AN EXAMINATION OF SELF-IDENTIFIED REASONS FOR STUDENT DEPARTURE AT A SMALL LIBERAL EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN CANADA

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AN EXAMINATION OF SELF-IDENTIFIED REASONS FOR STUDENT
DEPARTURE AT A SMALL LIBERAL EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN CANADA

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the self-reported reasons why students, who were registered as first year students at a small, primarily undergraduate liberal arts institution, left after only one year of study. Data collection involved a mixed methods approach and the results were analyzed using a phenomenological approach, examining variables; social and academic integration, residential living, family commitments and finances.

This study's findings confirmed there are a variety of reasons that students leave an institution after one year of study. The major findings revealed the reasons that the students self-reported for leaving were the inability to meet new friends, lack of career planning, unavailable program options and the cost to attend the institution.

Because purposive sampling was used in the study, results cannot be generalized to the wider population but are consistent with the literature on student persistence. Based on the findings, the study did identify several recommendations that would be helpful in assisting with an institution's student persistence plans.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandparents, George Beattie and Marjorie & James Melvin. Although you couldn't be here, I know that you have been watching over me and would have been proud.

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A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because
someone else thought they could.

~ Unknown

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Higher education in Canada has undergone a significant and rapid expansion during the second half of the 20th century (Tremblay, 2002). Advanced education in Canadian postsecondary institutions has evolved from a state in which higher education was reserved for society's elite to one that is accessible by all and produces one of the world's best-educated populations (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006, p. 6).

From the Confederation Act of 1867 to the introduction of web-based distance learning in the 1990's, several milestones and important events have shaped and defined the higher education system in our country and contributed to the evolution of the current educational system in North America. A variety of factors have served to promote postsecondary education in Canada including the expansion of the postsecondary system, increasing evidence of the market and non-market effects of education, an emphasis on credentials as the new rite of passage and national attention on issues of equality of opportunity (Andres, 2004). This change in the systems of higher education has also brought forth a number of issues related to a student's educational attainment. Throughout the history of higher education, the focus on student retention and persistence has continued to grow in importance and has institutions placing a strong emphasis on programs and services that help promote student success and educational attainment. Despite this increased emphasis by institutions on persistence related issues, rates of student attrition continue to be relatively high and of great concern to institutions.

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1.2   Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research was to explore reasons that students have for leaving an institution after completing only one year of study. For many reasons, there has been an increasing demand on institutions of higher education to look at student persistence issues. Research has demonstrated that the first year is the most critical period with more than half the students who drop out of college doing so within the first year (Tinto, 1999). As a result, many institutions are becoming concerned with increasing student satisfaction and academic success to decrease the number of students who leave before graduating from the institution (Tinto, 1987; Starke, Harth & Sirianni, 2001). By examining the issues surrounding student persistence, institutions can help make students' transitions into university easier and impact on student persistence (Schutte & Malouff, 2002).

Seidman (2005) defined retention as "the student attainment of academic and /or personal goals" (p. 296). Similarly, academic student persistence is defined as the ability for students to graduate from a program (Lufi, Parish-Plass & Cohen, 2003). Some researchers also define student persistence as the desire for students to remain at the institution until they have reached their educational goals (Comings, Parrella & Soricone, 1999).   In recent years, student persistence has become a priority in many institutions of higher education. Theoretical models of postsecondary student persistence over the past twenty-five years have examined how a student fits into the institution by looking at student and institutional variables and how students integrate into higher education institutions (Andres & Carpenter, 1997). Researchers have observed an array of variables

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that impact student persistence including organizational perspectives (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Tinto, 1986), sociological perspectives (Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 1986), economic perspectives (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; Cabrera, Stampen & Hanson, 1990; St. John 1994; St. John, Paulson & Starkey, 1996; Stampen & Cabrera, 1988); environmental perspectives (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Strange & Banning, 2001), and cultural capital perspectives (Bourdieu, 1973).

Initial models of student persistence focused their perspectives on students' social and academic integration into the institution. Studies focusing on student persistence have generated vast literature, drawing inspiration from a range of disciplines – psychology (Bean & Eaton, 2000), sociology (Tinto, 1993) and organizational behaviour (Bean & Metzner, 1985; York & Longden, 2004). Emile Durkheim, one of the founding fathers of sociology (Starkey, 2002) was one of the first to attempt to establish a sociologically based framework for a phenomenon that was traditionally viewed as not only psychological but individually related (Thompson, 1982). Several other researchers have used this sociological framework to research other phenomenon, including student persistence.

American in origin, the early literature on student persistence tended to have a bias toward sociology, reflecting the pioneering work of Spady (1970) and its development by Tinto (1975). Based on Durkheim's (1951) theory of suicide, the first recognized model for college student dropout was proposed by Spady (1975). The dropout concept was identified as problematic by Alexander Astin in the book *Predicting Academic Performance in College* (1971). According to Astin,

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> ...the term "dropout" is imperfectly defined: the so-called dropouts may ultimately become nondropouts and vice versa...but there seems to be no practical way out of the dilemma. A "perfect" classification of dropouts versus nondropouts could only be achieved when all of the students had either died without ever finishing college or had finished college (p.15).

Astin (1971) further argued that the difficulty in defining the term student dropout was compounded by the occurrence of a student's enrolment at numerous institutions throughout his/her educational career. Researchers, including Tinto (1987) and Bean (1990), have agreed that there are limits to understanding student departure because of the many different meanings of the term "dropout". Some students who depart college or university before completing their degree may have already achieved their educational objectives and goals and therefore really should not be considered dropouts.

Bean (1990) suggests that students who drop out might have already achieved their goals during their limited time at college and that neither the student nor the college should be considered failures. A dropout would then be defined in comparison to student outcomes versus original intent. It is only when students leave college before they have achieved their goals that they should be labelled a dropout (Hagedorn, 2006, p. 5). Building on the theory that student integration is directly correlated to student persistence or withdrawal (Spady, 1970, 1971), Tinto extended Spady's work to develop a longitudinal model of individual departure. Tinto's (1975) theory of student departure suggests that whether or not a student remains or drops out of an institution is quite strongly predicated by the extent they are academically integrated (faculty support, advisor interest, academic activities and academic satisfaction) and socially integrated (socializing, peer group interactions and sense of belonging) into the institution (see

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Figure 1). "Many researchers have worked to validate theoretical models of student persistence including Tinto's (1987, 1993) widely employed model of student integration (Mallette & Cabrera, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 1983; Terenzini, Lorang & Pascarella, 1981 as cited in Caison, 2007, p. 436)".

A strong focus on the area of student persistence will become increasingly vital to the survival of most colleges and universities (Tinto, 1993) and therefore validate the many reasons why institutions should concentrate their efforts on student persistence. In an era of increasing competition for students, reduction in government funding, a focus on institutional accountability and declining budgets, institutions are focusing more on improving student retention and graduation rates (Association of Universities and College of Canada, 2006). As well, diminishing student enrolments due to declining populations have placed considerable pressure on institutions to meet and maintain their enrolment targets. According to O'Heron (1997), some of the reasons for this decline in enrolment include "(a) the stabilization of the magnitude of the population between 18 – 21 years of age, (b) the worth of a university degree has flatlined, (c) the escalation of tuition costs have provided an accessibility barrier for some students to attend university, (d) the changes in the student loan system which results in an increased student debt load may influence their decision to attend university, and (e) the high levels of out-migration of young adults to other provinces in pursuit of employment (O'Heron, 1997 as cited in Parsons, 2000)".

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Figure 1. Longitudinal Model of Individual Departure

Replicated from Tinto, 1987, p.114)

Enrolment and recruitment plans outline vigorous recruiting strategies to help

offset the immense competition for students at institutions not only in Canada but in the

United States as well. This competition in recruiting students has challenged institutions

to focus on persistence initiatives to counteract the declining enrolment levels. Given the

loss of financial resources incurred by both the student and institution when a student

leaves college (Metzner & Bean, 1987), considerable attention has been placed on

understanding the complexities of postsecondary student attrition (Deitsche, 1989;

Gilbert & Gomme, 1986). The loss of students through student attrition has several

negative impacts on the institution: lost tuition revenue, wasted dollars spent on their recruitment and admission processes, and damage to the image and reputation of the institution through word of mouth (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003).

Student persistence has considerable impact on the financial state of a postsecondary institution. Most Canadian universities struggle with fiscal challenges and are becoming gradually more dependent on tuition fees and ancillary revenues to cover their operating expenses. As universities continue to become more dependent on tuition revenues as a source of funding, they will become more vulnerable to enrolment fluctuations (O'Heron, 1997).

Universities derive a significant percentage of their operating budget from provincial government funding. Higher education across Canada in the 1990's received a reduction in government funding in part due to the decreased federal funding transfers to individual provinces (Kirby, 2007). The proportion of university revenues from both provincial and federal governments has declined by 14 percent over the last ten years (Statistics Canada, 2006).

Many institutions in Canada have compensated for decreased government funding through escalating tuition fees and other support avenues. The average undergraduate tuition from 1990-91 to 2000-01 rose by over 135 percent and accounted for 19 percent of the average total revenue of Canadian universities (Statistics Canada 2002a, Statistics Canada 2002b, as cited in Kirby, 2007). Although all provinces have witnessed a decline in funding, tuition in institutions of higher education varies considerably from province to province. For example, in the Maritime Provinces, tuition and other fees on average

accounted for 25.8 percent of all the universities' total income (Canadian Association of University Business Officers, 2006). The average elsewhere in Canada varied by province: Newfoundland (13.8 percent), Quebec (11.0 percent), Ontario (24.3 percent), Manitoba (18.0 percent), Saskatchewan (15.6 percent), Alberta (16.7 percent) and British Columbia (19.1 percent) (Canadian Association of University Business Officers, 2006). Although the dependence on tuition revenues varies amongst institutions, reliance on tuition fees to supplement diminishing public funding has considerable impact on student participation in postsecondary education. Colleges and universities in the United States are also seeing an increase in the percentage of revenue derived from tuition, showing an increase from 12.9 percent to 18.5 percent from 1981-2000 (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2003).

Society greatly benefits from an educated workforce. From a student perspective, university graduates typically enjoy higher levels of savings, improved quality of life for themselves and their children and increased personal and professional mobility (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 1998). Studies have also shown that the non-monetary benefits of higher education improve our society. An educated student is more likely to engage in activities that improve their health, become more open-minded and less prejudiced, more cultured, more rational and less authoritarian (Baum & Ma, 2007).

The societal cost of student attrition can be calculated in several ways. Student participation in a public institution is indirectly subsidized by taxpayers. Government spending on postsecondary education has shifted focus from universities and colleges to a focus on the students. The federal and provincial government contributions for

postsecondary financial aid and tax incentives have almost doubled to $4.25 billion

between 1996 and 2001 (Tamburri, 2002) where as government transfers to institutions

declined from $18 billion to $16 billion during the same time period (Tamburri, 2002).

As government funding declines, universities and colleges must focus on student

persistence to minimize the cost of losing students from an institution. In the United

States, the financial impact of recruiting one new student to an institution is roughly the

cost of retaining three to five students who are already enroled at the institution (Noel,

Levitz & Saluri, 1985). Taking into consideration the cost-benefit analyses of student

recruitment efforts, there are costs associated with student recruitment which generally

range somewhere between $200 and $800 per student (Kramer, 1982). As Astin (1975)

points out, "investing resources to prevent dropping out may be more cost effective than

applying the same resources to more vigorous recruitment" (p. 2). Similarly, one

Canadian study estimated that it cost $4,230 to lose one student because of the

recruitment expenses incurred by the institution was $4,230 (Grayson & Grayson, 2003).

Individual costs to students play a considerable role in an institution's interest in

student persistence. When institutions admit students, they are focused on helping the

students achieve their educational goals. Some students who leave the institution will

have spent considerable time on activities that do not advance their career development.

For students, the cost of these activities must take into consideration the lost tuition and

fees, in addition to the opportunity costs of potential lost wages (Swail, 2006). For

Canadians, better prospects, new skills and higher salaries is seen to be obtainable

through the completion of a degree at an institution of higher education (Association of

Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2006). The Association of Universities and

Colleges of Canada cites that:

- ❖ University graduates earn about 50% more than those who have not completed a post-secondary degree and the differential grows over time.
- ❖ According to a Job Futures manual produced by Human Resource Development Canada's - about one-quarter of all new jobs (around 1.3 million) that were expected to be created before 2004 would require some form of university education (that is up from 17 percent of existing jobs in 1998).
- ❖ The unemployment rate is around four percent for university graduates, six percent for college graduates and nine percent for high school graduates.

> (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2006, General Information, para. 13)

The benefits of pursuing a postsecondary education are well documented and

prove to be a benefit for both the individual and our society. In 1999, the median family

income of a high school graduate was $42,995; that of a university graduate was $76,059

(Mortenson, 2001). Over the span of one's lifetime, the "...high school graduate earns an

average of $1.2 million; an Associate degree holder earns $1.6 million; and a Bachelor

degree holder earns 2.1 million (Day & Newburger, 2002). It is clear that the investment

in postsecondary education has considerable financial impact on an individual's financial

status.

The institution that is the focus of the research (University "A") is a small,

primarily undergraduate, liberal education university in Canada. The institution,

established over 150 years ago, is located in a rural town with a population of over 3500

(Statistics Canada, 2006) doubling to almost 7000 people during eight months of the year

with the University's student population. Full-time enrolment at the institution reached

3606 in 2005-2006 with the gender percentage distribution of 46 percent males to 54

percent females (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, 2006). With

students from over 50 different countries, this institution had the highest percentage of

international first-year students (19.8 percent) of all universities in Canada in 2006

(Macleans, 2006).

There is over 200 degree combinations offered at the university from within the

Faculties of Arts, Pure and Applied Science, Professional Studies. These faculties also

offer specialized programs in the schools of Business Administration, Education,

Engineering, Music, Nutrition and Dietetics, Recreation Management and Kinesiology

and Computer Science. In 2006-2007, the teaching complement was 211 full and 37

part-time faculty with a faculty to student ratio of 1:18 (About University "A": Since

1838, 2007).

The institution prides itself on providing a personalized and rigorous liberal

education. Woven in this mission is the notion of educating the "whole" student. The

university offers students an opportunity to learn, grow, and discover in a supportive

educational environment (University "A" Strategic Plan, 2006). It is critical that an

institution strives to support its students in their educational journey. Understanding the

issues around student departure from the institution can help with the development of

programs and initiatives that may have an impact on a student's decision to remain at the

institution. According to Bean (1986), "it is unethical to admit students for the benefit of

the institution and not for the good of the student" (p.47). Institutions of higher education

have a moral obligation to the student to ensure that they are doing everything to assist

students in attaining their educational goals. When high school students are considering which postsecondary institution to attend, it is important to realize that guidance counsellors play an important role. Because not all universities are alike, it is important that students have a strong understanding of the institution's mission, programs of study and what programs and services are offered. It is important that high school students, either on the part of the guidance counsellor and/or those in charge of university recruiting have options for postsecondary advising on career and educational goals. It is essential that universities are simply not recruiting students for the sake of achieving enrolment targets.

The focus of student persistence at small, primarily undergraduate, liberal education universities in Canada is an important area of research as we move forward in an ever increasingly competitive enrolment market. According to Levine (1989) the quickest way to increase enrolment within an institution is to decrease student attrition. The prospect of steady or declining college enrolments during the next decade and the greater competition for students that are pursuing postsecondary education has generated tremendous pressures on both college administrators and educational researchers to find ways to help retain students (Carnegie Council on Policy Studies, 1980).

By having a clearer understanding of the issues surrounding student persistence, institutions can focus on developing and implementing programs and services that address both the needs of the student and the institution.

1.3   Significance of the Study

Although there is a growing body of research on student persistence, institutions are still faced with problems of high attrition rates. In the United States, institutional graduation rates have consistently held at the 50 percent mark indicating that half of the students who enter postsecondary institutions fail to complete a degree program (Swail, 2004). Similar to the United States, 20 percent to 25 percent of entering students fail to proceed to a 2nd year of study (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006) and another 20 percent to 30 percent leave in the following years (Grayson & Grayson, 2003). Because issues of student attrition are problematic and costly to an institution and the student, looking at factors that affect student persistence is essential.

The demand for, and participation in postsecondary education has increased dramatically over the last century. Enrolment in colleges and universities expanded rapidly throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Seidman, 2005). The Post-World War II era also saw an enormous increase in student enrolment, along with a more diverse student body. In Canada, between 1984-85 and 1998-99, full-time university undergraduate enrolment increased by 20 percent and full-time enrolment in programs at community colleges increased by 25 percent (Statistics Canada, 1984-2001). The growth in student enrolment is mostly attributed to an increase in accessibility to postsecondary education for a variety of non-traditional students including women, students from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, disabled and older students (Andres, 2004). Although campuses responded to the influx of students by building new academic structures and residence halls, few resources were devoted to help support the culturally,

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ethnically and racially diverse student bodies on these campuses. Students from diverse backgrounds were not and still not prepared to deal with the academic and societal expectations of university and at the same time institutions were uninformed and unprepared to help these students attain their educational goals. Although most campuses monitored enrolment levels on a regular basis, there were limited attempts to look at patterns of student persistence (Seidman, 2005).

A constant in the business of higher education, student dropout and persistence are reflections of the functioning of the systems of higher education (Tinto, 1982). Both American and Canadian institutions of higher education have recognized critical issues with respect to student persistence since the early 1970's (Hicks, 2005; Stromener, 1993) leading institutions to more closely examine student enrolment levels. Because of the importance of higher education and the investment in higher education, governments have had significant impact on how universities and colleges monitor their student enrolment levels and have placed emphasis on reducing barriers to allow everyone equal opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education. Of the 2.4 million students who entered college in the United States in 1993, 1.1 million students were expected to leave without a degree (Tinto, 1993). The majority of these students leave the institution in the first two years of college, the largest percentage occurring in the first year of college (Tinto, 1987; Noel, Levitz, & Saluri, 1985). For example in the United States, first year students entering private and public universities and colleges in the United States experienced dropout rates of 25.9 per cent and 25.1 per cent respectively (Salinitri, 2005) with a completion rate of 49.1 per cent of all enrolled students completed their degree

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after five years (Salintri, 2005). During the same time period in Canada, the first year attrition rates as reported by the Consortium of Student Retention Data Exchange was 20 per cent (CSRDE (2001a) as reported in Grayson & Grayson, 2003). Statistics like these have only increased the concern about completion of postsecondary education. Although student retention has received considerable attention in higher education literature and research, issues of student degree attainment remains a challenge and continues to have an impact on institutional accountability, educational equity, and human potential (Kinzie, 2005).

The transition from high school to university is difficult for many students. Lack of a social network (Grayson, 1997), being away from home (Donaldson, 1996) and loved ones, feeling isolated, financial worries (Choy, 1999), making independent decisions regarding their future, the pressures of academic stress, lack of preparation in high school for university (Hill, 1996), and searching for independence (Grayson, 1997) are just a few of the challenges that many first-year students face. And while many students rise to these challenges, freshman dropout accounts for at least 50 percent of the overall dropout rate (Terenzini, 1987) and 75 percent of these students who dropout do so within or immediately following their first term (Tinto, 1982). Institutions of higher education have put into practice first-year experience/orientation programs that are designed to help students with their transition from high school to postsecondary education and assist with issues of student persistence on their campus. Developed from the counselling movement in higher education (Gahagan, 2000), first-year experience courses/seminars are designed to assist a wide range of first-year students' needs,

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transition them to the campus environment, promote academic success and enhance learning (Gahagan, 2000). Seventy-five percent of all colleges and universities offer some sort of first-year experience course (National Resource Center for the First-Year experience and Students in Transition, 1997; Gahagan, 2000).

