The Integration of First-Generation, First-Term College Students from Ohio Appalachia:

A Multiple Case Study

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Barbara L. Bradbury

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by
BARBARA L. BRADBURY

has been approved for
the Department of Counseling and Higher Education
and the College of Education by

________________________________________

Peter C. Mather
Assistant Professor of Counseling and Higher Education

________________________________________

Renée A. Middleton
Dean, College of Education
ABSTRACT

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The Integration of First-Generation, First-Term College Students from Ohio Appalachia: A Multiple Case Study (235 pp.)

Director of Dissertation: Peter C. Mather

This dissertation focuses on the factors affecting the integration of first-generation, first-term college students from Ohio Appalachia. The literature is expanding on the college going process of first-generation students; however, research focused on Appalachian student success is still limited. In order for faculty and staff to better serve and meet the needs of this population, an investigation into the influences affecting their success is needed.

The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of first-generation college students from Ohio Appalachia as they navigate entry into college. The research is guided by the following questions: (1) what are the barriers to admittance and successful integration into college and (2) what influences and factors assist students in the admissions and integration process?

Through the basic interpretive qualitative approach this research attempted to “understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (Merriam, p. 38). The data type for this interpretive study was narrative, obtained through interviews with students. Factors identified as either positively or negatively affecting integration were examined in the context of the students’ academic, social, and interpersonal environments.
The results of this study are not generalizeable to the traditional student population; however, they reveal important aspects of the college-going process for first-generation, first-term students from Ohio Appalachia. Barriers and strengths are examined from two perspectives: relationships and adjustment to college. Relationships encompass family, friends, and faculty members. The adjustment to college examines the following aspects of integration: developing a sense of belonging; achieving academic success; maintaining satisfactory living arrangements; developing a stable financial situation; and balancing other responsibilities.

First-generation students from Ohio Appalachia negotiate many aspects of the college-going process on their own, without the assistance of a knowledgeable guide. They are not, however, without support. For most of the participants, a mutual sense of responsibility with their families serves as an anchor that keeps them grounded. Also vital to student success is the importance of faculty who present themselves as accessible and approachable, without whom several of the participants would likely have found excessive challenge.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Peter C. Mather

Assistant Professor of Counseling and Higher Education
This study holds personal meaning to me, yet not because I am a first-generation student. I am interested in this topic because this population has been the focus of my career, in one way or another, throughout my 26 years working in higher education. In my own journey through college my costs were covered and I always had food and a place to sleep. This was not the experience of my husband, however, who also grew up with a thirst for knowledge, thanks to his mother and father. One of the oldest in a family of nine, money was tight and he had to pay his own way through college even though his grades and college entrance exam scores were stellar. (Minimal guidance was available at his high school.) Miles away from home and family, his financial resources were limited. When he didn’t have the money for food and rent in addition to purchasing books, he ate beans and slept on the back seat of his old beat-up car. He got into and through college in spite of the lack of advice, assistance, and financial help. My husband is a first-generation, Appalachian Ohio college student. I’m proud of him as I’m proud of the students with whom I’m privileged to work.
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I was blessed with many positive influences in this educational journey. Dr. Peter C. Mather, my advisor, provided continuous, pertinent, and much-needed input and support. Thank you, Pete. Dr. Marc Cutright helped me decide the path for my journey. Interviewing students was exactly the route for this study. Thank you for helping me realize my strengths in this area. Dr. Dan Evans, my Dean’s Representative, models the leadership style I’ve tried to emulate throughout my career—caring, positive, and focused. Dr. Dana Heller Levitt provided detailed suggestions and a thorough review of my writing. Thank you all for your support and for dedicating time and commitment to my research.

My career at Shawnee State University drove my interest and concern for first-generation college students. I thank the leaders of our institution (past and present) for their unfailing dedication to the students of Ohio Appalachia.

My mother and father promoted education, believed in my abilities, and paved the way for me to go to college. I am forever grateful.

I thank my husband for his patience and support. I could not have completed this journey without him at my side. To my three college-aged children (Forrest, Heather, and Mason), son-in-law Beau, and granddaughter Adeline, I wish you exciting journeys of your own. “Seek to do good!”
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

First-generation students represent at least one quarter of high school graduates (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). Warburton et al. conclude that, even when controlling for the characteristics that distinguish them from their counterparts, first-generation status is negatively related to persistence and attainment in college.

Compounding this problem, educational attainment levels in the Appalachian region of the country are low. In 2000, 25% of the population in the non-Appalachian regions compared to 18% of the population in the Appalachian regions of the country possessed a college degree. In central Appalachia, where the average high school completion rate is only 64%, education is not an accepted value for many parents (Shaw, De Young, & Rademacher, 2004). The landmark Appalachian Access and Success Study, conducted by the Institute for Local Government Administration and Rural Development (ILGARD) at Ohio University, examined the barriers to access in higher education in the 29-county area of Ohio Appalachia (Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education [OACHE], 1992). The findings in this study revealed that although 80% of high school seniors want to attend college, only about 30% actually do so. A two-year project, Access and Success-Appalachian Ohio: College Access, Retention, Postsecondary Pathways and Completion, directed by Ohio University is currently in progress to replicate portions of the study. The project will update the original data and gather additional information on degree completion and entry into the workforce (Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher
In addition to generating data, surveys will be conducted on high school seniors in the Appalachian counties:

In the spring of 2008 parents of high school seniors will be surveyed, high school counselors will be interviewed, and Institutional Research offices at the postsecondary institutions in the region will be asked to provide additional data on Appalachian Ohio students’ chosen majors. These efforts to collect data from students, families, high schools, and colleges will provide a richer, more complete picture of current supports, barriers, and attitudes related to college access and success. (p. 31)

“Appalachia” Explored

Appalachia is a region of contradictions. Even the adjectives which describe it are paradoxical: rich yet poor; exploited yet underdeveloped; scarred yet beautiful. To understand this paradox, it is first necessary to delve a bit into Appalachia’s history and the nature of its people. Only then is it possible to understand the socioeconomic evolution that led to its national emergence as “a pocket of poverty” in the richest nation in the world. (Appalachian Regional Commission, 1979, p. 2)

The 29 Appalachian counties in Ohio are the most rural and sparsely populated areas in the state. This region represents 34% of the total land area in the state yet is home to only 12% of the population (Ohio Department of Development [ODOD], 2007). Small towns are dotted throughout the region with access limited generally by two-lane, narrow, winding roads.
Some of the region’s most significant economic problems are tied to the geography of the area. The natural features, characterized by hilly, rugged terrain, limit accessibility and contribute to rural isolation. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), 42% of the population is rural compared with 20% of the national population (ARC, n.d.). The topography combined with the population density makes routine infrastructure development prohibitively expensive. For example, road construction costs run 50 to 100% higher in rural hilly terrain than on flat land (T. Barnitz, personal communication, May 10, 2007).

The impact of rural isolation on residents living in the area can be expressed in personal terms. Emergency services are usually provided by local volunteer squads and other community services are generally located in the more populated areas. There are neither subways nor public transportation systems although a few towns do provide limited mini-bus services for residents. A trip to the nearest supermarket is an event for many living in the region. This often coincides with the first week of each month when welfare benefits are received in the mail. Organized social and cultural activities, outside the region’s metropolitan areas, are limited. For many residents, social networks revolve around and are often limited to school “ball games” and church related activities.

Batteau (1991) reveals the face of Appalachia that is based on social relationships that form in rural, mountain communities. These relationships provide the meaning in life for those born and raised in rural Appalachia. They are based on family and include a strong sense of place, religion, and an identity anchored in a common history. Extended families, characteristic of Ohio Appalachia as well, often discourage students from
leaving home and “going off” to college. At times, due to the needs of the family, students are even actively discouraged from finishing high school. Unfamiliar with the college environment, families often fear that college means “up and out” (Carter & Robinson, 2002).

Whereas an extended period of economic decline has been detrimental to the prosperity of much of Ohio and the nation, it has been particularly difficult on residents of Ohio Appalachia. According to Ohio Poverty Indicators and Trends, Ohio’s Appalachian counties, traditionally the state’s poorest, made substantial progress during the 1970s. However, this improvement disappeared by a rapid 48% increase in poverty since 1980. Appalachian Ohio is poorer now than it was in the 1970s (Council for Economic Opportunity in Greater Cleveland, 1995). In fact, 26 of the 29 Appalachian counties have poverty levels higher than that of the Ohio average. Monies available for education are far below state averages as well. Expenditures per pupil average nearly $400 per year below the state average. Teacher salaries fall $4400 below the state average (Coalition of Rural and Appalachian Schools [CORAS], 2006).

Poverty rates are especially high in Scioto and Lawrence Counties where Shawnee State University and the Southern Campus of Ohio University are located. These institutions represent the two open admission universities in southern Ohio. Approximately one out of every six families in the area lives at or below the poverty level.

Income comparisons illustrate the economic hardships facing residents in Appalachia Ohio. Per capita income for residents in Scioto and Lawrence Counties at
$23,473 and $23,026 respectively, is $8600 below the average for the state. In comparison with national income figures, Ohioans from Appalachia fare even worse. Per capita income for residents living in the Ohio Appalachian region is only two-thirds the average amount for the U.S. Stated simply, the average resident makes only $.66 for every dollar earned by the average American (ODOD, 2007).

Not surprisingly, unemployment in the region is higher than for the state as a whole. According to ARC data, three-year unemployment rates in Scioto County consistently rank well above state and national averages which are approximately 7.8% compared to 5.4% for Ohio and 5.5% for the U.S. (ARC, n.d.). In line with recent trends, nearly all of the region’s job growth in the past 20 years has occurred in services and retail sectors of the economy—jobs which typically pay low wages or are part-time with few or no benefits. Therefore the declines in unemployment during the economic recovery periods of the 1980s and 1990s did not lead to comparable reductions in economic stress. They simply increased the number of working poor.

On a positive note, though, the wage premium for a college education is increasing. Higher education has increased in value for several reasons: (a) declining unions, (b) need for more technical skills beyond that developed in high school, and (c) the movement of blue-collar manufacturing jobs overseas (Callan, 2001). The demand in career areas requiring some postsecondary educational training is projected to grow faster than the 7.3% average for all occupations in the state placing great emphasis on the relationship between education and employment (January 22, 2007, Workforce Development). Similarly, Fitzgerald (2002) found that 60% of jobs require some level of
college. As a result, access to higher education is critical in order for students from Ohio Appalachia to gain the education and skills required in order to succeed in today’s workforce.

Ohio Appalachia lags behind in other areas that are important for success in today’s workforce as well. While much of the United States enjoys the economic benefits of the “Information Age,” rural areas and small towns in Appalachia have been left behind. A shortage of computers, Internet access, and worker skills restricts technology gains in the region. A recent study, conducted by the University of Texas and commissioned by the ARC to gauge the use of telecommunications in the Appalachian region, reveals the extent in which Appalachia is behind in the “digital revolution” (Oden & Strover, 2002):

1. The usage rates for home computers, Internet access, and even basic phone services are lower than the national average.
2. Broadband technology is not widely available and DSL services are limited in rural areas.
3. Businesses have difficulty understanding and evaluating technological needs and choices and integrating technology into their businesses to improve competitiveness.
4. Employment in information technology industries grew only 46% compared to the national rate of 53%.

Access to technology is an important factor in helping students prepare for college. In Ohio Appalachia, however, access to technology is found mainly in schools
and most schools don’t make technology available to adults in the district. There are few, if any, Internet cafes or computer labs open to the public. When provided through libraries, computer lab hours are limited. In the areas served by OU Southern and Shawnee State University, with an average per capita income of $23,249, transportation remains a barrier and personal computers are a luxury that many residents cannot afford (ODOD, 2007).

Residents in the area who do own a personal computer often do not have access to high speed Internet connection. Many benefits of computer technology such as web resources, Blackboard, and interactive college links are difficult to access, time-consuming, and sometimes unavailable without high speed internet access. Dial-up modem connectivity remains the only viable option for many residents in Ohio Appalachia. Costs for high speed satellite connections are out of the price-range for all but a few. Some of these costs begin with a one-time hook-up fee of over $400. The physical geography and sparse population density of this region hinder technological advances thus creating a disadvantage for residents needing to access to computer resources.

*Education in Ohio Appalachia*

Ohio University Southern and Shawnee State University share similar storied pasts. Both campuses are situated within eyesight of the Ohio River in the extreme southern portions of the state. They target similar populations and share a focused mission of providing access to students from southern Ohio.
Shawnee State University (SSU) occupies a twenty-acre campus located in the foothills of Ohio Appalachia in Portsmouth, the seat of Scioto County. In the 1950s Portsmouth was a bustling city of 50,000 with thousands of workers making a living at the steel mills and shoe factories. These mills and factories are now gone with Portsmouth’s population down to 23,000.

Ohio University Southern (OUS), the southern regional campus for Ohio University, is located in the city of Ironton, a town half the size of Portsmouth. Ironton is the seat of Lawrence County which has experienced steady growth from the 1990s to the present with a current population of 63,179 (ODOD, 2007). Ohio University Southern campus provides access to more than 1700 students from areas surrounding Lawrence County. The campus partners with community organizations to offer unique services and opportunities, e.g., Equine Studies Program. To provide outreach to neighboring communities, The Proctorville Center, a satellite of the Southern campus, was opened in 2007 (Lockhart, 2008).

Shawnee State University is the newest and smallest of Ohio’s thirteen state-supported, four-year, public institutions. With nearly 3,800 students, approximately 60% of the students are first-generation college students and 83% receive some type of financial assistance. As an open-enrollment institution, SSU has traditionally served the under-prepared, first-generation, rural college student. According to the Office of the Registrar (K. Patton, personal communication, March 1, 2007), performance on the college entrance test, the ACT, reveals that SSU students, with an average composition score of 19 fall well below the state and national averages of 21.6% and 21.2%
respectively (“Almanac Issue,” 2007). The scores are among the lowest of the state universities in Ohio, pointing to the disparity between the students in the region and other parts of the state and nation as a whole (S. Midkiff, personal conversation, April 13, 2007). This study was conducted at Shawnee State University since it was the location where the researcher was employed.

Education can be a pathway out of poverty. As a young, vital, and growing institution SSU is positioned at a critical stage of its development to create and implement programs and services that focus on the success of this population. With 57% of the students financing their education through student loans, academic success is an important issue (N. Montgomery, personal communication, February 16, 2007). Faculty and staff serving Appalachian Ohio students need to understand the factors influencing their success in order to help them progress and graduate from college.

This multiple case study aligned with the focus of the two-year access and success project (OACHE, 2007). In order for educators to help students succeed in college they need to understand the factors that encourage as well as negatively influence their entry into college. This study focused on the factors that influenced the integration of first-generation college students from Ohio Appalachia who attended a four-year public institution. I had a personal interest in this topic because this population was the focus of my career in higher education. Rural isolation, poverty, unemployment, and low educational attainment levels have created a tremendous disparity between the Appalachian area of Ohio and the rest of the state. As the researcher for the project I held
a personal bias in my belief that first generation college students faced barriers to college enrollment and success.

This study examined the experiences and ways that Appalachian Ohio first-generation students viewed and engaged their transition to college. I sought to discover specific answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the barriers to admittance and successful integration into college for first-generation college students from Appalachian Ohio?

2. What influences and factors assist students in the admissions and integration process?

Significance of Study

In the State of the State Address on March 14, 2007 Ohio’s Governor Ted Strickland emphasized an important goal of his administration:

We know an educated workforce attracts jobs—economic forecasts show that more than 60 percent of new jobs will require a college degree. And yet, Ohio is…37th in producing college graduates. My goal is clear… In 10 years, we will increase the number of Ohioans with a college degree by 230,000, and we will increase the graduation rate among those who start college by 20 percent…If we do this right, education will feed the economy. Success will bring more success. And beneficiaries of our efforts will not only be students in the classroom, but all Ohioans. (OACHE, 2007, p. 3)

This study aligned with the Governor’s focus of preparing Ohio for the knowledge economy. Researching the integration of first-generation college students in
Ohio Appalachia was important for several other reasons as well. Research indicates that graduation rates for U.S. colleges and universities have declined for several years (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Thayer, 2000). According to Billson and Terry (1982), first-generation students are over-represented among students who leave college. Ishitani’s (2003) research corroborates this finding demonstrating higher attrition rates for first-generation students compared to students with one or both parents having achieved a college degree. The risk of departure during the first year is 71% higher for first-generation students than for their continuing generation peers.

On the SSU campus, the site used for this study, it was estimated that approximately 50-60% of the students were first-generation college students. The fall 2006 - fall 2007 first-year student retention rate was 57% and the 6 year graduation rate for the 2001 entering cohort was 25% (K. Patton, personal communication, May 5, 2008). The statistics revealed the need for an in-depth study of the factors affecting the entry and retention of this unique population.

Additional research highlights the growing number of first-generation college students entering higher education (Ishitani, 2003). According to Kojaku, Nunez, and Malizio (1998), first-generation students made up 47% of new students enrolling during the 1995-96 school year. This rate was up from 43% reported in 1989-90 (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). It was important to learn the factors influencing persistence given the increased numbers of first-generation students entering college.

A review of the literature revealed only a small body of research focused on the college entrance and success of students from the Appalachian region. New research
would be generated by narrowing the focus to students from Ohio Appalachia. This study contributed to the literature by highlighting factors affecting the successful integration of these students.

In addition to contributing to the research this study was important in light of the declining status and funding for higher education. Once rated first in degree attainment, the U.S. now ranks 12th among industrialized countries (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). This drop in status comes at a time when postsecondary education is the expectation and requirement for many of the fastest-growing jobs in our country. It is estimated that 90% of these jobs in the new information economy will require some type of postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education). This finding does not bode well for Appalachia. The region mirrors the nation in the percentage of the population graduating from high school, however, Appalachia lags behind the nation in the number of people holding a college degree (Shaw et al., 2004).

Decreased governmental support of higher education along with increased public scrutiny and emphasis on institutional accountability demand a targeted focus on the goal of graduation. The National Library of Education (NLE) undertook a study to research several issues of public concern in education (Boesel & Fredland, 1999). The results of the study found poor outcomes for four-year college students who leave without graduating. Their earnings equal those of similar two-year college students, yet they are likely to have greater loan debt than are the two-year college attenders. Boesel and Fredland (1999) estimate that approximately half of the students who enter college each year eventually leave without graduating. Thus, resources needed to be targeted toward
efforts that enhance the retention and graduation of all students including this expanding population of first-generation college students.

The mission of Shawnee State University includes outreach to the Ohio Appalachian region in order to create access to higher education. A key to meeting the University mission includes identifying the barriers that inhibit the successful retention and success of first-generation college students. This study examined students’ narratives to provide a glimpse of their experiences at SSU thus uncovering some of the influences that promoted and inhibited their persistence in college. By gaining an increased understanding of the students’ experiences on campus and identifying the factors affecting students’ persistence, administrators and faculty members can develop initiatives that lead to meaningful and constructive change. In addition, consideration can be given to targeting resources toward the creation of programs, services, and supports to help retain students through graduation.

From a broader perspective, public universities have a responsibility to the citizens of the state including educating the less well-prepared “since such students pose the greatest risk of eventually becoming dependent on the state” (Astin & Oseguera, 2005, p. 19). The social returns of college completion include government subsidies to colleges and the additional tax revenues that governments receive from college graduates. Other nonmarket benefits to society include higher rates of civic participation, lower crime rates, and lower rates of reliance on public assistance among college graduates than among similar groups with less education (Boesel & Fredland, 1999). The Appalachian
area of southern Ohio, poor in human capital and lacking a vigorous economy, needed the boost that these benefits can provide.

Methods

The main data type for this interpretive study was narrative, obtained through interviews with students. The narrative process served as both the method of inquiry and object of interpretation. The purpose of the study was to understand the experiences of first-generation college students from Ohio Appalachia as they navigated entry into college. This narrative process was appropriate research methodology since according to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), naturalistic inquiry provides a better fit to most social/behavioral phenomena than do rationalistic or scientific theoretical structures.

As articulated by McIntosh (Orbe, 2004), we must study what we have not noticed in order to understand what we think we have noticed. The literature was devoid of research on college success of this population from the Ohio Appalachian region. Conducted through this basic interpretive approach, this study adds to the literature by providing first-hand “stories” which were analyzed to glean insight on the integration process for this select group of students. The narratives provided a glimpse into the factors affecting their entry and persistence in college. These stories were analyzed and interpreted based on connections and linkages that surface among the stories. Analysis revealed common themes representing the essence of the students’ stories.

Limitations

My perspective, shaped by my personal, educational, and professional experiences colored the interpretations I made of the students’ experiences. The findings
of this study were specific to this group of students and were not generalizeable to the
general population. I attempted to procure a diverse sample in order to examine
variations as well as commonalities in experience. Participation required the student to
make a commitment of time to the study. This interest and willingness to be involved
created a distinction among the participants selected that might not have been
representative to the first-generation, freshmen cohort as a whole.

As primary researcher I was also an administrator at the study site. The influence
and perceived control that I exerted over student financial aid might have detracted from
my effectiveness as primary researcher for this study. Students may have found it
difficult to view me as an unbiased, collaborative partner. I did not know, however, any
of the participants in the study prior to when it began. I believe I was able to separate my
work relationships with students from my role as co-collaborator in research. I seemed
able to develop a helpful, trusting relationship with the participants and believe that my
behavior and interactions with participants supported my effectiveness as a researcher
and co-collaborator.

Another limitation was inherent in all self narrative. The students described
important experiences and situations that affected their college going process. This
information became the basis for the student narratives. The stories, however, were
drawn from the students’ perspectives. As researcher, I was not able to validate the
students’ interpretations or explanations of the factors affecting their success or failure.
Nor was I able to affirm the extent of the students’ ability to accept responsibility for
their own actions.
Delimitations

The delimitations, i.e., parameters that framed the study, included:

1. Students were first-generation college students.
2. Students were residents of Ohio Appalachia.
3. Students were enrolled in their first term of college.
4. Students were enrolled at one public university (Shawnee State University).
5. Students met the definition of traditional aged college students.
6. Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted on the SSU campus.

Definitions of Terms

First-generation college student—According to some findings, first-generation refers to students whose parents did not attend college (Arredondo, 1999; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; The Education Resources Institute, 1997; Van T. Bui, 2002). Hsiao (1992) and Mitchell (1997) state that the term first-generation refers to students who are the first in the family to attend college. Thayer (2000) uses the definition that aligns with legislation establishing the federal TRIO programs. The student is first-generation if neither of his/her parents earned a bachelor’s degree. The definition for first-generation used in this study matched the description used by the federal TRIO programs—neither of a student’s parents earned a bachelor’s degree. This description also matches the criterion used to define first-generation status on the SSU application for admission. Some of the participants had relatives who attended college. By definition, however, they were considered first-generation students if neither their mother nor their father had a college degree.
Ohio Appalachia refers to the 29 Appalachian counties of Ohio that are among the most rural and sparsely populated areas in the state. This area extends from Clermont County in the southwestern part of the state to Columbiana County, bordering Pennsylvania in the northeastern part of Ohio. Tremendous disparity exists between the region and the rest of Ohio as magnified by a number of socioeconomic factors that include poverty, unemployment, rural isolation, and low educational aspiration and attainment levels.

Integration—Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) refer to integration as the degree to which an individual shares an institution’s values and follows formal as well as informal rules to become a member at that institution.

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter One provides the background on the study, presents the research questions, and shares the significance of the study. The methods and procedures and limitations and delimitations are explained. A definition of terms is included.

Chapter Two presents a review the literature on the Appalachian culture, education in Appalachia, Ohio Appalachia, first-generation college students, and college student development theories. Gaps in the literature pertaining to this student population and successful entry into college are discussed.

Chapter Three describes the basic interpretive qualitative research orientation and research methodology that guided this study. Narrative study is discussed in regard to how this process framed the interviews, analysis of narrative, and narrative analysis.
Chapter Four includes an analysis of student narratives delineating the common themes that emerged from the data analysis and interpretations. A narrative description representing the shared experiences and themes of the students is presented.

Chapter Five includes a discussion of the findings relative to the literature and presents suggestions for policy implications and practice. Recommendations for further research are presented as well.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a critical review of relevant literature addressing the influences affecting the success of first-generation college students from Appalachian Ohio. Research on the educational attainment of first-generation college students is limited and nearly non-existent for subgroups such as Appalachian students. In order to provide a frame of reference for this population a general overview of the Appalachian culture is highlighted in the review that follows.

First-generation, for the purpose of this study, refers to students whose parents did not graduate from college. This definition aligns with that used in establishing the federal TRIO programs in 1965. As part of the War on Poverty, President Lyndon B. Johnson supported legislation providing funding for the creation of TRIO to create access to postsecondary education for low-income Americans. The name TRIO represented the original three programs created in this legislation: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services. In summing up the emerging national view of the role of education in society, Johnson said, “The answer for all our national problems, the answer for all the problems of the world, comes down, when you really analyze it, to one single word—education” (as cited in Macy, 2000, p. 8). Although opportunity for postsecondary education increases incrementally as income increases the gaps between low- and high-income students attending college remains. Census data from 1972 shows the gap between students from the lowest income and highest income group was about 38

Most of the research conducted on the educational success of first-generation college students focuses on one of two areas: (a) influences affecting the preparation for and entry into postsecondary education and (b) influences affecting persistence, achievement, and attainment of a degree. Some of the research overlaps both areas. This particular study will highlight influences identified by students that affect their successful integration into college, i.e., personal, environmental, and/or institutional influences.

These factors are important to identify since they directly align with Vincent Tinto’s (1975) highly-recognized model of student departure. This model is based on the premise that academic and social integration are essential to student retention. According to this model “Some degree of social and intellectual integration and therefore membership in academic and social communities must exist as a condition for continued persistence” (Tinto, 1993, p. 120). First-generation college students may even have other factors hindering their ability to integrate into the college community. External influences such as lack of time spent on campus, ties to home communities, and time spent working can lower their level of structural integration or involvement on campus beyond the classroom experience (Billson & Terry, 1982).

This review is organized into seven sections. The first section, titled First-Generation, describes general characteristics that are commonly associated with first-generation college students. Barriers to Access and Success delves into the barriers identified as affecting the preparation, enrollment, and educational attainment of first-
First-Generation Students

First-generation students, those whose parents did not earn a bachelor’s degree, are becoming the focus of many new research studies. The number of these students on the higher education scene has increased. The Institute for Higher Education Policy reveals that first-generation students represented approximately 45% of all undergraduates in the 1995-96 cohort (Arredondo, 1999).

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) study, Bridging the Gap, focuses on a subset of 1995-96 beginning postsecondary students who enrolled in 4-year institutions. The study examined the extent to which academic preparation of first-generation students in high school affects their persistence and attainment in postsecondary education (Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001). The following profile, developed from this study, reveals basic demographic data for this group of students.

First-generation students are older than their non-first-generation peers: 7% are 30 and older, compared to 1% of their counterparts. First-generation students are more likely
than are their peers to be Hispanic (18% versus 7%) and they are also more likely to come from low-income families (29% versus 9%). In addition, more first-generation students are married compared to their peers (7% versus 1%). Results from this study conclude that first-generation status is an important factor in determining success in college. First-generation students are less likely than their peers to be enrolled at their initial institution three years later and to persist to a bachelor’s degree. Rigorous preparation in high school, however, narrows the gap in postsecondary outcomes between first-generation students and their peers whose parents graduated from college.

Another NCES study comparing postsecondary experiences and outcomes for first-generation students with their peers found similar results. Choy (2001) found first-generation students less likely than other students to have earned a bachelor’s degree (13% versus 33%) and more likely to have earned a vocational certificate (18% versus 9%). They were also more likely than their peers to have dropped out of college without a degree (45% versus 29%). A major finding reveals that when controlling for factors that distinguish them from their peers such as socioeconomic standing, type of institution, and academic and social integration, first-generation status still has a negative effect on persistence and attainment.

Research concludes that first-generation students tend to come from lower-income families and have lower education aspirations in high school (Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Terenzini, Springer, Yeager, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). In contrast, Billson and Terry (1982) concluded that these students approach the college experience with similar expectations as their continuing generation peers: they value the intellectual growth and
career preparation. Overall, compared to their peers, first-generation students are disadvantaged when it comes to level of family support, degree expectations, planning, and college preparation in high school (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

Barriers to Access and Success

First-generation college students are becoming a larger part of the higher education scene. Findings indicate that the chance of attending college for children of high school degreed parents has improved 4.8% between 1987 and 1996 (Ishitani, 2003). To meet the needs of an increasing number of first-generation college students, educators must learn how to help these students succeed in college. In order to “make a difference” for this population we must first understand their educational needs and the barriers as well as the positive influences that affect their educational success. This section of the review organizes the literature under three broad headings: preparation, enrollment, and attainment.

Preparation

Many first-generation college students are academically disadvantaged even before they enter postsecondary education. Poor academic preparation in high school creates a barrier for entry into college (Hsiao, 1992; Mitchell, 1997; and Thayer, 2000). Only 1 out of 10 first-generation students pursue a rigorous high school curriculum compared to 2 out of 10 students whose parents have bachelor’s degrees (Warburton et al., 2001). In addition, only 8% of first-generation students take Advanced Placement (AP) tests compared to 22% of non-first-generation students (Warburton et al.).
Congress enacted legislation in 2006 providing federal funds for students who completed a rigorous curriculum in high school. The U.S. Department of Education implemented the new awards program for the Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG). Eligibility for these cash awards is based on low socioeconomic status as well as the completion of a rigorous curriculum in high school. The course requirements for “rigor” include four years of college preparatory English, three years of math including algebra and higher, three years of science including laboratory science, and a year of foreign language. The new ACG grant is considered gift aid which means that it doesn’t have to be paid back. With some aid now tied to preparatory coursework in high school, it is critical that first-generation college students be adequately prepared for entry into college. A rigorous curriculum is offered in most high schools in Appalachian Ohio. The grant is still relatively new; however, many students are not familiar with it or the requirements for eligibility.

