research on student satisfaction could be strengthened by distinguishing between these two concepts.

Concluding Comments

This study has used a sociological perspective to describe the perceptions of university students and to identify the underlying causes of student satisfaction. The findings indicate that there is great room for improvement in the way that MUN services its most important client - the student. It is necessary to continue with more detailed examinations of the higher education processes that produce student

satisfactions and perceptions as well as other educational outcomes.

Universities in Canada face tremendous challenges in an era of budgetary deficits and severe financial restraint. Ensuring the worthy objective of accessibility without sacrificing quality will be no easy feat. As Newfoundland's only university, however, MUN is under a special obligation to ensure that those who desire a university education are able to receive it. Raising admission standards will not cure the problems caused by overcrowding and underfunding. Modifying current structures and processes to make the university a more 'student centered' institution is the best solution for ensuring that a quality education is available "to all the people" (MUN Calendar, 1992).

The question of funding for universities should be the focus of public debate among the major 'stakeholders' of a university education, namely students, their parents, government representatives and Canadian taxpayers. One option to address the underfunding problem is to increase state investments in postsecondary education. Another option is to shift the costs of attending university from the public sector to a more user-pay arrangement. Cultivating better relationships with students by soliciting and acting on their views, opinions and perspectives might also enhance other important sources of revenue.

The undervaluing of teaching is a serious problem at Canadian universities (Smith, 1991). The tradition that emphasizes research over teaching is deeply embedded in the university culture. Broadening the academic reward structure to recognize the scholarship of teaching is necessary if the university is to meet its fundamental mandate of educating students.

Universities in the United States are already responding to calls for increased accountability from students and their parents, employers, taxpayers and public representatives. Although Canada is lagging behind their American counterparts on these important issues, there is now a growing interest in student outcome assessments and in evaluating educational quality in this country. These are positive signs that Canadian universities are moving towards a system that demands greater accountability.

One of the areas that government officials, university administrators, faculty, and other professional staff at universities must pay closer attention to is student satisfaction. The factors that affect student satisfactions and perceptions are important to document and to understand if the undergraduate experience is to be made more rewarding and enjoyable.

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