Over the past two decades, access to postsecondary education has become less of a concern and more emphasis has been placed on the issues of choice, affordability and persistence. (Swail, 2006). With the introduction of financial, policy and legislative mechanisms, Canadian governments have become more involved in the setting of priorities and directions of postsecondary institutions (Kirby, 2007). As a critical component of policy and strategic planning, both governments and institutions of higher education have entrenched persistence research and activities in the culture and this continues to become a more important policy issue for institutional researchers and policy analysts (Bean, 1980; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1992; Pascarella,1986; Tinto,1987). An increasing emphasis has been placed by postsecondary institutions on the search for programs, policies and strategies that would increase retention rates (ACT, 2004). Because of the increased focus on accountability in institutions of higher education, the need to monitor and study student persistence will continue to be at the forefront. As the emphasis on higher education and the attainment of postsecondary education has increased, the study of student persistence will remain important to those stakeholders of higher education. "As budgets tighten, competition for students increases, resources shrink and as regents, tax payers, legislatures, prospective students and families turn up

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the cry for institutional accountability, institutions that put students first will succeed, even excel, just as their students will" (Levitz, Noel & Richter, 1999, p.31).

Because of the financial demands placed on institutions of higher education, decreasing demographics and increased accountability, institutions will be forced to focus more on student persistence issues and how they support their students while attending university.

1.4   Four Overarching Propositions

Tinto's interactionalist model has been one of the most widely studied and used theoretical frameworks when looking at student persistence. Tinto regards student departure as a longitudinal process during which the individual student assigns meaning to his or her interactions with the formal and informal dimensions of a given college or university (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Tinto, 1986; 1993). The formulations of this theory yielded thirteen testable propositions (Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson, 1999) which are logically interrelated and, as a set, explain college student departure (Braxton, Sullivan & Johnson 1997). Further research studies at individual institutions found that of the thirteen, four propositions were found to be "logically interconnected" and were defined as (Braxton, 2000):

1. Students bring to college different entry characteristics which will impact their initial commitment to the institution.
2. A student's initial commitment to the institution will impact the student's future commitment to the institution.
3. Student's continued commitment to the institution is enhanced by the level of *social integration* they realize early on.
4. The greater the level of commitment to the institution, the higher the likelihood of the student being retained through graduation.

                                                                    (Seidman, 2005, p.24)

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1.5   Theoretical Framework

Over the last three decades, three main theoretical models have been proposed to explain the phenomenon of student retention in higher education: Bean's (1982) Student Attrition Model, Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model, and Astin's (1975) Theory of Involvement. While for the most part, studies are empirically oriented and there have been efforts to conceptualize and model the attrition process (Lenning, Beal & Sauer, 1980). When student persistence first appeared on the higher education radar, the concept was typically viewed through the lens of psychology. Based on Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) psychological theory of attitudes, intentions, and behaviours, Bean and Eaton (2000) developed a psychologically based model of student persistence. In this model, psychological processes are at the core of academic and social integration and the reasons that students dropped out of college before graduation were reflections of the individual student's attributes, skills, and motivation.

The view of student persistence changed in the early 1970's. Pioneers in the research of the impact of college on students, the works of Feldman & Newcomb (1969), Alexander Astin (1971) and William Spady (1970, 1971) encouraged institutions to study student persistence. Sociologically based, the main theoretical tradition in the study of student persistence involved a search for similarities of behaviour that distinguished groups of students who stayed from those who leave (Tinto, 2006). This new view of student persistence took into consideration the role of the institution and how that influenced the student's decision to stay or leave. Over two decades Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) developed a longitudinal interactionalist model of individual departure that has

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been widely adopted by the research community. Tinto's (1975) theory was the first to provide a comprehensive model detailing the connections between the environment, both the social and academic systems of the institution, and the individuals who shaped those systems. This sociological model of student departure has had the greatest influence on our understanding of student persistence and is the theoretical framework for this study.

Emile Durkheim, one of the most influential figures in the founding of modern sociology, wrote several important works on the methods of sociology, the scientific study of religion, the division of labour, and how imbalances in the relations between self and society can lead to death. In one of the most influential sociological books, Durkheim's (1897) *Le Suicide* not only altered how the issues surrounding suicide was understood but fundamentally changed the way sociological research was conducted as it was the first successful attempt at testing sociological theories through scientific research (Kulkin, Chavin & Percle, 2000). This work was not only vital to the study of suicide but more importantly, was the first to effectively explain a social phenomenon through the use of both social theory and empiricism (Thompson, 1982). Within society, Durkheim (1953) explained that four specific types of suicide (departure) occur. Durkheim hypothesized that suicide could be categorized by the way in which a person integrates into society (Taylor, 1982). Defined as egotistical suicide, a person's inability to become fully integrated both socially and intellectually into society increased the likelihood that they would commit suicide. Durkheim further elaborated that suicide draws from the ideas of social integration, "referring to the social bonds existing between the individual and society" (Morrison, 2006, p. 207). Individuals who lacked well-defined values,

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traditions, norms, and goals generally had little social support and therefore tended to commit suicide on an increased basis. The unsuccessful integration into the life society is a result of breaking of one's ties with a social system stems (Spady, 1971).

Researchers such as Van Gennep (1909) and Spady (1970, 1971) had influence on the work of Vincent Tinto. Although variables of social and academic integration formed the foundation for Tinto's (1975) model, the inclusions of environmental variables were modified from Van Gennep's (1909) rites of passage theory. Central to Van Gennep's theory was the use of rituals and ceremony as essential components of a person's integration into a new setting. As a person moves from one place or stage to another, certain rites of passage occur, are celebrated and serve as evidence of accomplishment and acceptance. Tinto used Van Gennep's theory to explain a student's need to find their way through the higher education system.

Tinto's theoretical model was also influenced by the work of Spady (1970) who attempted to connect Durkheim's (1951) suicide theory to the study of college student persistence. Spady's (1971) model emphasized the interaction between individual student characteristics and key aspects of the campus environment. Each student has specific characteristics and educational goals; thus academic performance had a dominant influence on their decision to drop out of university or to persist. This model was designed as a conceptual framework to understand student departure and served as a precursor to Tinto's model that would soon become "near-paradigmatic" (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997) in the realm of student persistence.

Building on this research, Tinto used egotistical suicide as a model to explain student departure from higher education and suggested that student attrition was related to the inability of students to successfully integrate, both academically and socially, into the institution. Tinto's (1993) model hypothesizes that students enter college or university with individual characteristics like family background, as well as prior experiences that influence their decision to depart the institution prior to graduation. Students also enter university or college with certain expectations and commitments of their own. Initial commitments, both to staying at the institution and completing their degree influence the level of a student's integration into the academic and social systems of the institution and are also predictors of student persistence.

At the core of his model, Tinto identified the concepts of academic and social integration as integral parts of the student persistence puzzle. This theory is now used as the cornerstone to explain why students do not persist in higher education and to demonstrate why the focus on a student's "social integration" into the campus is essential. According to Tinto (1975) academic integration was thought to be the result of sharing academic values and meeting the explicit standards of the institution whereas social integration was viewed as the result of developing relationships between the individual student and the social systems of the institutions. The greater the student's level of academic integration into the institution, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of college graduation is. This can also be said for a student's social integration into the institution; the greater level of social integration equates to a greater level of commitment to the university or college (Tinto, 1975).

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Tinto (1993) further elaborates on his foundational theory on student persistence

to include other factors which influence a student's decision to remain in school. This

elaboration includes a more detailed discussion of the interaction between behaviour and

perception by students as they move toward greater integration with their social and

academic environments (Milem & Berger, 1997). The revised model recognizes the

influences of financial resources, classroom experiences, family and work.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) also provide further explanation to Tinto's theory:

> Students come to a particular institution with a range of background traits (e.g., race, secondary school experiences, academic aptitude, family background). These lead to initial commitments, both to the institution attended and to the goal of graduation from college. Together with background traits, these commitments influence not only how well the student will perform in college but also how he or she will interact with, and subsequently become integrated into, the institution's social and academic systems. Other things being equal, the greater the individual's level of social and academic integration, the greater his or her subsequent commitment to the institution and commitment to the goal of college graduation, respectively. In turn, these commitments are seen, along with levels of integration, as having a direct, positive influence on retention. (p. 215).

Although many continue to use Tinto's (1975) model in their examination of student

persistence, researchers have addressed the weaknesses in his early model of persistence.

Tierney (1992) suggested that Tinto's model depended on information on traditionally

white, four-year, residential students between the ages 18-21. Although Tinto stated that

student departure to be "value-neutral" (Tierney, 1992, p. 609), issues of persistence were

not the same for students of different socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and race. In

addition, by not individualizing results from institutional specific data, Tinto's

generalizability of findings may not be plausible (Metz, 2004). As new research

emerged, new variables affecting student persistence arose. Nora (1990) found that

campus-based financial aid programs were important influencers of student persistence

and were omitted from Tinto's previous work. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) also

asserted that future studies examining student persistence should include variables such

as race and gender; financial aid; specific individual institution attributes; and the

influence of peer, faculty and mentor relationships.

While there have some criticism of this theory, the variables that influence student

persistence from Tinto's interactionalist theory will provide the conceptual framework for

this study. From their studies, Terenzini & Pascarella (1980) determined that Tinto's

(1975) model of college student attrition seems to be a conceptually practical framework

for examining why students drop out of an institution before completion.

1.6   *Purpose of the Study*

This study strives to understand why students leave the institution after their first

year of study and to identify the reasons why students do not persist to the second year.

This data will help to build a framework to highlight the variables associated with student

transition from year one to year two. This data will also assist the institution in advancing

their retention initiatives and other programs that will enhance the student experience and

address the issues that contribute to a student leaving the institution before graduation.

With the vast amount of literature which indicates that the first year of college is

crucial to student success, it is important that we understand more about our first year

students, their transition to college, and the reasons why they stay or leave (Upcraft,

Gardener & Associates, 1990). The purpose of this study is to examine the self reported

factors that students in a small liberal arts institution indicate influenced their decision to leave the institution after their first year of study.

1.7 Research Questions

The following broad research questions will be used to guide the study of student persistence in a small, liberal education postsecondary institution:

1. Does a student's academic success during the year influence their decision to return?

2. Do social interactions (i.e. peer relationships, extra-curricular activities) influence a student's decision to persist?

3. Does living in residence influence a student's decision to persist?

4. Do financial factors (such as cost of housing, tuition, books) impact a student's decision to leave the institution before completing their degree?

5. What external influences may impact a student's decision to depart the institution prior to graduation?

6. Are there common demographic factors (i.e. age, race, high school average) that influence student persistence?

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

1. **Academic integration** is the development of a strong affiliation with the university academic environment, including faculty, academic staff, and peers, both in and outside of the classroom.

2. **Attrition** refers to students who fail to re-enrol at an institution in consecutive semesters.

3. **Commuter students** are those students whose place of residence while attending university is off campus.

4. **Dismissal** refers to a student who is not permitted by the institution to continue enrolment.

5. **Dropout** refers to a student whose initial educational goal was to complete at least a bachelor's degree but did not complete it.

6. **Entering grade average** refers to the calculated grade average of the high school courses that were used to determine admission to the university.

7. **Financial Resources** refers to all types of money, including scholarships, prizes, bursaries, awards, student loans, work-study programs, student assistantships available to a student to assist with costs associated with postsecondary education.

8. **Graduate** is a former student who has completed a prescribed course of study in a college or university.

9. **Involuntary student departure** occurs when the institution does not permit the student to re-enrol in the institution.

10. **Liberal education** is an institution of higher education that has traditionally emphasized interactive instruction with an emphasis upon the liberal arts.

11. **Mixed methods design** is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and "mixing" or integrating both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process

within a single study for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the research problem.

12. **Persistence** refers to the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education.

13. **Residential students** refer to those students whose place of residence while attending university is in a residence hall.

14. **Retention** is defined as the ability of a university to successfully graduate the students that initially enrol at that institution.

15. **Rural students** are those students from residential areas with a population concentration of less than 1,000 and a population density of up to 400 per square kilometre.

16. **Sequential explanatory design** refers to a research design where quantitative (numeric) data is first collected and analyzed then qualitative (text) data is collected and analyzed second in the sequence to help explain, or elaborate on, the quantitative results obtained in the first phase.

17. **Social integration** refers to the development of a strong affiliation with the institution and includes the formal and informal social interactions that students experience while at the university.

18. **Student involvement** refers to the amount of physical and physiological energy that a student devotes to the academic experience.

19. **Student persistence** is the desire and action of a student to stay within the system of higher education from beginning year through degree completion.

20. **Stopout** refers to a student who temporarily withdraws from an institution or system.

21. **Urban students** are those students from residential areas with a population concentration of more than 1,000 and a population density greater than 400 per square kilometre.

22. **Voluntary student departure** occurs when the student decides not to re-enrol in the institution.

1.9   Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Student persistence has been extensively studied in the United States for over seventy years (Braxton, 2000) while this phenomenon is relatively new in Canada within the last thirty years (Giroux & Mezei, 1993). Limitations and delimitations establish the exceptions, reservations, qualifications, and boundaries of any study (Castetter & Heisler, 1977).

In undertaking this study, it is important to note that there may be several differences in Canadian versus American institutions. It cannot be assumed that conclusions derived from the American schools are equally applicable to Canadian schools although a few Canadian studies have demonstrated similar findings to their American counterparts. Studies can be placed in two main groups: "research that is not based on theory (i.e. pre-or non-paradigmatic) and research that is theory based (paradigmatic)" (Grayson & Grayson, 2003, p. 25).

Much of the research completed on student persistence is primarily descriptive in nature and institution specific (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Another limitation is inherent in the methodology used in the study. A purposive sample was

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used; the sample size was relatively small and thus limiting the generalizabilty. The study is clearly limited to a single-institution, single-year sample. Additionally, the response rates to surveys are often relatively low and it may be difficult to track those students who have already left the institution.

The limitations of the mixed methods design include the length of time involved in the data collection process with two separate phases of study (Creswell, 2003). Of the qualitative approach, the greatest limitation is that the findings that are reported tend to be hard to replicate and can be somewhat biased and unreliable. Another problem with using a qualitative research method is in the interpretation of interview information. Sometimes there is a problem of social desirability bias, where people portray themselves in the best possible way and may respond to personal questions with what they think the "desired" response is rather than an honest answer (Manning, 2007). It is the job of the researcher to continue to probe further in the interview to establish the truth.

1.10 Organization of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the history of retention, the variables associated with student retention, and a review of relevant literature on each area of student retention.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in conducting the research study, including an overview of the research design, recruitment and participant selection, data collection techniques and strategies used for data analysis.

Chapter 4 provides a summary of the findings reported by each participant in the study.

Chapter 5 presents an interpretation and discussion of the student's reasons for leaving the institution after only one year of study as well as the differences and similarities that arose.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past twenty years, researchers have developed a substantial database of

persistence studies that covers a variety of institutional settings and student populations

(Tinto, 1998). As a result of these studies, theories of student persistence have been

developed to help explain the underlying process that lead to students leaving an

institution before completing their degree.

2.1   *History of Student Retention*

Historically, the study of student retention and persistence has been the most

widely studied area in higher education (Metz, 2004). Over time, several aspects of

student retention have been examined but the terminology used has evolved to include

such descriptors as student mortality (McNelly, 1937), college dropouts (Tinto, 1975),

student attrition (Tinto, 1993), college retention (Tinto, 1990), and student persistence

(Berger, 2002). A large majority of the early work on student persistence focused on the

first year of college, looking at the nature of interaction with faculty inside and outside of

the classroom and the transition of a student from high school to university (Tinto, 2006).

As a result, institutions designed programs and services that attempted to enhance the

first-year experience including orientation programs, freshman seminars, and a variety of

extracurricular programs and activities (Upcraft, Gardner & Associates, 1989).

Student participation in higher education has changed dramatically over time.

The lack of interest in those looking to complete a college degree in the early 1980's

made student persistence issues unimportant to institutions. The 1990's saw a larger

increase in student enrolment numbers with more and more people entering colleges or

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universities. With this dramatic shift, there has been an increase in the diversity of students entering postsecondary institutions and the greater demand society has placed on our workforce to have a college or university degree.

The past decade has witnessed a change in ideologies about higher education in North America. Postsecondary education in the United States has developed into a "college for all" (Rosenbaum, 2001) while Canadian systems of higher education are witnessing an uprising in educational expectations (Davies, 2005). In the early 1980's, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that Canada ranked second in the world, just after the United States, in the percentage of citizens attending university. However Canada's ranking dropped dramatically in the 1990's while other OEDC nations increased university participation rates (Association of Universities and College of Canada, 2007). Observers now predict an imminent evolution from "mass" to "universal" postsecondary systems (Kerr, 2002). As postsecondary education becomes accessible to all and enrolment levels increase, so will an increase in the problems associated with keeping those students and helping them graduate.

Both economic and demographic shifts have accounted in part for the increased focus on student attrition. The economic situation of a country has considerable impact on student persistence within an institution. Shifts in the economy have the ability to substantially alter enrolment levels. During times of economic prosperity, a greater value is placed on the attainment of a college degree in the competitive workforce market (Seidman, 2005) and ultimately increases the enrolment levels within institutions of higher education.

Demography population also has considerable effects on persistence issues in higher education. The relative stabilization and even the anticipation of stagnation in the pool of traditional high school graduates pursuing postsecondary education have forced institutions to examine how they can maintain their current student complement and the associated tuition revenues that come along with it. Between 2000 and 2006, Nova Scotia reported a 4.5 percentage drop in of the number of Nova Scotia high school graduates expected to attend university (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, 2001). Results from the 1995 School Leavers Follow-Up Survey show that slightly more than 40 percent of Canadian high school graduates had attended university, while nearly 30 percent participated in Community College (Statistics Canada, 1995). In the Maritime Provinces, the 18 to 24 year old population is expected to increase slightly in 2008 but then decline over the following ten years by 14 percent (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, 2007). The demographic trends will likely have considerable impact on student enrolment levels in postsecondary institutions and the impact on how institutions focus their efforts on student persistence.

Even though enrolment levels have generally continued to rise or stay relatively stable, the issue of student persistence still remains a challenge for institutions. The nature and supply of students enrolled in higher education has shifted over time and diversified the student body. This shift has created more student persistence issues for institutions. The student population that once consisted of selective and generally privileged individuals has evolved into a more diverse group of students from different cultures, ethnicity, and socioeconomic backgrounds. There has been a greater

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participation in postsecondary education from minorities, women and non-traditional students which increases the complexity of the student persistence issue.

The trend toward increasing accountability in higher education has serious implications for the future of student persistence. Governments have implemented accountability systems in which persistence has been used as both a key criterion for success and as a factor in determining funding for state campuses in the United States (Titus, 2006). Similarly, changes to the Higher Education Act in Canada brought forth a change in which the government is now linking institutional eligibility for federal student financial aid programs to institutional graduation rates (Burd, 2003). Provinces such as Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario also link student enrolment levels to provincial funding. As federal government funding declines and institutions become more dependent on tuition as a source of revenue, colleges and universities will tend to increase the focus on student persistence.

The soaring costs of a university education in both the United States and Canada have resulted in institutions carefully examining issues related to student persistence. Across the United States in 2007-2008, the average tuition and fees at a four-year private institution was $23,712 while public colleges average $6,185 (Baum & Ma, 2007). The average tuition for Canadian full-time undergraduate students was $4,524 for the same time period (Statistics Canada, 2007). The highest tuition fees were in Nova Scotia where on average was $5,878. Quebec students paid just $2,025 on average, less than half the national average. The average tuition in Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island and Manitoba was also below the national average.