For the traditional-age student, parental involvement has also been found to affect college preparation and enrollment patterns. Perna and Titus (2005) describe parental involvement as an important form of social capital that promotes college enrollment by conveying norms and standards. These norms and standards are conveyed through interactions with the student, the school and other parents. The authors describe social capital as the norms and social controls that an individual must adopt in order to succeed. Parental involvement can also have far-reaching effects. This involvement promotes college enrollment of other students as well by developing the social capital that other students in the same social network can access.
In contrast, connections between parents and children can also negatively impact college-going behavior. Some first-generation students suffer academically due to competing loyalties: family responsibilities and academic commitments. “Students who feel ‘caught between two worlds’ are more likely to have a difficult time making the transition from home to college” (Arredondo, 1999, p. 181). Tinto (1993) reports that separation from home can be a very painful, isolating experience, especially if the family doesn’t support going away to college. Merullo (2002) poignantly describes the fear of a first-generation college student: being viewed by parents and peers as the very type of person they despised. This potentially emotion-laden transition that many first-generation students experience is very different from the college going experience or expected rite of passage into adulthood for their continuing generation peers (Tinto, 1975).

Many first-generation students have difficulty straddling two distinct cultures (Arredondo, 1999; Hsiao, 1992; Mitchell, 1997; Van T. Bui, 2001). Competing loyalties and differing characteristics and values affect their ability to assimilate into a new culture. In addition to the typical college adjustment issues confronting most first-year students, first-generation students leave one culture to enter another. This new culture is often steeped in unfamiliar traditions and confusing norms. These norms at times are formed from values that students discover conflict with their own. Some first-generation students find that they must distance themselves from their personal backgrounds before pursuing their goals. Macy (2000) interviewed 23 low- and moderate-income college students mostly first-generation to learn about the barriers they faced getting to college.
Through their individual stories Macy found that the ability to break from family patterns and the importance of peers were among the six most important “keys to success” (p. 6).

**Enrollment**

Once enrolled in college first-generation students continue facing obstacles that negatively influence persistence and achievement. These students lack knowledge of the college application and financial aid process (TERI, 1997). This knowledge, described as cultural capital, is shown to have a positive relationship with postsecondary education success (Arredondo, 1999). Since first-generation students are the first in their families to attend college, they do not have this capital and thereby their chances for success are diminished.

Frequently, first-generation students delay enrollment into college (TERI, 1997). Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) found that enrolling in college at the age of 19 and older is negatively associated with persistence and attainment compared with being the age of 18 and younger (61% versus 69%). In *Leaving College*, Tinto (1993) states “Unlike the typical youthful high school graduate who goes to college instead of doing something else, the typical adult student goes to college in addition to doing other things” (p. 76). Consequently non-traditional students often enter college with many competing demands on their time such as balancing home, work, and school. Responsibilities outside of school divert students’ focus away from academic requirements and can make it difficult for them to attend advising, tutoring, or supplemental instruction sessions, participate in college activities, and take advantage in the full university experience.
The first-generation student, more often than not, finds himself or herself alone making the academic and social transition that is anything but seamless. Many students need extra help or support to successfully persist in college. These students are more likely to take remedial courses during their first year in college than are their peers, i.e., 21% versus 10% (Warburton et al., 2001). Other first-generation students fear failure, worry about financial aid, and put a lot of time into their studies (Van T. Bui, 2002).

First-generation students are less confident than are their peers in regard to their abilities and skills. Over 60% of non-first-generation students rated themselves as above average academically compared to only 40% of first-generation students (Arredondo, 1999). Overall, Terenzini et al. (1996) found that compared to their peers, first-generation students earned fewer first-year credits, studied fewer hours each week, and were less likely to view faculty as concerned for their progress.

**Attainment**

The need to work while attending college simultaneously places an additional burden on first-generation students (Mitchell, 1997; Pascarella et al., 2004). A recent study reveals that working 20 or more hours a week negatively affects bachelor’s degree attainment rates. Researchers predict, however, The *College Completion* study, conducted by the General Accounting Office (GAO), found that working 20 hours or less a week does not affect completion rates (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003).

Due to these forces, first-generation students are almost twice as likely as their peers to leave college or make a downward transfer, i.e., 14% versus 8% (Warburton et al., 2001). Ishitani (2003) found the risk of departure in the first year to be 71% higher for
first-generation students than for students with two college-educated parents. In addition, regardless of race, first-generation status affects college completion. For example, first-generation white students are no more likely to graduate than are first-generation black students (U. S. Government Accounting Office, 2003). The College Completion study was commissioned to determine the extent to which students (including those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds) completed a bachelor’s degree and the factors that affect bachelor degree attainment. The report found that only 43% of first-generation students earn a bachelor’s degree compared with 59% for non-first-generation students.

Throughout the research, first-generation status is shown consistently to negatively affect college attainment (Choy, 2001; Pascarella et al., 2004). Choy found that first-generation status is negatively related to enrollment in college and bachelor’s degree attainment even after controlling for factors such as income, academic preparation, educational expectations, peer influence, and parental involvement. In addition, first-generation students compared to those whose parents earned a bachelor’s degree are more likely to leave a 4-year institution before the second year (23% versus 10%).

Consistently, research reveals that first-generation status affects entry into and success in college. One of the goals of this study is to broaden the literature by identifying factors that affect successful integration of Ohio Appalachian students into college. A review of the literature reveals few studies that focus on the college success of residents from the Appalachian region. Furthermore, I did not identify any studies focused on this particular subset of the population in Ohio. This narrative investigation
into students’ stories will uncover some of the educational needs for this unique population. It will also extend the literature for this group of students which is currently virtually non-existent.

Appalachia Revealed

Return

I shall be going soon where no one knows:
I shall go to my pine pole mountain shack.
Before the autumn comes and summer goes
Before the leaves fall-I must be going back.
I was not made to walk on streets of stone
And breathe into my lungs the City smoke;
I must go to the highland world I own
Where I can breathe the air of pine and oak…(Stuart, 1963, p. 300)

Max Bogart (Stuart, 1963) describes the world of the Appalachian author Jesse Stuart through a description of its people, “They are proud and loyal and tough…they live with a fierce and deep-rooted love of the land” (p. iii). Stuart, a regional writer, focuses on the virtues of past generations of backcountry Americans. He weaves the contrasts of the people throughout his stories and poems. As a native he reveals the complex familial relationships that vary from deep-seated, violent conflicts to peaceful coexistence. In addition, he contrasts the espoused prejudice toward educated persons with the belief and hope that educational opportunities lead to a better life for their children.
As a regional writer, Stuart restricts his stories and poems to a specific geographic area. In a similar approach this study focuses on the educational achievement of first-generation college students from this region of Appalachian Ohio. Comparable to the far-reaching recognition of Stuart’s writing, the results of this study have universal implications that extend beyond the targeted area of focus.

This section of the review focuses on first-generation Appalachian college students in particular. As structured in the section on Barriers to Access and Success, this section, Appalachia Revealed, organizes the literature in a similar fashion, under two main themes: demographic data and information gaps.

**Demographic Data**

The term *Appalachian* simply refers to residents living in the 13 federally designated states (ARC, n.d.). The states were designated Appalachian for being located in the mountainous region of the eastern United States. The ARC was established in the 1960s to provide a framework that coordinated state and federal efforts to improve economic development in the region running along the Appalachian Mountain range (Darling, 1999). Appalachian students grow up in a region where per capita income is only 81.9% of the U.S. average (ARC). Raitz and Ulack (1991) portray the Appalachian region as “... a region of mountains, coal mining, poverty, unique culture, tourism, welfarism, isolation, and subsistence agriculture” (p. 10). Macy (2000) expresses the harsh realities of life in Appalachia, “In my family, poverty was like a chain they kept you in...It’s an Appalachian syndrome, I guess. It takes all your energy to get by, to live” (p. 20). With average incomes in Appalachia among the lowest in the country, a
college education offers an escape from poverty, “Over a lifetime, an individual with a bachelor’s degree will earn an average of $2.1 million—nearly twice as much as a worker with only a high school diploma” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 7).

A low level of educational attainment in the region makes it difficult to ease the region’s economic problems, which, in turn limits access to education. In Appalachian Ohio data reveal that education is not valued by many parents (Haaga, 2004). The percentage of adults who have not graduated from high school is much lower than the state average (21.8% versus 16.3%):

With some justice, Americans have always regarded the educational system as an engine of social mobility and a means for ensuring civic participation. Individual differences in academic success are always expected. But persistent differences in educational attainment among regions, like persistent differences among races and social classes, suggest that the engine is not working. (p. 3)

*Information Gaps*

Low high school graduation rates result in fewer adults entering and graduating from college. The educational attainment rate for adults (aged 25 and over) in Appalachian Ohio is approximately half the rate for the U.S. (12.3% versus 22.4%) (Haaga, 2004). Whereas Caucasians and African Americans living in Appalachia have made substantial gains in secondary school attainment levels since 1990 (9% and 12% respectively), high school graduation rates for Hispanics have decreased considerably. Due, in part, to the influx of new immigrants to the region, graduation rates dropped from 67% in 1990 to 51% in 2000 (Shaw et al., 2004). As a result, the majority of parents are
neither college educated nor able to serve as role models for higher education. They are unable to relate personal experiences about the college enrollment process, e.g., applying for financial aid, completing scholarship applications, selecting college majors. With fewer college-educated parents to serve as role models students receive little guidance when it comes to planning for their future.

Carter and Robinson (2002) describe parents’ knowledge gaps regarding knowing how to help their children prepare for college, e.g., completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and necessary coursework to prepare for college and following processes and timetables for college admission. These gaps are likely to be greater in poor rural communities and in families where parents have not attended college. For example, many schools do not have the resources to offer Advanced Placement courses to students. They increase the risk for Appalachian students as they transition from high school into college. Carter and Robinson suggest that few parents are knowledgeable about the cost of attendance and the importance of taking appropriate math, science, and language courses in order for their children to be adequately prepared for college admissions tests such as the ACT or SAT.

The landmark study *Appalachian Access and Success* conducted by the Institute for Local Government Administration and Rural Development (ILGARD) at Ohio University examines the barriers to access to higher education in the 29-county area of Ohio Appalachia (OACHE, 1992). The findings in this study reveal that although 80% of high school seniors want to attend college, only about 30% actually do so. Students identify the following barriers to postsecondary education: cost of education, desire to
earn immediate income, lack of information on cost and financial aid, being uninformed on parents’ income and savings, low self-esteem, and lack of information about skills needed in the labor market.

Integration into College

Many Appalachian Ohio, first-generation students beat the odds and go on to enroll in college. Once enrolled, research indicates the importance of attaining a degree in order to reap the full benefits of a postsecondary education (Boesel & Fredland, 1999). College retention and graduation rates, unfortunately, are dismal: less than half of all students who enter college pursuing a four-year degree actually graduate within five years (Callan, 2001). Margaret Spellings, Secretary of Education, reports the U.S. ranks 12th among major industrialized countries in higher education attainment with only 66% of full-time four-year college students completing a baccalaureate degree within six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The rates for Appalachian, first-generation college students are even more alarming. The risk of departure during the first year is 71% higher for first-generation students than for their continuing generation peers (Ishitani, 2003).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) refer to integration as the degree to which an individual shares an institution’s values and follows formal as well as informal rules to become a member at that institution. Following the basic premise of Tinto’s model (1975) of student departure, social and academic integration into college is essential to student retention. Characteristics such as family background, individual attributes, and precollege school experiences play a role in students’ integration into college. Successful
integration, however, is the first step toward improving retention and graduation rates. An in-depth review of the literature delves into four different aspects of integration. Each aspect is examined as it pertains to first-generation and/or Appalachian college students. This exploration highlights factors associated with students’ integration into college. The four aspects of integration examined in the following headings include transition, involvement, validation, and belonging.

**Transition**

As expected, many first-year students experience road blocks in their transition into college, e.g., making friends, managing one’s affairs, and scheduling time to meet deadlines and course requirements. Tinto’s model (1975), which provides a foundation for the study of persistence, begins with the initial stage of separation and transition followed by integration or incorporation into institutional life. This model suggests that first-generation students experience a lower level of structural integration because they are less likely to live on campus, be involved in campus organizations, or meet and develop their most important friendships on campus (Billson & Terry, 1982). The model does not, however, consider race and class issues that impact retention for diverse students (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Students who experience incongruence between their home and new college environment, for example, often have difficulty transitioning into college.

Carter and Robinson (2002) identify a number of transitional issues that appear unique to the first-generation Appalachian college student: (a) tensions created between home and assumptions that education means “up and out,” (b) changing relationships
with significant others, (c) concerns about family finances “back home,” and (d) unrealistic expectations about the amount of work required to succeed in their college courses. In general these students are motivated and able but many of them find themselves on the outside looking in.

**Involvement**

Another aspect of retention focuses on student involvement. Alexander Astin’s (1985) theory of student involvement, one of the most widely accepted models of student development, views involvement as the amount of energy that a student devotes toward academic experiences. The major premise of Astin’s theory is that “students learn by becoming involved” (p. 133). Astin states the need to learn whether or not unique populations are related to different forms of involvement and “whether a given form of involvement produces different outcomes for different types of students” (p. 153). It is my hope that this study will reveal indicators for the types of involvement that influence the successful integration of college students from Ohio Appalachia.

Many retention studies conclude that increased involvement leads to greater academic gains and increased persistence (Pascarella et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Pascarella et al. sought to expand understanding of how first-generation students perceive and benefit from college. Findings revealed that first-generation students derived a greater benefit from academic engagement than their continuing generation peers. Extracurricular involvement also revealed stronger positive effects in many areas related to college success for first-generation students than for their
peers. Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, and Gonyea (2006) found similar results in their report prepared for the Lumina Foundation for Education:

Student engagement positively affects grades and persistence to the second year of college even after controlling for [a] host of precollege characteristics and other variables linked with these outcomes such as merit aid and parents’ education…benefiting most in terms of grades and persistence are those who have been historically underserved by postsecondary education. (p. 34)

In applying theory to practice, however, Rendon et al. (2000) found that university administrators typically offer programs to students, passively, rather than purposefully reaching out to students and encouraging their involvement. In general, many non-traditional students find it difficult to get involved. These important differences between traditional and non-traditional students were not examined in the original student involvement theories.

Jalomo (1995) identifies characteristics which hinder the successful integration of first-generation students into college. Most of these characteristics limit a student’s availability for involvement in campus life: (a) married students with family obligations, (b) single parents, (c) students who are first in their family to attend college, (d) students who were not involved in activities during high school, (e) students who are afraid or feel out of place in the college culture, (f) students who take evening courses when little or no services are available, and (g) students who lack financial resources to take additional courses or participate in campus-based academic and social activities in college. First-
generation, Appalachian students share many of these characteristics which limit their opportunities for involvement in college.

Validation

Rendon (1994) discovered that validation, as opposed to involvement, transformed nontraditional students into successful students. Rendon’s model of validation proposes that nontraditional students do not perceive involvement as something they do but rather as something others do for them “when someone takes an active role in assisting them” (p. 44). Students are transformed into powerful learners andpersisters when an individual, either in- or out-of-class, validates them. Validation occurs when someone encourages the student, affirms them as being capable, and supports them in their studies and social adjustments. This model underscores the critical role of the institution and staff to “reach out to students and design activities that promote active learning and interpersonal growth among students, faculty, and staff” (Rendon et al., 2000, p. 147). Terenzini et al. (1996) similarly found that first-generation students need assurances that they were capable of learning and succeeding.

Having spent 20 years assisting all types of students navigate and enter the college-going process, I’ve observed, firsthand, the importance of validating experiences. In my work with Upward Bound I’ve watched nervous high school freshmen blossom into self-assured, focused seniors enjoying sparring with the Resident Advisors in water balloon fights during the residential summer bridge program. Now, on a regular basis in the Financial Aid Office I review appeals from students who have lost their eligibility for student aid.
First-generation students as well as their peers occasionally find themselves in this situation. First-generation students, however, have less social capital in their background to help them understand and navigate the complexities of maintaining academic progress. A first-generation student, “Sue” recently came to my office, desperate and hoping for helpful advice saying, “This is my first time being suspended and I don’t know anything about this college stuff, I don’t know what to do, can you help?” I explained the circumstances that caused her to lose her eligibility for aid and what she needed to do to get it back. No longer confused, she understood the cause of her problem and knew what was required to regain eligibility for financial aid. She knew that she needed to work hard to get back on track academically in order to continue toward the degree that would help provide opportunity for her family. Validation is recognizing and honoring the student for who he/she is and what he/she brings to the table. It’s a way of treating students with words or actions that say, “you have value.” Rendon et al. (2000) summarize this well:

Students will elect to stay or leave college not so much because of a theory but because college and university faculty and administrators have made transformative shifts in governance, curriculum development, in- and out-of-class teaching and learning, student programming and other institutional dimensions that affect students on a daily basis. (p. 152)

**Belonging**

It is important for retention purposes that students feel connected to the college community. The more a student feels a part of the college community and is validated by
interactions and experiences, the more likely it is that the student will be retained (Grayson, 1997).

Longwell-Grice (2002) conducted a case study of four first-generation, working class, first-year, white male college students in order to determine how they made the necessary academic, social and cultural adjustments to college. The study found that these students often lacked a sense of belonging to the campus community. The sense of belonging referred to the level of comfort the students felt when on campus, both in and out of the classroom. The lack of belonging in the study stemmed from four different situations: (a) lack of involvement on campus, (b) inability to make connections with faculty, (c) insecurity about making friends on campus, and (d) disorientation (a feeling of not being normal) due to anxiety about fitting in combined with whether or not they’ll be successful. These students felt out of place on campus and experienced status incongruity which put pressure on them to “choose between the college culture and their working class culture” (p. 269). Without a sense of belonging the students were left with a feeling that their presence did not matter. Longwell-Grice concludes his study with many recommendations focusing on students but also including alterations to the college culture so that first generation, working class students feel they are prepared, supported, and belong on the college campus.

The findings in a study by Komada (2002) echo the difficulty first-generation students face becoming connected to the campus environment. This study combined qualitative and quantitative methods to study 115 self-selected freshmen at a private liberal arts university. Komada focused on the differences between first-generation and
continuing generation students (parent had college degree) on various demographics, attitudes, familial support systems and personal resilience characteristics. First-generation students felt very alone and uncomfortable during their first month on campus compared to continuing generation students who took solace in knowing “everyone was in the same boat” (p. 114). Belonging for both sets of students was critical to their happiness; however, the first-generation students spoke more about homesickness for the familiarity that they knew all their lives. The study revealed that first-generation college students experienced feelings of not fitting in right from the start of college. It was not unusual for this feeling to continue for some individuals for quite awhile.

At the conclusion of the research study Komada (2002) provides recommendations for making higher education more attainable and for retaining students through graduation. Efforts focused on increasing a sense of belonging included: (a) improving preparation for college, (b) offering summer bridge programs that increase readiness for college level work and increase familiarity with the campus environment, (c) providing mentoring programs with faculty members or senior students, (d) offering a well-designed orientation program for students and their parents, (e) developing a holistic, integrated curriculum utilizing active learning and small classes and (f) requiring residential living for first-time students to better integrate them into the campus setting.

Alternate Findings

Research findings on students’ academic achievement are not always consistent. Generally, studies reveal that first-generation students perform at a lower level in their first year than do their non-first-generation peers. Some of the literature concludes,
however, that there is not a negative relationship between first-generation status and undergraduate grade point average (Arredondo, 1999; Billson & Terry, 1982). More recent studies expand on this finding and reveal that first-generation students who have taken a rigorous high school curriculum or excel on college entrance exams attain similar first-year grade point averages, and follow similar remedial course taking patterns as their non-first-generation peers (Warburton et al., 2001).

Similar research needs to be conducted on Appalachian college-going students. Per pupil expenditures are low and curricular opportunities are limited, however, in the secondary schools throughout most of Appalachian Ohio in comparison with areas of the state with higher standards of living. For example, only 57% of Appalachian Ohio school districts had one or more 2006 graduates taking an Advanced Placement course exam compared to 72% of non-Appalachian districts in Ohio (OACHE, 2007). In order to determine whether or not a negative relationship exists between Appalachian status and undergraduate GPA, additional study needs to be conducted.

Findings vary, as well, in regard to attrition from college. Pratt and Skaggs (1989) indicate that first-generation students were not at any greater risk for attrition than their peers. These students did, however, report more doubt in their level of preparation for college than their peers. These doubts were confirmed in other findings in the literature (Mitchell, 1997; Rendon, 1994).

On another positive note, some reports reveal that first-generation college graduates have equal opportunities for employment as their non-first-generation peers (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Additionally, these findings reveal no
difference in average annual salaries between the two groups. Data from the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) corroborate these findings: “Educational attainment mediates the influence of a student’s socioeconomic status on subsequent income and occupational status” (Ohio Board of Regents [OBR], 2002, para. 5).

These findings support the notion of the importance of retaining first-generation college students through to graduation. Surprisingly, one study determined that first-generation students earned higher incomes following graduation than their continuing generation peers (Wang, 2003). Wang suggests a possible explanation for this unexpected finding: first-generation students may be more aware of the need for financial security than other students.

**Synthesis**

According to Ishitani (2003) the number of first-generation students attending college is increasing. He indicates that college attendance for these high school students increased 4.8% from 1987 to 1996. College attainment rates for the Appalachian region have increased steadily as well although they still lag behind the rates for the country as a whole, e.g., 17.7% versus 24.4% in 2000 (Shaw et al., 2004).

Notwithstanding an increase in the college-going and attainment rates, however, the literature continues to reveal greater risk of departure for first-generation college students. The sources repeatedly conclude that, even when controlling for the characteristics that distinguish them from their counterparts, first-generation status has a negative effect on persistence and attainment in college (Ishitani, 2003; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Warburton et al., 2001). Compounding
the problem, educational attainment levels in Appalachia are low. Only 10.1% of adults in Scioto County attained a bachelor’s degree versus 21.1% for Ohio and 24.4% for the country as a whole (ARC, n.d.). In examining the effect of income on persistence, Ishitani (2003) found that students whose families had incomes of $25,000 or less had a 49% higher risk of leaving college in the first year. This is especially relevant in Appalachian Ohio where per capita income is nearly $9,000 below the average for the rest of the state (ODOD, 2007).

Nationally, the proportion of first-generation students represents about one-fourth of high school graduates (Warburton et al., 2001). In Appalachian Ohio the proportion of first-generation high school graduates who enroll in college is more than double the national average, at approximately 51% (OACHE, 2007). While Choy (2001) found that first-generation students remain at a disadvantage throughout their postsecondary education experience regardless of other background and enrollment factors, Carter and Robinson (2002) offer important insight into some of the unique factors influencing Appalachian students in particular as they transition into a four-year institution.

Faculty and administration need to become aware of the special needs of these students to fully understand the barriers that affect their entry into and success in college. Identification of important influences will enable researchers to examine their impact on students’ ability to move forward in the educational process. Strategic plans can then be developed to minimize the negative effect of first-generation, Appalachian status, focusing instead on the strengths and characteristics that help these students succeed.
This literature review offers a variety of strategies for improving the postsecondary success of first-generation, Appalachian Ohio college students. McConnell (2000) provides research-based suggestions to increase retention of first-generation students: form learning communities and find additional opportunities for campus employment. Appalachian students are especially sensitive to opportunities to earn extra money due to low socioeconomic conditions. These suggestions, however, need to be juxtaposed against the primary reason these students do not persist. First-generation students have difficulty juggling multiple roles as student, employee, and family member (McConnell, 2000, para. 25).

Successful integration into college is one of the key components to college retention. College and university staff members need to assume responsibility to help students navigate between their home and a new college environment. It is important that administrators and faculty help students make connections in their new college culture that “evoke a sense of comfort that originates in their early cultural upbringing” (Rendon et al., 2000, p. 137). Campus celebrations such as Black History Month, Cinco de Mayo, and Homecoming dances help provide this connection for students. Other students and staff can also serve as role models to help new students maneuver through unfamiliar traditions, cultural clashes, and behavioral expectations of the majority and minority culture.

Some of the research suggests matching up at-risk first-generation students with advisors early and often in their college career in order to help them with academic issues as well as help them socialize and integrate into the college environment more
successfully (Ishitani, 2003; U. S. General Accounting Office, 2003). Other recommendations focus on helping students increase their institutional commitment, improve their structural integration, and expand their support network in the academic setting (Billson & Terry, 1982). These approaches would benefit students from Appalachia as well. The *Student Persistence in College* report (2003), drafted by The American Federation of Teachers, suggests 5 main strategies to foster the kind of environment that helps students succeed: (a) improving support services that strengthen persistence, (b) develop intensive first-year programs including small classes and tutors, (c) encourage and develop school-college collaboration to strengthen preparation for college, (d) offer or expand summer bridge programs especially for underserved high school graduates entering college, and (e) conduct student-centered research on persistence.

Further research indicates that the primary reason first-generation students leave college is because they have difficulty juggling their multiple roles as student, employee, and family member. Therefore it may not be appropriate to recommend programs such as seminars, workshops and tutoring that require additional time commitments from these students. Any strategy, however, that improves the classroom experience and optimizes learning such as learning communities might help students need less time outside of the classroom to master the content and thus make it easier for them to manage their conflicting roles. More campus employment opportunities also have great merit in that they offer students opportunities to become more familiar with the campus environment, to stay focused on school-related issues, to feel connected to the institution, and to
develop meaningful relationships on campus. As a result students are more likely to become more academically and socially integrated on campus (McConnell, 2000).

Summary

This literature review provides the landscape against which this study will be conducted. A secondary goal has been to highlight information that will help college personnel develop sensitivity to and awareness of the challenges faced by Appalachian Ohio, first-generation college students. I also hope that this study will provide the impetus for the development of programs, policies and procedures that promote the successful integration of these students into college. My goal aligns with Tierney from Rendon et al. (2000), “The search for an understanding about why students leave college is not merely of theoretical interest; if a model may be built that explains student departure then it may be possible for colleges to retain students” (p. 143).
CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Orientation and Methodology

Merriam (2002) characterizes qualitative research as “The search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product” (p. 6). Patton (2002) provides a guide for using this approach, “Be sure that a qualitative approach fits your research questions: questions about people’s experiences; inquiry into the meanings people make of their experiences; studying a person in the context of her or his social/interpersonal environment; and research where not enough is known about a phenomenon for standardized instruments to have been developed” (p. 33). Unlike quantitative research which seeks to determine relationships between a set of variables, Glesne (1999) proposes that qualitative studies increase understanding of “perceptions, attitudes, and processes” (p. 24).

From a similar perspective, Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) state that the qualitative research approach is appropriate when attempting to understand a social setting or activity as viewed from the participant’s perspective. Qualitative studies focus on the experiences of single or several individuals and understanding their past, present, and future experiences (Creswell, 2002).

The research questions that guided this study applied specifically to the experiences of first-generation first-term students from Ohio Appalachia. The questions focus on students’ experiences relating to their integration into college. Factors identified as either positively or negatively affecting integration were examined in the context of
the students’ social and interpersonal environment. This study examined the experiences and ways that first-generation students viewed and engaged their transition to college. My goal was to identify specific answers to the following questions: (a) what do Appalachian Ohio first-term college students perceive as barriers to admittance and successful integration into college and (b) what influences and factors assist students in the admissions and integration process?

Research on the topic of integration with this population is nearly non-existent, thus a qualitative approach was appropriate in order to “build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gleaned from being in the field” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Cohen and Manion (1989) concur with Merriam’s findings, “The investigator works directly with experience and understanding to build his theory on them” (p. 39). Theory is emergent in interpretive research, arising from particular situations. It follows, rather than precedes the research (Cohen & Manion). Some aspects attributed to interpretive research include: (a) focus on the individual, (b) small-scale research, (c) non-statistical, (d) subjectivity, (e) personal involvement of the researcher, (f) understanding actions/meanings rather than causes, (g) investigating the taken-for-granted, and (h) interpreting the specific (Cohen & Manion).

Merriam (2002) considers basic interpretive qualitative studies the most common form of qualitative studies found in education. These types of studies seek to understand: (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how people create their worlds, and (c) what meaning they put on their experiences. Merriam states the purpose of basic interpretive study “is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their
experiences” (p. 38). This goal matches the goal of all qualitative inquiry; however, other types of qualitative research have additional foci, e.g., ethnography examines interactions of individuals with others and with the culture in which they live. Specifically, basic interpretive qualitative study seeks to “discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspectives and worldview of the people involved, or a combination of these” (Merriam, p. 6). Cohen and Manion (1989) characterize the interpretive paradigm as a “concern for the individual” (p. 38) with the key focus on understanding the subjective experience of individuals.

Similar to other qualitative orientations, the basic interpretive study collects data through interviews, observation or document analysis. The data are analyzed to identify recurring themes or patterns. These themes help generate findings which are richly described accounts of the phenomenon of interest.

As researcher, I focused on the voices of first-generation Appalachian college students in order to learn the factors that aided or detracted from their integration into college. Since this study centered on students from the Appalachian culture and some of the cultural values framed the study, readers might assume that the study was ethnography. Elements of ethnography surfaced in the study, however, it remained a basic interpretive qualitative study focused on (a) uncovering the factors affecting their integration into college, (b) discovering how the students interpret their experiences during their first term in college, (c) learning how interactions with others shape their experiences, and (d) discovering the meaning they attribute to those experiences. Through narrative inquiry I attempted to understand the experiences of students against
the backdrop of the first-generation Appalachian culture. Secondly, this research attempted to identify the factors affecting their successful integration into college.

Narrative Inquiry

This inquiry revealed how events were constructed by participants and provided a method for the systematic study of personal experience and meaning. Creswell (2002) maintains that narrative inquiry provides a middle ground between the objectivist and experimentalist perspectives by representing ideas about the nature of human experience and how it can be studied.

Creswell (2002) identifies seven main characteristics of the narrative research design: (a) focusing on individual experiences, (b) providing a chronology of the experiences, (c) collecting individual stories, (d) restorying the shared stories, (e) coding the texts for themes, (f) describing the setting or contexts of the stories, and (g) collaborating throughout the process with participants whose stories are being told.

Collaboration is both a strength and weakness of the narrative research design. By seeking out and collecting stories, the researcher has the opportunity to establish a close bond with participants. Shared stories enable the participant to be heard and to feel that their experience is important. Sharing lived experiences also helps individuals consider issues they may need to process and understand (Creswell, 2002).

Narrative research, however, is labor intensive and requires the researcher to assess whether or not stories are authentic. Validation checks such as triangulation of data and member checking are methods that the researcher can employ, however, to ensure the collection of good data. Sometimes the stories are too horrific for participants to tell or
they may fear reprisals from sharing their stories. Researchers must also resolve the issue of “who owns the story.” Creswell (2002) suggests, at minimum, providing information on the purpose and use of the stories at the beginning of the study and obtaining permission to share stories. In addition, narrative researchers need to maintain participants’ voice in the retelling of their stories and be mindful of the possibility of their own gain at the expense of the participant.