Provincial governments have increased funding levels to be used to hold the line on, or reduce tuition rates. This has considerable impact on the bottom line of an institution's budget. As research in student persistence evolves, so has the notion that each individual institution must examine their own issues related to student dropout and address the specific needs of its students. Institutions must also consider the impact that the issues related to student dropout have on the institutional environment.

2.2   *Variables Associated with Student Persistence*

The large body of research on student persistence indicates that there are a vast number of variables that impact a student's persistence in an institution and not one simple explanation or solution that can describe the student persistence issue. Data suggest that there are several factors that impact student persistence including academic factors such as high school grade point average (Mohr, Eiche & Sedlacek, 1998) and in the United States ACT assessment scores (Eaton & Bean, 1995); other factors such as socioeconomic status (Hossler & Vesper, 1993), financial aid (Ishitani & DesJardins, 2002) and non academic factors such as goal achievement and institutional commitment (Tinto, 1996), social support (Stollenberger & Robinson-Kurpus, 2004) and academic self-confidence (Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004).   Both variables that impact student persistence and strategies with respect to student success should be taken into consideration at not only the student level but also at the course, program and institutional level (Gilbert, 2000).

Arrays of theories and models in higher education research have attempted to explain the relationship between students and their colleges (Pascarella & Terenzini,

1991). The literature has highlighted several determinants influencing student dropout which can be allocated to one of three categories: personal variables, institutional variables and circumstantial variables (Berge & Huang, 2004). The most traditional view is that personal, pre-college variables such as student backgrounds, academic preparedness for college, and clear goals are the main factors in accounting for the differences in academic performance, persistence behavior, and other educational outcomes (Astin, 1991; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969; Stark, Shaw & Lowther, 1989). These personal variables include a spectrum of student factors including the characteristics of age, gender, ethnicity/race, socioeconomic status, parental educational level, and other individual attributes including academic skills and abilities, learning strategies, motivation, self-efficacy for learning and performance and prior educational experiences.

Another widely utilized perspective on student persistence falls under the student-institutional fit model and encompasses the institutional variables of student persistence. The most widely researched of these models claims that student persistence and growth depend on the degree of successful integration into the academic and social structures of the institutions (Spady, 1970, 1971; Tinto 1987, 1993). Institutional variables include factors such as organizational characteristics, the prevailing institutional attitude, values and beliefs, academic characteristics such as structural and normative systems and integrations; and social characteristics such as the degree of congruency and integration between the individual student and the social system of the institution.

Organizational variables such as institutional interactions, academic interactions, and social interactions, as well as interactions external to the institution such as life, work, and family circumstances, and perceived stress, responsibilities, and levels of satisfaction influence student persistence. Drawing from the literature on organization's structural and functional perspectives, researchers are encouraged to give greater attention to those variables that reflect the influence of organizational characteristics (Volkwein, Szelest, Cabrera & Napierski-Prancl, 1998; Volkwein & Cabrera, 2000; Hall, 1991). Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) indicate that studies have shown that campus mission, size, wealth complexity, productivity, and selectivity exert significant influences (ranging from small to large) on a variety of internal transactions and outcomes including student values, aspirations, and educational and career attainment which ultimately impacts student persistence and dropout.

2.2.1 Demographics

The personal characteristics of a student who drops out of university are of significant interest to institutions of higher education. Certain types of students have been found to be more at risk for leaving an institution before completing a degree than others. In this context, demographic factors include variables such as race, gender, disability and ethnicity that describe the students who are enrolled at the institution. Developing a profile of "at risk" students can help institutions build programs to support students to reduce this problem.

Research on student persistence has been conducted for decades but mainly looked at traditional postsecondary settings, one where students typically entered college

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immediately after high school and attended classes on campus (Bean, 2003). Students

enter university with a variety of attributes (e.g. sex, race, and ability), pre-college

experiences, and different family backgrounds. These variables can indirectly or directly

impact student performance and persistence in university. Researchers have compiled a

vast collection of data and have a clear picture of the formulas of success for traditional

college students: 18-24 year old non-minority students from middle-class backgrounds

whose parents had attended college. The research focus has shifted somewhat to look

also at non-traditional students including minority students (Ting, 2000), commuter

students (Johnson, 1997), graduate students (King & Chepyator-Thomson, 1996), adult

students (Bean & Metzner, 1985) and transfer students (McCormick & Carroll, 1997).

Although there are a variety of individual characteristics that are related to a

student dropout, the most important pertain to a student's family; including family

background and characteristics (Whelage et al., 1990), family support and educational

attainment levels of both parents (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). Students who persist in

college are more likely to come from families whose parents are more educated (Chase,

1970), are more urbane (Iffert, 1958) and are more affluent (Eckland, 1964a). Parental

relationships and support, along with parental expectations and interest in their children's

educational goals and attainment also have considerable influence on degree completion.

Academic performance has been identified as a key indicator of student

persistence. Student ability is measured through a variety of means including high school

grade point average, SAT scores, and high school rank (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983:

Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983; Tinto, 1997). Several individual campus based studies

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indicate that high school grade point average has a direct effect upon an institution's retention rate but is not a good predictor of student persistence (Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Okun, Benin, & Brandt-Williams, 1996). However, larger national studies completed by Astin (1975), Williamson & Creamer (1988) and Williams (1996) found that high school grades are predictors of student persistence. Similarly, once a student is in college, grade point average also influences student persistence (Cabrera, Nora & Castaneda, 1993; Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab & Lynch, 2003).

Some studies show that younger students are less likely to persist in college while other studies show that older students are more likely to do so. Belcheir, Michener & Gray (1998) distinguished between older and younger successful students attending university and found that a supportive family environment appeared to be critical for the student to achieve their educational goals. For younger students, understanding the value and importance of an education and getting involved with campus activities appear to be key factors that influence student persistence.

Gender differences in the university population have changed dramatically over time. Participation by women in university has outpaced men's participation since the late 1970's and the gap widened substantially during the 1990's (Statistics Canada, 2006). Christofides, Hoy, & Yang (2006) reported that the underlying factor in the growth differential in university enrolment among women is that women benefit more by attending university. Many studies examined gender as an influencer on student persistence and have found retention rates are higher for women than men (Astin, 1975;

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Smith, 1992; Allen, 1997), and that gender was significantly related to a college student's level of academic stress (Sands, Robinson, Kurpius, Dixon & Rayle, 2005).

Institutions in both the United States and Canada have become more diverse due to shifts in populations. Significant increases in the population of some minority groups show that current college generation is more ethnically diverse than that of previous generations (Levine & Cureton, 1998). Current understanding of the experiences of students from different backgrounds has been greatly enhanced (Allen, 1992) and can help researchers better understand the factors that influence student persistence in these groups. Evans (2001) reported that international students at one institution reported five reasons for their departure: a cultural background that did not prepare them for the freedom experienced at the institution, a focus of importance placed on social relationships rather than academics, institutional factors, unfamiliarity with higher education systems, and using the idea of going to college to leave home rather than to actually obtain a degree. Consistent with Tinto's integration model of student persistence, students who do not possess the dominant cultural behaviour patterns, norms, and values on campus were less likely to persist (Berger & Milem, 1999).

Much of the Canadian literature on ethnicity and postsecondary education relates to the Aboriginal and First Nations people whereas in the United States, much of the research has focused on Black and Hispanic ethno-cultural groups. More Canadian aboriginal students are enrolling in postsecondary institutions despite the substantial barriers that many face while attending university. Although there are more aboriginal students enrolled in university, the retention and success rates for these students continue

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to remain much lower than those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Malatest, 2004).

Barriers such as discrimination, low socioeconomic status, inadequate preparation in high

school for the rigor of university, family responsibilities and unfamiliarity with an

institution contribute to a student's inability to complete their degree. Research has

determined that families play an important role in a student's persistence in college

(Armstrong-West & de la Teja, 1988). American colleges and universities have seen an

increasingly larger number of racial and ethnic minority students attending college and

university but also a large number of students who drop out of university before

completing their degree. Of those minorities who are participating in postsecondary

education, the graduation rate of Hispanics is about 35 percent and African Americans at

a rate of only 45 percent (Gregerman, Lerner, Hippel, Jonides & Nagde, 1998). Racial

and ethnic minority students tend to face problems of alienation, marginalization, and

monoculture curriculum in the classroom, cultural conflicts, and lack of support services,

which ultimately result in higher dropout rates.

The nature of the relationship between student achievement and socioeconomic

status has been debated for decades. Coleman's (1966) landmark study on Equality and

Educational Opportunity indicated that academic achievement is strongly impacted by a

student's socioeconomic status. Previous studies in higher education have taken into

consideration socioeconomic status when examining issues of student persistence

(Haralson, 1995; Walpole, 2003). St. John & Noel (1989) found that there is a statistical

relationship between student persistence and socioeconomic status as low socioeconomic

status forces additional strain on the student. St. John, Cabrera, Nora & Asher (2002)

also showed that students with low socioeconomic status tend to spend less time studying than do students with high socioeconomic status and that this ultimately impacts their academic success. Students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds enter the college system with different objectives, a lack of understanding of the college environment and may even lack certain academic skills required to succeed.

It is evident from the wealth of research that student demographic parameters have considerable impact on student persistence. Student persistence efforts undertaken by the institution must be designed to meet the numerous needs of their diversified student body.

2.2.2 Academic Integration

A common theme throughout the research on student persistence is that students who immerse themselves in their studies are more likely to remain at the institution (Davidson & Beck, 2006). These students are experiencing what has been termed "academic integration" by succeeding academically and understanding the value of what is being taught to them in the classroom. Academic integration is defined as "the development of a strong affiliation with the college academic environment both in the classroom and outside of the class including interactions with faculty, academic staff, and peers but of an academic nature" (Nora, 1983, p. 235).

Widely accepted models of student attrition identify the significant role that academic integration plays in student persistence (Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975). More recent research elaborates on Tinto's interactionalist model of student retention and

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incorporates the classroom experiences as a factor that increases academic integration (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Noble, Flynn, Lee & Hilton, 2007).

Student-faculty interaction is a strong predictor of student persistence. Direct contact between members of faculty and the student population positively affects student satisfaction with their college environment and in the long run influences student achievement (Pascarella, 1980). Lack of this interaction with members of a campus community is the single leading predictor of college attrition (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). The amount of in class student contact with faculty (Griffith, 1996), caring attitudes of faculty and staff (Johnston, 1998) and quality of instruction (Pascarella, Whitt & Nora, 1996) all influence student persistence and have a positive impact on academic performance (Granunke, Woosley & Sherry, 2005).

Academic success during the first-year of college hinges critically on students' academic preparedness at college entry (Hoachlander, Skiora, Horn & Carroll, 2003). Grade point average is one of the factors that positively affect student retention (Pascarella & Terenini, 1991). It is thought that what students gain from their college experience depends a lot on how much time and effort they put into their studies and other education related activities (Pascarella, 2001). Ishitani & DesJardins (2002) found that the higher a student's grade point average in the first year of study, the less likely that student was to drop out of college. Students are more likely to leave the institution due to poor or failing grades but also when their academic performance and grades appear to have declined considerably from those previously attained in high school (Getzlaf, Sedlacek, Kearney & Blackwell, 1984).

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Tinto (1987) indicates that effective strategies to reduce college attrition on campuses include academic advising at the core of any student retention strategy. Academic advising on campuses creates an opportunity for one on one interaction with faculty (Habley, 1994). Academic advising provides students with the opportunity to connect with members of a campus community, examine educational and career goals, and assistance with choosing classes and programs of study. Meaningful and frequent contact with faculty, especially focusing on the areas of intellectual, academic and career-related issues, has been found to increase motivation and involvement of their students (Astin, 1984; Pascarella, 1980, 1985; Tinto, 1987).

Student persistence in higher education has shown that involvement, both socially and academically, matters. Faculty members have an impact on a student's academic and social integration (Endo & Harpel, 1982; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979, Tinto, 1982). Further, Pascarella, Terenzini & Hibel (1978) found that non-classroom student-faculty contact possibly influences student success and that the first few informal interactions with faculty members that a student has are most important. The end result of this increased academic integration leads to a greater likelihood that students will persist and complete their degree. Students who look for and receive academic support not only showed improvements in their academic performance but developed a greater sense of self-perceived control of academic outcomes and developed higher expectations for future academic success (Smith, Walter & Hoey, 1992). In contrast, the unavailability of faculty members and lack of student-faculty interaction negatively affects student success (Pascarella, 1984).

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2.2.3 Social Integration

The early work on student persistence guided what was termed the "age of involvement" (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in Higher Education, 1994). The notion that students learn more the more they become involved in both the academic and social aspects of the collegiate experience is the most basic tenet of Alexander Astin's Theory of Involvement. Astin's (1984) theory posits that the student plays an integral role in determining his or her own degree of involvement in college classes, extracurricular and social activities. Tinto (1975) further detailed a longitudinal model that outlined explicit connections between the academic and social systems of the institution, the institutional environment, and the individuals who shaped those systems and student retention.

Central to Tinto's model was the concept of integration and the patterns of interaction between the student and other members of the institution especially during the critical first year of college (Tinto, 2006, p.3). Social integration is the "development of a strong affiliation with the college social environment both in the classroom and outside of class including interactions with faculty, academic staff, and peers but of a social nature" (Nora, 1983, p. 237) and is a function of the quality of peer-group and student-faculty interactions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). The work by Pascarella & Terenzini (1980) served to reinforce the importance of student involvement and integration and the impact not only on student persistence but a host of other student outcomes. The social support systems of an institution allow for students to become socially integrated and involved in campus life, therefore increasing the likelihood of academic success. Tinto (1975) found

that students who had a higher degree of integration into the institution will have a greater commitment to that institution and to the goal of college completion. Studies have shown also that a student's social integration into the institution is positively influenced by social support (Napoli & Wortman, 1998) and peer involvement (Berger & Milem, 1999, Milem & Berger, 1997).

Astin's (1984) research focused on the campus environment and the significant influence that it has on a student's decision to remain in school. Like Tinto (1997), many researchers have begun to recognize the role of the classroom in the college student departure puzzle and have come to understand that the classroom acts as a conduit for student involvement in both academic and social circles.

Participation in extracurricular activities provides students with an opportunity to meet and connect with other students and contribute to the institution and the campus community. Students spend only 30 percent of their academic week inside the college classroom (Collison, 1990) and institutions provide many opportunities for students to fill their time with other out-of-class experiences. Studies of students involved in extracurricular activities (Hood et al., 1986; Hunt & Rentz, 1994; Williams & Winston, 1985 as reported by Evans, Forney & DiBrito, 1998) were more likely to persist with their studies. Furthermore, Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) report that many studies on student persistence have shown a strong correlation between involvement and educational attainment.

2.2.4 External Commitments

It has been determined that internal factors such as individual characteristics, prior experiences, and commitments impact the social and academic integration of a student into the institution. But it is also important to remember that an individual's decision to leave an institution is not unaffected by external factors. Very frequently, events external to the college can affect the social and academic integration into the institution (Tinto, 1975). External reasons for student departure can best be observed in the student's changing evaluations of his or her commitments to the institution and to the goal of college completion.

Edward St. John (2000) studied the economic influences on persistence by using the theory of cost-benefit analysis. In this theory, individual decisions with regard to any form of activity can be examined in terms of the perceived costs and benefits to the individual. With respect to student persistence, this theory contends that a student would withdraw from an institution when the perceived costs in the form of financial investments, time commitment and energy outweigh the perceived benefits of staying in college.

It is necessary to understand the variety of external forces that may arise and weigh on a student's decision to remain in school. The changing supply and demand of the job market can impact a student's decision to drop out of an institution. According to a recent report by the Human Resources and Social Development Canada (2007), the Canadian economy is expected to create about 1.9 million jobs over the next decade. These opportunities may create an environment where students earn a considerable

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income without obtaining a university degree; this benefit could deter some from obtaining a degree.

Family obligations can also influence an individual's desire to persist in university. Commitments sometimes require considerable amounts of time and energy and interfere with a student's studies. Childcare responsibilities, home maintenance, and other obligations are other variables that determine a student's commitment to higher education. In these instances, students are sometimes "pulled away" from university but are more likely to return to the university once those external commitments are met. Family conflicts (Sydow & Sandel, 1998), parental support (Allen, 1997), intent to marry (Himelhoch, et al., 1997), personal problems (Ogletree, 1992) and health problems (Gilmoure, 1995) also have been identified as factors that influence student persistence.

2.2.5 Residential Living

Residential living is an integral and valuable part of the university experience. Living in residence allows students to be at the heart of university life. Students have the opportunity to become part of the campus community, experience a variety of educational and social activities, develop lifelong friendships, meet people from around the world and learn about other cultures and lifestyles.

Although the need to house students is an important function of residence halls, institutions invest resources in these facilities to assist with the growth and development of the student. Residential living has been recognized as a factor that has been studied as variables influencing student persistence. Residential facilities on university and college campuses expanded greatly with the increased influx of students participating in

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postsecondary education. An American study reported that over two-thirds of students entering a four-year college or university lived in residence (Boyer, 1987).

Living in residence has been found to have positive effects on students, including increased levels of persistence, more involvement in campus activities, and enhanced interaction with faculty and peers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991) and to ultimately increase student persistence and retention (Astin, 1977; Berger, 1997). Astin's (1975) theory of involvement attempted to identify factors in the college environment that significantly affected student persistence in college. In his two major studies, Astin (1973) found that students living in residence halls were less likely to dropout and more likely to graduate in four years with a degree. These students also reported higher levels of social interaction and self-confidence and also indicated that they were more satisfied with their undergraduate experience. Berger (1997) found that community identity (i.e. feeling at home on the floor), community interaction (i.e. floor neighbours know me) and community solidarity (i.e. common values on the floor) all influenced social integration and ultimately student persistence.

Research on the value of living in residence indicates that it does have a positive influence on the student experience. Blimling (2003) indicates that there are several areas in which residence halls have significant impact on students. These students have greater expectations for academic achievement and are more likely to remain in college to finish their degree, are more involved in campus activities, have a more positive perception of the social climate of the campus, more opportunity for faculty interaction, and build stronger friendships and share more experiences. Students who live on campus

are more engaged overall compared with students who commute – consistent with previous research (Chickering, 1974, Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Students who live in residence have the time and opportunity to become more involved in all aspects of campus life. "Living in a campus residence was positively related to student persistence in all types of institutions and among all students regardless of sex, race, ability, or family background" (Astin, 1984, p.523). Residence halls allow for students to develop strong peer relationships, to interact with faculty outside of the classroom, to participate in campus life through social and academic activities and to help to explain why residential students are more likely to persist than those students living off campus.

Elaborating on Astin's (1977) findings that residence hall living increases the chances of student persistence by about 12 percent, Tinto's (1993) modified model of student retention stresses that students' involvement and sense of community within their residence halls is essential to their successful socialization into the broader social system of the institution. The on-campus social system and resulting interactions that lead to social integration occur largely in residence halls, and like other potential campus communities, provide scaled down environments that enable "newcomers to find an early physical, social, and academic anchor during the transition to college life" (Tinto, 1993, p.125). This contributes immensely to a student's social integration within the institution (Astin, 1999).

2.2.6 *Financial Support*

Given the escalating costs of a university education together with the unavailability of government student loans for some individuals, students are finding it more and more difficult to afford a postsecondary education. It would seem that finances would have considerable impact on a student's decision to remain enrolled at an institution. The effects of finances on student dropout generally can be either short-term or long-term and typically occur at the point of entry into the institution. Although students will cite financial issues as the reason for their departure; these reasons will often be reflected as the end decision rather than the origin of the decision to drop out (Tinto, 1982). Student finances will likely have a greater impact upon dropout early in one's educational career given that the degree goal is still quite distant.

Few studies of student persistence are specifically designed to assess the impact of finances on postsecondary student persistence. The ability for a student to pay for and their perceived perception of the costs to finance their education influence student persistence (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; St. John, Paulson, & Starkey, 1996). The dominant theoretical models of student persistence include financial factors but their influences are minor even though such effects are based on limited measures (Cabrera et al, 1993; Johnson, 1994; Dietsche, 1990). Although many students may indicate that financial problems are the sole reason for dropping out of university, Tinto (1987) and Cope (1978) argue that if a student's commitment to education and the institution is strong enough, they would find opportunities to help assist with financing their education.

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Recent studies have disputed this claim and have found that financial concerns do impact student persistence (Cambiano, George & Jack, 2000).

The decline in federal and provincial government funding has had considerable impact on an institution's tuition. University fees have been increasing steadily and between 1990-1991 and 2002-2003 have increased at an average annual rate of 8.1 percent (Oulette, 2006). Since 2002-2003, the increase in tuition fees has slowed, reflecting the government's decision to regulate fees. Tuition fees in Canadian undergraduate programs have almost doubled over the last decade. The cost of postsecondary education varies from institution to institution and from province to province. Quebec has the lowest tuition fees of any province at $1,916 per academic year whereas Nova Scotia has the highest undergraduate tuition fees averaging $5,828. This is close to $2,200 higher than the national average (Statistics Canada, 2006).

The rising costs of postsecondary education have considerable impact on a student's decision to attend university. Tuition and other college related expenses have been found to affect academic performance and success, and in turn, student persistence (Titus, 2006). Additionally, financial pressures associated with meeting the costs influence a student's decision to remain in university. Therefore, students evaluate the cost-benefit of completing their education by evaluating their time investment and economic required in completing their degree (Braxton, 2003). The lack of financial resources and the ability for students to pay for their education greatly influence student persistence (Cabrera et al, 1992a; Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Financial aid allow for students to have enough freedom to engage in social activities or remove anxieties, time,

and effort associated with securing additional funds to finance their education (Cabrera et al., 1992).

Approximately 75 percent of undergraduate students work on average 25.5 hours per week while attending college (National Postsecondary Student Aid Society, 2000). As a result, it is understandable why student employment has been identified as factor impacting student dropout. As tuition rates continue to rise and anxiety around how students will finance their education mounts, a greater understanding of how student employment will impact student persistence rates will be necessary. Students who worked on campus part-time had a greater probability of graduating than those students who worked off campus full-time (Astin, 1975; King, 2002).

Research on the impact financial aid on student persistence has focused on attracting and recruiting students to an institution while its role in retention has not been extensively investigated (DesJardins, Ahburg & Maccall, 2000). Most studies explored whether the reception of student aid or particular combinations of student aid packages bear a relationship with student persistence. Cabrera, Nora & Casteneda (1992) examined the relationship between student-level financial variables and student persistence and found that student financial aid facilitates both the academic and social participation of students in college.

2.3   *Summary*

This review of the literature suggests that there are several factors that may influence student persistence in higher education and indicates that these reasons are very complex. Tinto (1993) suggested that the very complex nature of student departure can

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only be fully understood by understanding the individual experiences of each student who departs the institution prior to fulfilling their educational goals. Although Tinto's model of student retention focuses on student involvement, Andres & Carpenter (1997) found that in addition to student involvement, competing demands of parents, friends, roommates, employers, financial and health problems can all influence students' coping abilities and their decision to remain in university.

Using a quantitative and qualitative research approach, this study will investigate the factors that impact student retention in a small, primarily undergraduate institution in Canada by examining the issues from the self identified variables provided by students who have left the institution after their first year of study.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY

3.1   *Introduction*

This research study attempts to examine the variables that influence student

persistence in a small, primarily undergraduate university in Canada.

The research design is a post-test non-experimental descriptive study designed to

understand the variables that influenced a student's decision to leave the institution after

the first year of study.   Polit and Hungler (1994) describe a non-experimental study as

"one to which there is no manipulation of the variable" (p.194). Although there is no pre-

test or comparison group, there is potential to gain valuable information that describes the

current variables that impact first-year student attrition.

To assess these self-reported variables, a mixed methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie,

2003) approach was used. Mixed methods, using both quantitative and qualitative

methods in combination, complement one another and yield a richer data set (Creswell,

1994). There are several reasons for using a mixed method assessment approach in

research. They include: triangulation, initiation, development, complementary and

expansion (Worthen, Sanders, Fitzpatrick, 1997).   Mixed method designs have the

potential to address a variety of research questions and will allow for further clarification

of the quantitative results with the anticipation that they will yield recommendations for

institutional areas of improvement in the area of student persistence.

In attempting to explain more fully the richness and complexity of human

behaviour (Cohen and Manion, 1986), the researcher will use methodology triangulation

(Denzin, 1978), employing both qualitative and quantitative data methods to give a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation (Altrichter et al., 1996)

The research project was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the university under review (see Appendix B) and by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University of Newfoundland (See Appendix A).
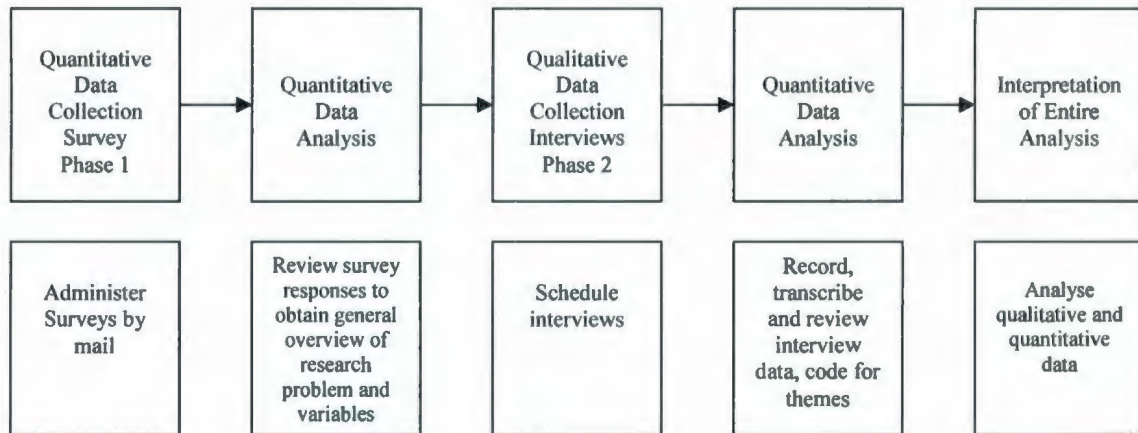
3.2   Overview of the Research Design

Studies on student persistence use a variety of methods to understand the student departure process. This study uses an explanatory sequential design approach that seeks to understand the self-reported reasons of students who leave the institution after only one year of study. Tinto (1993) stated that reasons students left an institution prior to completion were unique for each individual and therefore it is important to get the students' perceptions on why they might choose to leave school.

In order to answer the research questions, a mixed methods approach, called sequential explanatory design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) will be used (Figure 1). The overall purpose of this type of design is to use qualitative data to explain or build upon the quantitative results (Creswell, Piano Clark, et al., 2003). In this model, priority is typically given to the quantitative data and the two methods are integrated during the interpretation phase of the study (Creswell, 2003).

The first phase of the research uses quantitative survey results to look at the characteristics of the non-persisters, how they live as students, and the reasons they give for withdrawing from university after their first year of study. Because of the concern for

Figure 2. Sequential Explanatory Design

Quantitative Data Collection Survey Phase 1	→	Quantitative Data Analysis	→	Qualitative Data Collection Interviews Phase 2	→	Quantitative Data Analysis	→	Interpretation of Entire Analysis
Administer Surveys by mail		Review survey responses to obtain general overview of research problem and variables		Schedule interviews		Record, transcribe and review interview data, code for themes		Analyse qualitative and quantitative data

student attrition rates at the institution, the study attempted to discover the various factors that influence student attrition rates.

This approach also allowed the researcher to identify those students who were interested in participating in the qualitative portion of the research. Accessing students who have possibly identified themselves as having failed at university or made the decision to leave often provides a barrier to identification of students willing to participate in interviews on student persistence. The second phase of the research used qualitative research methods to follow from or connect to the results of the first phase of the study (Creswell & Piano-Clark, 2007). Guided by the principles of phenomenology, the purpose of the qualitative phase of the study is to "describe the lived experience of a cohort of people regarding a particular phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p.51). Thus, the quantitative data and results provide a general overview of the research problem and helped to identify some variables that influenced student dropout. The qualitative data

and analysis refined and confirmed the survey results by exploring the participants view in more detail.

According to Burns & Grove (2001) quantitative research is the "formal, objective, systematic process in which numerical data is used to obtain information about the world" (p.26). This method is used to systematically examine relationships between variables and describe variables as they occur without manipulation by the researcher. Survey research often uses a sample or smaller group of selected participants, but generalizes results to a larger group (Neuman, 1994). Used in almost all facets of higher education planning, the assessment of student satisfaction and the college experience in understanding persistence and graduate outcomes is done through the use of surveys (Porter, 2004). For this reason, this study will use a Student Persistence Survey to gain valuable information on student attrition at the institution, elicit demographic data to determine those students who would participate in the qualitative phase of the study.

Qualitative studies use a process of inquiry to understand social or human problems through the reported details of the participant of the study (Creswell, 2004). As indicated by Gillis & Jackson (2002), such study designs must include participants with first-hand knowledge of the experience to gain a greater understanding of the issues at hand.

It is the expected that surveying students and then interviewing them will assist in understanding why they did not persist to the second year of study. It is the expectation that the information will enable the university to develop programs and services that may

reduce the number of students who do not persist and help those students who enrolled in the institution to realize their educational goals.

3.3   *Recruitment and Participation of Sample*

The participants of this study included 100 students from all faculties across the campus that were enrolled as first-year students at the institution in the fall of 2006 but did not return in the fall term in 2007. For the purpose of this study, a small, primarily undergraduate university was chosen to be the institution of the study.

Purposive sampling was used in the study to gain information from the specified group. Defined by Burns & Grove (2001), purposive sampling is "judgemental sampling that makes the conscious selection by the researcher of certain subjects or elements to include in the study" (p.376). This type of sampling allows for the opportunity to explore the factors that students self-report for leaving an institution prior to graduation. The sample is one of non-random convenience, based only on those students who did not persist from the first to second year of study the following year.

The gender distribution of the sample population was 47 percent female, 53 percent male. The high school average of the sample population was 80.8 percent. Of the sample of students who did not return to the institution, 57 percent were from Nova Scotia, 10 percent from Ontario, 8 percent from British Columbia, 7 percent from New Brunswick, 4 percent from Alberta and 1 percent from Saskatchewan; 10 percent of the students were International students from outside of Canada. The participants were intentionally selected to better understand the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2005).

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3.4   Data Collection Techniques

Students who began their studies at the undergraduate university in Canada during fall of the 2006-2007 academic year but did not return the in the 2007-2008 academic year were mailed the questionnaire to gain insight for their reasons for not returning to the institution. The study was conducted during this time period as the reasons why they did not persist with their studies would be fresh in their mind.

The questionnaire was mailed to each participant. The use of surveys in educational research has traditionally been known as the standard method of evaluation (Arbuckle, 1953; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000) with the technique being most prevalent is the mail questionnaire (Parten, 1966). The overall response rates for e-mail surveys are known to be somewhat lower than paper and pencil surveys (Andreson & Gansneder, 1995) and therefore the researcher used the traditional survey method by postal mail.

Mail surveys are an effective method to collecting information on individual attitudes, opinions and perceived behaviours (Leon et. al., 2003). Jobber and O'Reilly (1998) indicated that the use of return stamps and anonymity improved standard mail survey rates. Each survey package included a postage paid return envelope for Canadian participants and international prepaid postage return envelope for those outside of the country.

The collection of survey data ran from December 15, 2007 to March 1, 2008. The procedure was complicated as many student addresses were not up to date and packages were sent to either parent's home addresses or to participants' previous addresses at or near the institution. All students in the sample population were sent an invitation to

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participate in the study on December 15, 2007. Each survey (see Appendix F) was accompanied by a letter that outlined the purpose of the study and assured the participants that all information provided and collected would remain confidential (see Appendix C), a self-addressed stamped return envelope and an informed consent form (see Appendix D). In order to ensure a high response rate, a follow-up email was sent to the participants (see Appendix E) on January 23, 2008 and a second email reminder was sent out on February 23, 2008. Of the email reminders that went out, seven messages bounced back as the email addresses that were used were no longer valid.

The qualitative phase of the study followed the return and analysis of the survey data. Email invitations were sent to thirteen students on April 3, 2008 (see Appendix G) requesting their participation in an individual telephone interview. Given that the individuals had left the institution and were scattered across the country, interviews were conducted via the telephone. Interviews were scheduled for the week of April 9, 2008 and completed on May 22, 2008. Interviews were recorded using a Roland EDIROL R-09 24 bit wave / mp3 recorder and transcribed by the researcher. In some cases, when participants know that they are being studied they alter their responses to fit the situation (Jackson, 2002). In this type of research, some of the reasons that students left the institution may be personal so a more formal, private, interview process was developed to elicit their experiences and beliefs. These interviews were also designed to explore more deeply and seek clarification on things that may have arisen from the quantitative part of the study.

3.5   *Instruments*

In the area of applied social sciences, survey research is considered to be one of the most important areas of measurement. According to Warwick and Linninger (1975), the "survey is highly valuable for studying some problems such as public opinion" (p. 6) and is appropriate for research that strives to gain information from participants about self-reported beliefs or behaviours (Neuman, 1997). For these reasons, a survey questionnaire was developed as the instrument for data collection for this study.

The self-created Student Persistence Survey was developed based on a review of the literature surrounding student persistence (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) and questions were based on the main themes identified as influencers of student persistence: including academic and social integration, residential living, financial support and external and family commitments. The survey was designed to gain further insight on a student's self-reported reasons for leaving the institution after only one year of study. The survey was designed to be quick for the participants to complete while at the same time allowing for an opportunity for participants to report any other issues and concerns that they may have had that were overlooked in the survey. The design of the survey was also based on the Institutional Integration Scale (IIS) developed by Pascarella & Terenzini (1980) to measure various factors of student persistence identified by Tinto's theory of student integration. The Institutional Integration Scale examined topics in the area of peer group interactions, faculty interactions, academic and intellectual development, faculty concern for student development and teaching, and institutional and goal commitments.

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The survey collected information about the following: (a) demographic characteristics, (b) factors that attributed to a student's domain of influence including academics, financial and personal circumstances and employment and (c) factors that are attributed to the college's domain of influence such as instruction, school environment, and available student services.

The survey contained 77 questions in the form of forced-choice responses, rating scales (i.e. Likert-scales) and open- and closed-ended questions. The first section contained questions about the student's country of origin, age, gender, marital status, program of study, and financial and living arrangements. The next section explores the student's experiences as they relate to social and academic integration into the institution, financial support, living arrangements, external and family commitments and other factors that may have impacted their decision to leave the institution. This was followed by a section that examined students' awareness of student services on campus and their use of those services while on campus. A space to provide any additional comments that would provide the researcher with insight as to why the students left the institution was provided at the end of the questionnaire.

As a result of changes in the assumptions used to research and generate knowledge, the natural and social sciences experienced a profound paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1970) which resulted in the "emergent" paradigm. Research methods based on this paradigm are predominately qualitative and use techniques of interviewing, observations and document analysis for data collection. The objective of a qualitative research design is to better understand the meaning of the respondents being interviewed and gain greater

insight into their experiences (Manning, 1992) as many qualitative researchers believe

that the best way to understand any phenomenon is to view it in its context. As part of

this study, a qualitative component was essential to hear directly from the students the

reasons that they left the institution after only one year of study. An Interview Schedule

(Appendix G) was developed for the qualitative phase of the study. Interview questions

were derived from the first phase of the study. Questions were standardized but tailored

to each individual participant and was designed to allow respondents to "talk at length, in

their own terms, and with time to reflect", while giving the researcher time to gain

"clarification of interesting points, with appropriate probing, and targeted questioning"

(Gaskell, 2000, p. 45). Twenty-one open-ended questions explored the reported reasons

for leaving related to their residential living experience, academic and social integration,

finances and their overall university experience.

3.6   *Data Analysis*

A phenomenological analysis (Creswell, 1998) was used to analyze the data. As

documented by Creswell, a phenomenological study describes the meaning of several

individuals lived experiences about a particular concept or phenomenon (p.51). Using

this type of research design allows for researchers to use inductive or qualitative methods

involving transcribed material, coding data into theme and drawing conclusions regarding

the phenomena based on these themes (Byre, 2001).

Analysis of the data was completed at both stages within the study. The

quantitative data was complied and evaluated using frequency analysis. The results were

reviewed and guided the development of the interview schedule for the qualitative phase of the study.

Following the completion of each interview in the qualitative phase, the researcher transcribed the tapes. This was completed to help the researcher think about what the interviewees were saying and keep the data fresh in the researcher's mind. Each tape was replayed while reviewing the corresponding transcript to ensure accuracy of the transcription process.

The researcher then compared the themes that emerged from all the interviews and looked for commonalities and discrepancies and identified the overall themes that best described the reasons for student dropout at the institution of study.

CHAPTER FOUR – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this study because of the inherent nature of student persistence research. In order to better understand the reasons why students leave university before completion, a Student Persistence Study questionnaire was administered to 100 students who had enrolled at the university for the first time in the Fall of 2006 but did not return in the Fall of 2007. The sample included only those students who left the institution due to personal reasons and not those who were academically dismissed from the institution. The results of the data analysis from the questionnaire included a description of the sample and discussion of the self-reported findings of the students who participated in the study. Results from the quantitative data allowed for more in-depth interviews to be completed with those identified by the survey response. The qualitative data derived from the interviews were also analyzed to gain a more elaborate and rich description of why they left the institution prior to completion.

This chapter presents a summary of the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data of the participants in the study. The focus is on the experience of the six students and their reported reasons for leaving the institution after only one year of study.

4.1   Student Survey Demographics

Fourteen of the possible 100 students in the sample population responded to the invitation to participate in the survey. Of the fourteen responses, one student was currently enrolled at the institution but on a study abroad exchange opportunity through the university and would be returning to the institution in the Fall of 2008. Another

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student was attending a university in Ontario and assumed that the materials were sent to his old address and one student opted to not complete the survey but sent comments about their experience at the institution via email. Eleven students completed and returned the survey.

All three faculties in the institution were represented in the student survey responses with the largest percentage of respondents from the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Pure & Applied Science. Although represented, the Faculty of Professional Studies had the least number of respondents. (See Table 1). This was representative of the sample; the Faculty of Professional Studies observed the smallest proportion of students leaving the institution after one year. The overall student response by faculty was representative of the overall student departure rates.

Table 1 – Number of Survey Respondents by Program of Study (N=11)

	Percentage (%)	Actual (N)
Faculty of Arts	54.5 %	6
Faculty of Professional Studies	9.1 %	1
Faculty of Pure & Applied Science	36.4 %	4
TOTAL	**100.0%**	**11**

Students who responded to the survey were full-time, undergraduate students with Canadian citizenship. One student self-identified that she was of aboriginal descent. Of those students, 54.5 percent indicated they were from an urban area while 45.5 percent

reported they were from a rural area. The average age of the students who completed the survey was 22.6 years, ranging in age from 20 years to 31 years. Females accounted for 63.6 percent of the students and males accounted for 36.4 percent of the students that responded to the survey.