For the purpose of this study, I worked from the basic interpretive approach using narrative as the method of inquiry as well as object of interpretation. The students’ stories, collected through interviews, provided the texts for the narratives. These texts were analyzed and interpreted to identify common themes. Through narrative analysis these themes formed the narrative description of factors affecting the integration of first-generation college students from Ohio Appalachia.

Methodology and Research Design

Cohen and Manion (1989) describe research methods accordingly, “We mean that range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction” (p. 41). In the interpretive paradigm some of the methods include participant observation, role-playing and non-directive interviewing.

Role of Researcher

The most important principle I held as researcher for this narrative study was to do no harm. First-generation college students from Ohio Appalachia are generally not stereotyped as savvy, cosmopolitan, or risk-takers. They are, however, viewed as honest,
hard-working, and loyal. There is an inherent distrust of outsiders which could have included me, as researcher. As I embarked on this study I was sensitive and attuned to their interests and backgrounds, and their preconceptions, as well as their apprehensions. I was also forthright about my intentions, clearly stating the purpose of the study and expectations for their participation. As I interacted with participants I demonstrated genuine interest and an attitude of positive regard. I quickly developed rapport during the initial interview process.

As a qualitative researcher influenced by the basic interpretive research approach and using narrative as a process and object of study, my role was one of co-collaborator with those researched, the students. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) remind us that the researcher’s presence in this role needs to be acknowledged and understood throughout the narrative process and included in the final narrative report. Creswell (2002) outlines three main tasks for co-collaborators: (a) negotiate entry to the site and the participants, (b) work closely with participants to obtain field texts to capture individual experiences, and (c) write and tell stories in the researcher’s words.

In the process of interviewing students and reporting their stories I made representations about their experiences. Hearing their voices helped me interpret and create texts. The meaning of these texts, however, was contextual, not fixed and universal. Riessman (as cited in Huberman & Miles, 2002) reminds us, “All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly” (p. 228).

One of the most important issues confronting narrative researchers is their relationship with participants. An ideal relationship is characterized by equality of voice.
This is important in order for the participant to feel empowered to tell his/her story. Gay et al. (2006) describe the narrative research process as highly personal and intimate demanding a high degree of caring and sensitivity. They emphasize the importance of establishing a high level of trust and respect similar to that expected in a close friendship. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state the importance of the researcher negotiating the degrees of closeness in the relationship with participants. Researchers need to understand, document, and consider the consequences of establishing different degrees of closeness with participants. They need to be cognizant of the impact those relationships have on interpretations and retelling of participant stories.

My role as narrative researcher included the collection of stories and the retelling of these stories into a framework such as a chronology of students’ experiences on a college campus. As co-collaborator, I checked with participants along the way in this iterative process to clarify my understanding and help fill in the gaps. The research process included case analysis which organized the data “by specific cases for in-depth study and comparison” (Patton, 2002, p. 447). Patton describes cases as units of analysis. This analysis represents a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. As I analyzed and interpreted students’ stories I realized that my own views and perceptions which were rooted in personal, cultural, and historical factors shaped my interpretations. The written summary, the narrative description, is my voice as the researcher.

A researcher must acknowledge and reveal personal bias that can affect the outcome of a study. I believe that first generation status negatively impacts a student’s chances for earning a degree. To minimize the effects of this bias and borrowing from a
concept used in the study by Darling (1999), I participated in a bracketing interview in which I responded to the same questions asked of student participants. This process enabled me to explore possible preconceptions I had about the undergraduate experience or about first-generation college students from Ohio Appalachia. The hour-long interview was conducted by a doctoral level faculty member who had extensive qualitative interview experience. The interview was transcribed and analyzed by the faculty member and me to identify any themes related to the research process. The resulting feedback increased my awareness of possible biases and assumptions that might influence me as a researcher.

The role of ethics in this study was a primary consideration for me, as researcher. Gay et al. (2006) state the role of ethics in qualitative research in respect to “how we treat the individuals with whom we interact in research settings” (p. 407). Unlike quantitative researchers who seek to measure, compare and quantify statistical results qualitative researchers rely on individual skills interacting with others to produce meaningful data. Patton (2002) states “The researcher is the instrument” (p. 14). As qualitative researchers we have an awesome responsibility as the “tool for research” and also for the safety and confidentiality of our participants. This study was guided by the following checklist (Gay et al.):

1. Researchers should have an ethical perspective that is very close to their personal ethical position.

2. Informed consent should take the form of a dialogue that mutually shapes the research and the results.
3. Researchers should be able to identify broader social principles that are an integral part of who they are as researchers and as contributing members of the communities in which they live.

4. Qualitative researchers are morally bound to conduct their research in a manner that minimizes potential harm to those involved in the study.

5. Even though an action may bring about good results, it is not ethical unless that action also conforms to ethical standards such as honesty and justice.

6. The qualitative researcher must remain attentive to the relationships between the researcher and the participants, i.e., one determined by roles, status, language, and cultural norms. (p. 411)

Adherence to these basic ethical guidelines enabled me, as a qualitative researcher, to ensure that my efforts were responsible and resulted in being equitable, liberating, and life enhancing.

Identifying and Selecting Research Participants

This study focused on a purposeful sampling of first-generation college students from Ohio Appalachia. Patton (2002) states that purposeful sampling permits the in depth study and understanding of a phenomenon. A great deal can be learned about the issues key to the purpose of the research by seeking out information-rich cases. This research study was conducted with nine participants who were first-generation college students beginning their first term of study at Shawnee State University. The targeted sample size is based on Patton’s explanation of obtaining in-depth, “information rich” information from a small group of people (p. 244).
Information about the study was shared with entering students during the summer orientation sessions conducted June through August. I attended several sessions to distribute information and to encourage students to participate. Information sheets and participant response forms (see Appendixes A and B) were distributed to interested students who met the eligibility criteria for the study. Basic criteria for selection included first-generation student status, resident of 1 of the 29 Appalachian counties in Ohio, and willingness to participate. Participants were enrolled full-time (12 or more credit hours) in their first term of college.

Students were contacted by phone or email to assess their level of interest and to ensure that they met the eligibility criteria for the study. The initial screening enabled me to explain the purpose of the study and to outline the plan for participation. Students could ask me questions prior to committing to participate. Following our discussion, I asked for verbal consent from the student to participate in the study. Initially only a handful of students expressed interest in the study. I contacted one of the professors for referrals and had an overwhelming response. The students who volunteered from the class received consideration on a first-come basis.

Selected students were given a consent form (see Appendix C) explaining researcher expectations, requirements, and the safeguards created to insure confidentiality. Assurance of confidentiality was documented and verbally explained to participants. Participants’ names and those of family and friends were changed and other identifying characteristics were, likewise, protected.
The plan for the study and interview schedule was explained to the students. During the actual interviews I provided snacks and basic school supplies, e.g., pens, notepads to the participants. These supplies provided motivation for the students to participate but, more importantly, demonstrated appreciation for their commitment to the study. I was fully aware of the harried pace and demanding schedule many college students must follow, i.e., balancing school, family obligations, and work schedules.

The Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs at Shawnee State University approved the plan for conducting this research study contingent on a successful review by the Institutional Review Board. The IRB review process was initiated and approved at both Shawnee State and Ohio University following the defense of the proposal (see Appendixes D and E). All aspects of the study were compliant with IRB guidelines.

Interviews

Qualitative interviewing provides a framework for participants to express their own understanding in their own words. Patton (2002) describes the purpose of the interview process in qualitative research, “To allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 341). Unlike the role of the researcher in quantitative study, the researcher in qualitative study becomes the main instrument in the process. Patton reaffirms this role, “The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (p. 341). Skill and technique enhance the quality of the data but “genuine interest in and caring about the perspectives of other people” is equally important (Patton, p. 341). Patton recommends that interview questions be open-ended, neutral, singular, and clear.
Cohen and Manion (1989) describe the research interview as a conversation between two people, initiated by the interviewer, for the purpose of obtaining research-relevant information. One advantage is that interviews allow for greater depth than is the case for other methods of data collection. A disadvantage, on the other hand, is that they are prone to more subjectivity and interviewer bias than are other methods.

There are many different approaches to interviewing strategies. Cohen and Manion (1989) list four types of interviews used as research tools: the structured interview; the unstructured interview, the non-directive interview, and the focused interview. Patton (2002) highlights the attributes and drawbacks of obtaining qualitative data through three basic approaches to open-ended interviews: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview.

The interview guide approach, used for this study, served as the main vehicle for collecting data. This approach provided the backdrop for the conversation—the interviewer built the conversation around particular subject areas. The flexibility and semi-structure provided by the guide enabled me to establish a relaxed yet focused setting for eliciting narrative about students’ experiences in college. The interviews were conducted in a professional manner with protection of confidentiality assured. Once students were selected for the study, a participation agreement, outlining the purpose and objectives, was completed and signed by each of the students and the researcher. The agreement followed the guidelines recommended by the Institutional Review Board and included information about the study such as the time commitment, assurance of
confidentiality, and an explanation of the audio taping of the interviews. The agreement also requested permission to review the student’s academic and advising records and files. It also explained any risk to the participant stating that the student could decline to participate at any time during the study. The students were given a copy of the agreement after signing the form.

Students were invited to an initial interview which was conducted early in the fall term. A follow-up session was conducted at the end of the term. The interview guides for the initial and follow-up interviews are in Appendixes F and G. Both of these interviews, lasting one to two hours in length, permitted prolonged engagement, described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as necessary for identifying the key characteristics of participants’ experiences. The researcher conducted and recorded interviews in a confidential yet comfortable location on campus. Discussion was directed toward the issues, concerns, and factors affecting the students’ engagement into college. The interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient to the participant. The researcher ensured that the interviews did not conflict with scheduled work or class periods or times when the student had to prepare for assignments or exams.

Opening statements in the interviews, as recommended by Patton (2002), generally covered the following issues: (a) the purpose for collecting the information, (b) who the information is for and how it will be used, (c) what questions will be asked, (d) how responses will be handled including the extent of the promise of confidentiality, and (e) the risks and/or benefits for the person being interviewed. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide approach. This approach utilized an outline of issues
to be explored with each participant. Four to six core questions were posed with follow-up prompts added as needed, i.e., “and then what?” or “could you tell me more about that?”

To show genuine interest and respect in my participants I began our discussion by asking them to tell me about their background, e.g., families, hobbies. In return, I shared basic information about myself as well as my interest in the study with each participant prior to beginning the interviews. This discussion was brief although I informed participants that I was available to discuss it further at a future time. I also asked participants if they had any questions concerning the study. This conversation helped establish rapport with participants, provided insight on the motivation for my study, and set the stage for a shared conversation during the interview process. This opportunity for one-on-one discussion with participants, prior to interviewing them, also helped avoid the concept described as “othering” the participants, i.e., asking for personal information from participants while not sharing information about oneself (Merriam, 2002).

The initial interview included questions about the students’ expectations and experiences as they began their first term in college. I explored their stories with them in order to fully understand their emotional, social, and academic experience in the college environment. These issues provided early insight into the primary research questions of “what are the factors that affect the successful integration of first-generation students from Ohio Appalachia.” Six or eight questions served as probes to help prompt discussion if students had difficulty forming their thoughts. The interview guides for both interviews are listed in Appendixes F and G. My intent as researcher was to empower the
participants to tell their stories and be collaborative in the process. Patton (2002) emphasizes the importance of capturing the actual words of the person being interviewed. I was able to retrieve students’ detailed descriptions accurately and completely by using the digital recorder.

Informal observations of the students’ demeanor and relationships with others as well as the setting where the interviews were conducted provided confirmatory data. These observations were noted on the interview sheets and included in the data analysis process. Interviews notes, observations, and transcripts were the main source for gathering data.

Each personal interview was digitally recorded and written onto notes. At the conclusion of the interview I reviewed and summarized my notes with the participant repeating and paraphrasing back key points and topics that were discussed. I asked for clarification about issues that weren’t clearly described or recorded. During our conversation I asked if anything was left out and/or offered them a chance to add to their story. In order to demonstrate my sincere interest in having an accurate record of their story I repeated, “This is what I heard, is there anything you’d like to add.” The process of reviewing the notes with participants is a form of member checking (Patton, 2002). It is an important method for ensuring trustworthiness of qualitative research and provides participants the opportunity to give input on the data, interpretations, and conclusions.

The interviews were transcribed by a staff member at Ohio University. During the time between the initial and follow-up interview I read the transcriptions, reviewed my notes and the points made through member checking. I made changes according to the
input, when appropriate. In addition, I examined the data to identify common themes that were relative to the experiences and stories the students told.

The follow-up interview was scheduled prior to the beginning of the spring term. This interview served two functions: (a) to clarify and gain a deeper understanding from the first interview and (b) to learn if any changes have occurred, i.e., have students encountered challenges or supports that have helped or deterred their progress. This meeting was also conducted in a private, convenient location on campus. The discussions were recorded and later transcribed. To re-establish rapport I asked students about their first semester and their break from school. The common themes identified from the initial interviews were shared. These findings did not reveal individual points of view. Instead, they focused on the general themes that emerged from the analyses of the data. I requested feedback from participants to gauge whether or not the themes I identified matched their perceptions. Student comments, obtained through the process of member checking, helped validate my interpretation of the data.

Data Analysis

The goal in conducting narrative research is to “learn about the general from the particular” (Gay et al., 2006, p. 436). Gay et al. state that analysis includes summarizing data whereas the interpretation of data involves making sense of what it means, i.e., answering the “so what” question in terms of the implications of the findings.

The focus of data analysis according to Glesne (1999) is to describe and interpret what people say and do. Patton (2002) describes qualitative analysis as inductive in the early stages: discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one’s data. Following the
gathering of student stories, I read the transcripts several times. I checked with participants my current understanding of their stories based on our initial interview. Where necessary, I contacted participants to clarify parts of their stories and added the information to bring to light the meaning of the students’ experiences. The transcript reviews provided additional insight on students’ experiences and revealed discrepancies between the recordings and the transcribed texts.

Several data analysis strategies were used to narrow the large set of issues and data into small and important groups of data. Analysis began with descriptions of each case, i.e., student’s story. Themes that emerged from the literature and from the collection of students’ stories were then identified. The analysis of the data included an in-depth review of the notes I made on the interview forms in search of meaningful codes.

Coding was used to mark parts of the text that indicated patterns and meanings in order to cull the data for repetition of common themes. Once identified, these codes were winnowed and sorted. They were carefully examined, refined even further, and organized into categories. Organized data simplified the examination of the different aspects of the students’ experiences. The coding process illuminated common themes that were analyzed to generate meaningful interpretations of students’ stories.

Creswell (2002) describes this phase of data analysis as iterative. As analysis proceeds the researcher cycles back to gather more information and fill in the gaps. The data are read several times and analyzed each time by the researcher. The researcher continues scanning, coding, categorizing, and generating themes in order to determine what can be learned and interpreted from the texts. After carefully reading through each
participants' story, I went back through the data to see where codes crossed individual cases. After thorough readings of the participants' stories, I listed and detailed the major themes.

Following the initial interview, participants reviewed the interview summary and provided input on additional meanings and interpretations. Findings were shared with colleagues to gain additional perspective and input as well as discovering new aspects of the data.

**Interpretation**

Patton (2002) states that qualitative interpretation begins with discovering meaning, i.e., what does this tell me about the phenomenon of interest? The meaning-making will come from comparing students’ stories and interpreting causes, consequences, and relationships. The data in the study was interpreted based on common aspects, connections, and linkages among the different types of data. Gay et al. (2006) list four important questions key to interpretation: (a) what is important in the data, (b) why is it important, (c) what can be learned from it, and (d) why does it matter. The interpretation process included seeking advice of friends and colleagues to gain insight on research that might have been missed.

Analyses and interpretations were shared with participants to ensure an accurate account of their stories and to test the validity of interpretations. Gay et al. (2006) describe this collaborative approach involving the researcher and participant in the negotiation of the final text as one of the key characteristics of narrative research.
Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the process refers to the use of research methods that are balanced, fair, and complete. In order to make it possible for others to decide the trustworthiness of a study researchers must: (a) describe how interpretations were made, (b) make the transformations visible, (c) describe how successive transformations were made, and (d) make the research data available to other researchers (Riessman, as cited in Huberman & Miles, 2002).

Unlike rationalistic enquiry that relies on measures of internal and external validity and reliability, attempts were made to increase the trustworthiness of this study by increasing the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmation of the data. I included several strategies to test the validity of my study and the conclusions. Testing insights and member checks was conducted to increase the credibility of the study. During the follow-up interview I reviewed the transcripts, developing themes, and resulting texts with participants to ensure that I accurately captured the meaning of what they intended to say.

Credibility lends credence to the study by guarding against bias. It requires that the researcher “adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 51). Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings to other situations under similar yet not identical, conditions. Gay et al. (2006) suggest that dependability refers to the stability of the data collected.

One key consideration in qualitative research is triangulation of methods or data. Triangulation strengthens the credibility of research studies by combining the methods or
data (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2002) states that triangulation involves corroborating evidence from different individuals, different types of data, and methods of data collection. Some examples of triangulation include: (a) combining interviewing and observations, (b) using different types of purposeful samples, (c) examining how different theoretical perspectives affect a particular analysis, and (d) combining qualitative and quantitative research strategies. The accuracy, credibility and confirmability of the study is increased by drawing the data from more than one source, individual, or process of data collection. This strategy decreases or neutralizes any inherent bias in a particular source, individual, or method. Triangulation of methods was incorporated into this study by conducting face-to-face individual interviews as well as phone or even email interview. Informal member checks took place on the phone, by email, and even through impromptu office visits or chats in the hallway. Data collection methods included narrative texts, recorded observations, as well as grade transcripts obtained with students’ written permission. This information provided insight on the success or difficulty the student was having navigating the university culture.

Toward the conclusion of the study I shared aspects of my findings with two colleagues outside the study, whose expertise included writing and qualitative research methodology. Their comments helped reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the project. The bracketing interview completed prior to beginning the study was intended to reveal any biases and/or assumptions I had concerning the participants or their home and university cultures. The different techniques incorporated into this study do not
necessarily guarantee the trustworthiness of the study but do help persuade the reader of its credibility.

In addition to the external review and bracketing interview, I worked hand in hand with my advisor during each rendition of the paper. He read the original transcripts and my case summaries. He provided suggestions for the coding process and followed the development of themes. His ideas and thoughtful input increased the clarity and quality of my writing.
CHAPTER FOUR

Findings: Cases and Themes

These stories revealed the emotional, academic, and social circumstances experienced by a group of first-generation students upon entry into college. An in-depth view of their interactions and experiences was possible because nine students volunteered to participate in the study. In examining cases, it was this act of volunteering that was analyzed first.

The participants in this study were all first-term students at Shawnee State University although they may not have been representative of the general student body. Whether from personal interest, willingness to help, or possibly believing they would benefit in some way, these students volunteered for this study. They received neither pay nor guarantee of personal gain beyond the opportunity, for some, to earn extra credit in a psychology class. Besides meeting the criteria required for participation, (i.e., first generation college students in their first semester of college), the act of volunteering required action. They met with a total stranger and discussed issues about their life in relation to their educational journey. Their involvement demonstrated attributes conducive to academic success: motivation, diligence, and follow-through. Alternately, they could have declined to participate. Instead, they volunteered and all nine completed the study.

Bill, Deb, John, Maggie, Maxie, Retha, Treva, Zee, and Lourine were strangers to each other; however, together they shared a common bond. As participants in the study they revealed their personal stories detailing the paths as well as the dead ends that led
them from high school to college. Common threads ran through several of their stories yet other aspects distinguished them from one another. These threads highlighted influences that led to and affected their entry into college. As cited in literature, some influences negatively impacted integration into college while others benefited and supported the transition. For example, students who experience incongruence between their home and college environment often have difficulty transitioning into college (Rendon et al., 2000).

Patton (2002) highlighted the attributes of obtaining qualitative data through three basic approaches. The interview guide approach, used for this study, provided flexibility and semi-structure enabling conversation to build around a particular subject area. The semi-structured interview offered a consistent approach which resulted in rich data. Conversation flowed naturally and included the individual twists and turns of the participants’ story. The interview guide included prompts to help students share their stories. Many of the prompts were drawn from research on the college-going behavior of first-generation students.

The focus of data analysis according to Glesne (1999) is to describe and interpret what people say and do. Following each interview major themes evolved that corresponded to prompts and categories defined by the interview guide. As data were sorted and analyzed new categories emerged and some of the data were organized into new categories. Further comparisons of data within the categories revealed additional themes, sub-themes, and patterns. The researcher was particularly sensitive to similarities, differences, variations, and relationships in the data. Data analysis resulted in
a collection of themes and patterns that illuminated the journey of these first generation college students in Appalachia Ohio.

Bill

Although unprepared for academic rigor, Bill was determined to succeed in college. We met one morning during the holiday break for our follow-up interview. Bill was already at Tim Horton’s waiting for me to arrive. The temperature outside was below freezing and he was not wearing warm clothes; he looked cold. Thinking that he had been running errands that morning, I asked him if he had more errands to complete. “No,” he explained that he had gone to the college bookstore to purchase books. Bill then walked more than a mile in sub-freezing temperatures with a backpack on his back to meet me. He did not have a car that morning—a family member dropped him off at the college and would pick him up later in the day. I assumed Bill had transportation to our meeting. I was wrong.

Bill is 22; he has two half-sisters—one who is five years old and another who is 20. He is just now pursuing a college education having spent several years following high school installing in-ground pools. Bill admits previous problems with drug abuse which led to minor infractions with the law. At one point he entered a rehabilitation facility to receive treatment for his addiction. Now, a recovering addict, Bill explains that he lives near the college with his grandparents, an aunt and uncle, and his mom and younger sister. Living with family members provides him a stable home and helps him stay away from the influence of friends who still use drugs and get into trouble with the police.
Motivation to Attend College

Bill was not on the college track following high school. Instead, he got into drugs. After a couple of years of partying and working off and on he decided he wanted a better life, “I got sick and tired of what I used to do.” Bill knew people who succeeded in college which gave him confidence that he could attend and succeed as well. He had a buddy making straight As who was only a mediocre student in high school. His sister and mother also attended college. In jest, friends and family told him he could not make it in college. That motivated him even more to show them that he could succeed. He enrolled with encouragement from his grandparents who wanted him to “go to college and straighten up.” They were both retired teachers and could help Bill with homework and assignments.

Bill's circumstance concerning first-generation status was unique. During the interviews I found that his grandparents had attended and completed college. However, neither of his parents had earned a bachelor's degree, which seemed to make his experience comparable to the other participants in the study. While attending college, Bill lived with his maternal grandparents, both who had graduated with four year degrees. This gave him access to assets that other participants did not have. Even with this benefit, Bill struggled in his classes.

Bill wants an education that will help him find a well-paying job; one that is easier than installing pools. His major is still undecided but he enjoyed the first term and gained confidence after earning passing grades in all of his classes. His mother, although
confident in his ability, did not think he had the determination to stick with college. She
is, however, very proud of his initial success.

*Academic Challenges*

Bill found the college atmosphere to be very different from high school. He
anticipated that professors would not care much about students’ progress since students
pay for instruction through the cost of tuition and fees. He expected the college
environment to be impersonal and run like a business focused on making money rather
than helping students. He realized, instead, that professors care and will try to help
students. He found that they differ in approach, teaching style, and expectations. Bill tries
very hard to meet their expectations. For example, some professors expect students to
attend class while others do not make it mandatory. Bill diligently attends class whether it
is expected or not.

Bill took developmental classes in the fall: math, reading, writing and academic
skill development. The coursework was harder than he anticipated but he enjoyed the
overall college experience, “It’s more fun than I thought it would be.” When he was
younger math was an easy subject for him. He did well in his college math course as
well. Bill was frustrated, however, with his reading class in the fall. He did not like the
class or the teacher. She switched from topic to topic and changed requirements without
informing the students. “It just drives me crazy. I can’t stand her. I can’t stand that class
either.” The amount of reading assigned in the class was difficult for him to complete.

Technology and determination helped Bill successfully manage and complete his
class assignments. When he began classes he purchased a phone to help keep track of
assignments, meetings and deadlines. He even used it for an alarm clock so he did not have to rely on his grandmother to wake him up. The phone is a tool that helps him stay on time. Bill uses it, however, to skillfully organize his whole life. It turned out to be one of the keys to his success during the fall semester.

The fall semester ended well for Bill. He earned two Cs, one B, and a P for passing. Bill will take more challenging courses in the spring—he will transition out of some of the developmental coursework. He says his biggest challenge will be to stay focused. He feels confident about his ability to improve his grades and says he just needs to study more. He has a plan, “Make sure that you like read and through the chapter ‘cause we don’t do it in class. Ah, and make sure that you take notes.” Bill also plans to reserve going out for the weekend rather than during the week as well.

Life as a College Student

Bill is proud that he made it into college. He enjoys meeting new people and, for the most part, enjoys his classes. An athlete in high school, Bill would like to play intramural sports or to try out for one of the college teams, possibly basketball. He also expressed interest in joining a fraternity. Bill enjoys meeting people but it is not his main motivation for attending college, “If I meet somebody, you know, that’s cool. But I’m not going to college just to find friends right now.” During the fall he became friends with a guy who lives four hours away. They maintained contact over the holiday break and are both back on campus for the spring semester. Another friend from high school invites him to participate in some of the fraternity events and activities. He enjoys the opportunity to participate in these activities.
Bill had a girlfriend during the fall semester. She was not a student and the amount of time he studied became a factor that broke up their relationship. “I was dating this girl and she would get mad on nights that I told her I can’t come over…she’s like, ‘why.’ I was like ‘cause I got homework and stuff.’ And she’d get mad.”

**Family Responsibilities**

Bill’s responsibilities are far different from those of a typical traditional-aged, residential, college freshman. Living in a household of seven people makes it difficult for him to focus on assignments. He helps care for his grandfather who is disabled and he is responsible for all of the lawn mowing chores. He helps his grandmother by taking out the garbage, washing dishes, and cleaning the house. Bill also helps his mother by babysitting for his sister. He quit his job in order to focus on school. When there is time, he hangs out with friends. Bill balances all of these responsibilities with schoolwork.

This living arrangement places many demands on Bill; however, he benefits from it as well. Family members drive him back and forth to school since he does not have a car that runs at the present time. The system is not perfect; if their cars are not running, Bill cannot make it to class. He also benefits from the support and academic assistance he receives from his grandparents. As retired teachers, they provide Bill a free and valuable resource to help him with his homework.

Some aspects of living with extended family, however, are not conducive to studying. Bill’s younger sister demands attention and wants him to play with her. There are other distractions as well:
At my house it’s very hard. It’s noisy…my room is downstairs in the basement. Now it’s kind of quiet down there but with the atmosphere it makes it hard there to study. People come down and they do clothes, the wash and dryer’s running and then once that happens I stop doing my homework and I start watching TV….Sometimes my mom, she’ll come down at 2 or 3 a.m. and start doing laundry and I’m like “oh geez.”

Generally there are fewer distractions in the middle of the night and the household is quieter than in the daytime. As a result though, Bill rarely gets six or more hours of rest at night. He relies on the weekend to try to catch up on sleep.

Despite the demands on his time, Bill tries to follow a schedule, prepare for class, and complete his assignments on time. Sometimes, however, circumstances beyond his control, e.g., when he does not have a ride to school, can make him miss classes. When this happens, he becomes stressed out. Smoking, one of his few remaining vices, helps him relax.

_Dysfunctional Home Life_

Bill told me a lot about his childhood at the end of the first interview. Growing up was hell. Drugs and violence were commonplace in the house:

My mom’s been married three times. So I’ve seen different guys here come in and come out. That drives me crazy. Plus every, like my dad when I was young, used to like beat and stuff and then every, every boyfriend my mom’s had was always there beating me. So now I have kind of a anger problem.
During the follow-up interview he revealed a disturbing episode that recently happened at home. One night his mother left the house to go check on her husband’s whereabouts (her husband currently lives with another woman):

The other night she drove over there and he comes out, they start fighting and then he grabs a brick and throws it at the car and all this. And I’m like, “Mom, why do you even go over there?”…She came up and said “Shut up.” And I was like “No I ain’t going to.” Then she starts smacking me and stuff. And I grabbed her and said “Mom just quit.” She just goes BOOM and hits me and I’m like “What in the world, you know. That’s crazy.” And then I just snapped right then and then it took my grandma and grandpa and they’s like “Calm down.”

Bill’s life has many challenges. This recent episode seems to have put him, understandably, more on edge. He was stressed and preoccupied with the situation.

Safe Haven

As a teenager and young adult Bill got into drugs. For the past year Bill has lived with his grandmother who, he says, “Goes to church every Sunday.” Even though he lives in a large household with extended family it served as a safe haven against violence and drugs. (The recent violent episode with his mother, however, may threaten the safety of this environment.) Having a stable home life enabled Bill to cut his ties with his old friends who were still into the drug scene, “Me staying there, it makes sure that I don’t go out all of the time and find trouble.” He now has the support and encouragement of family members who want him to succeed in college and make something of his life.
Summary

Bill is a non-traditional college student who comes from a history fraught with episodes of domestic violence and substance abuse. As a college hopeful he has many marks against him: poor academic preparation, unreliable transportation, limited financial resources, and a less than ideal environment for studying. Bill states he is a recovering addict and admits that he has problems managing his anger.

Bill faces many challenges in his pursuit of a college education. He has many attributes and resources though that can help him succeed another term. He has grandparents who care. They provide him food and shelter and support and encouragement that are important to him at this point in his life. They serve as excellent resources for school. In return, Bill assumes responsibility for much of the inside and outside housework. He also helps care for his sister.

Despite his chaotic life, Bill is very diligent about meeting his appointments and trying to complete all of his class assignments. He attends class, takes notes, and makes time to study. He is resourceful: he uses his phone to keep himself on track and he volunteered his time for this study—maybe because he thought it would benefit him in some way.

Deb

Deb is the only participant who attended a private high school. She finds college liberating compared to her experience in high school:
It’s like kind of like being around a bunch of clones….They all did the same stuff. They all drank every weekend. They all partied every night. And I’m like so “It’s nice to be here and meet people who have more interests like mine.”

Deb is an only child who grew up in the same city as Shawnee State University. Her parents are divorced and she lives with her mom. She is very close to her three cousins on her mom’s side and states, “My cousins are like my brothers and sisters.” Being the first in the family to attend college makes her proud. She is also the first of her cousins to graduate from high school so far and enroll in college. Her mother and grandma always talk on the phone about her college experiences:

My whole family is like excited…my parents and grandparents always worried ‘cause I didn’t get involved; I didn’t hang out a lot and now like I’m doing stuff and having fun and I always overhear them talking about how like happy they are and how much like I’m enjoying it.

**Motivation to Go to College**

From the time Deb was a young child to her high school graduation her parents often reminded her of their expectations for how her life would progress, “You’ll go to high school then to college. You’ll get a job, get married, and then have kids.” She did not question their plan. In fact, Deb accepted their mantra as her own. Furthermore, having lived with them during their rocky marriage, she decided that college was her main priority. She was not going to college to find someone to get married. “I’m here to study and to get a degree.”
Now in college, Deb realizes the financial challenges of earning a degree. During the first interview, she mentioned that her father occasionally gives her money, but he “doesn’t really provide very much support.” After the fall term, however, he seemed to have had a change of heart: he purchased all of her texts and other supplies for the spring term. Deb attributes her father’s inconsistent behavior to a history of reoccurring medical problems. Her mom struggles to make it on her own but she provides financial support to Deb as much as possible. As a result of their financial problems Deb is determined to pursue a career that enables her to earn a satisfactory income to support herself and her children, if and when she has them.

Deb considered going away to college. She realized it would be a valuable experience that would benefit her. Due to the cost of living on campus and her desire to stay close to home, however, she decided that it was not the best decision for her, “I don’t think I could’ve handled it.” When her friends are home from college, however, she is often envious of their opportunities and wishes that she had gone away to school.

Family Ties

Deb and her mom share a close relationship. They escaped the typical conflicts that often occur between mothers and daughters during the adolescent years. While her friends were rebelling and acting out during junior high she voluntarily asked her parents to go to church, “I was the only kid I knew who asked to go to church.” Her parents did not set a curfew for Deb during high school. It was not needed. “I’ve never given them a reason…I’ve never come home at like 6 in the morning…I don’t drink or do drugs or date or anything.” Deb’s relationship with her mom is very comfortable and she did not
think she could handle being away from home “I was a nervous wreck my first day here. If I’d have been at a big school I couldn’t have done it. I’d have been home.”

A typical week for Deb includes spending time with both of her parents and helping her mom around the house. A couple of days each week she goes to her father’s house for lunch. Because of her mom’s health problems Deb assumes the brunt of household chores, i.e., washing dishes, running the sweeper, etc. Deb has become better organized and able to balance her responsibilities reasonably well most of the time.

Financial Concerns

Paying for college is a huge challenge for Deb. Part of the reason she chose to live at home was because she knew she could not pay for room and board along with tuition and fees. She admits to neglecting her studies in high school because she did not realize that getting good grades was one of the avenues for receiving scholarships, “I was one of those people who thought your grades had absolutely nothing to do with your future.” Also she assumed her parents would remain married and able to help pay her college expenses. They divorced immediately before she began her senior year. At that point it was too late to improve her chances for scholarships. Deb is concerned about her financial situation, “I worry almost more than my mom does. ‘Cause I feel bad making her pay for everything.”

In order to reduce her financial burden Deb tried to find a job. Originally she had hoped to find some type of student employment on campus since typically jobs are scheduled around the student’s classes. She did not realize until several weeks into the term that it was up to her to find a position needing filled:
I qualified for work study but what it is is like I thought that they just like gave you stuff…saying you get it and here’s where you work. I didn’t realize until too late that you had to like find it yourself.

This reduced her opportunity to find employment since most positions were filled at the beginning of the term.

Late in the fall, however, Deb found a sitter position at the local hospital. During the holiday break she worked a lot and was excited about finally earning a paycheck, “I’m so excited for my next paycheck ‘cause I worked a full 40-hour week last week and this week I’ll work like a 44-hour week, so I’m pumped for my next paycheck.” Once the spring semester begins she will have classes three days each week and work two days during the week at the hospital. The unit she works in is very student-friendly. Students can set their own work schedule. Working helps Deb clarify the connection between time and money, “Every time I go to like spend money somewhere I’m like okay how many hours of work is this.”

*Exceeded Expectations*

Even though Deb expected college to be much harder than high school she was looking forward to going for several reasons. The private high school she attended had limited curricular offerings. She was not as academically challenged or socially engaged as she would have liked to have been in high school, “I wasn’t really a fan of high school myself.” As a result she did not apply herself fully academically or socially in high school.
Deb found college to be very different from high school. While her graduating class had fewer than 20 students, one of her first college classes had 75 students. Initially she was intimidated and distracted by the large number of students. Her solution was to sit toward the front where she would only see 10-20 students, “If you sit in the front two rows then you only see like 20 people in the front and you forget everyone else is there.”

Since no one in her family went to college she had no idea of what to expect from professors. She enjoys her classes and the professors and finds them approachable, “They’re all very nice…they’ve said numerous times, ‘You know, if you have questions come to me.’”

Social Connection

Having attended a private school with less than 200 students Deb was concerned about being in large crowds and having to make friends with people she did not know. She describes the insecurity she felt as a new freshman, “My first week I was thinking I’m not going to talk to anyone. I’m just going to go and sit there…every break I’d go run to my car and I’d sit in my car in between classes.” She had similar fears about going to the cafeteria, “used to be scared to death of the cafeteria, wouldn’t step foot in that thing. It was like there’s too many people. Hated it.” Deb states that now, however, she is completely over her initial fears. She is always open to going to the cafeteria, “I’m like, ‘Who wants to go eat there?’” Initially, she was also intimidated by large classes. Her psychology class with 75 other students, however, quickly turned into being her favorite class because she liked the professor and way that she incorporated technology into her instruction.
Deb found that she enjoys the interaction and diversity in classes, “There’s so many different opinions...It’s neat to hear all the different people.” While growing up, she hung out with the same 26 kids in her class, “Like with those 26 people you knew what pushed whose buttons, who you could say what around...we were used to each other.” In her college classes “It was like, oh my gosh, all these people are different and you don’t know how people are going act.” Unlike many of her friends though, Deb looks forward to the opportunity of meeting new people different from herself:

I have class with a bunch of them next semester like five or six people I graduated with and in a way I’m kind of like, “oh yea I get to see them again” but at the same time I’m like, “that means I’m not going to meet anyone in that class, they’ll…. sit by me”...you know what I mean? And they don’t want to talk to new people. And I’m like, “I do.”

Whereas she anticipated having difficulty meeting new people, Deb found she actually enjoys the experience. In fact, she enjoys getting to know people who are different from her as well as those who share similar interests, “I feel like I fit in here a lot more than I did in high school. So I really enjoy that because...there’s such diversity and it’s really nice.”

Deb surprised herself by joining one of the national sororities on campus; it was not something she had planned to do. She was not very involved in high school activities and was hesitant to get involved at college. Her mother encouraged her to attend some of the Meet the Greeks activities in the fall. Deb followed up on her mother’s advice and
found that the sorority provided an opportunity to help others as well as develop close friendships:

I love all my classes, all of the sorority I’m in now…I met a lot of new people and that’s been really good, too. And then it’s not just you meet them, like you meet other people through them too.

Participation in the sorority also motivates Deb to do well in classes. To remain in good standing she has to maintain a minimum GPA requirement each term. Weekly study tables are required based on designated levels of academic achievement.

Desire for Independence

Deb wants to be more independent. Her job experience and responsibilities in the sorority provide her glimpses of new possibilities, “It’s just that I want more like responsibility in a way….I think the sorority helped….Giving me responsibility like office and stuff and working’s helped a lot…I always knew the money didn’t grow on trees.”

Even though Deb thoroughly enjoys her experiences at Shawnee State University she often wishes she had gone away to college. It is awkward going back home during break after being in college for a semester, “You’re so different [but] no one notices.” She feels that she is changing as a result of being in college:

I feel weird because you know what I mean? You try to act different but at the same time you’re home with your parents. So it’s kind of hard ‘cause it’s like growing up but at the same time it’s like they won’t let me.
Deb knows that she is growing up as a result of being in college; however, her parents do not recognize these changes.

Deb’s friendships have changed as well. She made several new friends and embraces the differences in people she meets. She rarely sees her friends who went away to college, “I’ve hardly talked to them at all. I mean it’s not like intentional that we don’t want to. It just they’re so far away.” When her high school friends came home for the holiday break it was difficult to get together because everyone was busy. When they were able to find a time to hang out she was not that interested, “I’m like that’s OK I’ll pass.”

Deb begins the spring term with increased confidence and a sense of achievement. She successfully completed the semester having earned three As and two B+s. She attributes her success to liking the college experience. Deb earned an A in her Art History class, however, not because she liked the subject but because “I made myself work for it.” In the first term in college she learned that she could succeed in something she did not like by making herself work for it.

Summary

In a short period of time Deb successfully made the transition into college. In fact, she already seems to be in her element at Shawnee State University. Deb is more confident and out-going. She was not involved in high school and was stifled academically. She feels much more comfortable in the college setting, “I feel like I fit in here a lot more than I did in high school.”

Her parents’ rocky marriage and resulting divorce served as the main motivator for Deb to pursue a degree. Deb views college as a route for gaining self-sufficiency and
financial stability in the future. She is not in college to find a husband, “I’m here to study
and to get a degree.”

Deb is gaining confidence in her ability to handle some of her own affairs. Earning excellent grades during the first term increased her confidence. By holding down a job she is learning to handle her own finances. She is very conscientious about spending habits since she earns her own paycheck. Her responsibilities in the sorority also provide the opportunity to develop her skills and abilities. She views herself as more independent and able to handle increasing levels of responsibility. Deb wants her parents to recognize this as well.

Deb feels herself changing yet her parents do not seem to notice. Even though she is very close to her mom she is increasingly ready to be on her own and become more independent. She is not the same person who she was in high school. She is developing more fully as a confident and capable young adult; she is blossoming in her transition as a college student.

John

John is trying out college. He is the only participant to receive all Fs the first term. Alcohol and partying took priority over academics. He returned the spring term, however, to try and turn things around.

John lives in a town located an hour from Shawnee State University. His twin brother lives in the western United States and an older brother attends another college nearby. John enjoyed and played various sports in high school. He attended a vocational school to study diesel mechanics during the last two years of high school.
Motivation to Go to College

Following graduation John was hired as an apprentice to work alongside mechanics that had 20-30 years of experience in the field. The work was monotonous for his coworkers and after five months in the plant it had become monotonous for him as well. He quickly learned the basics of the trade. While only 18 years old he said he felt 60. Everyday he “found the same old problems, did the same old thing.” His coworkers “didn’t look happy at what they’re doing anymore.” These experiences influenced his decision to pursue a college education rather than continue working as a mechanic.

Some of his older friends played sports in college and John knew he wanted to experience college as well. His familiarity with college was limited to the party atmosphere portrayal in movies like Animal House. “But also one of the biggest things is I’ve always wanted to go to college or something. I didn’t know what exactly though.”

Getting a job that pays well is important to John. He wants a more secure, better paying job than his father was able to obtain. To achieve this goal he believes he needs to either go to college or learn a trade. He also desires his father’s approval. He wants him to be proud of his achievements. Although only an average student in high school, John is determined to do better in college.

John visited a couple of colleges prior to deciding which to attend. He selected Shawnee State University because it was the most affordable. Since it was an open-admission institution, he was admitted without difficulty.
Drinking Habits

In preparation for college John inadvertently set up roadblocks for himself. Suffering from a hangover the morning of his ACT exam, he undermined his opportunity by randomly filling in the bubbles on the score sheet. “I didn’t take it seriously.” In fact, one of the reasons he chose to attend Shawnee State University was because course placement could be made from an institution-specific placement exam in place of the ACT.

John enrolled in college expecting drinking to dominate the campus culture. In high school he drank alcohol every weekend, “Me and my friends were all alcoholics in high school.” As he began the fall term, partying and hanging out were more important to him than studying. “I have the social aspect of college down.” He would sleep in on Friday instead of waking up to go to class; Thirsty Thursday’s drinking activities became a regular routine. Eventually he realized his grades were slipping and that he was wasting his money by not attending class. While some of his friends’ parents paid their bills, he had to cover all of his college costs. He made a plan to keep himself from doing so poorly spring semester. John created a schedule for the spring with classes Monday through Thursday so that he had no classes on Friday. Upon returning for the spring he explained, “This semester I have my schedule perfect….I have no class on Friday, which is amazing because Thursdays at Shawnee State University are, well, Thirsty Thursday.”

Adjusting to College

John has many adjustments to make as a freshman. It is the first time he has lived on his own for any length of time. He is free to do things he could not do at home, e.g.,
drinking daily, sleeping in day after day. In addition he is expected to complete projects and assignments for which he is under prepared. John lacks time management and study skills. He is also learning how to manage his fiscal affairs by himself. He has to pay his college expenses and bills and has difficulty keeping the records straight. He claims, “I still don’t know where my loans are from.”

Financial Independence

John is paying for school without financial assistance from his parents. He received some federal grants but also has to take out student loans. He does not mind though and, in fact, thinks it is a good idea that he is assuming responsibility, “I’d rather do it myself…I think that’s an advantage that I have—that it’s my money that I’m working on instead of my parents.” During the follow-up interview between terms he seemed to view his financial situation more soberly, “I’m in debt…I try to shine some light on it, but I owe money. That’s the way it’s going.” He had received his semester grades by the time the follow-up interview occurred. The poor grades may have been a factor in his attitude at that point.

John wants to find a job. A high rate of unemployment in the area makes it difficult for college students to find jobs. He applied for a student maintenance position during the fall term but was not hired. During the spring he is applying to be an orientation leader or to work in the Success Center. His mother gives him cash occasionally. Since he already has room and board covered, cigarettes and beer are his only regular weekly expenses.
Learning to Study

John was academically unprepared for college level work. He knew the work would be more difficult than high school but he had not learned how to prepare for class, prioritize, and develop good study habits. He had difficulty completing the large number of reading assignments and his math course was challenging; however, he found a study partner to explain and work through the concepts with him. John had planned to look into services available to students with identified learning problems since he had been previously diagnosed with a learning disability. “Those first three weeks I was struggling. But now I’m not struggling but it’s a little rocky, but now I’m doing better.”

When the semester ended John’s failing grades reflected his difficulty in school. He shared his grades with his mother but simply told his dad, “I didn’t do good.” During the follow up interview John attributed his poor performance to “mostly my schedule. I didn’t make my schedule the way…my partying; my drinking went around [it]. This semester I have my schedule perfect.”

Following the first term John learned that staying in college was more difficult than getting into college. “Staying in I found out was harder…I just found out how easy it was to slack off. So I mean I just gotta stay centered.” He depends on financial aid to pay for college and realizes that poor performance will eventually negatively impact his eligibility for aid, “I like wasted it pretty much. That’s how I felt. It was like a huge smack in the face. So now I have to turn it around.” John reports he is doing well in his classes as he begins the spring term.
Adjusting to Living on Campus

John considers himself easy going and able to get along with most people. During the fall, though, an episode occurred that created tension in his residence. One of his housemates began taking and using John’s personal items without asking for permission. As a result, John and his roommate started to lock their bedroom door; however, it did not resolve the situation completely. After awhile John stopped going to his room altogether—hanging out, instead, at his buddy’s place. He coped by avoiding the situation, “Like I’m really good at not causing problems. Like I’ll just like let it slide. I just won’t hang out with you.” John considered moving out of the unit during the spring semester if things did not improve.

Social Connections

John thrives on being around people. He joined a campus group called the Blue Crew that supports the lesser-known sports. Like a pep club with a party atmosphere, they attend games, rev up the crowd, and cheer on the players. He has also enjoyed meeting students from other countries and learning about different cultures and traditions.

At social gatherings John likes to be the life of the party. He jokes about being voted the biggest flirt at both his home school and the vocational school he attended during his senior year. He enjoys dancing and is not self-conscious; in fact, John finds college liberating—no one knows him. He can be whoever he wants to be, “When I get to a bar or something I can be anybody I want.” John’s extroverted personality makes it difficult for him to buckle down and set aside time for homework. He attributes his poor
performance during the fall term to hanging out and partying, “I think that’s what killed me my first quarter.”

Relationships Back Home

John’s relationships with his high school friends and family have not changed much since he left home. Even though John and his brothers are in college or out of the home, sibling rivalry still strains their relationships. He thinks his parents are more relaxed with the boys gone, “Some days me and my brothers will be fine. Other days we’ll be fighting like cats and dogs…I think that that headache’s out of the house; I think my parents [are] better off.”

John seems to have a relaxed and close relationship with his mother. He openly communicates about things happening in his life and she serves as his sounding board. His relationship with his father, however, is strained, “I’m just like my dad.” His father drank a lot when he was young, “He’s the same way when he was younger, he just hates his son being like him. And so he’s just always was hard on me and I’m always hard back on him.”

Drinking seems to be a central focus for many members of his family. His mother drinks “every night but doesn’t take it over the edge.” His grandpa, who was his mom’s drinking buddy, drank a lot before he died. John began drinking during his sophomore year in high school and was picked up by the police for underage drinking. In addition, like his father, he has anger problems. He was suspended in high school for fighting a student who was mouthing off, “I’ll never start a fight, but if someone pushes me I will. I like to fight.”
John’s parents take a hands off attitude regarding his enrollment in college. His mother was supportive but also clear in her expectations, “She even told me I could go to college when I move out or get a full-time job. It was one of the two.” John’s father encouraged him to stick with automotive work since he did that in high school. John tried it but did not want to be miserable like the other guys in the shop; he did not want to pursue that for his career.

John’s parents drove him to campus on move-in day but were not able to come back during the semester to visit. John explained, “There isn’t much to do in town if they did come to visit.” Friends encouraged him to come home to attend football games and one friend, still in high school, wanted him to escort her to the Homecoming dance. He declined the invitation. He felt awkward being home and definitely did not want to be like a guy that lives in the past.

Over the holiday break he talked with his mom about his grades. She did not pressure him but encouraged John to return to school and try harder, “She doesn’t care if I graduate or not.” She wants John to pursue something he enjoys and to make a positive contribution to society and not be a freeloader. Her support, however, motivated John to return the second semester to try to turn things around.

John remains undecided about his career. He dreams of traveling and even living abroad. He feels a strong attachment to his parents, however, and wants to be around them as they get older, “I don’t want to leave my dad and mom with nothing….I mean I want to see my parents and stuff.” Even now, John sometimes feels guilty about being away from home. He would like to be around home more often to help his parents.
Summary

John comes from a blue collar family that has to work for everything they have. His father used to be a carpenter but carpal tunnel disease ended his ability to work in that trade. He switched to selling trucks. Eventually the high cost of gasoline sent truck sales into a nosedive. His family’s finances are stretched thin.

John has a strong need for his dad’s approval. To please his dad he tried the automotive mechanics trade. He watched young men work day after day, unfulfilled and bored with the work. John learned the basics of the trade quickly and knew that he, too, would soon become bored with the repetition of the job. He did not want to pursue that profession.

College represented excitement and challenge—both were things John wanted. He came to Shawnee State University because it was the least expensive of the schools he considered. John was shouldering the costs and assuming personal debt for the first time. He was reckless and approached college with carefree abandon: he partied and drank throughout the week and on weekends. He missed classes, assignments, and failed to take exams. John’s irresponsible behavior resulted in all Fs for his first term of college. During the holiday break John talked with his mom about the fall semester. She encouraged him to try again but with restraint and a focus on his studies.

John attributes his failure during the term to a bad schedule—one that included classes on Friday. He created a better schedule for the spring semester—one which allows him to sleep in and does not include Friday classes. John’s priority in college at this point seems to be fitting school around drinking.
**Maggie**

Among the participants in the study, Maggie is probably the best prepared and has the strongest academic credentials coming into college. She received college preparatory services for two years through the Upward Bound Math Science (UBMS) program. She also graduated salutatorian in her class and completed her first term in college with a 4.0 GPA.

Maggie grew up on a tobacco farm located approximately one hour from Shawnee State University. She has an older brother and a younger sister and states that they are a very close family. Maggie excelled in high school. She considers herself laid back, friendly, and “down to Earth.”

No one in Maggie’s immediate family had the opportunity to attend college. Her parents only have high school diplomas, however she points out, “They wanted me to go to college.” Maggie shares the goal of a college education with most of her friends. “Since elementary I’ve always wanted to go to college cause my parents never had the opportunity to go. And so that’s never been out of my mind that I wasn’t going to go to college.”

**Preparation for College**

During high school Maggie was selected to participate in the Upward Bound Math Science program (UBMS), which is a pre-college program that helps students prepare for college. She met the eligibility criteria and took advantage of program services, which included the opportunity to live on campus two consecutive summer terms. The summer programs were five weeks in length and offered intensive academic
instruction along with enrichment courses, personal growth opportunities, recreational and social activities, and field trips.

As a UBMS participant Maggie “really became familiar with the campus.” The experience provided her an edge when she enrolled as a regular university student. “Like we took college classes but we didn’t get credit for it, but it really like helped you get into the mindset of what college is like.” Maggie already had friends because of her participation in this program.

The UBMS academic plan included different assessments such as study skills and career interest inventories. When she entered the program Maggie completed the Self Directed Search career inventory that indicated teacher education a good match for her abilities, skills, and interests.

Connection with Family

Maggie decided to attend Shawnee State University because it was affordable and close to home. “I didn’t want to go somewhere far away.” Her relationships with family were very important. She was comfortable on campus and had contacts with some of the college staff who were employed in the pre-college program.

Even with these benefits Maggie had problems integrating into the campus community. She had to adjust to many different aspects of college life. She was trying to get used to living with girls whose backgrounds and interests were very different from hers. She was not accustomed to the amount of homework either, “I was really stressed out like the first and second week ‘cause it just, I wasn’t really used to doing homework a lot because I came from such a small school that we really didn’t have homework.”
Being uncertain about a major also worried her, “It’s just kind of frustrating right now ‘cause I don’t really know what I want to do.” All of these worries exacerbated her feelings of homesickness, “It’s been kind of hard ‘cause where I’m really close to my family, I’ve been really homesick.” In the fall Maggie went home every weekend, and the girls in her house made fun of her saying she is a “mommy’s girl or a daddy’s girl.” In high school this would have bothered her but she said, “Coming here has actually like toughened my skin.”

Living away from home also made Maggie realize how much her family did for her, i.e., cooking her meals, giving her money, doing laundry. She and her mom had a rocky relationship her senior year of high school but things smoothed over and, in fact, they became very close. She relies on her mom a lot “We get along like we’re almost best friends.” Maggie recalls a situation that happened early in the fall:

A lot of the girls went to like go get their noses pierced and all that stuff and I didn’t go with them at the time cause I wanted to go home and talk to my mom about it first….She would’ve been really disappointed if I didn’t like talk to her first.

Maggie states she is closer to her family as a result of going off to college. Her family, however, relies on her help as well. Her brother and sister miss her even though she still goes home nearly every weekend. She helps with the tobacco crop and does other chores without having to be asked. Maggie’s father and brother will not help with the household chores; they consider that woman’s work. Thus, she is a big help to her mom at home, “I think she misses that when I’m away.”
Social Integration

Homesickness did not prevent Maggie from making new friends on campus. “I enjoy meeting all the new people. I’m a very social person.” She had a network already in place; she knew some RAs and had friends from UBMS at the university. Through some of these contacts she also developed new friendships on campus.

At the beginning of the fall term, Maggie’s housemates partied all of the time and she became annoyed with their behavior. Some of them were up until 2 or 3 a.m. making it difficult for her to rest. “They have been going wild…always bringing guys over and stuff.” This made her feel uncomfortable. She addressed her concerns with her RA and the girls in her house but the situation did not improve. This topic surfaced several times during the initial interview. The conflicts with her housemates clearly bothered her and were negatively affecting her experience. Maggie also felt that she was the only one doing homework, “I’m here for the education. Everyone else is here to party.” During the follow-up interview, however, Maggie noted that things had improved:

I’m really close with my housemates. They’ve really toned it down since the beginning. They still party, you know, but it’s like on the weekends when I’m not there. It’s a lot better that way….I think it was just one of those things where you get it all out of your system in the beginning.

Living in campus housing enabled Maggie to learn to live cooperatively with others, to recognize and appreciate differences, and to develop close friendships. After their initial falling out the girls learned to come together to discuss the issues and “since then it’s been really good.” The girls learned how to work through problems in a positive
manner, “We know that we can come to each other and just say if something’s wrong…. We don’t have to go behind each other’s backs. So we’re very open that way. But we all really get along.”

Living with others also helped Maggie develop a thicker shell. She tried not to make a deal out of every issue “If they said something that maybe like hurt my feelings but they didn’t mean to do it intentionally, I just ignored it and I just like brushed it off.”

Maggie noticed less serious differences with her housemates as well. Whereas some of her housemates were from large metropolitan areas Maggie was from a rural, sparsely populated section of the state. As a result, she shared a different perspective about opportunities in the area. For Maggie, a simple trip to a movie or shopping mall required an hour of driving. She “loves Wal-Mart.” That is where she and her friends went if they were bored. Her housemates complained that there was nothing to do whereas Maggie responded, “What are you talking about? There’s everything to do here.”

With the start of the spring term a couple of Maggie’s housemates transferred to other schools. Maggie has the opportunity again to make new friends and welcome new housemates. This time, however, she is better equipped to handle problems, “I know if we ever have a problem we can just come to each other and tell each other we’ll talk it out and not get mad.”

Maggie is better adjusted to college life. She is not as homesick as she had been at the beginning of the fall term. In fact, she looks forward to participating in some of the campus activities such as student programming board.
Becoming Less Dependent

Maggie only lives an hour away from campus yet she lives in campus housing. Living away from home provides Maggie the opportunity to make new friends. At the same time, however, she feels that she is drifting apart from her old friendships in high school. During the holiday break she and her best friend made plans to get together but it never worked out, “Every time I’d make plans with her she would have to cancel at the last minute….It is hard when our schedules conflict.” Maggie and other friends have lost touch as well “I’ve had other friends from high school and I just don’t really talk to them any more. But they have their own things going on.”

Coming back to school from the holiday break Maggie still misses her family but is more independent and capable of handling her own issues, “I can fend for myself, but I know I still need them there to back me up….I can make my own decisions about things.” She still relies heavily on her mother’s guidance, however, when getting ready to do something. “My mom’s voice is in the back of my head….If I want to do something and I know that I really shouldn’t and I hear her voice, I don’t do it.”

Financial Considerations

Financial concerns loom over her college experience even though Maggie received several grants and scholarships during her first year of college. She received enough aid this year to cover tuition and fees and room and board without having to take out a student loan. Maggie conscientiously takes advantage of every meal that is included on her board plan. She feels guilty if she wastes a meal. She was shocked, however, by the high costs of books, “They’re so expensive. That was the only thing that made me
mad was the books.” Fortunately, some of her scholarships will continue next year and she plans to move out of campus housing to reduce the amount of her room and board expenses. If necessary, she can withdraw funds from her savings account to cover expenses.

Maggie also hopes to find an on-campus job so that she can have cash occasionally for extras, e.g., eating out and purchasing snacks. She does not want an off-campus job though because it would interfere with being able to go home on the weekends, “I really don’t want to get an off-campus job because they’d want me to work on the weekends and I want to go home.” Her mother gives her extra money when needed. Originally she wanted Maggie to get a job but now she wants her to focus on her studies without the added responsibility of holding down a job.

Maintaining eligibility for her scholarships is Maggie’s most important goal at this time. Her scholarships provide financial stability and in order to keep them she must maintain a 3.25 GPA. Maggie is wary of taking on another responsibility such as employment, that would make it difficult to balance homework, course requirements, weekends at home, and socializing with friends.

During the summer she plans to be involved in 4-H again. It will be the last summer that she is eligible to participate. Maggie will take dairy cows and possibly a goat to the county fair. This is a money-maker for Maggie and helps her save money for college. She also plans to look for a part-time job in order to “save up a little money back in my account for college.”
Academic Transition

Through her many connections, Maggie has a strong support network in place on campus. When she began her coursework she was intimidated by her instructors but later found them to be really nice. She found them approachable and knew “if I ever had a problem I could go talk to them and they would help.” Maggie receives help and support from the TRIO Center staff as well. She knew them through UMBS. She also frequents the Financial Aid office often due to her various scholarships, “I’ve been to the Financial Aid office a lot…everyone in there is really nice.”

Maggie expected college to be a lot harder than high school. The amount of reading required in her classes stressed her out because she did not know how to establish priorities and manage her time. During the first semester, however, she became adept at balancing and prioritizing her time between studying, socializing, and spending weekends at home. Maggie developed a habit of completing assignments on time and finishing homework before going out with friends.

Her system worked! Maggie had an outstanding first semester in college: she finished the term with a 4.0 GPA. Even though she “was really worried about grades” she now knows she can do it:

Getting all As last semester has helped me relax a little bit. Like I don’t expect me to get all As every semester, but it’s nice to be like, yeah, I actually done that before. I’ve gotten all As before.

She credits her initial success to several different things: “I studied for tests. I did my homework. I paid attention in class. I went to class.” When asked how she feels about her
first term, Maggie states, “I am satisfied. It was a little rough at the beginning but I think it is for everybody.”

As Maggie begins her second semester in college she is up for the challenge, “Even though I didn’t want to come back to school again just ‘cause going to classes and stuff, I think I do enjoy going to classes.” Maggie has become more relaxed and confident, “I didn’t want to come back, I was like oh my gosh school again, but like when I get into the classroom I’m like this is where I’m supposed to be.”

This term, however, Maggie wants do more than just study. She plans to get out and meet more people. She created a schedule with no classes on Friday. She looks forward to going out on Thursday night, “Just hang out with the girls, talk with them, watch TV, you know, just little things. I’m not a big partier, but like I don’t have class on Fridays so I can go out…to meet more people.”

Undecided Major

During the fall Maggie was trying to decide her college major. She was stressed out because she could not make up her mind between majoring in dental hygiene or going into the education field. She always enjoyed school and thought that she would be a good teacher. In addition, the career assessments taken in UBMS matched her skills and abilities to the field of education.

When she returned to school in the spring Maggie had decided: she wanted to teach. She is now pursuing a teaching degree and will take several education-related courses during the semester. Ideally she hopes to teach in grades K-6. Maggie is relieved
to have made this decision. She begins the spring term more confident and glad to be working toward a major.