Students were asked to indicate their relationship status: 63.6 percent of the respondents were single, 6.7 percent were married and 27.3 percent indicated their status as other. Students were also asked about their living accommodations during their year at the institution. 54.5 percent of those students had lived in university residential buildings while the other 45.5 percent had lived off campus.

Several student participants (54.5 percent) indicated they came to the institution on some sort of financial assistance either through student loans or other government financial assistance and 36.4 percent of the students had received money through the institution's financial aid program. Many students (63.6 percent) indicated that they did not have a part-time job while attending university whereas 36.4 percent reported that they had a job off campus working more than 10 hours a week off campus to help offset the costs associated with attending university.

The level of parental education attainment reported by the students interviewed was obtained during the quantitative phase of the study. The largest percentage of respondents indicated that their parents had completed a college certificate or diploma program. Both the completion of a bachelor's degree or higher and a high school diploma was reported by the next largest percentage of respondents. A small percentage

indicated that their parents had either not completed high school or had gone back to complete their General Educational Development (GED) (See Table 2).

Table 2 – Survey Respondents Indicated Level of Parental Educational Attainment) *(N=11)*

	Percentage (%)	Actual (N)
General Educational Development	4.6 %	1
High School	13.6 %	3
College	50.0 %	11
University	27.3 %	6
Other	4.6 %	1
TOTAL	**100.0%**	**22**

4.2   Student Interview Demographics

Of the eleven students who returned their completed survey, six individuals (54.5 percent) agreed to participate in a telephone interview.   66.7 percent of the participants were female; 33.3 percent male. All the students were single, full-time Canadian citizens with one individual of aboriginal descent. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 20-23 years old with the average age being 21.0 years. 66.7 percent of the students indicated that they came from a rural area while 33.3 percent from an urban area.

The largest percentage of students participating in the interviews indicated that the highest level of parental educational attainment obtained was that of a college degree,

diploma or certificate. This was followed by the completion of a high school diploma,

university degree, and other forms of education (see Table 3).

Table 3 – Interview Respondents Indicated Level of Parental Educational Attainment (N=6)

	Percentage (%)	Actual (N)
High School	25.0 %	3
College	50.0 %	6
University	16.7 %	2
Other	8.3 %	1
TOTAL	**100.0%**	**12**

Half of the students participating in the interview portion of the study were

registered in a bachelor degree within the Faculty of Arts while the other half was

registered in a bachelor of degree within the Faculty of Pure & Applied Science. There

were no students participating in the interviews who were registered in a bachelor degree

within the Faculty of Professional Studies (see Table 4).

Half of the students reported living in the residence halls while the other half

reported living off campus. Over one half (66.7 percent) of the students indicated that

they had come to the institution on some sort of government financial assistance (i.e.

student loans) and half of the students had received some sort of financial assistance (i.e.

some sort of scholarship, bursary or award) from the university. A third of the students

indicated that they had a part time job while attending university but indicated that they

were working less than 10 hours per week.

Table 4 – Interview Respondents Program of Study (N=6)

	Percentage (%)	Actual (N)
Faculty of Arts	50.0 %	3
Faculty of Pure & Applied Science	50.0 %	3
TOTAL	**100.0%**	**6**

4.3   Student Interview Response

Each participant was given a fictitious name to keep their anonymity during their study. Each participant was then profiled to outline their self-reported reasons for leaving the institution after only one year of study.

The profiles of the participants reflect the information provided not only in the interviews but in the quantitative survey as well. Participants' responses are described and reported to help better gain insight as to why students leave an institution before completion of a degree. The experiences from the time the student first thought of attending a postsecondary institution right up until the time that they left are reported to provide insight into this complex issue.

4.3.1   Profile of Dan

Dan is a 23 year old Canadian, single white male from an urban area. Graduating from high school in 2003, Dan did not pursue university directly following high school graduation but did begin his university career at the institution of study. Describing his average high school marks, he reported it fell within the 71-80 percent range. As a full-

time student, Dan was registered in a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in Sociology. On the survey questionnaire, Dan indicated that the highest level of education completed by his mother was at the high school level and his father had completed a trade program at the college level. Dan was not on student loan and without a part-time job but had received an award from the institution to assist with the cost of his education as a member of the varsity athletics program. Dan opted to live in an apartment off campus.

Social Integration

Meeting new friends and developing close personal relationships was something that was not difficult for Dan. He indicated that being "part a part of athletics allowed him to make friends from different sports teams". Being a varsity athlete allowed him to be part of a group and he indicated that "everyone was part of the same team". Not only did he have the opportunity to make new friends, he also indicated that these relationships had positive influences on his personal and intellectual growth, attitudes, values, interests and ideas.

The campus environment allowed Dan to get involved in extracurricular activities and various clubs / internal organizations during his time at the university. He participated in varsity sporting events, intramurals and enjoyed various bands that performed on campus. When asked about how he heard of these events, Dan replied "more through word of mouth and posters that were on bulletin boards". He also indicated that word of mouth seems to be the best way to encourage people to participate in extracurricular events on campus.

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Academic Integration

Not finding the transition from high school to university extremely difficult, Dan realized that you are expected to do much more work than was previously expected of you. He responded on the questionnaire that he agreed that "professors were not unreasonable in their demands of students". Dan indicated that his academic experience was not extremely positive and felt that he did not have a great deal of success in meeting the academic demands placed on him but this was an indication of his commitment to his studies, not the professors demands placed on him.

Dan agreed that he had a number of academic supports to help assist with his academic courses. He indicated that his academic advisor helped him with his academic career path, including courses in which he should enrol in. Dan remained neutral when asked the question of whether or not one of more of his professors took interest in his academic progress.

When asked about whether or not there was anything in his classes that helped prepare him to get through those classes, he mentioned that the "bouncing around of ideas on the topics being lectured" in class and the professors spending a lot of time clarifying the course material. This was further identified when Dan responded to the questionnaire by agreeing with the statement "my professors encouraged students to participate in class discussions".

Creating informal opportunities for faculty and students to interact has considerable impact on the student experience. Dan agreed with statements like "I was satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with my professors" and

"my non-classroom interactions with faculty had positive influence on my personal growth". Although he indicated that he was satisfied with the opportunities to interact with faculty, he later indicated on the questionnaire that he disagreed with the statement "I participated in informal academic activities outside of the classroom" while on campus. This was more academic events such as seminars and out of class lectures.

Financial Support

Attending the institution on a financial athletic award, Dan indicated that he was fully aware of the costs to attend the institution and indicated that the costs to attend the institution were what he had expected. When asked where he received the information pertaining to the amount of tuition and fees, he replied "that he was well informed before I actually came to the institution" of the associated costs and received that information from the coaches who recruited him.

Dan also indicated that he strongly disagreed with various statements around employment opportunities and indicated that the reason why he left the institution was not related to the fact that he could not finance his education or find part-time employment to offset the costs of his education during the school year.

Family Commitments

Dan reported on the questionnaire that he disagreed with such statements like "family responsibilities forced me to leave the university", "my family were not supportive of my participation in higher education" and "there was a death or illness in my family forcing me to return home" and that these were not reasons that he opted to

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not return the following year. This area was not discussed during the interview process as it was not applicable to his reported reasons for leaving.

Other

When asked about what led him to choose university as a postsecondary education option, Dan replied "I wanted to pursue a career that would require a university degree". In looking at the institution, "he felt that they had a very exceptional educational program" and attended the institution as part of a varsity athletics team. Being very satisfied with the overall university, Dan explained that he was impressed with the university's facilities and the size of the campus.

Dan's experience was a positive learning experience for him. Although his experience was a good one, he realized that he needed a little more will on his part and his focus was more on the varsity sport and not his academics. In responding to the questionnaire, Dan disagreed with the statement "it was important for me to graduate from college" and "I decided to pursue another career". When asked why he opted to leave the institution, he indicated during the interview that:

> finally realizing that for my own purpose the jobs that I wanted
> to pursue I would be using more of a physical aspect as opposed
> to an intellectual aspect – more of a trades person more than an office person.

Reason for Leaving

The main reason that Dan left the institution was that he realized that his educational goals were not consistent with his career goals.

4.3.2   *Profile of Angela*

Registered as a full-time student, Angela is a 20 year old, Canadian white female from a small rural town. When asked about the educational attainment of her parents, she indicated that her mother had completed her grade 12 and a horticulture program while her father completed multiple courses following high school. Attending university immediately following graduation from high school, Angela registered in a Bachelor of Science majoring in Biology. In order to finance her education, Angela indicated that she received a student loan or other government student assistance to help with the costs. Additionally, she worked approximately ten hours per week off campus. Being just a few minutes away from the university, Angela did not live on campus but rather at home with her parents.

Like many high school students, Angela took courses in high school required for university because "it was just kind of the path that you achieved". She attended the institution because "it was really close to home" and she wasn't ready to move and opted to live at home with her parents for the year. Like many students who leave university after one year of study, the institution did not meet her expectations but she indicated that "I don't think that it was the institution in general, I think it was just university wasn't where I wanted to be at that point in time".

Social Integration

In the questionnaire, Angela agreed with the statements that she "had the opportunity to develop close personal relationships with other students" and that it was not difficult for her to meet and make new friends. Although many people cautioned her

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that living off campus would make it hard to meet new friends, she found that "being kind of an open person I didn't have trouble making friends in my classes".

Active participation in club or internal organizations can have considerable impact on student persistence. In answering the survey question related to participation in club activities and external events at the institution, Angela indicated that she strongly disagreed that she had the opportunity to participate and was not encouraged to participate in these events but she would have "been interested in more of an intramural type sports system and would love to have participated" but stated that the institution is "more dedicated to varsity sport and some of us are not good enough to play varsity sport". However, she also indicated that "trying to keep a part-time job outside of university" and "still had a lot of friends in the area" were the main reasons for not attending these events. Angela had very positive things to say about the communication about these events stating that "the Students' Union used to send out a lot of emails about what was going on" and "did a pretty good job of informing people of stuff going on".

Academic Integration

Many students find the transition from high school to university a difficult one. Fortunately for Angela, she felt that she was adequately prepared to meet the academic demands of university. She credited this in part, to not having to move very far away from home and "kept her regular life" as she continued with her education. The one thing that she did find difficult in the transition was the way that the professors marked in comparison to her high school teachers. Even though they were doing basically the same concepts, Angela noted that "it was a very big adjustment" and marks dropped by 15

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percent because of the marking differences. High school teachers would give partial points for the question if you completed most of the question and showed how you got your answer but in university it was all or nothing and a great deal of multiple choice exams which were directly computed electronically. Angela also mentioned that the teaching style of her high school teachers varied greatly from her university professors. "In university you just sit there and they lecture and it not doing a lot of practicing with homework questions" and you had to "kind of learn it on your own".

Angela very strongly agreed that the interaction between herself and her professors was very positive. She indicated that her professors encouraged their students to participate in classroom discussions and were readily available to help outside of class. One professor in particular stood out in her mind. Although the course work was difficult, the professor was "always available for extra help" and "really took the time to help students". She also indicated that her academic advisor was extremely helpful in assisting her with her career path.

Although her experience with faculty was a positive one, Angela indicated in a number of her responses that she did not have the opportunity to interact with faculty outside of the classroom. When asked if she had the opportunity to attend various informal faculty functions on campus, she indicated that "her personal life outside of the institution" made it hard to find the time to attend such events.

Residential Living

Angela indicated that because she lived very close to the university, she opted to not live in residence but at home with her parents. During the interview, Angela

explained that because she lived off campus, it was sometimes difficult to get involved socially in events happening in residence. She said "you would hear a lot of people talking about the dorms and the party tonight in such and such room. Because you didn't live there you didn't get to partake in".

Financial Support

When responding to the questionnaire, Angela disagreed with the statements that "she felt that she did not have sufficient funds available to finance her education", that she was "unable to find part-time employment opportunities" and that work responsibilities and job opportunities were reasons that she left the institution after completing one year. When asked the question about whether or not she felt that the costs of attending the institution were high or less than anticipated she replied:

> Oh higher. I always knew that the institution was going to be
> expensive but for what I got out of that first year and the cost I paid,
> it really honestly wasn't worth it at all.

Pursuing another form of postsecondary education, Angela has opted to enrol in a college program. She indicated that the cost was pretty much similar to what she paid for one year of university and once she is done she will have a diploma for the same amount of money for one year of school. In comparing the price, Angela noted that the price comparison was "kind of shocking".

When asked if she was provided information outlining the costs for the year, she indicated that she kind of knew what to expect but it was "kind of shocking when you see it written down".

Family Commitments

When asked on the questionnaire about family commitments and the influences they had on Angela leaving the institution, she indicated that family responsibilities and / or a death or illness in the family did not impact on her decision to leave university. She strongly disagreed with the statement that her family was "not supportive of her participation in higher education".

Other

Angela indicated on the questionnaire that she strongly disagreed that if she was to start university all over again, she would choose the institution of study. She also disagreed that she was satisfied with the overall university in general. On a positive note, she did indicate that she agreed with several questions in the survey regarding the university as a whole. She did indicate that she was impressed with the facilities within the university; felt that there was an "institutional climate that encourages contact amongst students from different economic, social, racial and ethnic backgrounds", the "faculty / student ratio was good" and the "size of the campus was good". Like many students, Angela indicated that it was "important for her to graduate from college" but felt that university was not for her. She further elaborated during the interview that her time "was not a bad experience and doesn't regret going...it just wasn't for me" and that her leaving would have happened if she was at another institution. She also commented that "the university was good, very expensive but good" and was "a good learning experience".

Reason for Leaving

Angela's main reasons for leaving the institution were due to the financial costs associated with attending the university and a change in her career goals.

4.3.3   Profile of Jennifer

Graduating from rural high school in 2003, Jennifer began her university career at another postsecondary institution then transferred to the institution under study. When asked about her average marks in high school, she reported that she was in the 71-80 percent average range. Jennifer explained that she decided to pursue a university education "mainly for work purposes" as she felt that "most people couldn't get a decent job without a university or college education". She chose to attend the institution because of the reported small class size and the small town atmosphere.

Jennifer was not on scholarship or other financial support from the university but received a student loan or other government student assistance while attending school. Jennifer opted to live off campus and reported that she did not work while attending university.

Of aboriginal descent, Jennifer is a 23 year old single female with Canadian citizenship. When inquiring about the educational attainment of her parents, she responded that her mother had completed Business College and her father had completed grade 11. Registered as a full-time student, she was enrolled in a Bachelor of Science degree majoring in Engineering. Unhappy with her declared choice of major, Jennifer switched majors twice during the year; first to Biology and then to Geology.

Social Integration

The university experience presents many opportunities for students to interact with other students and build lasting friendships. Unfortunately for Jennifer, this was not the case. Responding to the questionnaire, she strongly agreed that she had difficulty in meeting and making new friends and felt very strongly that she did not have the opportunity to develop strong, personal relationships with other students. Jennifer also disagreed with the statements on the questionnaire that her relationships with other students had positive influences on her personal growth, values, attitudes and ideas. However, she did agree with the statement that "most students at this university had values and attitudes that were different than my own".

The social environment of the campus also has considerable impact on student dropout. In her opinion, most students on the campus had values and attitudes that were different than her own and therefore did not have a positive influence on her personal and intellectual growth.

Jennifer indicated that she felt very strongly that she was not encouraged to participate in various club events, intramurals and other campus activities. She did indicate that she participated in some social activities on campus, for example, going out to the campus bar. Further in the interview, Jennifer said that she "wasn't aware of any opportunities" to get involved in other activities from the university directly.

Academic Integration

Faculty interaction is an integral part of the university experience. Regrettably for Jennifer, her academic experience was not as positive as she would have liked. The

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transition from high school to university was a difficult one for her. She strongly felt that she did not have success meeting the academic demands of her classes. Starting out a program in Engineering, she quickly realized that this wasn't what she wanted to do long term and decided to switch her majors. In the written comments, she indicated that her "heart wasn't in her studies this year and it was time to rethink my educational goals". She further elaborated that the she didn't really think that it was the university but rather it was her not being sure of what she wanted to do.

From an academic perspective, Jennifer indicated that the institution was:

one of the only universities where you need to choose a major
in your first year. Personally, I think that this is crazy, students
need a chance to explore their possibilities before committing to
their major.

When asked about her professors, Jennifer indicated that her professors were reasonably accessible for help outside of the classroom. She had indicated on the survey that she strongly disagreed with the statement on the questionnaire "I had developed a close personal relationship with at least one of my professors". When asked about this during the interview she indicated that there were a couple of people on campus who took interest in her and made her feel like part of the campus community.

Jennifer also indicated from the questionnaire that she did not have an opportunity to participate in informal academic activities outside of the classroom and that she was not satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with her professors.

Financial Support

Jennifer indicated that work responsibilities were not an issue when it came to her leaving the institution after only one year. She did not need a part-time job to help offset

the costs of her education and strongly disagreed that she did not have sufficient financial funds available to finance her education.

When asked about whether or not she felt that the costs of attending the institution were higher than anticipated, she indicated that she thought that they were much higher than she had originally thought. Jennifer had figured out the cost for her living arrangements on her own but the breakdown of tuition and other fees came from either the Registrar's Office or Student Accounts.

Family Commitments

Family obligations did not play a factor in Jennifer's decision to drop out of university. When asked whether or not family commitments forced her to leave the university or her family was not supportive or her education, she strongly disagreed with those statements.

Other

Jennifer remained neutral on several of the statements pertaining to her overall university experience. She did agree that the quality of her education was what she had anticipated.

Jennifer strongly disagreed that there was an institutional climate that encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial and ethnic backgrounds. She also indicated that she did not feel like she was part of the campus community. This was in part due to the fact that she lived off campus. She further stated that she felt that if you lived in residence you would feel like part of the community.

Being an older student, she sometimes felt that the younger students really just wanted to party and were not really focused on academics.

Jennifer strongly agreed that the "size of the campus was good" and the "faculty / student ratio was good" but remained neutral on the question "I was impressed with the university's facilities". She did state during the interview that the gym facility "seemed kind of old".

Reason for Leaving

When asked about why she didn't return to the institution for her second year, Jennifer reported that financial costs associated with attending university and a need to rethink her educational goals as the two main reasons for not continuing with her studies at the university.

4.3.4   Profile of Doug

A single, white, twenty year old male from a Canadian urban neighbourhood. In Doug's family educational background, his father completed a bachelor's degree from university and his mother completed high school. Like many high school students, Doug realized that most of the career options that he wanted to pursue required a university degree. Being interested in mathematics, it seemed like a logical choice to enrol in a Bachelor of Science degree majoring in Mathematics and Statistics. Doug indicated that he chose a school that was close to home and "liked the small university atmosphere" and ended up going because of a "scholarship offer".

Graduating from high school in 2006 with a 90 percent plus average, Doug accepted the university scholarship and enrolled as a full-time student. In order to offset

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the costs of his university experience, Doug also received a student loan during the academic year. Doug decided to live on campus in hopes of meeting new people.

Social Interactions

With respect to social interactions at the university, Doug responded in a positive manner. When responding to the questionnaire, he strongly agreed that that he had the opportunity to develop close personal relationships with other students and that these relationships had a positive impact on his personal growth, attitudes, values and interests. He further elaborated that his transition from high school to university was "fine" and although the "first few months were rough but once I got settled in and made some friends" he adjusted to university life.

Some students find it difficult to meet and make new friends. Doug strongly disagreed with the statement that "it was difficult for him to meet and make new friends with other students". When asked further on why he thought some students had difficulty in meeting new friends, he thought that

> ...some of it was just getting out there and being involved. I
> didn't find it a problem because I am a little more outgoing than some
> others, than someone with a sheer personality who doesn't' speak
> up as much.