Summary

Maggie grew up on a tobacco farm. Rather than make an hour-long commute to school she resides in campus housing. She is very close to parents, brother, and sister and returns home nearly every weekend. Her mother especially, relies on her help at home. When she went to college Maggie was very homesick at first even though she experienced living on campus for two summer terms during high school through the UBMS program.

Her familiarity with the campus and with some of the staff gave her a heads up and early connection to campus. She knew some of the RAs and staff in the TRIO Center. Even with this connection, adjusting to residential living was challenging. Some of her housemates went crazy their fall semester: having guys over all night and partying throughout the week. With intervention and the RA’s assistance, however, Maggie is now better equipped to handle problems, “I know if we ever have a problem we can just come to each other and tell each other we’ll talk it out and not get mad.”

Going away to college helped Maggie become more independent. As her interactions and involvement on campus increased, Maggie’s opportunities to maintain high school friendships decreased, “They have their own things going on.” Maggie is responsible for paying for her education. She focuses on schoolwork above all else to ensure she maintains eligibility for her scholarships. Even though Maggie has become
more independent by living away from home, she still relies heavily on her mother’s
guidance for many decisions.

Maggie entered college with an undecided major. She earned a 4.0 GPA during
the fall and decided to pursue a degree in education. She is more confident in her
abilities and her direction as she begins her second semester at Shawnee State University.

Maxie

Maxie attributes her motivation and ability to succeed to her upbringing. She is
capable of doing college level work yet struggles with unresolved issues that hinder her
academic progress. Her reported difficulty overcoming a negative academic experience in
8th grade and her admitted insecurity seem to hinder her academic success. She is one of
two participants who did not return to college the second semester.

Maxie is 19 years old and commutes approximately an hour to school every day.
She lives with her elderly parents. Much of her childhood was spent with adults since she
did not have siblings or playmates close by. She was not involved in school or
community-based activities. Instead her activities were centered at home, including
working alongside her parents in the garden. She remembers relaxing with them on the
porch glider:

I didn’t have a lot of younger kids to play with while I was growing up so I stayed
around adults. So I consider myself more mature because of that. It never was
really a bad thing but instead of like trying to play ball or anything like that, I
learned the joys of gardening or sitting on the front porch and rocking back and
forth on the glider. It’s much more relaxing. I like it better now.
**Insular Upbringing**

Maxie grew up in a tightly knit community tucked away at the end of a hollow. Even though many relatives lived nearby she explains that her family did not have many interactions with others. Until very recently everyone in the area was related to one another. This past year some neighbors moved into the hollow that were not related to everyone else. She and her parents view them with skepticism:

> My parents and I both feel the same sentiments since people moved in that aren’t in our family. It’s very distrustful. We don’t really know what to make of them because we haven’t known them for about 20 years or so.

It appears that Maxie grew up in an environment that was suspicious or at least cautious of outsiders.

Maxie has an amicable yet distant relationship with her parents, “My family and I get along decently. I feel very neutral on them. If I were not related to them, I would consider them casual acquaintances, at best.” She does not appear to rely on them for emotional support or direction. Her parents follow Christian values although they did not force their beliefs onto her, “They taught me morals basically as a way to live.” Maxie and her parents share a comfortable relationship: they provide food and shelter and she covers some of the bills.

**Motivation to Attend College**

Maxie’s parents value education. They expected her to complete high school, “Oh, you’re graduating high school. I don’t care if you don’t want to, you’re graduating high school…you have to get up. You have to go to school.” Neither parent, though, had
the opportunity to go to college. Her father was not able to complete high school because he had to care for his brothers and sisters:

He still does the same thing that he’s done since he was 14. He still helps build houses. He’s good at it. But he always says that he wishes that he could go back to high school or college.

Although she is the first person in her family to go to college, Maxie always assumed that she would attend. “I never really thought about it. I just assumed, really….It was just part of life.” She was thrilled after completing the application and learning that she was accepted, “It just felt like such a great thing.” Her parents are also proud, “They are quite proud that I am in college.”

Maxie decided to attend Shawnee State University because she wanted to major in art education. She was told that the program at the university was one of only two in the state. Although her plans are not definite, she hopes to pursue teacher education.

Negative Experiences in High School

Maxie’s biggest concern about college was that it would be just like high school. She was concerned especially about being the victim of name calling and bullying:

I was scared…I was scared of college not because, you know, it’s more paperwork, it’s more homework. It was the bullying, the pick on, the name calling, the dramas that you deal with in high school that make you every single day dread getting up and going…I was afraid college was going to be just like high school.
She actually hoped that she would not know many people in college. Since the social aspect of high school was extremely negative she wanted to create a new life in a new place “away from the tiny little compacted town.” Maxie delayed enrollment in college for a year in order to “forget how much that I didn’t like high school.”

Creating a new life for herself was an important goal for Maxie. She quickly adjusted to the college environment. She said people were calm. “I haven’t seen anyone in a fight.” She found people kinder and more relaxed than back home. It was easier for her to get along with people than when she was in high school although she still hesitated letting people get to know her very well. Her interactions with staff on campus were limited; however, she mentioned the cafeteria workers were especially friendly—they seemed happy in their work. On the other hand she noticed that her interactions with the Financial Aid office staff were different. They usually seemed hurried and very business-like, “I understand so it doesn’t bother me too much. I try to empathize with things like that because I used to work in a retail store so I would have to deal with situations like that.”

Aversion to Homework

Maxie developed a hang-up in the eighth grade that ultimately would compromise any chance for a successful college career. During that year she had a teacher who regularly assigned homework but never collected or graded it. Maxie became so angry with the teacher’s lack of follow through that she refused to do homework altogether “I would rather get a root canal then do homework.” She wanted rewarded for doing the work and took it as a personal affront when the teacher failed to collect the work:
Somebody that sits there and takes their notes and does their homework could be the dumbest person in the class. As long as they do it they get the praise, they get the rewards, they get the grades, they get the college, and eventually get the life they want. Somebody like me or my friend, at 15 I was 128 I.Q….I didn’t do my homework. I sat and I drew on my papers. I’m not going to get the same praise. My GPA in high school was 2.7, 2.9. It wasn’t because I was stupid—not by far. It was because I want to say I didn’t care.

This grudge became a hang-up, Maxie refused to do homework in any class after this experience.

Maxie did not discuss whether or not this habit negatively affected her high school grades. She did reveal, however, her worry about passing college courses. “I’m absolutely terrified what my grade will be like ‘cause I don’t know. I do well on tests. I do well in class. I’m by far not an ignorant person, but I don’t do homework.” She said that one of her goals was to get over the hang-up and begin completing homework assignments. “I want to change. I do want to turn over a new leaf, do my homework, do all of it to the best of my ability.” During the term she took a step; she began completing a few of the math assignments for concepts she did not understand.

Financial Concerns

Concerns about money were a constant source of stress. Due to limited funds she lived at home with her parents, “I’ve lived on my own before….It was only money problems that stopped me from living on my own.” She received some grants that helped pay for tuition and fees. She also received a refund check that went toward the cost of
transportation, books and supplies. She was not prepared though for the high cost of textbooks and supplies. Her math book cost $140.

The cost of transportation created a huge problem for Maxie. Some days she simply could not afford the gas to go to school. She considered moving onto campus spring semester in order to reduce these costs. Eliminating the hour-long commute would help her get more rest. Balancing her work schedule with school would also be easier.

In order to meet her financial needs, Maxie worked two jobs in two different towns while attending college full-time. She stayed extremely busy and was exhausted most of the time. She found it difficult to develop and maintain friendships while traveling back and forth between two locations. Participating in campus activities was nearly impossible. She made new friends in both of her jobs, however, which made the work more fun. In the follow-up interview she mentioned that she still had both jobs and was “once again divided most of the week between two cities.”

Expectations Exceeded

Academically, Maxie was concerned that college professors would be just like teachers in high school, “breathing down your neck if you didn’t draw something the way they wanted or you didn’t write something the way they would, then it wasn’t right at all.” She expected that professors would be critical and demanding; instead, she found them lenient, “It’s almost to the point that they don’t care.” Although she claimed to hate English, her English professor became one of her favorite instructors. She described her as interesting, lively, and calm:
She’s very lively and she’s not nervous about saying things like being politically incorrect or swearing, which makes her more human to talk to rather than a robotic assed math teacher….She insists that we call her by her first name…she repeats “I’m not hung up on that professor stuff,” which always makes it sound as if, you know, she actually hates being higher than everybody else, hates being the one in control.

On the other hand Maxie did not particularly like her math instructor who seemed to be “reading from a dictionary rather than actually enjoying his job….He does not care….Flat out does not care what you have to do, what you have to say.”

Overall Maxie was pleased with the academic environment at Shawnee State University. Her first term in college exceeded her expectations: she had grants that paid for school, she found employment, made new friends, and enjoyed some of her classes and professors. She was proud of one of her mid-term reports and posted it on the refrigerator so her mother would see it. She knew that her parents were proud of her too.

Relationship Woes

A split with her boyfriend during the fall term sent Maxie into an emotional rollercoaster. This loss affected her outlook as well as her ability to focus on school, “I’ve been distracted from school work because it’s lonely.” Maxie was fixated on finding a boyfriend; one who could be a best friend and a partner. She had relied on one person to fulfill all of her emotional needs, “I have this extremely strong pull not to be alone.” She wanted someone to share everything with, “It’s very empty going home and call your
friends, but after you get off the phone you’re still alone.” The breakup was especially difficult because she did not have strong support at the time:

I sit for 12, 13 hours at a time or sleep for 12, 13 hours at a time without speaking another word to another human being. I’m lonely without a boyfriend….If I live down here I would have a chance to interact with other people more often, make more social bonds….but I don’t have a chance because I’m divided between two places.

Stopping Out

Maxie’s tumultuous relationship with her boyfriend was distracting. They broke up and then got back together; however, their relationship continued to be tenuous. She ended up dropping out of college after completing the fall term; her grades were not stellar. She earned a B, D, and two Fs.

Maxie plans to leave the area with her boyfriend when he enlists in the Air Force. She hopes to “Be happy, fix my relationship, and eventually move to Mississippi and then eventually Germany.” Although she did not return to Shawnee State University she indicated plans to continue college at some point in the future. In retrospect, when asked if she wished she had done anything differently she stated, “I wish I had lived on campus and studied harder.”

Summary

Maxie had an atypical childhood living with elderly parents “up a hollow.” Everyone in the hollow was related—outsiders were distrusted. She did not have many playmates nearby or opportunities to participate in activities with children her own age.
Maxie’s goal was to go to college to be a teacher. Her parents were not able to help her financially but they were very proud that she was in college.

Being the brunt of bullying in high school, Maxie hoped to create a new life in college. She enjoyed the students, faculty and staff at Shawnee State University and found the classes challenging. Her irrational hang-up against doing homework may have been one of the reasons she did poorly during her first term. Even though she worked two part-time jobs to earn extra money, there were also days she missed class because she could not afford to buy gas.

Maxie had an on-again, off-again relationship with her boyfriend. They were not together in the fall when she was trying to transition into college. She was extremely lonely and lost, and not able to focus on school. She mentioned having some friends from work but it did not appear that these relationships were very fulfilling or reliable. Being secure in an emotional relationship seemed vital to her happiness. Maxie is not returning to Shawnee State University for the spring semester although she mentions hoping to continue school in the future.

_Retha_

Retha was one of the most determined of the nine participants to go to college. During her senior year she gave up volleyball and track in order to work more hours to pay college costs. As her second semester in college began she looked forward to starting back, “I’m probably more excited about this term than last, you know, because I have a job on campus.”
Retha is from a small town located about an hour away from Shawnee State University. There were approximately 500 students in her high school. She said that everyone in the community knows each other’s business but on the other hand, “It’s nice because everyone is really close to each other.” Her grandparents live across the street from her mom and other relatives live just a few miles away.

Retha’s friendships in high school centered on typical teen activities: hanging out and gathering with friends at weekend school football games. She participated in high school sports and enjoys being in the out-of-doors. Her parents were divorced but her mother remained very supportive of her activities, attending as many events as possible.

*Connection with Family and Friends*

Retha has a strong connection and sense of responsibility to her family. She spent the past summer, following graduation from high school, caring for her 1½ year old sister while her parents worked, “Both my parents working and ‘cause my parents just bought a new house. I know they just finished car payments, so they’ve been trying to save up and I’m just trying to help them out.”

Retha went to college in order to get a good job. Her parents supported her desire to go to college. She stated that her mom “was happy that I was going. She wanted me to go….Sometimes she felt bad because she didn’t know how to help me but she wanted me to do it.” Her step dad went into the military following graduation from high school and had no experience with college; however, “He also wanted that for me.”
Retha has a close relationship with her grandfather. He has a history of heart problems which influenced her decision about a career. When growing up Retha was intent on becoming a cardiologist:

I can remember I was seven and I knew I wanted to at least be in the medical field because all that happened with him. I wanted, you know, to be able to help people like my grandfather.

She decided to pursue nursing rather than medicine, however, because of the enormous financial commitment of medical school. Nursing still enables her to be in the medical field helping someone.

The transition to college did not seem to impact Retha’s relationships with family and friends back home. She remains connected through frequent visits for high school football games and to see friends and family. She feels her parents view her as more mature because she is on her own living away from home. Her mom, at first, had trouble letting go. Now, however, her mom is super-excited that Retha is in college. She tells everyone “My Retha’s in college.”

In a similar way when she returns home and meets up with old friends they are excited and want to hear what it is like living on campus. Her friends who live at home grill her about dorm life, roommates, and campus parties.

The proximity of Shawnee State University to home was one of the factors that affected her college choice. The university was a comfortable distance from her home. It was far enough away that she could be on her own but close enough to get something she needed or “to see my parents or hang out with friends.”
Being Needed at Home

When Retha went to college her parents had difficulty adjusting to her being gone. She was in high school and able to help her mother a lot when her baby sister was born. She and her mom have a close relationship; she knew it was difficult when she left for college, “I left and all of a sudden there’s no one there to help you out a little bit.” Her parents still rely on her help:

I know there have been a couple times where both my parents were working and, you know, they’d asked if I could come in and watch the kids and I wouldn’t be able to….when I do go home I have homework or an essay I need to type up.

Once football season ended Retha did not make as many trips home. She still worked at Wendy’s occasionally; however, driving back and forth was using up her wages. Toward the end of the term she went home several weekends in a row for family holiday events. Eventually she told her parents she could not keep coming back because she had to prepare for exams “My mom would want me to come home…I told her I couldn’t do that every weekend….She’s a little bummed out just because, you know, I was gone and everything.”

Financial Considerations

Money is a major theme woven throughout Retha’s story. She bears the responsibility of paying for school. Her parents are not able to help her out financially. When discussing her goal to be a doctor her step dad reminded her that medical school was a long term commitment and required a lot of money:
My step dad, he was “Like that’s good but if you’re going to be a doctor you’re going to be in school for a long time. That means you’re going to need money and we don’t really have the money for you to go to school for eight years or whatever to become a doctor.” That was kind of why I went to nursing instead because you don’t have to go to school for as long.

Retha also considered the telecommunications field as a possible college major. When she learned that career opportunities are more limited than in the field of medicine, she quickly dismissed the idea.

A college degree is very important to Retha. In high school she decided to do whatever was necessary to get to college. After arguing with her parents about money, she gave up sports during her senior year in order to save money, “My parents didn’t have the money so I have to try to save up mine.” She did this by working a lot more hours. “It was smarter for me to just make money—saving it instead of risking not getting a scholarship or something.” Her grades slipped a little by focusing so much on work rather than school; however, she saved up money for college.

Even now, Retha proactively strives to maximize her employment options. She maintains her part-time work status at Wendy’s in her hometown, working one weekend each month, in order to have a job during holiday and summer breaks. Originally she wanted to find a college work-study position on campus or a part-time job in the community in order to have spending money without taking it from savings. She successfully found a position that began the spring term. When she is a sophomore she
hopes to work as a resident adviser since it pays for room and board. Lower cost housing off campus is also an option for the next year if an RA position does not work out.

Retha took out student loans to pay her expenses. Borrowing such a large amount of money was frightening. Her parents were also concerned about her level of debt. Retha worried about being in debt forever. Even though she was not excited about having to pay back loans she felt it was worth the tradeoff:

I’m not really happy that I’m going to pay all this money back, but I’d rather have a good education…I’m thinking most people take loans out to go to college anyways….So it’s not like I’m the only person that has, you know, taken out loans….So I was okay with it. I knew what I was getting into….I need some guidance sometimes to try and figure out things, but I was prepared for it.

Loans were crucial for her enrollment in the fall. Her greatest stress related to the timing of her loan disbursement. She was worried that a $255 late fee would be assessed if her loan came in late. To avoid the late fee, she dipped into savings to cover her first tuition bill. She and her parents worried that she might not be reimbursed for the payment once the loan funds arrived. This was very stressful for her but fortunately everything worked out. The funds arrived and she was reimbursed for the payment she made.

Self Reliance and Determination

Retha’s parents want the best for her, including a good education. Being unfamiliar with the enrollment process, however, they could not provide much assistance. Retha was determined to go, with or without help “I guess they encouraged me to go, but I think I already had the mindset that I’m going whether or not, you know.” Her mother, a
Filipino, had difficulty with the language and could not understand the admission and financial aid application processes. Retha was pretty much on her own.

Retha made it into college and continues to move forward. She takes pride in her ability to manage her time. She faithfully attends classes and is diligent about completing assignments on time. She uses free time to study, visit with friends, or chill. When necessary, she resorts to studying after midnight because by then everyone is asleep, the apartment is quiet, and she can focus on homework, “I’ve actually done a lot of homework really late at night just because that’s when I can concentrate.”

Some of Retha’s friends put partying ahead of schoolwork; they often pop in her dorm encouraging her to come, “Hey come to this party, come over here.” She enjoys social gatherings but does not want to waste money and jeopardize her progress in school, “This is my money. I don’t want to be wasting it.” Her focus for now is on school.

Learning How to Study

One of the most difficult tasks for Retha was “just getting used to the teacher and how they grade it or how they taught.” She juxtaposed college with high school where “You know all the teachers even if you’ve never had them you know them.” Her college biology class, in particular was difficult for Retha because she was not sure how to prepare for exams:

My biggest transition was just I didn’t know the professors….I didn’t know…what they expected, how I was going to be graded on things, if I need to
Unlike high school, where teachers told students to read the chapters college professors assume students will automatically complete the reading assignments. In the follow-up interview Retha explained that she finally figured out what and how to study in biology, her most difficult course. During the spring term she is taking the next sequence with the same instructor since “I finally figure out…how to work well in his class.”

Feeling Connected to College

Retha’s impressions of college came from images and stories on TV. She imagined large, boring classes where the professor lectured and students slept. At first she was afraid of some of her professors because they did not talk or appear friendly. In time she realized they were all approachable and friendly which helped her feel comfortable in her classes. She was initially worried that her college courses would be much more difficult than high school classes:

You always think that “Oh my gosh, college, it’s going to be so hard.” I mean it’s not easy, but you know I can do it….I was kind of nervous that, you know, “I’m going to be in a class. I’m not going to know what’s going on. Something’s going to be too hard for me.” But, you know, it was the opposite.

Retha chose to attend Shawnee State University because the student population was relatively small (3800) and thus, she expected her experience to be different from the media portrayal. “I chose Shawnee State University because it’s a smaller campus, smaller classrooms, you get more attention from the teacher.” Retha looked forward to
the opportunity for one-on-one interaction with teachers. She enjoyed English because
the professor encouraged interaction and class discussion. She also enjoyed the friendly
atmosphere of the campus and thought the summer orientation experience provided an
excellent start for the fall semester. As a result of her heavy reliance on student loans,
Retha interacted frequently with the financial aid office staff. They helped her maneuver
through the red tape:

Someone sat down with me and went through my promissory note….And I was
happy about that because I had no idea what I was doing….But it was making me
nervous. I was thinking about it in class, “I don’t have…the money to pay that
second payment.” And I was getting really nervous about that. So I came up here
and I talked to them about it.

Retha planned to join student government but her class schedule conflicted with
the meeting time. She joined two other groups and enjoyed the opportunity meeting other
students, “The first time I went I met some people and then, you know, I realized I live in
the same building with them.” Belonging to these groups enables her to “sit down at the
table, discuss matters, but it’s still enjoyable. It’s not like we’re stuck here in a meeting or
anything.”

Retha enjoys many aspects of the campus: (a) the physical layout, i.e., no hills to
climb; (b) availability of parking; (c) compactness of the campus; (d) freedom to have
car; (e) the apartment style housing; and (f) small classes. She revels in the freedom of
making her own schedule and being responsible for only herself, i.e., she does not have to
take in consideration any needs but her own when making plans. Focusing on school
would be difficult if she lived at home; there would be many distractions. Her class schedule is spaced out with time between classes for study or just hanging out, “I have time to do what I want in between them, you know, whether it’s do homework or study or relax, chill.”

Retha experienced a smooth transition into college. She roomed with a friend from home which eased her adjustment to campus living. She enjoyed making new friends and found her circle of friends expanding through her involvement in campus activities. Whereas she originally worried about the difficulty of college classes, she successfully passed all of them in the fall term.

As the spring term begins, Retha returns to campus determined to do even better in her classes. In retrospect when talking of what she could have done differently in the fall she states, “I would’ve taken some of that back [staying up late] if I could, maybe focused a little more on studying….I’ve disciplined myself a whole lot more knowing that you can’t do that. There’s a time for it, but not all the time.” Retha remains motivated to do well, “I think it goes back to, you know, this is my money. I have to do good.”

Summary

Retha is very close to her mother and younger siblings. Her mother relies on her help and companionship and had difficulty letting go when Retha went off to college. Retha returns home on weekends as much as possible to help out. Her interest in medicine stemmed from her grandfather’s heart disease. She was intent on becoming a cardiologist until she learned the cost and time required to complete medical school. Her
new goal is to enter the nursing program at Shawnee State University. Nursing still enables her to be in the medical field helping someone.

Retha seems mature and capable of managing her responsibilities. Her parents cannot help pay for college. As a result, she gave up high school sports during her senior year—to work and save money for college. To cover expenses, she took out a personal loan and is in debt for the first time. She is fiscally very conservative, “This is my money. I don’t want to be wasting it.”

Retha maneuvered through her first semester of college successfully. She adjusted to her professors’ expectations, learned how to study, and became involved in a couple of groups on campus. She reveled in the freedom of being on her own. Retha passed her classes, found a job on campus, and is already attending her second term in college.

Treva

Treva is the only participant transferring to another college for the spring semester, “I’m going to miss people and like it is a nice school, but it just didn’t really work out here for me.” “Drama” on campus and at home coupled with mounting debt made Treva decide to attend a university closer to home.

Treva lives just over an hour’s drive from Shawnee State University. She is the youngest of four siblings and is the first to attend college. Her two brothers and half sister attended technical trade schools. Treva chose to attend the university because it is small and close to her home.
Motivation to Go to College

Treva’s father works as a janitor in a nearby school district and her mother is a factory worker. For a couple of summers during high school Treva worked in the same factory. “That was one thing that really motivated me to go to college ‘cause I don’t want to work there forever like she did…there’s like long days in a hot factory…it wasn’t fun!” This experience as well as her experience clerking in a grocery store motivated Treva to attend college in order to have more options for employment than did her mom.

Treva wants to find a career to “make more of myself.” Her brothers encouraged her to pursue college. They believe she is the person in the family who will do something with her life. Treva plans to major in sociology or psychology since she is interested in why people do the things they do. She visited three colleges prior to selecting Shawnee State University. She finds the campus friendly and notices that people get along well with each other.

Financial Concerns

The cost of education is the main stumbling block for Treva. Her cost of attendance includes tuition and fees, books, and supplies as well as the substantial expense of campus housing. Her parents cannot help pay for college so she has to take out student loans. Fortunately she was awarded four scholarships this year that supplemented the amount she had to take out in loans.

Treva wants to find a job. She applied for a position on campus and received an interview but she was not selected for the job. During the fall term she tried to find employment in the community as well, “I do want to find a job somewhere.”
Leaving home and being on her own was stressful for Treva. It was difficult not knowing anyone at first but she made friends quickly. Her boyfriend visited a couple of times during the term. She admits that the distance created a strain on their relationship, “It has put stress on between me and my boyfriend, but we’re working on it.” Treva’s mother stayed in touch by phone every other day to keep her up to date on news and happenings back home, “Mom calls me like every other day.” She and her grandpa have a very close relationship, “He is like one of the most important people in my life.” He lives only a short distance from her home. He was diagnosed with cancer prior to the beginning of the term. She worries about her grandpa.

Home remains a central aspect of Treva’s life. Her family remains closely connected by phone, email, and My Space. One brother is married and lives about 15 minutes away from her parents; the other still lives at home. The brother at home missed her while she was away at school and called nearly every day. During the fall she went home at least twice a month for family events and activities, to help out, and to see her boyfriend. She also helped her grandfather as much as possible by taking him shopping and spending time with him. She helped her parents clean house and took care of their pets. Treva hoped to find employment even though she knew it would further complicate her life. She would have to balance work with school, home, friends, and family.

Exceeding Expectations

Being the first in her family to continue her education beyond high school, college was a big unknown. Treva’s expectations came from images shown in movies; college
was portrayed as a place where students study but also where they were constantly attending wild and crazy parties. She described Shawnee State University as laid back and calm compared with those images:

Well, first, classes are boring classes. They are somewhat. They’re not too bad. And I guess I sort of it like clichés, in movies of all big parties all the time and crazy people running around. But it’s more calm than I expected. It’s really laid back. I like that.

For the most part classes and college life met her expectations. She especially enjoyed large group discussions about assigned readings. One class, though, had 140 students. Group discussion was limited. However, Treva was impressed with the teacher’s skill and technique using examples to explain the topic, “He uses good examples so it’s not too hard to understand what he’s talking about.”

Treva enjoyed many other aspects in the fall: (a) freedom to be on her own and to do what she wants; (b) hanging out with friends whenever she wants; and (c) freedom to make her own schedule:

I’ve enjoyed the freedom of being here like my family’s back home and I’m here and I can pretty much do whatever I want. Not that I’ve done anything crazy or anything but just the freedom of it. And getting to hang out with friends all the time and kind of going at my own pace of when I want to eat or when I want to do my homework or that kind of thing.

She also liked the laid back atmosphere of the campus; it was very different from high school. There, teachers were constantly watching over students.
Treva was afraid that making friends in college would be difficult, especially since she did not know anyone prior to coming, “I didn’t really come with knowing anybody here.” Her roommate, however, was very outgoing; that made it easier getting to know people. The first few days were tough and she still missed friends and family but she successfully made new friends who helped ease the transition. She liked the apartment-style housing and small classes. Her house ended up to be the spot other students came to hang out and socialize.

Treva mentioned many positive aspects of living in the community. She enjoyed living in close proximity to a large river and found it convenient living within walking distance of downtown and the grocery. A brisk walk downtown provided exercise, fresh air, and the opportunity to purchase snacks for the week.

*Personal Growth*

The college experience seems to have broadened her perspective. Treva talks about her group of friends including a “gay guy” who she describes as “goofy so he’s fun to hang out with.” She made friends on move-in day at the midnight breakfast. Several students from her unit ate together and hit it off, quickly becoming friends. “It did help. It helped us to start to meet people so we just didn’t stay closed up in our dorms.”

*Decision to Transfer*

Following the fall term Treva decided to transfer to another state university located closer to her home. There were many factors of her college experience that influenced this decision. For example, even though she wants to major in sociology she is
undecided about her focus within the major. The school she will attend provides co-op experiences and other opportunities that are not available at Shawnee State University.

One of the most salient factors influencing her decision was her roommate situation in the fall. During the semester she and some of her roommates had problems with one of their housemates. She and two other freshmen were assigned to a suite with an upperclassman who was very difficult to live with. “We’re all freshmen…none of us knew what we were going into. And I guess they’ve had problems with her before.” The girls asked housing and their resident advisor (RA) for assistance. The RA conducted a meeting and things improved for awhile but after a few weeks the situation deteriorated again. A second meeting was held but by that point tensions had increased and the atmosphere was contentious:

We have a roommate who we didn’t get along…so that caused a lot of conflict and my actual roommate, who’s like my best friend here, ended up moving out and the other girl who lives with us stays in one of the other apartments. She only comes to our house to take a shower. She sleeps somewhere else because she doesn’t want to have to live with her.

The housemate began harassing her friend “to the point where she was crying every day because it was too much.” Her friend moved out toward the end of the term.

Due to this negative situation, Treva never had an opportunity to adjust to living on campus, “I never really got to adjust to living here, ‘cause it’s like she kind of make it her house and like I was a guest there and I wasn’t really welcome to live there.” Treva was not satisfied with the response by housing. In order to handle this stressful situation
Treva retreated to her room to focus on schoolwork and limited her time in the dorm, “I just closed myself up in my room and studied when things got too annoying with other people.”

It is unfortunate that Treva’s experience in university housing ended up being a stressful and contentious situation:

I was having some family drama but that on top of it and then not being able to get away from it just kind of pushed me further to transfer. And I just think I might have more opportunities there.

Treva hopes that moving home will reduce her stress and improve her financial condition. She will have classes three days a week at her new campus. She will not, however, have the expense of driving home each weekend. She will also save money not having to pay for room and board. In addition, she plans to work approximately 20 hours a week at the local department store. She accumulated $10,000 in loan debt during her first term and hopes to begin paying it off as soon as possible, “It’ll help pay it off faster I think. I’m just afraid I’m going to be graduating and just be completely swamped with loans.”

Treva has mixed feelings about her decision to transfer. She will miss the good friends she made during the fall term. She will miss her advisor as well; he went out of his way to be helpful. On the other hand there were times in the fall that being away from home was stressful. At the time she was experiencing roommate problems her family was also going through a tough situation at home, “Not having like my family here with me…I mean there’s drama going on and you just need people there.” Treva feels guilty for transferring but overall feels it is the right decision, “I do feel somewhat like a wimp
for going home, but I’m not the only one….I just miss home. I think I’d be a lot happier
back home than I am here.”

*Lessons Learned*

During her semester away from home Treva became much more independent and
developed confidence in her ability to live on her own:

I learned to…take control of things myself and learned to basically survive on my
own ‘cause I had nobody here to help or anything ‘cause back home I always had
somebody to lean on when I needed help or go to when I needed help. But here I
just kind of have to take charge and do it myself….I don’t need to have a
boyfriend there or my mom and dad right there with me. But even my best friends
back home…it I don’t have them I can still survive, you know.

Treva is more assertive and able to stand up for herself as a result of her semester away
from home, “I’ve learned to take control better and try to control situations the best I can.
I mean I know I can’t have control over everything. I don’t want control over everything,
but control over myself at least.”

Treva learned how to deal with roommate issues and how to maneuver through
the bureaucracy on campus in order to get what she needed:

Nobody’s gone to college before in my family so I didn’t know what to expect. I
learned more it’s different than high school where if you need something done
you gotta go do it yourself ‘cause they’re not going to chase you down.
As she prepares to begin the spring term in her new school she is determined to do well. “Keep myself focused and make myself better. Go to college. Get a degree. Try to get into a good job.”

*Summary*

Treva lived about an hour’s drive away from Shawnee State University. Rather than commute back and forth she lived in campus housing. Treva’s motivation for college stemmed from wanting “to make more of myself.” She already experienced working in a factory and clerking in a department store; she knew she wanted more out of a career.

Treva pays for college herself and had to take out loans for the fall term. During the term she maintained close contact with family members—talking on the phone nearly every day and going home every other weekend. Despite her fear of starting college where she did not know anyone, she made good friends quickly. She enjoyed her classes, the opportunity to make new friends and hang out, the laid back atmosphere of campus, and especially the freedom to make her own schedule. Roommate problems surfaced, however, and became unbearable even after staff intervened to mediate the situation.

Treva decided to transfer to a college closer to home at the end of the term. The move home will ease her financial situation as well as enable her to be more supportive and helpful at home. Treva feels guilt about wimping out and transferring home, however, she knows “I’d be a lot happier back home.” The roommate situation was stressful; however, it helped Treva learn how to handle difficult people and to be more assertive.
Zee balances part-time employment with a full time course schedule and helping out at home. She does all of this while making time each week to visit her grandmother who is in hospice care. These are sad days for Zee.

Zee graduated from one of the county schools in the area. She was an athlete in high school, playing basketball and volleyball. She chose to attend Shawnee State University in order to commute back and forth and continue living at home.

Motivation to Attend College

Zee credits her decision to attend college to one of the university outreach programs. Through staff contacts and activities in elementary and middle school Zee learned the advantages of a college education. By the end of her eighth grade year she had decided to attend college. Her teachers and family members encouraged her and supported her plan. Two high school teachers in particular helped her explore and research college majors and different career fields. Her high school friends were planning to attend college as well—at Shawnee State University or another college nearby. She selected Shawnee State University because it had an excellent reputation in her field of study.

Zee’s grandma suffers from Lou Gehrig’s disease. Zee’s career choice was influenced by her grandma’s illness. She became interested in helping others as she watched the therapists work with her grandma, “I just see how much, you know, she relies on them for help and, you know, they’re wonderful people…and they’re good at what they do.” These experiences helped Zee decide on a college major.
Connection to Home

Remaining close to family and friends is important to Zee. Her family became much closer due to the recent loss of relatives and her grandma’s disease. Zee decided to attend college close to home, “I just had strong connection to just staying home. Like I really just wanted to stay home and be with my family and stuff.”

Prior to the start of the spring semester Zee learned that her grandma’s disease had progressed and she was not expected to live much longer. She and her grandma shared a heart-to-heart talk, and tears. Finally, they were able to discuss the “white elephant in the room”:

We kind of both had a breakdown and it was good. And I felt that since then it’s not been quite as awkward and I think it’s like she knows that I know and I know she knows. That was the best thing…it’s like she is still my grandmother. I mean like before it was like [the disease was the bigger thing].

Zee continues to visit her grandma as much as possible. Her mother recently took a new position though which requires Zee to help out more at home.

Most of Zee’s contacts still center on family and friends from home. Family activities consume much of her time. She misses being around her younger brother, a sophomore in high school. “It’s made me realize that he’s a pretty good boy…and not get to see him as much you know, makes me miss him…so the time we do get to spend together we have fun.”

Her mother’s help, encouragement, and support enable Zee to balance her part-time job with home and other responsibilities, “They’ve been supportive, 100%.” She
wakes up her brother and sees him off to school—driving him there if he misses the bus. With her parents working opposite shifts she runs errands and makes appointments when necessary. She becomes stressed when class assignments are looming or she is preparing for an exam, “I do get stressed out very easily, but…my mom she’s real good about helping me calm down.”

**Gaining Independence**

Zee has limited contact with high school classmates since many of them attend college away from home. She and her boyfriend from high school broke up during the fall term. This was especially difficult for her because her old friends were gone and her mother was working the night shift, “I depend on my mom a lot for emotional support…it was a hard time.” In the end, the breakup was a good thing. She grew from the experience and became more self-reliant. She felt she drew closer to her family and learned not to take as many things for granted.

After the breakup Zee began to acknowledge and accept the changes that college would bring:

> It was very hard to come to college and be, you know, as independent as, you know, as a college student is….I knew college was what I wanted but I wasn’t ready for it to be here so quickly. It changed, you know, about the time my boyfriend and I broke. I was like, “Oh, go for it. You’re in college now….” I was pretty prepared for education…but um; I just wasn’t prepared for being by myself all the time.
Zee views college like a job. It is different from the social orientation of high school. “College is different….Going back and forth from home to work to college, I feel like college is like another job….just like this routine.”

Although she does not participate in many student activities Zee made new friends during the fall term. She met one friend in English class. They saw each other daily and talked regularly after class, “It was new to both of us being college freshman. And we kind of just helped each other as far as adjusting to it and making something new and different. We kind of helped each other along.”

Expectations Exceeded

So far, Zee’s experience in college exceeds her expectations. Her high school teachers “prepared us for the worst.” They told her to expect anything. So far, however, college is not as difficult as she thought it would be. She expected classes to be hard, stressful, and more work than fun. “I did expect it to be very difficult. I expected to work a lot more than I did in high school….It’s still early…but it’s been a lot more enjoyable than I expected it to be.”

Trying to figure out what professors look for and expect can be a challenge. In high school the older students help prepare younger students by telling them what the different teachers expect. Zee did not know anything about her instructors. As a result, she had to learn how to adjust to their different teaching styles, techniques, and preferences.

After one semester Zee is proud of her ability to adjust to college. She achieved a goal she did not think she could attain:
College always seems so, you know, far ahead that I never thought that I’d be there and be able to do and now that I’m adjusting…not failing…it’s kind of just a success to me, like a sense of pride.

An average student in high school, she just didn’t put forth the effort. Zee knew college would be different. “This is your future that you have to do well.” She feels confident about her ability to do the coursework. She also thoroughly enjoys college, “It’s…rewarding to…believe in yourself to be able to do something you thought might have been more difficult.”

The instructors at Shawnee State University seem to care and be sincerely interested in helping students. This surprised but pleased Zee. As a result she is very comfortable asking questions and discussing problems and issues with them:

They want you to be able to feel comfortable around them and they give you all their office hours and their phone numbers and email. And it was just very surprising to realize how approachable you know; they wanted you to know that they were. And I didn’t expect that.

Zee enjoys many aspects of the college experience. She likes meeting new people and working on small group projects in and out of class. She feels more self-aware and understanding of others due to assignments and discussions in her psychology class. She especially likes the way faculty members integrate technology into their instructional techniques. When the professors use Blackboard it enables her to “just get online and check it out or whatever.” Email facilitates communication and networking with classmates and friends, “Working with your classmates is something that I’ve done more
at college and not just in class but out of class also.” She had a great experience during the fall term.

Worries

Prior to enrolling in college Zee was concerned she would not make it. She was stressed out about: (a) not knowing anyone, (b) difficult classes, and (c) failing. Her parents could not back her up because, “They didn’t know what to expect. All they could say is…‘you can do it…all you have to do is concentrate and do well and do your work.’” No one in the family knew anything about the college enrollment process and she felt “clueless to the whole college experience because I have no idea what to expect.” Fortunately, some older friends attending the university helped her complete the enrollment process.

Zee’s only challenges now involve paying for college and spending as much time as possible with her grandma. She did not receive any grants; however, her parents are helping cover her college expenses. Although uninformed about college processes, they are willing to help pay her costs. Zee contributes to the cost of her tuition and fees; however, their assistance lightens her load tremendously. For now, at least, she does not have to take out student loans. She knows she is fortunate to have their financial and emotional support. They have told her again and again “We’re going to help you get through college…we want this for you so, you know, we’re here for you.”

Home versus Campus Life

Working off campus, living at home, and maintaining close contact with family and high school friends limits Zee’s ability to become involved on campus. Zee realizes
her off campus commitments “take attention away from like experiencing the whole college life.” At the same time she adds, “I don’t know what I’m missing because I haven’t been involved with it.” Her high school friendships remain an integral part of her life. During the holiday break she met a few of her friends. “I just think it’s made us have to be stronger to keep in touch with one another.”

Summary

Zee attends Shawnee State University for many different reasons. Her decision to go to college resulted from her participation in one of the pre-college programs. Following graduation she selected Shawnee State University because it was close to home. Her goal is to work toward an Occupational Therapy degree. She became interested in this career because of her grandma’s debilitating disease.

Helping out at home and visiting her grandma as much as possible are Zee’s priorities for now. She balances these activities with school and a part-time job. Any remaining time is usually spent with family and friends from home. Her parents did not know how to help her get into college. Once she was in, though, they were willing to pay to keep her there, “We’re going to help you get through college.”

Zee enjoys her classes, learning new technology, and the opportunity to interact with other students. She feels more confident and self-aware due to her interactions and experiences on campus. She finds a helpful attitude among the faculty. They are sincerely interested in the students and willing to help.
Lourine

“First time went really well and I can’t wait to get back.” Lourine attended the fall semester at Shawnee State University despite injuries sustained in a serious automobile accident a few weeks prior to her graduation from high school. She did not, however, register for the spring. Perhaps her enrollment in fall was premature given the severity of the accident and its impact on other areas of her life.

Lourine graduated from a class of about 60 students in a neighboring county. Many of the graduates attend Shawnee State University because it is close to home. Beginning in her sophomore year she knew she wanted to attend there as well. The cost of attendance is one of the lowest of the state universities and she can live at home while attending school.

Connections with Family and Friends

Remaining at home and being close to everybody is important to Lourine, “I didn’t want to leave.” Although she does not have a close relationship with her mom or step dad, she feels very close to her grandma:

My parents were no help to me, they seem to care more about themselves than me but my grandma is a strong force in my life and has stood behind me all the way and has always pushed me to do my best and really makes me want to succeed in my goals.

When she was five years old her parents divorced. Her grandma moved Lourine into her home for awhile. At the age of 14 she began switching back and forth between her mom and her grandma. She states that she was needed by both of them because of
personal issues they were facing. “So that was always the thing, you know, where was I going to be when I graduated and would I be able to just pick up and go.”

Lourine’s grandma remains her most ardent supporter. She provides encouragement when needed. In return, Lourine tries to meet her expectations. Lourine’s friends are important to her success as well, “My friends and family are my biggest strength and without them I couldn’t do it.” At times she thinks her family holds her back, however, she readily admits, “But then again they are the ones that push me to do the best.” Lourine considers her close friends just like family; they are equally important to her. “My friends are my family and my family is my backbone and help me to be the best I can be.”

*Relationship with Boyfriend*

Lourine considers her boyfriend “the best thing in my life…he stands behind me always and wants me to always do my best.” She lives with her boyfriend and another couple. Originally she and a girlfriend decided to live together because they were not ready to be on their own. Once they found a place their boyfriends decided to join them. Sharing a house with her boyfriend and another couple is stressful at times. She feels that she assumes a greater share of the responsibilities when divvying up household chores. She is often exhausted and resentful. Even though this situation is tense at times and out of balance, she feels it is worth the effort. She is planning, however, to move again. She decided to move away from the other couple and move into housing with only her boyfriend.
**Motivation to Attend College**

Lourine looked forward to attending college; she always liked school. She remembers wanting to teach from the time she was in the fourth grade. She loves children and plans to major in education at Shawnee State University. For awhile, she considered writing instead but she changed back to education because of the social interaction in teaching. She was also influenced by the determination her two close friends who are teenage mothers. They are weighted down with responsibility yet remain committed to obtaining an education.

Lourine needed money to go to school if she was to become a teacher. The tuition and fees were reasonable; however, finding the money for school was still a challenge. Her mother’s divorce settlement was not large enough to help pay Lourine’s college costs. Her step dad could not help out either. Other family members were supportive and encouraged her to attend college but they could not contribute financially. “Everybody wants me to do this…my family, the people I live with…they are all very supportive. You know if I do nothing else with my life they want me to do this.”

Two months before high school graduation Lourine was in a serious car wreck. The accident changed her life. Her back was broken in three places and limited the type of work and activities she could do. As a result of the accident Lourine reestablished her priorities. There were medical bills to pay and stacks of forms to complete yet she maintained her resolve to attend college. Originally, because of her injuries and expenses, she planned to move back the start date for enrolling in college. She changed her mind.
once she began receiving the insurance checks for her medical bills. The influx of money eased her financial situation and she moved ahead to begin college on time.

*Exceeds Expectations*

Nearly recuperated from her accident, Lourine attended the fall term and loves it. Initially she was very intimidated by the professors, stating they appeared unfriendly. “College professors are very intimidating. High school teachers should be taught to be rough and tough and scary.” After the first couple of weeks, however, she realized her judgment was premature; they were not mean and most wanted to help. She was also surprised by the overall helpfulness of everyone on campus, i.e., students, staff, administration, and faculty.

The academic experience is similar yet different from her initial expectations. She was used to the social atmosphere in high school classes and imagined that college courses would be more formal. She thought, for example, that students would do more work on their own. Instead, many of her professors include teaching methods based on one-on-one interaction and class discussion. She also found that the professors do not hound students to do their work as sometimes happens in high school. They leave it up to students to follow the syllabi and complete course requirements, “The work isn’t like high school. I mean if you don’t do it, you don’t do it. The teacher doesn’t care. There’s nobody telling you you have make-up.” Similarly, Lourine expected less guidance in college but found, instead, “Everywhere you turn there’s somebody willing to help you.”

Lourine quickly felt at home. She already knew some of the people in her classes. She also found it easy to get to know other students, “The campus is small.” Lourine’s
transition was easy: she felt that she belonged and she felt safe and secure. Shawnee State University was a comfortable environment for her first term in college.

Lourine enjoyed the college experience and the opportunities available to her. At the time of the initial interview she felt very comfortable on campus, “School is one of the most relaxing aspects of my week.” She was satisfied with her academic progress. There were many other aspects of the college experience she also enjoyed: (a) freedom to make her own schedule, “I really like that I can make my schedule”; (b) finishing classes early in the day; (c) lecture format for certain classes; (d) ease of computer access around campus; and (e) being tutored by classmates in math.

Worries and Stress

Traveling back and forth from home to school, however, was difficult for Lourine. It was a long drive and the price of gasoline was increasing. Commuting was particularly inconvenient “when you need to be on campus and live 45 minutes away.”

Walking around campus also proved difficult for Lourine; it was sometimes exhausting. She admitted though, “The walking. Um, it’s good, it’s healthy, it keeps me, you know, it keeps my metabolism up. It keeps my energy up.” She knew where all of the student lounges were and frequented them often in order to rest between classes. She loved the ease of computer access throughout the different areas of campus.

Her initial worries about college focused on being unprepared for the work. She was afraid of failing and being less than everyone else. In her classes she hesitated to participate in classroom discussions. She was insecure and worried that her comments might not make sense. In high school, though, she never worried about giving her
opinions and thoughts. Lourine misses being engaged and plans to make an effort during the spring term to become involved in class discussions.

Lourine was surprised by the different teaching styles of her instructors. She found it difficult to adjust to the expectations and course requirements from one instructor to another. Some faculty assigned several chapters of reading between classes whereas other faculty assigned much lighter loads. Lourine often studied late into the night in order to complete assignments and prepare for class. She often had difficulty balancing the course requirements with her other responsibilities.

Unlike many students, Lourine did not come to college for the social experience. “I’m not really here for the new people experience….I don’t purposely go out and try to meet people.” She met a few new people but mostly kept the same friends. She is interested in some activities though and wants to become more integrated on campus, “Talking to more people and making myself not such a loner would probably help in the social department…the interaction in class would probably help me.”

Lourine enjoyed living at home but experienced a lot of stress balancing schoolwork, keeping up her house, and spending time with those close to her, i.e., her boyfriend, grandma, and her friend’s children. On the other hand, commuting to campus enabled her to “leave school at school.” She could take schoolwork home but at the same time leave the drama or classroom stress at school.

Lourine worried that she would have difficulty finding her way on campus, adjusting to classes, and making a successful transition into college. Overall the transition
was not hard; she proved to everyone, including herself, that despite her accident, she could succeed in college.

**Stopping Out**

Lourine reported her grades for the fall semester were “really good”! She earned an A-, B-, C, and a WD (withdrawal). She attributed her success to “a lot of studying and many long nights.” She also credited her boyfriend as a good support. In addition to doing well academically in her classes Lourine enjoyed the first term, “First term went really well and I can’t wait to get back.”

Lourine, however, did not return to Shawnee State University for the spring semester. She is considered a stopout and indicates plans to attend the upcoming summer term. In the meantime she hopes to find part-time employment. Her plans are contingent on whether or not her boyfriend enlists in the military.

Lourine will do a few things differently when she returns to college. She wished she had become involved in social activities, “I pretty much went to class and went home.” Lourine looks forward to returning to college; she is determined to “stay on track” and make progress toward a degree.

**Summary**

From the age of fourteen through the year she graduated Lourine moved back and forth between her mom and her grandma. Although her grandma provides support and encouragement, Lourine must provide for herself and pay for college. Prior to graduation she was in a serious automobile accident. Fortunately, she can use the funds from the insurance settlement to pay her college costs.
Lourine feels comfortable at Shawnee State University—it is a small campus. She already knew some students in her classes and found it easy to make friends. She feels safe and secure and feels that she belongs, “School is one of the most relaxing aspects of my week.”

Lourine, however, maintains a very full schedule. She lives in a house with her boyfriend and another couple. Negotiating the different aspects of their relationships and taking care of a home steals a lot of her energy and time. It is often difficult to balance her responsibilities and complete her assignments on time.

Lourine satisfactorily completed the fall semester, however, she did not return for the spring term.

Cross Case Analysis

Another aspect of data analysis includes examining data across cases. Cross case analysis is important because it provides the opportunity to individually and across cases examine and tie together common themes and patterns in the participants’ stories. The analysis for this study follows the pattern of the interview process beginning with an examination of participants’ motivations to attend college.

Motivation to Attend College

First-generation college students are on a voyage that no one else in their family has traveled. They have no maps, no navigational tools, and they do not come from a long line of sailors. Instead, many feel that they are bumbling through on their own from the moment they step foot on campus, figuratively “sinking or swimming.” College represents a foreign land—one which they are not prepared to travel. They are unfamiliar
with the language, the customs, and the expectations. Maneuvering through college, unfamiliar territory is difficult for most new students. It is especially difficult for first-generation college students.

Some level of motivation is required to enroll in and successfully complete college. Participants in this study were asked to explain their reasons and motivations for attending college. Their motivation varied. This examination delved into three main areas of motivation: family and friends, financial goals, and personal goals. Several students attributed motivation to more than one area. The section concludes with a review of the reasons participants chose to attend Shawnee State University.

*Family and Friends*

At least seven of the nine participants were encouraged or influenced by family members or friends to go to college. Five of them shared close relationships with grandparents, most of whom suffer from deteriorating health. These relationships had a profound positive impact on the students, motivating them to strive to reach their goals.

Bill lived with his grandparents. They provided a safety net from his addiction-ridden past as well as room and board and a stable home. They believed in his ability to make something of himself. Like Bill’s grandparents, Lourine’s grandmother was her bastion of support, “My grandma is a strong force in my life and has stood behind me all the way and has always pushed me to do my best and really makes me want to succeed in my goals.” Retha had been close to her grandfather her whole life; he lived across the street. Her dream of becoming a cardiologist rose from his day-to-day fight with heart disease. Zee’s career choice had been influenced as well by her grandmother’s ill health;
she suffers from Lou Gehrig’s disease. Treva, very close to her brothers and family, was touted as the one to “make something of her life.” She was hesitant to leave, however, upon learning her grandpa was diagnosed with cancer. Her closeness to family was part of the reason she transferred at the end of the term.

John had friends who played sports in college. They provided a model for him; if they could make it through college, he could as well. John wanted the opportunity to be a college student. He had already worked as a mechanic and had friends who were still in the trade. His friends were not satisfied with their jobs and John knew that it was not a field he wanted to pursue as a career.

As tobacco farmers in a rural, economically depressed area of the state, no one in Maggie’s immediate or extended family had the opportunity to go to college. Maggie wanted to go to college especially because her parents were not able to attend. Whereas they did not have the money to go themselves, Maggie earned scholarships and obtained financial aid that cover most of her costs.

Financial Goals

Deb was deeply affected by her parents’ recent divorce. Following the settlement, her mother was left in a very unstable financial position. Deb was determined to obtain a degree that enabled her to be financially secure with a stable income to support her and children if she decided to have a family.

John was also affected by his parents’ deteriorating financial situation. His father earned a good salary in the past through truck sales but the bottom fell out of the market and he lost his job. During this period his parents traded their home for a less expensive
house in need of repair. With no available funds to remodel the house, however, John was disappointed and embarrassed by the appearance of their home. He was determined to earn a degree that enabled him to have a comfortable salary, a salary greater than his father was able to make.

Having the opportunity for well paying jobs was also important to other participants. This was a stated priority for Bill, Treva, Retha, and Maxie. Finding better employment opportunities than their parents were able to find was, in itself, also a priority for them. Through their parents’ experiences these students observed firsthand the hardships, sacrifices, insecurities, and barriers that unemployment and employment in low-wage jobs created.

**Personal Goals**

Deb was destined to go to college; it was mandated in the family mantra, “You’ll go to high school then to college. You’ll get a job, get married, and then have kids.” In a similar vein Maxie never imagined that she would not attend college. Going to college was part of life’s plan as well for Retha and Maggie. Retha was determined to go to college whether her parents helped or not. “I guess they encouraged me to go, but I think I already had the mindset that I’m going whether or not, you know.”

College represented the route to their reach their goals. Lourine and Maggie always wanted to teach. By enrolling at Shawnee State University they were taking the first step in this direction. John already knew he could work as a mechanic but he wanted something more. He thought college provided an opportunity for a better life. He wanted a comfortable lifestyle and was willing to go into debt to make it happen.
John also needed his father’s approval. Their relationship had always been slightly contentious—they never saw eye-to-eye on an issue. Even so, he sought his father’s approval; he wanted to make him proud. Succeeding academically in college and earning a degree was one way he thought he could earn his father’s approval.

Maxie did not enjoy high school and wanted to create a new life for herself in college. “I was scared of college….It was the bullying, the pick on, the name calling…I was afraid college was going to be just like high school.” Deb, Lourine, and Retha also looked forward to creating new lives and finding their niche in college. Their high school experiences were not as difficult as Maxie’s; however, they were ready for a new start. For example, Deb was not academically challenged or socially engaged in high school and she looked forward to becoming actively involved in college classes and activities.

**Motivation to Attend Shawnee State University**

The participants chose to attend Shawnee State University for a variety of reasons. It was close to home, small, and relatively affordable when compared to other similar institutions. The opportunity to live at home while attending college was also important to many of the students. Some participants chose to attend the University due to the reputation of their desired program of study. Five of the participants selected Shawnee State University because it was close to home. Four chose to attend because it was small. At least three of the participants based their decision on affordability.

**Influences – Helpful Versus Detrimental**

Established goals propel students along the college going process. As students prepare to enroll in college they must also contend with influences that assist as well as
detract from their entry into college. The influences identified by the participants in this study fell under two broad categories: relationships and adjustment to college. Within each of these categories sub-themes surfaced that expanded and detailed additional aspects of the students’ experiences.

Relationships

This theme reveals relationships that benefit or detract from students’ integration into college. Some relationships can, at the same time, both help and hinder the process. Parental support, for example, is usually welcomed and desired by first-time students. Involvement to the extent of the “helicopter parent,” however, is detrimental to the students’ development of autonomy and confidence. Sub-themes within this category include Family, Significant Others, and Faculty and Staff.

Family. Bill’s grandparents provided support. As retired teachers, they encouraged him to study and they ran interference when events spun out of control. His mother, embroiled in an emotionally charged, damaging relationship, was not in control of her own life. She did not have the energy or ability to provide for Bill’s needs.

John’s parents played an important role in his life. He was close to his mother but had a “push/pull” relationship with his father. His parents were not involved in his life at college. For them, college represented unfamiliar territory. After one term in college John still did not know how to maneuver successfully through the collegiate environment. His parents, unfamiliar with a culture of expectations, were unable to help.

Deb and Maggie shared similar relationships with their mothers. They relied on them for companionship and sought guidance on important decisions. Their mothers
wanted their companionship as well. Deb lived at home; she was not ready to live on her own. Maggie lived on campus yet traveled home for the weekends. As a result of living away from home, however, Maggie was more confident in her abilities to handle problems on her own. Like Deb, she knew she could rely on her mother if necessary.

Retha felt a strong sense of responsibility toward her family as well. She helped care for her sister when she went home. She was especially close to her grandfather who had a history of heart problems. When Retha moved onto campus her mother mom had trouble letting go. Later, however, her mother proudly told her friends, “My Retha’s in college.”

Maxie and Lourine shared distant relationships with their parents. Maxie’s relationship with her parents was detached yet amicable. Her parents seemed to support her educational plans yet they were neither emotionally nor financially involved in the process. Maxie did not hesitate to proclaim, however, “They are quite proud that I am in college.” Lourine’s mother and other family members provided encouragement even though they could not help pay her college costs. “If I do nothing else with my life they want me to do this.” She was not close to her mom or step dad but relied heavily on the support of her grandmother.

According to her siblings Treva, the youngest of four, was the one who would make something of herself in life. During the fall she received daily updates of news and upcoming events from either her mother or brother who still lived at home. Her grandfather, diagnosed with cancer, was also often on her mind. Problems at home influenced Treva’s decision to transfer to a college closer to home.
Zee’s life revolved around family and friends from home. She focused her energy on spending time with her grandmother who is in hospice care. She balanced school and a part-time job secure in the knowledge that her parents were able to help pay her costs, “We’re going to help you get through college…we’re here for you.”

Significant Others. The two students who had serious relationships with boyfriends did not return for the spring semester. Lourine lived with her boyfriend and another couple. Maintaining their relationship and the household required a lot of energy. She stopped out in order to find a part time job. Maxie put her college plans on hold to join her boyfriend when he left for the Air Force.

Three participants suffered from broken relationships during the term. Bill had two girlfriends. One resented the time he dedicated to his studies while the other girl’s mother was addicted to drugs. Neither relationship benefited Bill’s academic progress. Treva and Zee had boyfriends from high school when they came to college in the fall. Zee’s breakup was difficult; however, she felt she grew closer to her family and matured through the experience. Treva and her boyfriend broke up at the end of the term. She had already made her decision to transfer back home. “It didn’t really have anything to do with being closer to him or anything. I just wasn’t happy here.”

Deb and Retha expressed similar views on having a boyfriend in college. Deb explicitly stated she was not in college to find a husband, “I’m here to study and to get a degree.” College represented the opportunity to gain self-sufficiency and financial stability in the future. Both of their parents were divorced and not able to help pay their
college expenses. Deb and Retha observed firsthand the importance of having the means to provide for themselves.

*Faculty/Staff.* Many of the participants were initially intimidated by their instructors. Their intimidation may have stemmed from first impressions with the faculty or from expectations that professors would be hard and callous. Either way it appeared these perceptions were soon dispelled. Retha was especially anxious:

I know my first day I had English and math and when I walked into the classroom none of the teachers said anything. You’re used to knowing the teacher for, you know, a couple years [in high school] because they’re walking in the hall. You see them all the time. You know their names. They didn’t say anything.

You’re like, “Oh, no they’re going to be mean.”

She soon relaxed and began to enjoy classes, “I like all my teachers actually.” Initially, Lourine also found them unfriendly. She later learned they wanted to help, “Everywhere you turn there’s somebody willing to help you.”

Zee was surprised but pleased to find the instructors truly cared about students’ success:

I will tell you my biggest surprise was the first week of classes, you know we get our syllabuses…they preach and preach how they want you to be able to feel comfortable around them and they give you all their office hours and their phone numbers and email. And it was just very surprising to realize how approachable, you know, they wanted you to know that they were. And I didn’t expect that.
Deb was intimidated by the size of her college classes having graduated from a class of fewer than 20. Like Lourine and Zee, Deb soon found the faculty members approachable and willing to help, “They’ve said numerous times, ‘If you have questions come to me.’”

Maggie was also intimidated by some of her instructors despite the college preparation she received through the Upward Bound Math Science (UBMS) program. She had already completed two summer sessions taught by college instructors through UBMS. Early in the fall term, however, she learned, “If I ever had a problem I could go talk to them and they would help.” Maggie sought assistance from RAs, TRIO staff, and members of the Financial Aid office. Through her efforts she earned a 4.0 GPA.

The low student/faculty ratio facilitated in-class discussion. Retha particularly enjoyed the opportunity for individual discussions with faculty members. Treva and Lourine also enjoyed the opportunity for in-class discussion and one-on-one interaction with faculty members. Treva especially enjoyed the laid-back atmosphere of the campus and accessibility of the faculty. She was very pleased with her academic advisor. He went out of his way to be helpful.

Several of the participants, however, experienced difficulty figuring out and adjusting to their instructors’ teaching styles and expectations. Lourine, Zee and Retha found it challenging to adjust to the different preferences and expectations. Bill learned to meet deadlines and attend every class regardless of the instructor’s preference. In addition to different styles and expectations Lourine discovered that unlike high school, many college instructors did not hound students to complete assignments. John, lacking
adequate preparation for college, was not able to complete the homework and reading assignments required in some of his classes.

Adjustment to College

The students’ initial adjustment to college set the stage for the remainder of the term. Through a rigorous analysis of students’ interviews five sub-themes surfaced. Each of these areas represented a key focus of their first-term experience: (a) belonging, (b) academic progress, (c) living arrangements, (d) financial situation, and (e) other responsibilities.