Doug further elaborated on student's having difficulty getting involved socially and meeting new friends. He indicated that "student's who aren't really into drinking" may have difficulty. He felt that some students would feel pressure to drink and that "they don't want to do it but everyone else is doing it so they don't want to have to get involved with anything".

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Getting involved in campus life was easy for Doug to do. On the questionnaire, he strongly agreed with the statements "I had the opportunity to get involved in campus activities on campus", "I was encouraged to participate in club or internal organization through the Students' Union" and "the campus environment provided the support that I needed to thrive socially". When asked how he heard about the events on campus, he said:

> I think that a lot of general emails are sent out and sometimes people don't read them at all. [There were a] lot of emails but nothing really stood out because there was so much of it that after awhile people didn't even look at it.

Interestingly, Doug agreed that most students at this university have values and attitudes that were different than his own. During the interview, he indicated that he had read the question in a different manner. He felt that the diversity of the student population was a positive thing and felt that it was beneficial to meet and learn about students from different cultures. By interacting with these students, he "had the opportunity to have a firsthand look at what their culture is about and so on".

Academic Interactions

Feeling very strongly about his interaction with faculty, Doug agreed that at least one of his professors took interest in his academic progress and was given opportunities to engage in conversation with his professors on ideas presented within his classes.

Doug reiterated that he did not have a difficult transition to university from high school, and academically it was no different. Feeling confident in how well prepared he was for university by his high school teachers, Doug felt very positive that he had success in meeting the demands required of him in the classroom and that professors

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were not unreasonable in their demands of students. He also indicated that the professors that he spoke with before actually coming to the institution gave him a good idea of what to expect academically.

Faculty interaction had a positive influence on Doug's experience. He strongly agreed that his academic advisor played an important role in deciding his academic career path and helped with course and program selection. By encouraging students to participate in class discussions and by being accessible outside of class for help, Doug felt that the professors were "really open" and willing to help. This openness and willingness to help their students extended into various opportunities for students to informally interact with their professors outside of the classroom. Doug indicated that he had the opportunity to attend various events that took place on the campus.

Residential Living

Living in residence proved to be a positive experience for Doug. Satisfied with the living conditions of the residence hall, he further explained that he opted to live in residence to meet people and felt that he if had lived off campus he "would have been isolated". Knowing that meeting friends in his classes would be people in the same program or major, he decided that living in residence would allow him to meet a "whole bunch of people in different programs and different years".

The goal of the residential living experience should enrich the student learning experience. It is the role of the Resident Advisors (RAs) to help achieve this goal by helping build a welcoming atmosphere that supports their students, promotes diversity, interaction and builds community. Doug reported on the questionnaire that he strongly

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agreed that the "residence atmosphere was welcoming to all kinds of diversity", "the RA's were available if I needed help with non-academic issues" and that he "participated in events with his residence group that allowed him to contribute to the campus community".

Having been encouraged by his RAs, Doug further indicated that he participated in various programming events within the residence. When asked to describe in further detail how he heard about these events, he explained that "he heard of them through the RA". Doug also explained that it was hit or miss if you heard about the events. Sometimes he said, "There were times when you didn't hear about an event and then there were times that there were posters everywhere". The promotion of the event appeared to be dependent upon who was organizing the event and the enthusiasm that they had for the event.

Although the residence experience for Doug was a positive one, he did note on the questionnaire that he strongly disagreed with the statement that "the housing costs (both the residence room and dining plan) were affordable".

Financial Support

The lack of financial resources was not the reason that Doug opted to leave university after only one year. He indicated that he did not work part-time during the school year nor was the lack of employment opportunities reasons that he left after only one year. Doug responded to the survey questionnaire that he thought that the costs to attend the institution were higher than he had anticipated but long term was less than

what he thought that it was going to cost. This was mainly in part because of what he had heard about the total cost for that institution.

When asked where he found information about the tuition costs and associated fees, Doug replied that he found the information "mostly on the website" but explained that he "did have to dig a little. The actual fees were sometimes hard to find and what you were actually going to end up paying was even harder to find".

Family Commitments

Family obligations and support were something that did not influence Doug's decision to leave the institution. He strongly disagreed with the statements "Family responsibilities forced me to leave the university", "My family were not supportive of my participation in higher education" and "there was a death or illness in my family forcing me to return home".

Other

For Doug, graduating from university was extremely important so it was good that attending the institution was "a positive experience" for him. The reason that he left the institution was that the university "was not able to give him the same opportunities post-graduation" and therefore transferred to another Canadian university. The university that he is attending now offers a degree program that is currently not offered at the institution of study. Additionally, the university he is now attending has one of the "largest Cooperative Education programs in the world and the career opportunities are greater".

Doug indicated on the questionnaire that the institutional climate encourages

contact among students from different economic, social and racial and ethnic

backgrounds. He also confirmed this in his interview when he said that he had the

opportunity to interact with students from different backgrounds and have a firsthand

look at what their culture is about.

Overall, Doug was happy with the institution, agreeing with the statements like

"the quality of education was what I expected", "I felt satisfied with the overall university

in general", "I was impressed with the universities facilities" and the "size of the campus

was good". Doug also agreed with the statement on the questionnaire "the faculty /

student ratio was good" and further elaborated during the interview that it "is a small

university and is really good".

One negative thing that emerged from Doug's interview was related to the

customer service on campus. He found that even though it was a small campus the

administrative functions were run more like a large university. He explained that:

> with a smaller university you expect it to be friendlier in the
> offices. And I found at times that with Student Accounts and
> the Registrar's Office that they were really not that open and
> it was really hard to get information from them.

Reason for Leaving

Doug indicated that the reason that he left the institution was due to acceptance

into a university that had a stronger cooperative education program in his field.

4.3.5 *Profile of Nancy*

Nancy is a 20 year old, single, white female with Canadian citizenship. From a small rural area, she came to the university directly from high school and enrolled as a full-time student in a Bachelor of Arts program with a focus in French. She indicated that she was a 71-80 percent average student and therefore did not receive a scholarship or other financial award from the university but did obtain a student loan to help finance her education. She also reported that she did not have a part-time job while attending university. Nancy decided to live on campus because of convenience.

When responding to the questionnaire, Nancy indicated that the highest level of education completed by her parents was at the Community College level. With long term educational goals of being a teacher, Nancy knew that she had to go to university in order to pursue her dream. She mentioned that "it was a last minute decision to attend the institution" but chose it because the institution offered a Bachelor of Education program.

Social Integration

Making friends can be difficult for some students but Nancy felt very strongly that she had the opportunity to develop close personal relationships with other students and further explained in the interview that she "didn't have difficulty meeting new friends". She lived in an all female residence; it provided her with a vehicle to meet many new friends easily. She also indicated on the survey questionnaire that the relationships she developed with other students had a positive influence on her personal growth, attitudes, values and interests.

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Indicating that "the campus environment provided the support that I needed to survive socially", Nancy participated in a number of campus events and activities including house events, homecoming events and social events put on by the Students' Union. When asked about how she thought that the institution could communicate with their students about out of classroom events, she answered "they emailed the students about all the events all the time. This was a good method in getting the information out".

Academic Integration

Having success in meeting the academic demands of her classes, Nancy had a good academic experience while at the university. She agreed that her professors encourage students to participate in class discussions and were not unreasonable in their academic demands of their students. Additionally, many of her professors helped students in their classes to "learn how to study and to do essays and stuff like that". Academic advising is an important part of the student experience. When asked about the helpfulness of her academic advisor, she indicated that she neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement "my academic advisor helped with my academic career path (including course and program advising)".

Coming directly from high school to university, the transition can sometimes be a difficult one. Nancy indicated that although she did well academically at university, the structure of the classroom was very different than in high school. She further elaborated during the interview that "there was a lot more work" and not a lot of interaction between the professor and the students. And although she indicated that the faculty / student ratio was good, compared to high school, there were many more students in the classes.

Faculty members have a vested interest in a student's academic progress. Nancy indicated on the questionnaire that one or more of her professors took an interest in her academic progress. Furthermore, Nancy explained that she had the opportunity to participate in informal activities outside of the classroom with her professors and it was something that "she found interesting".

Residential Living

Thinking that it would be easier to live in residence instead of off campus, Nancy registered in a female residence. She strongly agreed with the question on the survey "I was satisfied with the living conditions in the residence hall" and agreed that she "felt the housing costs (both residence room and dining plan) were affordable". The residence environment was also one that Nancy felt was welcoming to all kinds of diversity including race, gender and sexual orientation.

Having a positive residence experience, Nancy participated in a variety of residence hall activities and also events that allowed her to contribute to the campus community. She added during the interview that the residence halls had an activity almost every week and her residence section had activities as well. Getting the word out about on campus events can sometimes be difficult but Nancy indicated that the Resident Advisors (RAs) encouraged participation in these events and spread the word about the events through the house meetings that they had every week. Although a number of students participated in the events, there were still a number of students who didn't participate. When asked if there was a better way to get students to participate in the events, she explained that "a lot of people participated but there were some people from

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different countries or whatever that didn't participate in those events" but she wasn't sure how to encourage the students to participate.

Feeling confident in the residence staff, Nancy felt that they were knowledgeable about where to direct her to get help if she needed it. She also strongly agreed that the RAs would be able to help her with a non-academic problem should one have arose.

Financial Support

The cost of attending postsecondary education is an expensive one. Not having to work to finance her studies, Nancy neither agreed nor disagreed with the statements around employment. She also remained neutral on the survey question about not having sufficient funds available to finance her education. She did confirm that work responsibilities were not the reason why she left the institution after only one year.

Nancy indicated that she agreed with the statement on the questionnaire "the costs to attend the institution were considerably higher than I had anticipated". She further confirmed this in the interview portion of the research. She further indicated that she was provided information on the costs of her education but it was only at the end of August as she applied late in the summer.

Family Commitments

Nancy indicated from the questionnaire that family commitments did not influence her decision to leave the institution. On the questionnaire, she strongly disagreed with the statements: "Family responsibilities forced me to leave the university", "My family were not supportive of my participation in higher education" and "there was a death or illness in my family forcing me to return home".

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Other

Overall, Nancy's university experience was a good one. She strongly agreed with the questionnaire statements "the quality of education was what I had expected" and "I felt satisfied with the overall university in general". She was also impressed with the university facilities and the size of the campus.

The institutional climate of the campus was one that allowed her the opportunity to talk to students with other religious beliefs, political opinions and values and encouraged contact among students with different backgrounds. Professors encouraged interaction and Nancy was impressed with the faculty / student ratio. Feeling like a part of the campus community, Nancy indicated that she participated in such campus events like Homecoming, varsity athletic events and events that occurred in the Town as well. When asked about her reasons for leaving the institution after only one year, Nancy agreed that she decided to attend another postsecondary institution, one that was less than ten minutes away from her hometown. Enrolled in a five-year, Bachelor of Arts / Education degree, the cost to attend that institution was almost one-half of what she would have paid to attend the institution of study. Additionally, with the combined Bachelor of Arts / Education program, she would save herself an additional year of study.

Reason for Leaving

The main reason that Nancy left the institution was to enrol in a program that was not currently offered by the institution. This was also more financially viable for her as it saved her an additional year of study.

4.3.6 Profile of April

April is a 20 year old, single, white Canadian female from a rural area with a population of less than 1000 people. April specified on the questionnaire that the highest level of education completed by her mother was an accounting program at Community College and by her father, a Master of Science degree with no specified major. She indicated from the interview that she decided to go to university to "further her knowledge of things that she liked and that she chose the university because "it was close to home", the university was "really small" and she "knew the area quite well". Additionally, her twin sister was also attending the university at the same time. Even though she lived close to the campus, she opted to stay in on-campus housing in one of the female residences.

Graduating from high school in 2006 with a reported 81-90 percent average, April was offered and accepted a scholarship offer from the institution to help assist with the costs of her university experience. She indicated from the survey questionnaire that she worked at a part-time job of approximately five hours per week off campus to help offset these costs as well.

Enrolled as a full-time student, April originally entered the university in a Bachelor of Arts program majoring in French. Like many students after their first year of study, she opted to switch to the Bachelor of Science program majoring in Biology in early April but did not return to the institution the following academic year.

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Social Integration

When responding to the questionnaire, April strongly agreed with the statements "I had the opportunity to develop close personal relationships with other students" and "My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth attitudes and values". During the interview, April was asked about her transition from high school to university and whether or not she had difficulty in meeting new friends. On the questionnaire, she was neutral in her response to the question "It was difficult for me to meet and make new friends with other students" but during the interview indicated that it was "fairly easy for her because she had a lot of friends going" and "knew the area".

During the interview, April confirmed her responses on the questionnaire that she did not get involved in campus activities on campus. She indicated that she did participate in some intramural sport activities but wasn't "particularly involved". When asked about why she didn't get involved in the campus life during her year, she replied "At that point, I didn't really want to be involved" but indicated that looking back she "would have loved to" have been involved in different activities on campus. For many students, it is sometimes difficult to hear of these events that occur on campus. When asked if she was aware of the events going on, she indicated that "I don't think that there was necessarily a lack of information but I had a few personal problems that prevented me from participating". She also noted that the "music and theatre ones were very well advertised".

Academic Integration

April had reported on the questionnaire that she was an honours student and was offered a room scholarship at the institution. April had a very positive academic experience at the institution and felt that the transition from high school to university was not too much of a transition. April strongly agreed that she "had success meeting the academic demands of her classes" and that "professors were not unreasonable in their demand of students". She credits this to the difficult courses that she took in high school. Although she had taken science courses in high school and done well, she opted to pursue a degree in Arts as she was "afraid of the math".

Agreeing with such statements like "one or more of my professors took an interest in my academic progress" and "my professors were reasonably accessible outside of class for help", April had at least one professor who helped make her feel like part of the campus community. When asked about if there was anything in your classes that helped prepare you to succeed academically, she replied that she "…always found that they (professors) were easy to access" for additional help and support. When asked about her academic advisor, she strongly disagreed with the statement "my academic advisor helped with my academic career path (including course and program advising) and wrote "didn't know that I had one".

In the classroom, April felt that the professors encouraged students to participate in classroom discussions. Although she disagreed that she "had the opportunity to work with faculty on activities other than course work", she indicated that she was satisfied with the opportunities to interact with her professors and participate in informal academic

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activities outside of the classroom "especially in the French department". She credited

this to the small class sizes in that department. She also strongly agreed that the

"faculty/student ratio was good".

Residential Living

Living in a single room in a female dormitory, April opted to stay in residence

during her year at university even though she lived close to the university because the

university had offered her a "room scholarship" to live on campus.

Her overall residence experience was a very positive one. She strongly agreed

with the statements on the questionnaire like "I was satisfied with the living conditions in

the residence hall" and "the housing costs (both residence room and dining plan) were

affordable". The atmosphere of the residence can also have considerable impact on a

student's learning experience. Strongly agreeing with the statement on the questionnaire

about the residence atmosphere, she noted that it was "welcoming to all kinds of diversity

(ability, race, gender, sexual orientation etc...)". She also felt that it was an environment

that she could ask her peers for help with academic problems that she may have

encountered.

Residential staff also has considerable impact on the type of experience that a

student has in residence. April strongly agreed that her Resident Advisors (RA) were

available if needed for help with non academic issues and were knowledgeable about

where to direct students to get help if needed. An integral part of the residential

experience is the residential programming that occurs. RAs are required as part of their

employment to provide programming activities for their residents. April agreed that the

RAs encouraged participation in social activities and events that allowed her to contribute to the campus community. She suggested that she participated in some activities such as intramural sports and Coffee Haus'. When asked about how she found out about these activities, she answered that "the RA in her section" and it was more through word of mouth. She also indicated that "there wasn't a whole lot of posters and stuff up" about the events.

Financial Support

Like many students, April agreed that she did not have sufficient funds available to finance her education. April indicated that she did work at a part-time job during her university year, working approximately five hours per week but financial issues were not the reason why she opted to leave the university after only one year.

April agreed with the questionnaire statement that "the costs to attend the institution were considerably higher than I had anticipated". She further elaborated on this during the interview by saying the costs "were higher" than she had anticipated "but I think that they always are". April further elaborated on where she received the information about the costs prior to coming to school. "As I recalled it, they had a prospective student website and I think that they had a rough breakdown of what it was".

Family Commitments

April responded to the questions surrounding family commitments and the influences that they had on her decision to leave university with strong conviction. She indicated that she strongly disagreed with all the statements including "Family responsibilities forced me to leave the university", "My family were not supportive of my

participation in higher education" and "There was a death or illness in my family forcing me to return home".

Other

When asked about her overall university experience, April felt satisfied with the overall university in general and the quality of education was what she had expected. In terms of academics, April positively replied "the professors were excellent" and she felt like part of the campus community. She further elaborated that "she didn't have a big problem with the institution...but was looking for more of an adventure because she was from around here".

The institutional climate of a university can enhance the student learning experience. April strongly agreed that "there was an institutional climate that encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial and ethnic backgrounds" and that she "had the opportunity to talk to other students with different religious beliefs, political opinions and values".

The one thing that April commented on was the helpfulness of the residence staff citing that "she didn't find the residence people particularly helpful" but indicated that it may have been the residence that she was living in which was "way across the campus".

Graduating from university was very important to April. She reported from the questionnaire that she strongly agreed that "health reasons contributed to me leaving the university". April indicated that she decided to pursue another career and opted to attend another postsecondary institution. Although she originally was from a rural area, April

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explained that she "liked the city life" and transferred to an urban university that had a "well known Science program".

Reason for Leaving

The main reason that April left the institution was to pursue a different degree and live in a more urban area.

4.4   Summary

This chapter outlined the profiles of six students, Dan, Nancy, Doug, Angela, Jennifer, and April. Each of these profiles highlighted the students experience at university in an attempt to understand why they left the institution after only one year of study. Each profile examined issues that were related to student persistence at the institution through different contexts: questionnaires and individual interviews. The analysis and interpretation of all the responses will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE – FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an interpretation of the self-reported reasons of six individuals and the discrepancies and similarities between the identified variables: social integration, academic integration, residential living, family commitment, finances and the overall university experience.

5.1   Summary of the Findings

A significant reason for completing this study is the considerable pressure that universities are facing with respect to enrolment. It is hoped that the institution may address issues that affect student persistence before student's leave the institution prior to the completion of a degree. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to determine the reasons for student attrition. Each student participating in the study had a different university experience. Each individual student had specific reasons for leaving the institution after only one year of study.

Social integration into an institution is an important part of the student experience and is often the primary cause of voluntarily withdrawal (Tinto, 1993). While most students thrived socially, others found it difficult to meet new friends. Taking part in extracurricular events such as sporting events, nightlife, concerts, homecoming and intramurals all provided students with a venue to interact with their friends and feel like they were part of the campus community. Those students who participated in the extracurricular activities found that it was an important part of their university

experience. This was consistent with Tinto's (1993) work on students fitting in to the educational climate and becoming part of the academic community.

Academic expectations and experiences also varied for each student. Some students did not find the transition from high school to university a difficult one while others found the style of teaching much different. While most students indicated that they met the academic demands of the classroom, a few students found that the academic rigor was difficult in part due to the lack of their determination to succeed academically. All but one of the students highlighted that they were extremely pleased with the faculty at the institution and would really like to have more opportunities to interact with them outside of the classroom.

Fostering the career development of incoming freshman increases student satisfaction (Feldman, 2005). Several students, consistent with Tinto's (1987) finding that the lack of clear academic focus and career goals contributes to persistence, indicated that they did not have a clear career goal and realized that their desired career path did not require a university degree.