Belonging. College represented an opportunity for Deb to come out of her shell. She enjoyed the diversity of opinions in the classroom and quickly learned how to meet people and make new friends. In college she found friends who shared her interests. She was more at home in college than in high school; she felt she belonged.

After four years of intermittent employment in unskilled labor and hanging out with shiftless peers, Bill wound up in trouble with the law. He moved back into his grandparents’ home and resolved to shed himself of the negative influences that disrupted his life. “I got sick and tired of what I used to do.” With prodding from his grandparents Bill enrolled in college. College revealed new opportunities: he enjoyed meeting new people and participating in activities on campus; for the most part, he enjoyed his classes. He found a focus that brought meaning and purpose to his life. He was no longer interested in partying and instead, focused on completing his assignments.

Retha lived on campus during the week but returned home in the fall for weekend football games. Like Deb, she made friends quickly. She enjoyed living with roommates
and going to parties but not to the detriment of her studies. Her focus, similar to Bill’s, was on school “This is my money; I don’t want to be wasting it.”

Whereas Bill shunned the drug-addicted lifestyle, John reveled in anything that resembled a party. It was possible that he had a genetic predisposition to alcoholism; he unashamedly admitted that his grandfather was his mother’s drinking buddy. He was too distracted by social influences in the fall to concentrate on his studies.

Upon entering college, Maggie and Treva were homesick. They missed their families and went home nearly every weekend. Initially they also experienced stressful situations in housing. Treva’s situation did not improve. Due to housing, financial, and family difficulties she transferred to a college closer to home at the end of the term. Maggie’s situation, however, improved. She learned to confront the issues and work through problems. Like Deb and Retha, Maggie enjoyed meeting people. She became adept at balancing and prioritizing her time between studying, socializing, and spending weekends at home.

College provided Maxie an opportunity to redefine herself. Her feelings about high school were similar to Deb’s; she did not enjoy the social or academic aspect of being in high school. She was comfortable in the college setting, however, and found the students to be “kind” compared to students in her high school. The college environment was a better fit for her. Even though her parents could not help pay for college, they provided a stable home environment.

Neither Zee nor Lourine became involved in campus activities. They both lived off campus: Zee with her family and Lourine with her boyfriend. Zee’s grandmother was
seriously ill. Zee visited with her often and helped her family as much as possible during this difficult time. She made good friends in college; however, her old friends from high school remained a critical support in her life. Lourine relied on her high school friends as well. She had difficulty balancing her relationships and responsibilities and could not do it without the support of her friends. Unlike Zee, however, Lourine was not in college for the “new people experience.”

**Academic Success.** Bill quickly adjusted to the rigor of his studies; he worked hard to fulfill requirements and learned to take responsibility for his own progress. He attended class whether or not it was required and paid attention and took notes. He used his cell phone to stay on track with appointments and assignments. Bill found the developmental classes challenging yet he completed the work and passed them all.

Deb attended a small private high school with limited course offerings and few opportunities for involvement outside the classroom. College opened up exciting new avenues for becoming engaged in the learning process. She was enamored with the use of technology in the classroom. Deb also enjoyed the diverse nature of her classes, “There’s so many different opinions.” She looked forward to meeting people different from herself. Participation in the sorority included built-in motivation to perform well in classes—she had to achieve a minimum GPA requirement each term. She was very proud of earning As and Bs her first term, especially considering she balanced a part time job and responsibilities with the sorority.

Zee also found the teaching methods employed by her instructors different from standard practices followed in high school. Like Deb, she especially enjoyed the use of
technology. She used Blackboard to keep up with assignments. “In high school, you know, we never had anything like that.” She also enjoyed the in-class discussions and opportunities to work with other students on group projects. These activities provided a great opportunity to meet people and learn how to adjust to different opinions and communication styles. Through in-class experiences and interactions Zee became more self-aware and understanding of others. She was proud of her ability to adjust to college. She did not apply herself in high school and knew that she would have to work harder and dedicate more time to studies in college. “This is your future that you have to do well.” Zee earned a 2.29 GPA for the fall term.

John was not prepared for college level work. He experienced difficulty with math and reading and lacked study skills. Like many of the other participants he expected the coursework to be more difficult than in high school. He did not know how to prepare, prioritize, and develop good study habits. For example, he often skipped his math class and instead, asked a friend for help. During the fall, John was more interested in partying than studying; he failed all of his classes. “Staying in I found out was harder…I just found out how easy it was to slack off. So I mean I just gotta stay centered.” In preparation for the spring term, he created a class schedule that included more time between classes. He planned to use the time for studying.

Maggie received preparation for college through the UBMS program. She had already been in classes taught by college professors; she knew what to expect in college. In the fall, however, she found it difficult to complete all of the reading assignments because she had never learned how to prioritize and manage her time in high school; her
high school teachers rarely assigned homework. By the end of the fall term, however, she had developed a winning strategy: she completed assignments on time and finished homework before going out with friends. Maggie finished the term with a 4.0 GPA.

Maxie was afraid college was going to be just like high school. “I was afraid there was going to be teachers breathing down your neck if you didn’t draw something the way they wanted or you didn’t write something the way they would then it wasn’t right at all.” Instead, she was pleased with the academic environment. Maxie enjoyed her classes and professors and took pride in her accomplishments. She posted one of her mid-term reports on her parents’ refrigerator. She worried that her refusal to complete homework, however, would jeopardize her grades. She remained in constant fear that she would fail her courses. “I want to change. I do want to turn over a new leaf, do my homework, do all of it to the best of my ability.” Maxie’s fears were realized. She earned a .88 GPA for the term. She did not return in the spring.

Lourine completed the fall term with a 2.78 GPA. When she initially began school in the fall she loved it even though she worried she was not prepared for the academic rigor. As a result of her hesitancy, she did not actively participate in class discussions and worried that her comments would not make sense. She did not enjoy these classes very much because her natural manner was to be engaged. She planned to participate more fully during the spring term. Not fully recuperated from her accident, however, Lourine had difficulty balancing her course requirements with other responsibilities. Like Maxie, she did not return for the spring semester.
Retha chose to attend Shawnee State University because classes were small; however, like Lourine, she worried that she was not prepared for the academic rigor. She realized early in the term that her worries were unfounded. She attended classes and regularly completed her assignments. During the fall, one of the required courses for entry into nursing was very difficult; however, in general the other classes were not hard. She earned a 2.2 GPA for the term.

Treva decided to transfer at the end of the term. She enjoyed, however, the relaxed atmosphere of the campus. It differed greatly from her high school. She also appreciated being treated like an adult and having the opportunity for one-on-one interactions with the faculty in her classes. She earned a 3.27 GPA for the term.

Living Arrangements. In the fall semester five of the participants lived at home with family members while four resided in campus housing. Shawnee State University required first-time students who lived more than an hour’s drive from campus to live in campus housing. In general, residing in housing was much more expensive than living off campus in a privately-owned residence. These students were also required to purchase the 19-meal weekly board plan. Room and board expenses were substantial for students living on campus. These expenses were a heavy burden for the participants living in campus housing.

Treva, Retha, Maggie, and John lived on campus during the term. All of them except for Maggie relied on student loans to help pay expenses. Maggie was fortunate to have been awarded scholarships and grants that covered her fees. The others worried a lot about the level of debt they were incurring. Roommate issues surfaced as well for all of
them except Retha who shared a room with a friend from home. Many of the issues were resolved by the end of the term. Treva’s situation, however, became intolerable and factored into her decision to transfer.

Treva liked the apartment style housing. She was worried initially though because she did not know anyone on campus. Fortunately, she and her roommate quickly became good friends. Due to another housemate, however, the situation deteriorated over time. “It’s like she kind of make it her house and like I was a guest there and I wasn’t really welcome to live there.” This situation became extremely stressful and as mentioned previously she decided to transfer. Her difficult experience, however, was not without some value: she learned how to live on her own, how to live with difficult people, and how to succeed in her coursework despite a bad situation.

Even though Maggie lived in housing during the UBMS summer components her adjustment to college was challenging. Similar to Treva’s situation she and her roommates shared very different backgrounds and interests. Early in the term some of Maggie’s suitemates were extremely inconsiderate, partying and having guys over at all hours of the night. These conflicts intensified Maggie’s feelings of homesickness. She missed her family. By the end of the term, with staff intervention, however, the situation improved. Her roommates became more considerate, cooperative, and understanding of her needs. In fact, she and her suitemates began to enjoy each other’s company.

Fall semester was the first time John lived away from home and on his own. He had an easygoing manner and usually made friends quickly. Not much riled him. When his roommate began taking things without first asking permission John resolved the
problem by locking his door and hanging out at his buddy’s place instead. John enjoyed his freedom at college: doing what he wanted, when he wanted. He partied a lot—off campus as well as on campus.

Like John, Retha loved having her own place and the freedom to be responsible for only herself. She liked the apartment style housing and found that living with a friend eased her transition to school. She was proud when her home-town friends excitedly grilled her with questions about her apartment and campus life. She had difficulty though as Maggie did, finding a quiet time to study. “I’ve actually done a lot of homework really late at night just because that’s when I can concentrate.”

Bill, Deb, Maxie, Zee, and Lourine lived at home and drove to college. Their commutes range from several minutes to more than an hour’s drive. They did not have to physically move and adjust to new peers and a new environment; however, they had to realign household schedules, find reliable transportation, establish a place to study, balance a work schedule, and continue to help with household chores.

Bill shared a house with six other family members. He had a stable home life although the arrangement often interfered with his ability to study and prepare for class. As mentioned in his story, his room was in the basement where family members laundered their clothes.

Deb could not afford the cost of campus housing and decided to live at home. She was often envious of friends who went away to college, however, she wasn’t ready to move out. “I don’t think I could’ve handled it.” Zee also chose to live at home. Her
grandmother was in poor health. “I just had strong connection to just staying home. Like I really just wanted to stay home and be with my family and stuff.”

Unlike the other participants Lourine and Maxie were very involved with their boyfriends during the term. Lourine lived with her boyfriend and Maxie went through tumultuous periods—sometimes broken up and other times back together. Lourine had a hard time keeping up with her responsibilities and relationships. She stopped out at the end of the term. Maxie also did not return in the spring. She wished she “had lived on campus and studied harder.” The residential experience might have helped her remain in school. Following the breakup with her boyfriend she was very lonely, “If I live down here I would have a chance to interact with other people more often, make more social bonds.”

Financial Situation. To make ends meet Maxie worked two part-time jobs and lived at home. She was constantly stressed about money. She was especially surprised by the high cost of books and supplies. Her financial aid, fortunately, covered all of her expenses the fall term. At times, however, she could not afford the transportation to and from class.

Deb worked as well in order to help pay bills. Her father occasionally provided money for textbooks and supplies but did not have the income to help with tuition and fees. Her mother helped cover expenses although her disposable income was also limited. Like Maxie and Retha, Deb worried a lot about paying the cost of college. She scrutinized all of her purchases.
Bill managed to pay for school with his financial aid award. He did not own a car, nor did he have a job. Family members transported him to and from class. If the cars did not run, he missed class. His grandmother provided free room and board in return for his help around the house. Bill’s mother lives in the household, however, she does not have the means to help him pay for college.

Maggie was the only participant with sufficient funds in grants and scholarships to cover all of her costs. She still worried about having enough financial aid. She diligently tried to use every meal on her board plan and felt guilty if she “wasted” the cost of a meal. Like Maxie she was astounded by the high cost of textbooks, “They’re so expensive. That was the only thing that made me mad was the books.” Maggie worried about her grades incessantly. To maintain her scholarships she had to meet eligibility criteria annually, which included a good GPA.

John, Retha, and Treva assumed a lot of debt to pay their expenses for the fall term. Fortunately John was eligible for grant money as well. He was also trying to find an on-campus job to help supplement his income. His parents could not help pay his expenses, however, when his mother had extra funds she gave him spending money.

Like nearly all of the other participants, Retha was paying her way through college. Due to the cost of education, her goal of being a cardiologist was supplanted by choosing to be a nurse. For the first time in her life Retha was in debt. “I’m not really happy that I’m going to pay all this money back, but I’d rather have a good education.” She continued to work part-time at home on weekends and successfully found a work-study job on-campus for the spring term.
With no financial assistance from her parents Treva had to take out $10,000 in student loans to pay her costs during the fall term. She will have free room and board when she transfers back home. She hopes to begin paying back her loan at that time. When she resumes her part time job at the local department store Treva will be eligible to receive the tuition waiver benefit. Returning home eases Treva’s financial situation.

Zee was the only participant whose parents contributed to the cost of education. She covered some expenses as well but their assistance helped her remain out of debt. They told her over and over, “We’re going to help you get through college…we want this for you so, you know, we’re here for you.”

Lourine’s financial situation was unique. Due to the injuries sustained in a serious automobile accident she received insurance checks for her medical bills. These reimbursements were greater than the amount of her medical expenses. She used the excess funds to cover the costs of her education. Despite her improved financial situation Lourine did not return for the spring semester.

Other Responsibilities. Bill was resilient. As part of a seven person household he cared for his grandparents and his younger sister. He assumed responsibility for the bulk of the chores, inside and out. He quit his job in order to focus on school. Often without a car, Bill relied on family members for transportation back and forth to school. He balanced these responsibilities with a fulltime class schedule.

Maggie and Retha felt responsible for their families as well. Maggie helped at home during her weekend visits. Even though she was away during the week her mother
or brother remained in contact daily informing her of family news, drama, and disputes. Her mother relied on her assistance and companionship when she went home.

Retha, Zee, and Maggie had similar mother/daughter relationships. Their mothers continued to rely on their help even though the girls went off to college. Retha cared for her younger sister the summer after she graduated. Her parents still relied on her assistance when she left for college in the fall. They continued to ask for her help even though she was an hour away at school, “They’d asked if I could come in and watch the kids and I wouldn’t be able to.”

Treva, like Maggie, was pulled between two different worlds. She went home every other weekend to help with household chores and attend family events. She visited her grandfather and took him shopping or ran errands with him. The move back home will simplify Treva’s life. It will be easier for her to assist and support her family.

Zee needed to be with her family and they needed her especially at this time. She visited her grandmother as much as she was able to. Since both of her parents worked she helped with daily chores and also ran errands and scheduled appointments. In addition, she woke up her brother and made sure that he was at school on time. She balanced all of this with a part time job and a full time schedule at school.

Deb assumed a part time job in the fall. She took on this responsibility at the same time she joined a sorority and accepted a leadership role. These opportunities enabled her to make a lot of friends and become involved. She developed confidence in her abilities to assimilate into the campus environment.
Lourine’s relationships and living arrangements required a lot of her time and energy. She and her boyfriend shared a house with another couple. Lourine was often resentful because she felt she assumed a greater load of the household chores. Daily chores and travel back and forth to school tired her out since she was not fully recuperated from her injuries sustained in the automobile accident. She also continued to have to complete paperwork associated with the accident. Lourine was often stressed out and exhausted.

Summary

These participants came from different areas of the 29 county Appalachian region in Ohio. Their backgrounds were varied, yet they all shared the experience of being a first-generation college student. Upon entering college the participants faced influences that both helped and hindered their transition. Most of the students enjoyed their college experience; all of them were still enrolled or planning to reenroll in the next term. Most, like Zee, developed confidence in their ability to successfully maneuver through the college environment, “I’m excited…because it’s kind of just like rewarding to, you know, to believe in yourself to be able to do something you thought might be have more difficult. It gives you a sense of pride.”

Research Questions

This study seeks to examine the experiences and ways that first-generation students view and engage their transition to college. I hope to discover specific answers to the following questions:
1. What are the barriers to admittance and successful integration into college for first-generation college students from Appalachian Ohio?

2. What influences and factors assist students in the admissions and integration process?

These questions explore the crux of the matter. The categories have been identified and emerging themes and sub-themes were rigorously analyzed. What is the outcome after this thorough examination: what are the factors that help and as well as hinder students’ integration into college?

Research Question 1: What are the Barriers to Admittance and Successful Integration into College for First-Generation College Students from Appalachian Ohio?

A brief overview of the barriers that impede each student’s integration into college follows. Beyond the daily interactions and pressures that confront the participants, many of them narrowed their greatest challenges to one or two areas. This aspect of the participants’ stories was summarized from the follow-up interview conducted at the end of their first term in college. Most of the barriers confirm some of the highlights previously shared.

Bill distanced himself from peers and influences connected with drugs and alcohol. He made a plan to maintain his academic success in the spring: stay focused and study more, and reserve going out for weekends only.

Deb blossomed through her involvement in the sorority, classroom activities, and her experiences in her part time position at the hospital. Her financial situation, however, continued to be tight. The money she earned through the hospital kept her fiscally afloat.
Having received all Fs his first term, John knew he was in a hole academically. He had to find a way to be successful in order to remain in school. He created a class schedule for spring that he hoped would be more conducive to making academic progress. John continued to assume the responsibility for his college expenses and worried about the mounting debt.

Maggie, Maxie, Retha, and Treva tied their greatest challenges to financial circumstances. Each student had financial limitations on their enrollment. For example, even though Maxie received grants to pay for college, funds were tight. She worried about missing classes due to the rapid increase in the cost of gasoline. Maggie’s enrollment, on the other hand, was contingent on maintaining eligibility for scholarships. She fretted about this even though her achievement was outstanding—with a first-term 4.0 GPA. Retha took out student loans to pay her expenses. Like Deb, she scrutinized every dollar she spent. Finding a work-study job on campus for the spring term, however, provided some relief from her financial stress. Treva transferred to a public institution located closer to home. She was $10,000 in debt from the first semester. Transferring home eased her financial crunch and enabled her to move back with her family.

Zee’s main challenge was balancing school with work and sharing quality time with her grandmother. She was the only participant who did not exhibit anxiety about money. Her parents were able to shoulder the burden for her college costs.

Lourine experienced lingering discomfort from the injuries sustained in the automobile accident that occurred the previous spring. She stopped out spring semester.
In a follow-up email Lourine indicated her plans to find part time employment and return to school during the summer term.

The next level of analysis compares barriers that developed into common themes across cases. Several themes are common to all of the participants; others are relevant to only a few. These key challenges and barriers are grouped according to themes and examined below.

These themes tie back to the categories established though the cross-case analysis. Some of the themes are further delineated into sub-themes due to the variety of differences in students’ backgrounds, abilities, and goals. This cross case analysis ensures close study of additional meanings that can be derived from the students’ stories. Relationships that serve as barriers to college are examined first. This section also examines other issues that make adjustment to college difficult.

Relationships

Relationships play a critical role in student success. Dysfunctional and contentious situations within families and among friends distracted the participants’ focus away from their academic responsibilities. Students’ relationships with faculty members also impacted their ability to successfully negotiate the academic terrain. Each of these categories is examined below.

Family. The role participants played within their family unit was extremely important. Even though they graduated from high school and entered college nearly all of the participants expressed a need for some degree of closeness to family members. This need became urgent when the student was experiencing a crisis. Not having family
support when it was needed made adjustment to college and personal situations more difficult. For example, when Treva had the difficult roommate situation her family was having their own “drama” at home and they were not able to be emotionally available for her. Even though she maintained frequent contact with her mother and brother by phone and My Space she still felt isolated and alone.

Zee and her boyfriend broke up in the fall. At the same time her mother had been assigned to work nights. During this difficult time Zee did not have family or friends for support. Her mother was unavailable much of the time and her friends were away at college.

In a completely different manner, family events and “drama” had the potential to positively as well as negatively impact their academic success. In Bill’s situation individual family members often became a barrier to progress. His mother’s unstable and violent behavior created a volatile situation and threatened his stable, secure home life. He temporarily lost his academic focus.

John’s situation was much more stable. His parents remained in the background, in fact, absent. They dropped him at Shawnee State University in the fall and did not return to visit during the fifteen week term. College was a foreign environment—one in which they could not navigate nor understand. They did not demonstrate interest in John’s classes nor his day-to-day campus experience.

Grandparents were key figures in many of the participants’ lives. Treva’s grandfather and Zee’s grandmother had serious medical conditions. The girls worried about them and visited them as much as possible. With her grandmother in hospice, Zee
was going through an emotionally wrenching period. Treva’s grandfather was diagnosed with cancer. When she first learned this she did not want to leave for college. Her reasons for transferring back home could also be tied to his poor health.

Some of the participants’ family members experienced difficulty letting go, in fact, some were still hanging on. Even though she was in college, an hour away from home, Retha’s mother still relied on her to help take care of her younger siblings. Retha felt guilty telling her she had to study instead. Treva’s mother or brother called her everyday to keep her informed of news in the family. Maggie’s family looks forward to seeing her on weekends. Her mother relies on her help with chores and her younger siblings. Both Deb and Maggie’s mothers rely on them for companionship as well. Maggie explained, “We get along like we’re almost best friends.”

*Friends.* In some cases friendships were as important as family to students’ adjustment to college. The participants relied on friendships from high school, new friends in college, and even friends who seemed closer than family. Lourine explicitly stated, “My friends and family are my biggest strength and without them I couldn’t do it.”

Friendships impact students in positive as well as negative ways. Bill’s avoidance with his past provides the obvious example of a negative influence. In fact, he distanced himself from old friendships in order to focus on school. Alternately, John embraced the partying lifestyle that Bill shed. His failing grades confirmed the incongruent relationship between academic success and intoxication.
Neither Lourine nor Maxie blamed “stopping out” on their serious relationships with boyfriends. Much of their focus and energy, however, seemed to be directed toward making their relationships work. For example, Maxie’s goal, following one of the breakups in their relationship was, “Be happy, fix my relationship.” Lourine’s future plans were tied to her boyfriend’s enlistment in the Air Force.

Maxie’s feelings of loneliness and separateness resulted from the breakup of her relationship in the fall. She had acquaintances at work but no supports or close friends to fall back on. When Zee and her boyfriend broke up she also experienced insecurity and alienation. Her close friends from high school were away at college.

*Faculty and Other Relationships.* The literature reveals the important role faculty relationships have on student success. This function is especially important for first-generation college students. Few of them have relatives who attended college. Their families cannot provide tips and suggestions for negotiating the college experience.

Initially, participants found their professors intimidating. Their intimidation may have stemmed from preconceived notions about the academic world or from instructors’ impersonal manner in the first few days of the term. As mentioned previously, those impressions soon faded. Other difficulties resulted from poor instruction. Bill was extremely frustrated with a professor who changed the syllabi and assignments without communicating the change to the students.

Maxie’s relationship with her 8th grade teacher resulted in a pattern of behavior that jeopardized future academic success. Her refusal to do home work carried through
high school and into college and negatively affected her academic performance. She received poor grades for the fall term and stopped out.

Some of the participants had problems with their roommate assignments. In most cases the situations improved over time. Treva’s situation, however, eroded; even with staff intervention. She felt that more could have been done to try to resolve the issue.

Adjustment to College

Belonging. It is important for all new students to feel as if they belong. Longwell-Grice (2002) found that without a sense of belonging students are left with a feeling that their presence on campus does not matter. First-generation students have an especially difficult time integrating into college. During their first month in college Komada (2002) found they felt uncomfortable and alone compared with their continuing peers.

Treva and Maggie experienced the most difficulty making the adjustment from home to college. They went home regularly and at times, Maggie even drove home during the middle of the week. They had a difficult time separating from family members and developing autonomy. Both girls were more connected to activities at home than on campus. Following the first term Treva transferred back home. After experiencing a difficult adjustment, however, Maggie began to feel at ease and comfortable with her roommates.

Academic Success. Successful integration into college can be measured by several factors, including academic success. All students, over time, must make progress in order to remain enrolled in college. First-generation students are at a distinct disadvantage knowing how to understand and meet their professors’ expectations. They have at least
one academic edge, however, over their continuing generation peers. Pascarella et al. (2004) revealed that first-generation students derived a greater benefit from academic engagement than their continuing generation peers.

Most of the nine participants did not know how to meet the expectations of their professors. Unlike high school, where students knew the teachers by name, the participants did not know their college instructors. Adapting to the different styles and expectations of their professors was challenging. Many of the students had difficulty completing the reading assignments and they often did not know how to study and prepare for exams.

John and Maxie, with GPAs of less than 1.0, experienced the most difficulty in school. A combination of factors may have influenced John’s low GPA: (a) poor attendance in class, (b) poor study habits, (c) not completing homework assignments, and (e) carousing too much with friends. His difficulty may also have stemmed from an inaccurate perception of his progress early in the term, “Those first three weeks I was struggling. But now I’m not struggling but it’s a little rocky, but now I’m doing better.” Maxie’s tumultuous relationship with her boyfriend as well as working two part time jobs in two different communities diverted her focus away from her coursework. Her poor performance may have also been affected by her refusal to complete homework.

Living Arrangements. In order to focus on rigorous academic classes the students needed a stable home life that provided an environment conducive to studying. Personal preferences, individual study habits, and abilities to concentrate dictated the kind of environment they needed to succeed.
Most of the participants lived in stable environments. At the time of the initial interview, Bill’s home life appeared to be chaotic yet safe. After the explosive episode with his mother, his grandparents’ home was no longer a safe refuge. Lourine’s living arrangement also changed during the term. Sharing a home and housekeeping responsibilities with her boyfriend and another couple became a source of friction and argument.

Campus housing presented unique adjustment issues for all of the participants living on campus. Retha found it difficult to study until late into the night. Maggie, Treva, and John were distracted and stressed due to conflicts and exasperating situations. Most of these situations stemmed from typical freshman behaviors: immaturity, and inconsiderate and irresponsible behaviors. Regrettably, Treva’s roommate was a poor match. Maggie’s conflicts turned around following staff intervention. John resolved his own roommate issues by staying away from his room as much as possible.

Financial Situation. To earn a college degree, students must succeed academically and they must find a way to pay for college. For most students at Shawnee State University paying for college represents a barrier they must overcome. The percentage of students taking out student loans to pay for college at Shawnee State University is approximately 57%.

Finances created a hurdle for nearly all of the participants. Most of the students needed to work to earn money that would help pay the cost of their education. Maxie supported herself by working two part-time jobs. Retha had two part time jobs as well—one at home on the weekends and a work study position on campus. Deb and Zee both
held part time positions in the local hospital. Treva worked some of the weekends when
she returned home to visit. John and Maggie were hoping to find a job on campus.
Lourine wanted to work but was physically limited due to the injuries she sustained in the
automobile accident. Bill quit his job in order to focus all of his time and energy on his
studies.

Finding the money to pay for gasoline and textbooks remained difficult. (At the
time this study was conducted gasoline prices were rising rapidly resulting in record
highs.) Maxie missed classes due to high gasoline prices and Retha spent some of her
weekend’s wages by making the hour’s drive home to work. Bill’s predicament was
particularly tenuous. He relied on a relative for transportation to and from class. Nearly
all of the students worried about how they would pay for college. Some of them
scrutinized purchases for the first time in their lives.

John, Retha, Deb, Bill, and Treva assumed substantial debt to begin their studies
at Shawnee State University. Uncomfortable with her level of debt; however, Treva
planned to begin paying off her student loan when she moved back home. Retha and John
were not pleased with being in debt but they knew they could not enroll in college
without taking out student loans.

Other Responsibilities. College students live complex lives. First-generation
college students especially have ties that bind them to home, to work, and to school.
Many of the participants had family duties and other responsibilities that diverted their
attention from school. Rarely, however, did participants view these ties and
responsibilities in a negative light.
Bill assumed responsibility for maintaining the inside and outside of his
grandparent’s home. He also ran errands, prepared meals, and did laundry. Maggie
helped her mother with various chores during her weekends at home. Treva and Zee
helped with chores, running errands, and visiting ailing grandparents. Several of the
participants provided childcare for younger siblings, i.e., Retha, Bill, Maggie, Zee, and
Treva. All of them balanced these responsibilities while making the transition to college
and taking a fulltime course load.

Research Question 2: What Influences and Factors Assist Students in the Admissions and
Integration Process?

The structure of this response follows the same format as the structure for
Research Question 1. The factors aiding the integration process are analyzed across cases
in order to extract important information that reveals additional insight and meaning in
the students’ stories. The major themes fall under the categories of relationships and
adjustment to college.

Relationships

Family. As stated earlier, many of the students chose to attend Shawnee State
University because it was affordable and close to home. They leaned on family members
for support as they maneuvered through and into the college environment. The students’
needs varied as did the type of help they received. Bill and Lourine received valuable
encouragement from grandparents who believed in their ability to succeed in college.
Few parents were able to provide assistance with the admission process since they had
not attended college themselves. Some, like Zee and Maggie, however, received
assistance from friends who had attended college previously or high school teachers who wanted to help with the process. John’s parents took him to visit three different colleges before he decided to attend Shawnee State University. It was the most affordable.

Several of the participants retained close relationships with their parents or grandparents and relied on their help in making difficult decisions. Being able to rely on parents or grandparents for support and guidance helped participants gain confidence in their abilities to perform college level work and succeed in the college environment. Deb, Maggie, and John consulted their mothers frequently prior to making a major decision. Bill’s grandparents were supportive and encouraging and provided room and board in exchange for his assistance with chores.

Retha, Treva, Maggie, and Zee maintained daily contact with family members. Maintaining a relationship with their siblings became increasingly important once they had the opportunity to view family relationships from a distance. Attending family events and activities continued to be regular aspects of their college lives. Of the nine participants, Maxie appeared to rely on her parents least. Her parents were proud that she was in college; however, that was the extent of their involvement.

*Friends.* Friendships played an important role helping to ease the transition to college. Zee and Lourine were the only participants who maintained close friendships from high school. These connections helped them transition to college. Due to their hectic lives, however, neither of them participated in campus activities nor developed many new friends on campus. Retha experienced an easy transition into the college environment—a friend from high school became her roommate in college.
Many of the participants developed friendships quickly. Treva and her roommate became close friends immediately. Deb was in her element in college. She rapidly developed new friends once she joined a national sorority on campus. John was gregarious and made friends easily.

Through involvement with UBMS, Maggie already had friends on campus and she was prepared for college life. She knew many RAs and TRIO personnel. Some of her friends from UBMS also enrolled in Shawnee State University following high school. These friends and contacts served as a valuable resource.

Friends were especially important to Zee and Treva. They broke up with their boyfriends from high school during the term. The support they received from friends helped them weather the breakup and successfully integrate into the college environment.

Maxie and Lourine cherished the relationships with their boyfriends. Their relationships were usually a source of comfort and stability. They received invaluable support and encouragement that helped them remain motivated to pursue a degree. Even though neither participant enrolled in the spring semester, they both intended to return to college in the future.