Parental educational attainment varied for each student but the majority of parents had received a college degree or less. It is apparent that this factor may have had an effect on the students' success in the program due to possible encouragements to complete the program. It was interesting to note that the parents of only one individual who transferred but persisted in another institution had both completed a university degree. One could assume that students may have felt more compelled to complete the

program if their parents had received a similar level of education (Bean & Vesper, 1992; Tinto, 1993).

The individual reasons that students self-reported for leaving the institution are consistent with the literature on student persistence including the inability to socially integrate into the college (Tinto, 1987), prolonged indecision about academic majors and career goals (Astin, 1975), and academic experience including quality of instruction, lack of availability of faculty for consultation and lack of opportunities to interact with faculty outside of the classroom (Noel, 1978).

5.1.1   Summary Outcomes - Dan

Participating on a varsity sport team, Dan was recruited to the institution to attend school and be an active participant in the athletics program. Wanting to eventually pursue employment that he felt required a university degree; it was an obvious decision for him to attend university.

The transition from high school to university wasn't a difficult one. Dan had no trouble integrating socially into the institution. Meeting new friends was easy for Dan as he was a member of a varsity sport team and had the opportunity to meet a number of other varsity athletes.

Academically Dan knew what was expected of him and realized that it was much more demanding than high school. Indicating that he did not meet the demands required of him academically to succeed, he reflected that he would have required more will and determination to do well academically. Unfortunately, Dan did not feel that he had professors that took an academic interest in his progress but did agree that his academic

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advisor (although not a faculty member) did help him with choosing courses and his career path.

After one year of study, Dan felt that his career choice did not require a university degree and decided that he would not continue at university.

5.1.2   *Summary Outcomes - Angela*

During high school Angela took courses that would help her during university because that was the only plan that she had at the time. Coming from a small town, Angela opted to attend a university that was close to her hometown. Being an open person, Angela pointed out that she did not have a great deal of difficulty meeting new friends within her classes. Unfortunately, she did not get to experience campus life by participating in extracurricular activities. By keeping a part-time job and maintaining some of her high school friends not at university, her social activities were focused outside of the university.

Academically, Angela felt that she was relatively prepared for university but did note that the teaching methods between high school and university are quite different but the professors were extremely helpful and always willing to help their students.

Angela had a positive experience during her university year as it gave her a good opportunity to learn more about herself. Even though Angela felt that attending university wasn't a good career choice, she opted to transfer to a college program that would be better suited to what she wanted to do professionally. The cost benefit of attending a college and completing a program in one year was very appealing to Angela.

5.1.3   *Summary Outcomes - Jennifer*

Choosing to attend an institution that had small classes, Jennifer enrolled in the institution after spending a year at a much larger Canadian university. Attending university mainly for work purposes, she decided to pursue a postsecondary education because she felt that she wouldn't be able to get a decent job without a university or college degree.

Jennifer did not have a positive academic experience during her time at the institution. Not sure of what she wanted to do career wise, she switched her program midway through the academic year. Finding the transition from high school to university a difficult one, Jennifer indicated that she was not able to meet the academic demands required of her in her courses. She also mentioned that she did not feel that her professors took an interest in her academic progress.

Finding it difficult to meet new friends, Jennifer indicated that she did not feel like she had an opportunity to develop close personal relationships with other students or participate in a lot of social activities on campus. She also felt that living off campus may have hindered her opportunities to develop a social network and to hear about various on campus events.

Her overall university experience was not a positive one. Deciding to leave the university, Jennifer cited financial costs and lack of direction relative to what she wanted to do professionally as reasons for leaving the institution.

5.1.4   Summary Outcomes - Doug

Doug's enthusiasm about his university experience was very enlightening. Feeling very confident both socially and academically, his transition from high school to university was not a difficult one. Looking for an academic challenge, he was pleased with his academic experience and his interactions with his professors both in and out of the classroom. Being a very socially outgoing individual, he quickly made friends both in and out of the classroom and participated in a number of campus activities.

Living in residence proved to be a valuable experience for Doug and provided him with an opportunity to meet new friends and get involved in campus life.

Doug explained the reasons that he opted to transfer to another university wasn't because of a bad experience, but rather because the other university had a program that this institution didn't offer. The university that Doug transferred to also had a well known Cooperative Education program and long term offered more career opportunities and financial resources to help finance his education.

5.1.5   Summary Outcomes - Nancy

Nancy decided at the last minute to attend the institution, mostly in part because her career aspirations were to be a teacher and the institution offered a Bachelor of Education program.

Living in residence provided Nancy a way to meet new friends outside of her classes. She felt very strongly that she had a support network through the residence staff that would provide her with assistance should she require it. She also participated in a variety of events which helped her integrate into the campus community.

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Nancy did not have a problem adjusting to university life. She indicated that she did not have a problem meeting new friends and credited this to living in an all female residence. She also indicated that she developed a number of close, personal friends which had a positive influence on her personal growth.

Academically, Nancy met the challenge of university life. Meeting the academic demands required by her professors was something that she was easily able to do. She did indicate that she had the opportunity to interact informally on occasion with at least one of her professors in out-of-classroom events and her professors were extremely willing to help students who required extra help.

Nancy left the institution to attend an institution that was cheaper, closer to home and offered a program that she was interested in and could complete more quickly.

5.1.6   Summary Outcomes - April

Deciding to attend an institution close to home, April enrolled in an Arts program although her high school courses were concentrated in Science.

Socially, April indicated that she did not have a problem meeting new friends and had a social network of friends from high school who were also attending the university. Although she didn't get involved in a lot of extracurricular activities, in hindsight, she would have loved the opportunity to participate but personal reasons kept her from doing so.

April indicated that the university met her expectations academically and felt that the professors were excellent. She was able to meet the academic demands of university as she felt that she was well prepared by the difficult courses that she took in high school.

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Offered a room scholarship by the university, April decided to live in residence during the year. She felt that this was a positive experience and did have the opportunity to participate in some residence programming events.

Not unhappy with her university experience but citing personal considerations as the reason why she left, April opted to transfer to another university because she liked the city life and felt that the university had a well known science program.

5.2   *Social Integration*

Milem & Berger (1997) have determined that involvement with peers and the perception of peer support is important in predicting social integration. Several studies (Astin, 1977; Tinto, 1975, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1983) have indicated that the more involved a student is in the institution (social integration) the more likely the student is to persist while others have found that social integration failed to link directly with persistence (Braxton, Duster & Pascarella, 1988). Results from the study found that the majority of students felt that they had the opportunity to develop close relationships and did not find it difficult to make friends. One student did indicate that she felt that she had values, attitudes and beliefs that were different than the other students.

Most of the students were aware of a variety of extracurricular activities that took place on the campus. Almost all of the students participated in at least one event. A couple of students reflected on the fact that they wished that they had become more socially involved and attended various events on campus. Getting the information out about the events can sometimes be difficult. Several emails were sent and not often read by students so one student suggested that "word of mouth" seemed to be the best way to

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encourage students to participate in campus events. Students who lived in residence also heard about events through their RAs, floor and house meetings and from posters.

Students participating in this study did not cite the lack of personal relationships or lack of participation in campus activities as reasons why they left the institution after only one year of study.

5.3   *Academic Integration*

The teaching practices and involvement of faculty play a significant role in student persistence. The informal interactions between faculty and students are very important in assisting with a student's transition to university (West, 2007). Creating activities and opportunities for students to interact with faculty on an informal basis is important to help build relationships. Pascarella (1975) noted that students are more inclined to be honest with faculty as it presents a less threatening situation to develop relationships. Half of the students indicated that they felt that they had opportunities to participate in informal academic activities outside of the classroom while the other half did not. Of the remaining half, those students had indicated that they would have liked to have had the opportunity to participate in these types of events.

A few students indicated they felt that the transition from high school to university was a difficult one. Finding the teaching styles much different, two students indicated that university professors expected more and there was not as much of a connection between the professor and the student as was expected. The majority of the students felt that they were adequately prepared in high school to meet the academic rigor

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of university. Of the six students participating in the survey, only one of the students felt that they were unable to meet the academic demands of their classes.

All of the students indicated that they had at least one professor, or someone on the campus, that made them feel like they were part of the campus community. From helping to find information on where to go for help to having professors offer tutorials, extra help and office hours, students felt that the university environment offered a support network for them.

Two of the students cited academic reasons for their departure from the institution before completing their degree. One student felt that she was not sure of what she wanted to do professionally and therefore decided to take some time off to figure it out before continuing with her studies. The other student indicated that he felt that university was not the route that he wanted to take because his career aspirations had changed and he felt that university was not required to meet these goals.

5.4 Residential Living

Of the students that decided to live on campus during the year, all felt that their residence experience was a positive one. There was a variety of reasons why students decided to live on campus. One student indicated that it was a way for her to meet new friends; one thought that it would be just easier to live there and the other received a room scholarship.

All of the students who lived in residence participated in at least one residence event during the year. Intramural sports, concerts, Coffee Haus' and varsity athletic events were all promoted as extracurricular activities in the residence halls. These events

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were promoted through the Resident Advisors (RAs) knocking on individual's doors, telling of the events through floor and house meetings, by posters in the residence and other residents. Students felt that these were good ways to communicate the events to the students but felt that some RAs did a better job than others in promoting their event.

All of the students felt that the residence environment was welcoming to all kinds of diversity.

5.5   *Financial Support*

Students face mounting financial pressures to fund their postsecondary education. As anxiety rises about escalating tuition costs and loan amounts (Boehner & McKeon, 2003; College Board, 2003 as cited in Dundes & Mark, 2006, p.107), students may often have to either find part-time employment to offset these costs or even dropout before completing their degree. The students participating in the study did not mention lack of available employment opportunities or the lack of financial resources sufficient to fund their education as the reasons for leaving the institution after one year of study.

The costs of postsecondary education have grown substantially over the last few decades. All but one of the students participating in the research indicated that the costs to attend the institution were considerably higher than they had anticipated. Students also indicated that although the fee schedule was on the website, it was difficult to find and finding out what the total costs would be was that much more difficult.

Fortunately for the six students who participated in the study, finances were not cited as the reason for their early departure from the institution.

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5.6   *Family Commitments*

In their 2005 study, Sand, Robinson Kurpius & Dixon found that support from both family and friends seem to be a connection between academic stress levels and their transition into college All of the students who participated in the survey questionnaire and completed a one-on-one interview strongly disagreed that family commitments and obligations were in fact the reason that they left the university after their first year of study.

5.7   *Overall Experiences*

The effects of institutional type and size have also been examined (Mallette & Cabrera, 1991). All of the students except for one indicated that they were generally satisfied with the overall university, were impressed with the university's facilities and stated that the size of the campus was good.

All of the students indicated that the quality of education of the institution was what they had expected. Most of the students enjoyed their experience, even though they had different reasons for not returning to school the following year. One student indicated that he left the institution because they did not offer a specific program and transferred to an institution that did. Another student indicated that she had a very good experience at the institution but left for personal reasons. She further indicated that she was looking for more of an adventure and likely had she got involved in the campus life, she would have likely enjoyed her time more.

Looking at costs and academic programs were reasons that another student cited for leaving the institution. Being able to attend an institution that was close to her home

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for half of the price was very appealing to her. Two students indicated that they enjoyed their university experience but realized that university was not for them and they changed their educational pursuits to meet their new career goals. The final student indicated that she needed a break from school to step back and rethink her educational goals.

5.8   Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations in conducting this study on student persistence. Because of the small sample size participating in the study, the results of this study may not be representative of the other students who left the institution during the same period but did not participate in the study. The study also utilized a single-institution sample, and does not allow for the researcher to make generalizations to all other universities across the country.

Although it is difficult to generalize to a broader population, the results from this research will advance knowledge in the area of student persistence and hopefully address the needs of the students attending that institution.

Due to the nature of student persistence, data collection was extremely difficult. Students who leave the institution often feel disengaged from the institution and are less likely to participate in studies for the institution. Those students who participated in this study were generally pleased with the institution and most were able to make alternate academic plans at institutions which were a better fit for them. The collection of data is also another limitation of the study. Because a student has left the institution, the probability of having accurate and updated contact information is relatively low and therefore the responses were not as high as the researcher would have liked.

Ideally, developing a more in-depth understanding of the needs of the students could be achieved by completing interviews with students immediately following their decision to leave the institution.

5.9   Recommendations

Studies that examine student persistence have indicated that there are a number of variables that influence a student's decision to remain in school. The development of successful retention strategies need to address these complex variables. Below are a number of recommendations to help the institution develop a solid retention strategy and help improve the student experience.

1.1   Development of a Faculty / Staff – Student Mentoring Program

Mentoring programs can be developed to have a positive impact on the student and help assist with the transition of students from high school to university. There has been an increase in the number of institutions that offer mentoring programs (Haring, 1997). These programs are seen by some as a tool for promoting student retention (Walker & Taub, 2001).

A mentoring relationship involves the mentor acting as a guide and developing a trusting relationship with their mentee (Brown & Hanson, 2003). The actual role of the faculty and staff mentor would be to provide support to a student during a difficult transition period, especially beginning with the first year of study. This individual will also act as a resource and answer many questions related to support services available and key contacts on the campus. It is recommended that every member of the institution

participate in this process and be assigned a number of student mentees at the beginning of the academic year. Contact will be made with the students upon arrival and subsequent contact will be made throughout the year. It is the belief that students will feel that they have a contact to go to, especially if they feel that they don't know where to turn or where to find specific information.

1.2   Development of Peer Mentoring Program

Peer mentoring programs can also be a useful vehicle to assist in an organization's retention efforts. Students can be paired with other students upon their arrival to the institution to in essence, "show them the ropes". This is beneficial as sometimes many students new to the campus may be unsure of where to go for help and are uncomfortable speaking to faculty or staff. This also helps the new student build a social support network early on in their university career.

2.   Enhance Current Orientation Programs

Marking the beginning of a new educational experience, orientation can be the defining moment in the transition to college for the student and can influence a student's academic success and personal growth (Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2005). Mullendore & Banahan (2005) sum up orientation "as the need for students to know academic requirements, course offerings, registration procedures [and] to assist students in their adjustment to and involvement with the college" (p. 393). According to a survey conducted by the National Resource Center for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (2005), over 62.5 percent of schools indicate they offer orientation programs (Shupp, 2005).

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The university currently has a New Student Orientation program which helps to prepare students both socially and academically during the first week of school. It is recommended that the programs implement ways to inform students of all the services available to them on campus, provide additional social networking opportunities, more courses on how to succeed academically and also provide them with opportunities to see what types of student organizations, clubs and groups they can get involved in by showcasing these as part of the orientation activities.

3. *First-year experience programs*

Recent studies have shown that participation in a first year experience course had positive impact on the student experience (Schmitt & Graham, 2000). Research indicates that more than 70 percent of institutions offer some type of first-year experience program (Skipper, 2002). Varying by institution, first-year experience programs can be very basic introducing students to university life or more extensive through the development of learning communities.

Extending the student orientation process, the development of a basic first-year seminar offered to freshman called University 101 would offer sessions to provide students with opportunities to meet new friends and develop lasting friendships, develop academic and personal skills and introduce students to the support services and programs that are available on the campus.

The support of building learning communities to promote collaborative learning and assist with a student's integration into the campus community is evidenced in the research (Tinto, 1996; Ebert, 1999). "Learning communities, in their most basic form,

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begin with a kind of co-registration or block scheduling that enables students to take courses together, rather than apart" (Tinto, 1999, p.5). In the future, the organization will benefit from the development of residential learning communities. Basing various residence floors on disciplinary themes such as those enrolled in the same academic program or even those interested in various areas such as leadership development, students will live in small groups of students who have the same interests as themselves.

Ultimately, the main goal of any first-year experience program is to help transition the student into the university, increase student performance and impact student persistence by integrating students both academically and socially into the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

4. *Academic Advising*

Although most students will have some sort of contact with their professors, the development of the relationship between an academic advisor and student will have considerable impact on student success. Advising and persistence are terms that are often linked together and academic advising has been referred to as the "cornerstone of student retention" (Crockett, 1978).

The role of an academic advisor is an important one, especially for first-year students new to an academic environment. Academic advising has been strongly linked to student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2006).

Students are assigned a faculty member to help assist with course choices and career decisions. Although all institutions have some sort of academic advising, only 54 percent of postsecondary institutions have a written statement outlining the procedures

surrounding academic advising (Crockett, Habley, & Cowart, 1987). To expand on the advising that is already being done at the institution, it is recommended that the university develop support systems that help with the coordination, promotion and implementation of academic advising program. Only about one-half of the collective bargaining agreements for faculty make mention of advising as a faculty responsibility (Teague & Grites, 1980) and is typically given only minor consideration in faculty tenure and promotion considerations (Hubley, 1998). Although this component is listed as part of the evaluation process, it would be beneficial for the institution to recognize and give credit to those individuals who are doing superior academic advising.

5. *Career Counselling*

The literature on student persistence indicates that a student's commitment to their educational and career goals is perhaps ones of the strongest variables that are related to a student's degree attainment (Tinto, 1996; Wyckoff, 1999). Students who commence university with a clear degree goal / major in mind are more likely to persist with their studies as evidenced by a York University study where by many students who left the institution after only one year of study never intended to complete a degree (Grayson, 1996). Linking the academic advising programs to have a clear connection with Career Services would allow students to choose their academic courses to connect with their long term career goals. Since Career Services provides students with information on career development, resume writing workshops and networking opportunities, linking with the academic advisors would allow for students to start thinking about preparing for their career in the first year of their studies. Therefore, the

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institution should look at developing a strategy that would allow for academic advisors to be linked with the Career Services department to continue to build on an advising program that would ensure that students are linking their academic experiences to their career objectives.

6. *Redesign of the Exit Survey*

Understanding the reasons for a student's departure from an institution prior to degree completion is very important to an institution. This is very important as it will better inform the practices of the recommendations outlined above. The reasons that students drop out of the institution vary and are dependent upon their experiences of processes, policies and procedures (Williams, Hricko, & Howell, 2006). Exit surveys have been designed to collect data on issues related to student attrition (Kielty, 2004). Learning about the experiences of students who have left the institution is essential in providing the institution with both diagnostic and strategic information.

A review of the current exit survey process should be undertaken at the institution and a framework of how the exit survey is completed should be developed. Following up with students who did not return the following academic year by sending them an electronic survey similar to the one used in this study should be completed around the end of September each year. Data should be examined and the dissemination of the information to the appropriate people should occur to ensure that programs and services that are being offered can benefit from this feedback.

5.10 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study confirm other studies on student persistence which suggest that academic and social integration, residential living and clear career / educational goals are closely related to student dropout. Thus, opportunities exist within the university structure to look at the programs and services that are being offered to ensure that they are being developed with these issues taken into consideration.

Draper (2003) indicates that an important limitation of applied research in the area of student persistence has been the absence of a standardized questionnaire. Because of the lack of a consistent tool for measuring the variables that are associated with student dropout, researchers often use customized surveys which make it difficult to validate empirical research (Williams, Hricko, & Howell, 2005). Further research into the area of student persistence can help build a validated survey questionnaire that accurately examines student persistence and would enable the researchers to move beyond the "what" question to the "why" question (Williams, Hricko, & Howell, 2005, p. 31).

The use of a mixed methods research design was extremely beneficial as it allowed for issues that affected student persistence to be identified and then the opportunity to gain more in-depth information on what factors were associated with their decision to withdrawal from the institution. Further research in the area of student persistence should look to this method of research design as it allows for a richer data set to be obtained.

5.11 Conclusions

Academic success and student persistence should be the concern of all members of the campus community (Evenbeck & Hamilton, 2006). As the institution moves forward, the development of a student persistence plan will enable a systematic review of programs and services offered and how to improve those services to enhance the student experience. Students who successfully integrate into the institution tend to persist (Bean, 1980). The reasons that students leave an institution prior to graduation are complex and vary dependent on the student (Peltier, Laden & Matranga, 2000). Interestingly, students who leave the institution prior to completion often have more than one reason for leaving and compound one another (Hermanowicz, 2006).

At this small, liberal education institution in Canada, the reasons that the six participants of the study reported were similar to those reasons outlined in the research completed on student persistence. From the information that was presented in the study, it is evident that there are several factors that are associated with student persistence. Similar to past research, the findings of this study indicated that lack of social and academic integration (Tinto, 1987, 1993), lack of connection to peers and faculty (Astin, 1977, 1993), issues with residential living (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and lack of educational (Bean, 1990) and career (Feldman, 2005) goals were all found to be issues that students reported influenced their decision to leave the institution after only one year of study. These self reported reasons for leaving are consistent with other research conducted in Canada on student persistence. Of all of the participants in the study, the lack of career goals or direction was the most cited reason for leaving the institution.

One of the realities that institutions face with respect to student persistence is that students often opt for different educational opportunities rather than completely dropping out of the postsecondary education system. Students in this study had not departed from the system but rather made new educational choices. The need for studies like this to inform service delivery is high. Although obtaining a large sample size was difficult and resulted in a limitation for the study, the results can be extremely useful to the institution to inform the planning and delivery of programs and services. More research needs to be conducted by institutions across the county.

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Appendix A – ICEHR Approval

MEMORIAL
UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

Office of Research
St. John's, NF Canada A1C 5S7
Tel. 709 737 8368 Fax 709 737 8627
www.mun.ca

December 7, 2007

ICEHR No. 2007/08-039-ED

Ms. Sonia Richards
Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Ms. Richards:

Thank you for your submission to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) entitled *"Undergraduate student retention in a post-secondary institution in Canada"*. The ICEHR is appreciative of the efforts of researchers in attending to ethics in research

The Committee has reviewed the proposal and we agree that the proposed project is consistent with the guidelines of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS). Full approval is granted for one year from the date of this letter

Although approval has been grant, we recommend that the ICEHR contact information on the consent form given to participants be amended to read "Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR), Memorial University of Newfoundland, Office of Research, St John's, NL A1C 5S7 Phone: (709) 737-8368. Email: ebutler@mun.ca."

If you intend to make changes during the course of the project which may give rise to ethical concerns, please forward a description of these changes to the ICEHR Co-ordinator, Mrs Eleanor Butler, at ebutler@mun.ca for the Committee's consideration.

The TCPS requires that you submit an annual status report on your project to ICEHR, should the research carry on beyond December 2008. Also, to comply with the TCPS, please notify us upon completion of your project.

We wish you success with your research

Yours sincerely,

Lawrence F. Felt, Ph.D.
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research

LF/bl

copy: Supervisor – Prof. Robert Shea, Faculty of Education

Appendix B – RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD APPROVAL

December 6, 2007

Ms. Sonia Richards

Re: "Undergraduate Student Retention in a Postsecondary Institution in Canada" (REB 07-39, as revised November 16, 2007)

Dear Ms. Richards,

At its meeting of December 4, 2007, the Research Ethics Board granted ethics approval to the above-referenced research proposal submitted by you in connection with your Master of Education thesis at Memorial University. In the judgment of Dr. David Duke, a Representative of Faculty on the Board, the proposed research poses no more than minimal risk of harm to research subjects. Accordingly, the application received an expedited approval by Dr. Duke and subsequent ratification by the entire Board, as provided for in Article 1.6 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) governing research on human subjects.

This approval is for a term of one year. If the project will not conclude before December 6, 2008, please contact me at that time regarding an extension of this term of approval. Please inform me of any significant changes to the research before they are implemented. Please also note this additional requirement: In accordance with Article 1.13(c) of the TCPS, the Board must be promptly notified when the project concludes; an email notification sent to me will suffice.

The Board extends its best wishes for a successful project.

Sincerely,

Stephen Maitzen, Ph.D.
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Appendix C– Introductory Letter to the Questionnaire

Hello,

My name is Sonia Richards and I am a graduate student enrolled in the Master of Education (Postsecondary Studies) Program at Memorial University of Newfoundland. As a future student affairs professional, I am interested in learning more about why students decide to leave "University X" after one year of study in hopes to develop recommendations that might make the experience better for students. To assist in my research of student retention, I would appreciate if you could complete the attached questionnaire.

Individual responses will be kept confidential and no individual results will be reported.

Completed questionnaires can be mailed to back to me using the enclosed self-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Please note that the return envelope has been numbered so that follow-up letters may be sent to if you necessary.

The study has been approved by Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) Committee. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact my thesis supervisor, Rob Shea, at (709) 737-6928 or via email at rshea@mun.ca.

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and cooperation in completing this questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Sonia Richards

SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Undergraduate Student Retention in a Postsecondary Education Institution in Canada

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Sonia Richards, a graduate student in the Master of Education program at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Participation in this research study is completely confidential and in no way will your information be released with identifying information.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Professor Rob Shea by phone at (709) 737-6926 or by email at rshea@mun.ca.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to help identify reasons why students who enrolled at a small postsecondary institution in Canada in the fall of 2006 did not return in the fall of 2007.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Participants for this research study were selected on the basis of those students who were enrolled at a small postsecondary institution in Canada during the fall of 2006 but did not return in the fall of 2007.

The research study will commence in the fall of 2007. There is a minimal time requirement on the part of the participant. Participants will be mailed an invitation to participate in the study, an informed consent form, and a copy of the questionnaire. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

The research findings from the study will be available to the participants if requested. Participants interested in the details should contact the researcher at (902) 585-1714 or by email at sonia.richards@xxxxxu.ca.

POTENTIAL HARMS

There are no known or anticipated harms associated with this proposed research study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The potential benefits associated with this study are helpful both for the institution and the participant to have a greater insight as to the reasons why students left the institution after one year of study.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no remuneration for participation in this research study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any identifying information that is obtained in connection with this study.

Confidentiality will be respected. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without first having your consent.

but

If we find any information that we are required to disclose by law we cannot guarantee confidentiality.

PUBLICATION

The data and results will be published as part of the Master of Education (Post Secondary Studies) thesis and will be located at the library at Memorial University. The participant's identity will not be revealed in any publication.

COMMERICALIZATION AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There will be no potential profit made from this research study. The researcher does not have a conflict of interest that needs to be addressed.

CONSENT

As outlined above, there are no potential harms, benefits or remuneration for participation in this study. By signing this consent form, the participant has read and understood all the relevant information pertinent to the study. Participants will also have the opportunity to contact the researcher or supervisor to ask any questions that they may have about the study. By signing this consent form, the participant has indicated their free consent to participation in this study.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Should you choose to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the institution of study and Memorial University's Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

ICEHR
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Inco Innovation Centre
Second Floor, Room IIC 2015
230 Elizabeth Avenue
St. John's, Newfoundland A1C 5S7

Phone: (709) 737-8251

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I have read the information provided for the study "*Undergraduate Student Retention in a Postsecondary Education Institution in Canada*" as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Name of Participant (please print)

_____
Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

_____   _____
Signature of Participant or Legal Representative   Date

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS

_____
Name of Witness (please print)

_____   _____
Signature of Witness   Date

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Appendix E – Follow-up Email to Questionnaire

Hello,

I wanted to follow up message to you regarding the Student Persistence Survey that was mailed to you. Unfortunately I have not yet received your completed questionnaire. Your opinion is very important to me as it will assist in identifying ways that we can help make the university experience better for first year students.

If you have not already done so, please take a few minutes and fill out the enclosed questionnaire. Please disregard this notice if you have already mailed the questionnaire back to me.

Don't forget, you can mail the questionnaire back to me using the self-addressed, postage paid envelope.

Thanks again for your time and cooperation. Your assistance with my research is much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Sonia Richards
MEd Graduate Student
Memorial University

Student Persistence Study

My name is Sonia Richards and I am a graduate student enrolled in the Master of Education (Postsecondary Studies) Program at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am interested in learning more about why students decide to leave university after one year of study. I hope to develop recommendations that might make the university experience better for students. To assist in my research of student retention, I would appreciate if you could complete the attached questionnaire. The questionnaire should take about 20 minutes to complete.

I realize that there are a variety of factors that may have impacted your decision to leave. This survey was designed to gain insight as to some of the reasons why you did not return to school after one year of study.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. **All of your responses will be kept confidential**. Except for the researcher, no one will see your finished survey so please be honest.

Please tell me a little bit about yourself:

1.   Citizenship
O   Canadian
O   American
O   International

2.   Gender
O   Male
O   Female

3.   Race / Ethnicity
O   Aboriginal
O   Asian
O   Black
O   Hispanic
O   White
O   Other (please specify)

_____

4.   Month and year of your Birth

Month [   ]   Year [   ]

5. *Program of Study*
In what degree program were you registered? (For example B.A., BSc., BBA)

_____

What was your major, intended major, or subject of concentration?

_____

6. *Year of Study*
In what year of study where you in? (For example 1st year, 2nd year)

_____

7. *Marital Status*
O   Single
O   Married
O   Married with Children
O   Other

8. *Student Status*
O   Full-time
O   Part-time

9. *If known, what is (or was) the highest level of education completed by your parents?*

Mother: _____

Father: _____

10. *Do you live in an urban area (population of more than 1000 people) or a rural area (population less than 1000 people)?*
O   Urban
O   Rural

11. *Where did you live while attending "University X"?*
O   With parents / guardians / relatives
O   In on-campus housing (residence hall)
O   In rented home / apartment
O   In personally owned home

12. ***Which best describes your average marks that you received in high school?***

O   50 – 60 %
O   61 – 70 %
O   71 – 80 %
O   81 – 90%

13. ***In what year did you graduate from high school or CEGEP?***

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┌─────────────────────
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14. ***Did you begin your university career at "University X" or transfer from another school?***

O   Started here
O   Started elsewhere

15. ***Were you receiving a student loan or other government student assistance while attending "University X"?***

O   Yes
O   No

16. ***When you started "University X", did you receive a scholarship or other financial award from the university?***

O   Yes
O   No

17. ***Did you work while attending "University X"?***

O   Yes
O   No

If yes, please indicate the average number of hours you worked per week:

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18. ***Was your part-time job on campus?***

O   Yes
O   No

19. Your university experience.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Social Interactions					
I had the opportunity to develop close personal relationships with other students.	O	O	O	O	O
It was difficult for me to meet and make new friends with other students.	O	O	O	O	O
My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values.	O	O	O	O	O
My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.	O	O	O	O	O
Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had a personal problem.	O	O	O	O	O
Most students at this university have values and attitudes that were different than my own.	O	O	O	O	O
I had the opportunity to get involved in campus activities on campus (i.e. Athletic events, Residence programming, Nightlife etc..)	O	O	O	O	O
The campus environment provided the support that I needed to thrive socially	O	O	O	O	O
I had the opportunity to participate on a varsity or intramural team while attending *"University X"*.	O	O	O	O	O
I was encouraged to participate in club or internal organization through the ASU while attending *"University X"*.	O	O	O	O	O
Academic Interactions					
One or more of my professors took interest in my academic progress.	O	O	O	O	O
I had the opportunity to discuss ideas from my readings or classes with faculty members outside of the classroom.	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have had success meeting the academic demands of my classes	O	O	O	O	O
The lack of unavailable courses / course selection was the reason for my leaving the university.	O	O	O	O	O
My professors encouraged students to participate in class discussions.	O	O	O	O	O
I had the opportunity to work with faculty members on activities other than coursework (i.e. committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc...)	O	O	O	O	O
My professors were reasonably accessible outside of class for help.	O	O	O	O	O
My non-classroom interactions with faculty had positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.	O	O	O	O	O
I had developed a close personal relationship with at least one of my professors.	O	O	O	O	O
I was satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with my professors.	O	O	O	O	O
I felt that professors were not unreasonable in their demands of students.	O	O	O	O	O
My Academic Advisor helped with my academic career path (including course & program advising).	O	O	O	O	O
I participated in informal academic activities outside of the classroom while on campus.	O	O	O	O	O
Residential Living					
I participated in residence hall activities (i.e. programming events) during my stay in residence.	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My roommate contributed to the reasons for me leaving the institution.	O	O	O	O	O
I was satisfied with the living conditions in the residence hall.	O	O	O	O	O
I felt that the housing costs (both residence room and dining plan) were affordable.	O	O	O	O	O
I was able to turn to resident advisors (RA's) if I needed help with non-academic issues.	O	O	O	O	O
The residence atmosphere was welcoming to all kinds of diversity (ability, race, gender, sexual orientation etc…)	O	O	O	O	O
The residential environment was not conducive to studying.	O	O	O	O	O
Resident Advisors (RA's) encouraged me to participate in social activities on the campus (sporting events, cultural activities, etc..)	O	O	O	O	O
I participated in events with my residence group that allowed me to contribute to the campus community.	O	O	O	O	O
I had asked my peers for help with academic problems that I may have encountered.	O	O	O	O	O
The residence staff were knowledgeable about where to get help if needed.	O	O	O	O	O
Financial Support					
Because I had to finance my studies by working at a part-time job I couldn't attend university and work at the same time.	O	O	O	O	O
I felt that I did not have sufficient funds available to finance my education.	O	O	O	O	O
I was unable to find part-time employment opportunities, therefore was not able to stay at university.	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The costs to attend *"University X"* were considerably higher than I had anticipated.	O	O	O	O	O
I left the university because I was offered a job opportunity.	O	O	O	O	O
Work responsibilities forced me to leave the university.	O	O·	O	O	O
Family Commitments					
Family responsibilities forced me to leave the university.	O	O	O	O	O
My family were not supportive of my participation in higher education.	O	O	O	O	O
There was a death or illness in my family forcing me to return home.	O	O	O	O	O
Other					
If you could start university all over again, would you choose to attend *"University X"*?	O	O	O	O	O
The quality of education *"University X"* was what I expected.	O	O	O	O	O
I felt satisfied with the overall university in general.	O	O	O	O	O
I felt like part of the campus community.	O	O	O	O	O
Health reasons contributed to me leaving the university.	O	O	O	O	O
I was impressed with the universities facilities.	O	O	O	O	O
I had the opportunity to talk to other students with different religious beliefs, political opinions, or values.	O	O	O	O	O
There was an institutional climate that encourages contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds.	O	O	O	O	O
The use of technology in and out of the classroom was beneficial to me.	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
It was important for me to graduate from college.	O	O	O	O	O
I decided to attend another post-secondary institution (i.e. Community College, University).	O	O	O	O	O
The size of the campus was good.	O	O	O	O	O
I decided to pursue another career.	O	O	O	O	O
The faculty / student ratio was good.	O	O	O	O	O

Were you aware of the following services / programs on *"University X's"* campus? If so, have you used any of these services? (Please circle your answers).

	Awareness of Service			Used Service	
Student Resource Centre	Y	N		Y	N
Writing Centre	Y	N		Y	N
MASH (Mathematics and Statistics Help)	Y	N		Y	N
Career Services (employment)	Y	N		Y	N
Co-operative Education Services	Y	N		Y	N
Campus Bookstore	Y	N		Y	N
Library	Y	N		Y	N
Chaplaincy	Y	N		Y	N
Health Services	Y	N		Y	N
Off-campus Housing	Y	N		Y	N
Residence Life	Y	N		Y	N
Services for Students with Disabilities	Y	N		Y	N
International Centre	Y	N		Y	N
Intramurals	Y	N		Y	N
Athletics Complex	Y	N		Y	N
Financial Aid and Scholarships	Y	N		Y	N
Tutoring Services	Y	N		Y	N
Academic Support Program	Y	N		Y	N
First-year Advisor	Y	N		Y	N
Study Skills Workshops	Y	N		Y	N
User Support	Y	N		Y	N
Registrar's Office	Y	N		Y	N
Student Accounts	Y	N		Y	N
Safety & Security	Y	N		Y	N
"University X" Students' Union	Y	N		Y	N

Please feel free to provide additional comments that may provide us with insight on why you left the institution.

I may be conducting interviews with students to gain a more in-depth understanding of why students did not return to the institution. Please indicate if I may contact you at a later time by providing the following information. **Participation is totally voluntary.**

Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Thank you for your help.

Please return your completed questionnaire in the enclosed envelope to:

Ms. Sonia Richards
PO Box 191
15 University Avenue

By January 15, 2007

Appendix G – Invitation for Participation in Interviews

Dear Student,

Thank you for completing the survey that was sent to you about your experience at our institution. I write to ask if you would be willing to participate in a short interview to gain a more in-depth understanding of your experience.

I am looking to schedule the phone interviews sometime in the next week. Would you be available for an interview on Wednesday, April 9th? It should take no longer than 20-30 minutes. If you are not available during that time, could we work on getting a time that is more convenient for you?

If you could let me know if this would be a convenient time for you, we can work on arranging a specific time.

Thanks again for your help! I greatly appreciate your help with my thesis.

Sonia

Appendix H – Interview Schedule

Thank you for taking the time to chat with me tonight about your university experience. This interview should last between 15 to 20 minutes, though we can talk longer if you would like. Because we are talking about some issues that may be rather personal to you, if there any questions that you do not wish to answer, I respect your wishes.

I would also like to ask your permission to record this interview. I will be the only person listening to the tape. The transcripts will be kept completely confidential and anonymous. Tapes will be kept in a locked filing cabinet to which I am the only person with a key. After the study has been completed, I will provide you with a summary of results if you are interested. All tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after 12 months. Does this seem reasonable? Do you have any questions?

As you may recall, the purpose of this study is to gain insight as to why students leave the institution after their first year of study. I would like to ask you questions about your university experience and to gain better insight to some of the positive and negative experiences that you may have had.

Choosing your Institution
1. What led you to go to university?
2. Why did you decide to choose "University X"?
3. Did it meet your expectations? Why or Why not?

Social Integration
1. The transition from high school to university can be a difficult one.
   > Did you have any difficulty?
   > Did you have difficulty meeting new friends?
   > If so, why did you think that you found it difficult?
2. You referenced in your response that you felt different than other students. Can you tell me a little bit about that?
3. Did you have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular events (i.e. concerts, club events, varsity games, etc...) on campus?
   a. If not, would you have been interested in participating?
   b. How do you think that the institution could better communicate with students about out-of-classroom events?
4. Why do you think that you left the institution and others did not?

Academic Integration
1. How did you find the transition from high school to university? Was it more difficult academically that you had anticipated?
2. Was there a professor that you really liked, that helped you feel like part of the campus community?
3. Was there anything in your classes that helped prepare you to succeed academically?

4. Is there anything that the institution could have done to help better prepare you for academic study?
5. Did you have the opportunity to attend non academic events (i.e.: Coffee Haus, informal luncheons) with faculty members? Would this be something that you would have been interested in?

Residential
1. Why did you decide to live in residence?
2. What sorts of activities were promoted through residence?
    a. How did you find out about these activities?
    b. Is there a better way to encourage students to participate / inform of campus events?

Non Residential Students
1. Why did you decide to live off campus?
2. Did you participate in campus activities?
    a. How did you find out about activities that were going on?
    b. Is there a better way to communicate / encourage students off campus to participate in campus activities?
3. Living off campus, did you feel like part of the campus community?

Financial
1. Did you feel that the costs for attending *"University X"* were higher or less than anticipated?
    If so ...why?
2. Were you provided information outlining the costs for tuition, living arrangements, books etc...before coming to the institution?
    a. If so, where did you receive this information from?

Other
1. If you were to look at attending the institution again, are there things you would change?
2. Did you feel like you were or were not part of the campus community?
    o Why or
    o Why not?
    o What sort of things would make you feel like you were part of the *"University X"* community?