Faculty and Other Relationships. Although they initially found the faculty intimidating, as referenced previously, their professors were approachable and willing to help. The students enjoyed being treated as adults in the classroom. This supportive environment helped them relax and provided the motivation to complete the required assignments and tasks. Most of them gained confidence in their ability to excel academically.
Many of the participants also enjoyed the variety of instructional methodologies employed by the faculty. The techniques increased their interest and involvement in classroom activities. Retha, Treva, and Lourine especially enjoyed the in-class discussions and opportunities to interact with faculty members. Bill and Treva appreciated the easy going style of some of their instructors. Alternately, Zee and Deb found the use of technology fascinating.

Responsiveness, a congenial atmosphere, and concern for students’ needs were also factors that facilitated entry into college. The participants enjoyed the inclusive environment and described the climate laid back and calm. Some were surprised and pleased by the overall helpfulness of the staff. Several participants visited the financial aid office upon arrival at the University. Maxie found the staff helpful yet business-like and hurried. Loan officers, on the other hand, saved the day for Retha. They went out of their way to ensure that her loan was ready in order to keep her from being charged a costly late fee. Maggie received help with scholarships and found the staff congenial and helpful. Some departments maintained excellent reputations all of the time. Maxie noticed, for example, that the cafeteria staff was always friendly; they seemed to enjoy their jobs.

Adjustment to College

Belonging. A sense of belonging helps students begin their college career with confidence and a feeling that their presence matters on campus (Longwell-Grice, 2002). Deb, Retha, Bill, and Maggie thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people and develop friendships through classes and activities. John enjoyed college and literally, was
often the “life of the party.” As long as he was engaged in social activities he was happy. Even Deb and Maxie who were both uninvolved in high school, found the college experience stimulating. Treva, however, was pulled between home and school. She was not happy and eventually decided to transfer home for the spring term. Having a sense of belonging was not an issue for Zee or Lourine; Lourine admitted she was not in college for “the new people experience.”

Academic Success. Academic success is dependent on many factors. Motivation, ability, and support provide a foundation for student success. All of the participants had potential to succeed. Five of the students worked while also taking classes. Nearly all also had additional responsibilities to their families. While balancing these responsibilities, all but two of the students (John and Maxie) passed the term with a 2.0 GPA or better.

These participants maneuvered through the college going process and learned how to succeed in their classes. Their methods and approaches differed; however, they all persevered and completed the term. Bill steered clear of negative influences while Retha, Maggie, and Debra focused on their studies. Zee learned to apply herself and John, by making some poor choices, learned how easy it was to fail. Maxie and Lourine were the only participants not returning to college in the spring. Treva enrolled in a college closer to her home.

The participants attributed several factors to their academic success during their first term in college:

1. Involvement in campus activities.
2. Attending class, taking notes, and making time to study.
3. Sitting in the front of the class.

4. Actively participating in class.

5. Creating a course schedule that included breaks of time between classes.

6. Completing homework before going out with friends.

Living Arrangements. The students’ living arrangements, on and off campus, impacted their successful integration into college. The four participants living in campus housing found the accommodations comfortable and more than adequate. One of the benefits of housing was the built-in social network it provided. This environment created the opportunity for students to develop new friends quickly.

Many of the participants reveled in their new found freedom to live on their own, be responsible for only themselves, and to develop and follow their own schedule. They were no longer tied to the strictly controlled schedule of high school. Many of them were also free from family commitments for the first time. This independence was exhilarating.

Living in campus housing provided Retha, Treva, Maggie, and John the opportunity to form and negotiate new relationships and to become more self-reliant. Maggie gained an appreciation for differences and learned to view issues from perspectives other than her own. Due to their difficult roommate situations, she and Treva became more adept in handling conflict. They all gained confidence in their ability to make new friends, live away from home, set their own schedule, and meet the demands of college life.
In a different manner Bill, Deb, Maxie, Zee, and Lourine began their college career as commuter students. Remaining at home reduced their living expenses and enabled Deb, Maxie, and Zee to continue working part time jobs. Most of the participants had never lived away from home nor learned to rely on only themselves. Living at home enabled them to maintain close ties to family. Neither Deb nor Zee was ready to move away from their families. Bill benefited from his grandparents’ encouragement and support. Maxie and Lourine were dedicated to school; however, their relationships with their boyfriends were extremely important to them. Living at home enabled them to spend time with their boyfriends.

**Financial Situation.** Students need adequate financial support to earn a college degree. At Shawnee State University 57% of the students finance their education through student loans (N. Montgomery, personal communication, February 16, 2007). Many also work at least a part time job. Five of the nine participants worked part time jobs to help make ends meet. Three of the students were seeking employment. Working full or part time enabled the students to earn extra funds to help pay for gas, textbooks and supplies, or an evening out on the town. Bill was the only participant who did not want to work. He had quit his job in order to focus on school.

Nearly all of the participants had some type of financial aid that helped pay their expenses. Five of them took out student loans to pay for college. Retha weighed her options and decided it was worthwhile to go into debt in order to earn a college education “I’m not really happy that I’m going to pay all this money back, but I’d rather have a good education.”
All of the students, except for Zee, expressed anxiety about money and how to pay for college. Zee was not burdened by the cost of college—her parents covered her expenses. “We’re going to help you get through college.” Several of their parents contributed some funds toward the costs of books and fees. Others, with little disposable income, were less able to help. They provided spending money when they could.

Managing their financial affairs helped the students gain important skills that were transferable to other areas of their lives. Retha developed conservative spending habits, “This is my money. I don’t want to be wasting it.” Being fiscally secure enabled many of the participants to successfully balance work and school with their personal lives.

Treva’s transfer out of Shawnee State University was a loss for the school. For Treva, however, enrolling in college closer to home represented an economic advantage. The tuition and fees were lower and she had free room and board, an employee tuition waiver benefit, and a part time job.

Lourine’s financial situation was also unique. The insurance checks she received for medical bills provided a windfall. This influx of cash paid for her courses and provided a source of funds for future expenses.

Other Responsibilities. Most of the participants maintained close ties and a sense of responsibility to their family. Even John, who rarely saw his parents, helped his father with projects when he went home. Even though they were in college the participants still played key roles within their immediate or extended families. These roles included: visiting and caring for grandparents; babysitting siblings; assisting with chores; and
scheduling appointments, shopping, and running errands. Five of the nine students were also employed. They balanced their responsibilities with a fulltime academic schedule.

At times the commitments were a burden. For the most part, however, these roles served as an anchor, one that kept them grounded. Their duties to family helped them stay “in the loop.” Even though they embarked on a new journey into college their place in the family remained securely intact.

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth analysis of the themes from the students’ stories. The analysis examined themes applicable to individuals as well as themes relevant across cases. The cross case analysis explored additional nuances of students’ experiences. The themes were then examined in relation to each of the research questions.

This study examined the experiences and ways that first-generation students viewed and engaged their transition to college. The research findings as described in Chapter Five address the following questions:

1. What are the barriers to admittance and successful integration into college for first-generation college students from Appalachian Ohio?

2. What influences and factors assist students in the admissions and integration process?
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The term has ended, grades are in, and nine first-generation students from Appalachian Ohio completed their first term of college. Two students are “stopping out” and one is transferring to a college closer to home. These students took a risk: they went into debt, stepped into a new environment that was unfamiliar and embarked on academic study for which many were ill-prepared.

There are many other students like them. Research highlights the growing number of first-generation college students entering higher education (Kojaku, Nunez, & Malizio, 1998). Even with expanding numbers of first-generation students going to college, enrollment in Appalachia lags behind. Whereas 24% of the adults in the U.S. are college graduates, only 12% in Appalachian Ohio can make the same claim. The gap is unfortunately widening. The percentage of adults nationwide with a college degree increased four percentage points from 1990-2000. The increase was half that amount in Ohio’s Appalachian region (Haaga, 2004).

This study investigated the experiences of nine first-generation students in order to reveal the factors that helped as well as hindered their integration into college. The research is timely and joins other statewide efforts to examine the barriers of students pursuing a college education (Ohio Appalachian Center for Higher Education [OACHE], 2007). Continued research on access and success is needed to expand educational opportunities for the people of Ohio.
This study was housed at Shawnee State University which is situated in southern Ohio in the heart of the Appalachian region of the United States. Shawnee State has roots as a technical school and community college prior to becoming the newest state university in 1986. The University houses approximately 750 students on campus and has a population of approximately 3800. Most of the students are from surrounding areas in southern Ohio. A continuing aspect of the institution’s mission has been to meet the educational needs of students in the region.

This study examined the experiences and ways that first-generation students view and engage their transition to college. The following research questions guided the investigation: (a) what are the barriers to admittance and successful integration into college for first-generation college students from Appalachian Ohio and (b) what influences and factors assist students in the admissions and integration process? These questions address the experiences of first-term, first-generation students. Factors identified as either positively or negatively affecting integration are examined in the context of the students’ academic, social, and interpersonal environments.

This research is approached from the qualitative perspective. Since research on this population is virtually non-existent, this approach is appropriate in order to “build toward theory from observations and intuitive understandings gleaned from being in the field” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). This research seeks to identify factors that help or hinder the integration process. Qualitative study is appropriate when attempting to understand a social setting or activity as viewed from the participant’s perspective (Mills & Airasian, 2006).
Basic interpretive qualitative study focuses on the individual: a concern for the individual and an understanding of the subjective experience of individuals (Cohen & Manion, 1989). This basic interpretive approach uses narrative as the method of inquiry as well as object of interpretation. Narrative inquiry provided an examination of the students’ experiences against the backdrop of the first-generation, Appalachian culture.

The students’ stories provided the texts for the narratives and in-depth study into the factors affecting first-term integration into college. Information about volunteering for the study was presented to students at summer orientation. From an original list of 26 possible candidates, nine students, who met eligibility criteria, were selected to participate.

The initial and follow-up interviews were conducted during and following the Fall Semester, 2007. Nearly all of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and followed the original plan outlined in Chapter Three. Interviews were conducted in a professional and confidential manner. A concerted effort was made to ensure that participants were comfortable and relaxed. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. As recommended by Patton (2002) interview questions were open-ended, neutral, singular, and clear.

Several data analysis strategies were employed to narrow the large set of issues and data into small and important groups of data. Analysis began with descriptions of each case, that is, the student’s story. The analysis included a review of extensive notes jotted down on the original interview sheets. Coding was used to mark parts of the text that indicated patterns and meanings in order to cull the data for repetition of common
themes. Once identified, these codes were winnowed and sorted. They were carefully examined, refined even further, and organized into categories. The process of organizing the data facilitated a rigorous examination of the numerous elements and meanings from the students’ stories.

The coding process illuminated common themes from the collection of participants’ stories. Themes that emerged from the literature and from the collection of stories were identified. Transcripts of interviews were also reviewed to gain additional insight on students’ experiences and to discover any discrepancies between the recordings and the transcribed texts. These transcripts were scrutinized to identify common themes. Summaries of the stories and the key themes were shared with the students in order to gain additional input and clarification.

The themes that evolved through these processes provided the foundation for the interpretation and synthesis of findings for this study. They formed the narrative description of factors affecting the integration of first-generation college students from Ohio Appalachia.

Once stories were summarized two other types of case analysis strategies were utilized: the case analysis and cross case analysis. In the case analysis, the researcher approached each case separately, completing a rigorous analysis of each interview and writing up the case before proceeding to the one. In the cross case analysis, data from the interviews were grouped together by category. Themes emerged where codes crossed individual cases. These strategies focused within each category and across individual cases.
The results of this study are not generalizeable to the traditional student population. In fact, they are not generalizeable to the student population in other state universities in Ohio, nor are they generalizeable to the university that provided the setting for this study. The participants are all first-generation college students from Appalachian Ohio. They all attend the same institution. The sampling procedure did not attempt to gain a representative sample from the student population. There are seven females and two males. All participants are white.

A summary of the study’s findings is presented below followed by discussion of the findings against the backdrop of related research and theory.

This study examines the experiences and ways that first-generation students view and engage their transition to college. The categories have been identified and emerging themes and sub-themes were thoroughly examined. What is the outcome after this thorough review: what are the factors that help as well as hinder students’ integration into college?

Research Question 1: What are the Barriers to Admittance and Successful Integration into College for First-Generation College Students from Appalachian Ohio?

The key challenges and barriers are grouped according to themes and described below. They begin with relationships, which include family and friends, significant others, and faculty members. The barriers also include adjustment difficulties: developing a sense of belonging; achieving academic success; maintaining satisfactory living arrangements; developing a stable financial situation, and balancing other responsibilities. Relationships play a critical role in student success. Situations with
families and friends as well as relationships with faculty members impact students’ ability to negotiate the academic terrain. Each of these types of relationships is examined below.

Nearly all of the participants expressed a need to be close to family members. Not having family support at critical times made adjustment to college extremely difficult. Alternatively, being drawn into family events and “drama” made focusing on school challenging. Conversely, one participant, John, seemed largely ignored by his family, which also presented challenges.

Worries and concern for ailing grandparents also adversely affected students’ focus on college. Many students returned home on weekends, thereby reducing their time on campus, in order to visit and assist their relatives. They went home because they were needed. Many students were tethered to their families and expected to help every weekend (sometimes every day) with household chores and family responsibilities. Several mothers, in particular, had difficulty letting go of their daughters, continuing to rely on them for companionship and assistance.

In some cases friendships were as important as were family relationships to students’ adjustment to college. The participants relied on friendships from high school, new friends in college, and even some friends who seemed closer than family. Some friendships such as John’s drinking buddies were negative influences and served as barriers for success in college. Serious relationships such as Maxie and Lourine’s relationships with boyfriends had the potential to divert students’ focus from school. On occasion, turbulent situations threatened the stable foundation necessary for attachment
and engagement in college. Nearly all of the housing students experienced conflicts with roommates.

The literature points to the important role faculty relationships have on student success. First-generation students, especially, rely on connection with faculty. All of the participants were initially intimidated by their professors. Intimidation faded, however, when students realized their professors cared about their success. Maxie’s refusal to complete homework had disastrous consequences on her success during the fall term and, perhaps, contributed to her eventual withdrawal from school.

This section also examines other issues that make adjustment to college difficult. Students experienced the following difficulties in college: developing a sense of belonging; achieving academic success; maintaining satisfactory living arrangements; developing a stable financial situation, and balancing other responsibilities.

New students need to feel as if they belong. First-generation students have an especially difficult time integrating into college. During their first month in college Komada (2002) found they felt uncomfortable and alone compared with their continuing peers. Two of the participants went home on weekends and had difficulty separating from family members. They were torn between two conflicting worlds and maintained stronger ties to activities at home than at school.

Successful integration into college is measured by several factors, including academic success. First-generation students are at a distinct disadvantage knowing how to understand and meet their professors’ expectations. The participants had difficulty learning how to adapt to the different styles and expectations of their professors. Many
students also experienced difficulty completing the reading assignments. Most of them did not know how to study and prepare for exams. In addition, some students developed inaccurate perceptions of their progress and did not realize how poorly they were doing in their classes.

In order to focus on rigorous academic classes these students needed a stable home life that provided an environment conducive to studying. Most of the participants lived in relatively stable and secure environments; however, a couple of them had lived in environments that were unstable and challenging. These students experienced difficulty focusing on the academic environment.

Next to the ability to perform academic work, the ability to pay for college was one of the participants’ greatest challenges. Financial concerns were barriers for nearly all of them. Most of the students worked to earn money to help pay the cost of their education. The students worried about the costs of textbooks and paying the cost of gasoline to drive from home to school and to work. Many of the participants also borrowed money and assumed responsibility for their personal finances for the first time in their lives. As first-generation college students they were ill-equipped to manage their money; they had little experience with this in the past. Their parents could not advise them and thus, they began their journey “up a creek without a paddle.”

Nearly all of the students had a myriad of ongoing responsibilities and connections with family despite taking a fulltime course load in college. Their duties and work schedules sometimes conflicted with attending class and completing assignments
and projects. If something had to suffer, it was usually schoolwork. Loyalty to family usually took precedence over commitment to school.

*Research Question 2: What Influences and Factors Assist Students in the Admissions and Integration Process?*

Examination of the factors affecting the admissions process begins with a look at the students’ reasons for attending college, and Shawnee State University in particular. The factors aiding the integration process for participants are presented in the same order as they were examined with major themes falling under the categories of relationships and adjustment to college.

Participants listed three main areas influencing their decision to attend college: family and friends, financial goals, and personal goals. Nearly all of the participants received encouragement and support from family or friends to attend college. Having the opportunity for well paying jobs was also an important reason for going to college. Through their parents’ experiences these students observed firsthand the hardships, sacrifices, insecurities, and barriers that unemployment and employment in low-wage jobs created.

Most of the students had long imagined themselves as college students. Some of them viewed college as a way to create a new life and others believed it to be the route to achieve their goals. All of the students viewed college as an opportunity for a better life. Their choice to attend Shawnee State University was based on three factors. In order of importance those reasons included: proximity, size, and affordability. The University was “close to home,” small, and affordable.
During the admissions and integration process participants relied on family members for support. Although few parents could provide assistance with the application and enrollment process they offered valuable encouragement in the students’ ability to succeed.

Once enrolled, students continued to maintain close relationships with parents and grandparents, relying on their advice and support when facing difficult decisions and situations. Over half of the students maintained daily contact with family members and continued to attend family events and activities on a regular basis.

Friendships also eased the transition to college. A few of the participants maintained close friendships from high school. Most, however, developed new friends in their classes and through residential experiences and campus activities. This support helped participants weather broken relationships, homesickness, and conflicts in housing.

Participants experienced Shawnee State as a student-focused environment and a culture where service to students was valued. Several of the participants received valuable assistance from the financial aid office staff. The advice and assistance facilitated an easy transition to campus in the fall. It is relevant to note that my position as Director of Financial Aid may have unintentionally affected the students’ remarks.

Participants wanted to know their professors. Beyond the students visiting the financial aid office, few of the participants reported significant contact with any other staff on campus. Initially intimidated by faculty, students ultimately found them caring and approachable. The participants found their classroom experiences energizing: they were treated as adults, invited to participate in class discussions and interact with the
faculty, and they were encouraged to actively engage in projects and activities. Many of
the participants were also intrigued and motivated by the use of technology in the
classroom, e.g. Blackboard. This supportive environment was stimulating and helped
students gain confidence in their ability to excel.

Nearly all of the participants enjoyed the opportunity to get to know their
professors and develop new friendships on campus. A sense of belonging helps students
begin their college careers with confidence and a feeling that their presence on campus
matters (Longwell-Grice, 2002).

Academic success is dependent on many factors. As referenced earlier in the
literature, first-generation students derive a greater benefit from academic engagement
than their continuing generation peers (Pascarella et al., 2004). These participants
maneuvered through the college going process and successfully completed the term. All
but two students earned a 2.0 GPA or better. The participants attributed several factors to
their academic success during their first term in college: (a) involvement in campus
activities; (b) attending class, taking notes, and studying; (c) sitting in the front of the
class; (d) actively participating; (e) creating a course schedule with breaks between
classes; and (f) completing homework before going out with friends.

The students’ living arrangements, on and off campus, had a major impact on
their successful integration into college. The participants living in campus housing
enjoyed the apartment style layout—it facilitated the development of new friendships.
These students reveled in the freedom to live on their own, be responsible for only
themselves, and to develop and follow their own schedule. They developed confidence in
their abilities to manage conflict, live away from home, make new friends, and meet the
rigors of college life.

Living at home and commuting to school had benefits as well. Students living in
this situation had fewer living expenses. They were also able to maintain close ties with
their families and friends from high school.

Entry and persistence in college were dependent on financial support. In order to
pay their expenses nearly all of the students either worked or were actively seeking
employment. Few of their parents were in a position to pay any of their expenses. Five
participants took out student loans to pay for college. Managing their financial affairs
helped participants gain experiences and skills that were transferable to other areas of
their lives.

Most of the participants felt a strong connection and sense of responsibility to
their family. Some were still integrally involved: visiting and caring for grandparents,
babysitting siblings, etc. These responsibilities were both a burden and an anchor. As
they began a new life on campus their place in the family remained securely intact.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in this study correspond with much of the research on first-
generation students and students from Appalachia. Compared with their peers, first-
generation students are disadvantaged when it comes to level of family support, degree
expectations, planning, and college preparation in high school (Nunez & Cucarro-
the importance of family and a strong sense of place for those born and raised in rural Appalachia.

The participants in this study exemplified a strong loyalty to family. For most of them, this was evidenced through daily communication and regular visits with family members and, in some cases, maintaining work projects or chores at home. Loyalty to family, however, could be a double-edged sword. The ties and commitments to family provided students with a sense of identity and security. At the same time these responsibilities prevented them from fully engaging in campus activities and, perhaps, created distractions from their academic obligations. This study revealed that students began their educational journey while having their place in the family firmly intact and as a high priority in their lives. Despite the inherent tensions and challenges in the multiple responsibilities students needed to manage, there was no evidence that family obligations were questioned. These loyalties appeared to be sacrosanct.

With an educational attainment rate half that of the U.S., parents in Appalachia are not college educated or able to serve as role models for higher education (Haaga, 2004). The findings in this study align with the literature and illustrate that the participants’ parents were unable to assist in the college going process: applying for college and financial aid, taking out student loans, and selecting a college major. Students received little guidance in planning for their future.

Participants experienced a number of the transitional issues identified by Carter and Robinson (2002) as unique to the first-generation Appalachian college student: (a) tensions created between home and assumptions that education means “up and out”; (b)
changing relationships with significant others; (c) concerns about family finances “back home”; and (d) unrealistic expectations about the amount of work required to succeed in their college courses. Like the students identified by Carter and Robinson, the participants in this study were motivated and able but found themselves on the outside looking in.

There are few studies focused on the academic success of students from Appalachia. The literature is much more comprehensive, however, on first-generation student success. The findings in this study matched those revealed in one of the earliest studies on first-generation student success. Billson and Terry (1982) found that first-generation college students often had many external influences hindering their ability to integrate into the college community, e.g., lack of time spent on campus, ties to home communities, and time spent working.

One of the aspects of retention focuses on student involvement. Alexander Astin’s (1985) theory of student involvement describes involvement as the amount of energy that a student devotes toward academic experiences. Astin’s major premise is that “students learn by becoming involved” (p. 133). In a similar vein, participants in this study acknowledged their enjoyment interacting with the faculty and joining in-class discussions. They even credited several activities, listed previously, to their initial success, for example, involvement in campus activities and participating in classroom discussions.

Komada (2002) found that first-generation students felt very alone and uncomfortable during their first month on campus compared with their peers who took
solace knowing “everyone was in the same boat” (p. 114). The findings in this study were similar but not completely the same. Most of the participants were unsure of their ability to be successful. Of the four students living on campus two were extremely homesick and the other two were not. The differences in the findings may be attributed to several factors: size of research sample, campus size, distance from home, housing situations, accessibility of faculty, and helpfulness of the college staff.

Implications and Recommendations

Within the areas of relationships and adjustments to college, this study identified specific influences affecting the entry and enrollment of first-generation, Appalachian Ohio college students. Many of these findings have been supported by the literature. The next step is to figure out what to do about it. As educators working in the field of higher education, our responsibility is clear:

Students will elect to stay or leave college not so much because of a theory but because college and university faculty and administrators have made transformative shifts in governance, curriculum development, in- and out-of-class teaching and learning, student programming and other institutional dimensions that affect students on a daily basis. (Rendon et al., 2000, p. 152)

Based on the stories of these first-generation college students from Ohio Appalachia and the meaning I have gleaned from them it is evident that we have barely scratched the surface in our attempts to meet the needs of this population of students. Much needs to be accomplished to level the playing field in order for these students to compete in the global economy. The problem is, the global economy is here and now. We
must be proactive and purposeful in our efforts to reduce barriers and to increase positive influences that help students enroll and integrate into college. Due to similarities among different segments of the Appalachian regions in the U.S. the following suggestions are offered to assist first-generation students from other regions in Appalachia.

The implications for practice fall under the categories (a) cultural sensitivity and (b) a focus on student success. These implications may not be plausible for every type of institution. They require an overarching mission of helping students succeed. Flexibility and a spirit of collaboration with a focus on meeting students’ needs provide the springboard for making transformative change.

It is important to note that my role on campus may have unintentionally influenced the research. I am the director of financial aid, and my participants were aware of that. When I asked students about their experience with the administration, faculty, and, specifically, the financial aid office, I heard positive comments. In particular, students frequently mentioned the development of positive relationships with faculty. Additionally, nearly all of the participants worried about paying for college and indicated that financial aid was important to their success. While I assume that students were honest about their evaluations, it is also possible that these positive responses could be informed, in part, by their awareness of my position with the university.

**Cultural Sensitivity**

1. First-generation students need to be identified in the college application process in order to initiate communication, early in the process and often, between faculty and staff, the students, and their parents.
2. Student affairs staff or the department of enrollment management needs to initiate cultural awareness among key office staffs in order to better understand and meet the needs of first-generation students from Appalachia.

3. It is important for first-generation students from Appalachian Ohio to be comfortable in the classroom; they may be intimidated easily in unfamiliar environments. The faculty plays a critical role in these students’ success. They represent the first and strongest connection students have to campus. In order for faculty to positively impact students’ academic and social progress they need to understand their culture and become aware of the barriers that detract from their success. Only then can the faculty focus on the strengths and characteristics that help these students succeed.

4. Departmental policies and procedures need to be examined to determine if particular processes create unnecessary burdens for students. More often than not processes are continued “because it’s always been that way.” Forms and letters need to be examined to ensure that explanations and requests are clear, free of jargon, and easily understood. An effective way to improve office communications is to have student workers critique them and provide suggestions for improvement.

_A Focus on Student Success_

1. The campus environment needs to develop a heightened awareness of the importance of service to students. It would be a good idea to adopt the spirit of the “in-loco parentis” philosophy for high school students whose parents are not familiar with the college decision-making process. Alumni could play a key role in this process. Interested
students could be matched with alumni or current students from the same geographic area who would answer questions and assist them with the application process.

2. In order to assure students and help them become competent in their ability to manage their financial aid it is critical that they are provided financial aid counseling that is detailed, specific, and compassionate. Students must feel comfortable asking for assistance from the financial aid office. Websites and hotlines addressing the complexities of the admissions and financial aid processes could be developed to provide FAQ’s and to target the most difficult aspects of the processes. An interactive “to-do list” or animated video clip could lead students through the steps of the college application processes. Students could have access to computers in the financial aid office in order to complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

3. Parents need to be educated about the requirements and expectations as well as the benefits of the college experience. Orientation programs need to provide special sessions for parents that focus on common terms and processes, academic expectations, and the student development goals that are part of the academic experience.

4. Recognizing the importance of family and friends, the culture on campus must be welcoming, inclusive, and responsive. In order for families to become familiar with the college environment special weekend activities need to be planned in which family members are invited to campus, e.g., mom and dad’s weekends, little sibs weekend. The University website and campus newsletters can also offer vehicles for communicating with parents.
5. Financial Aid Officers should provide frequent updates to high school counselors. They need to emphasize the importance of a rigorous curriculum as well as the processes and deadlines for applying for financial aid. Key communications could be relayed through the financial aid webpage, office phone recordings, and through written or email communications with parents, students, and secondary school officials.

6. A partnering program could be offered to new students on campus. It would be similar to mentoring but not as comprehensive. As a partner, the faculty member, staff, or upperclass student would be matched with a first-time student prior to the fall term. They would initiate contact prior to the start of the term to welcome them to campus. At least twice during each term they would meet to discuss the student’s progress. Such a program would provide the student a connection to campus thereby helping them to feel less intimidated and more comfortable early. This program would not be costly and could be financed through the University Development Foundation.

7. Having enough money to pay for school was a serious problem for nearly all of the participants. Several of the participants were frustrated by the lack of employment opportunities. The problem was two-fold: there were limited numbers of positions on campus and in the community. The University is located in a depressed region with few opportunities for employment. More students could work on campus if funds were available to increase the budget for student employment. This suggestion aligns with McConnell’s (2000) findings: retention can be improved by providing additional opportunities for campus employment. Working on campus also helps students establish
a support network. They become a part of the work group and develop a sense of belonging.

Suggestions for Further Research

More needs to be learned about first-generation, Appalachian Ohio college students. Studies need to be targeted on different aspects of the population such as non-traditional aged, commuter versus residential, high risk versus well-prepared, and students attending small versus large institutions.

This particular study needs to be extended over time. A longitudinal study could focus on enrollment, persistence, and graduation rather than limited to the college going process. A longitudinal study could also provide a more detailed and thorough examination of the factors affecting students’ success.

Additional research is also needed to determine the impact of students’ connections with family on retention and graduation. Some of the literature implies that these ties distract students from their academic focus (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). In contrast to some research, however, this study reveals that their ties and responsibilities can be both a burden and an anchor. As the students began a new life in the campus environment, their place in the family structure remained securely intact.

Limited funding for higher education makes it important to regularly monitor and assess the impact of institutional awards on the enrollment and retention of first-generation, Appalachian Ohio students. Federal, state, and institutional policies need to be constantly examined to determine the impact these policies have on low-income students’ enrollment in higher education.
This study was conducted at a small public university within the Appalachian Ohio region, where many students from this region enroll. It is also important to understand the experience of first-generation students from this area enrolling in different institutional contexts. Participants indicated considerable satisfaction with the personal touch from student services as well as the accessibility of the faculty. Proximity to home and the small size of the student population were key factors in their decision to attend the University. Many first-generation students from this region, however, travel further from home, and attend larger institutions, some with a stronger emphasis on research. What challenges and opportunities do first-generation students from Appalachian Ohio face when they are further from home, and situated in these different environments?
REFERENCES


Astin, A. W., & Oseguera, L. (2005). Degree attainment rates at American colleges and universities, Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, LA.


Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Cruce, T., Shoup, R., & Gonyea, R. M. (2006). *Connecting the dots: Multi-faceted analyses of the relationships between student engagement results from the NSSE, and the institutional practices and conditions that foster student success*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, Center for Postsecondary Research.


[http://www.ohio.edu/outlook/07-08/January/263.cfm](http://www.ohio.edu/outlook/07-08/January/263.cfm)


http://www.odod.state.oh.us/cms/uploadedfiles/Research/s100.pdf

http://www.odod.state.oh.us/research/files/s0/htm


*Workforce Development.* (2007, January 22). Paper presented at the meeting of Governor Strickland and college presidents, Columbus, OH.
Hi! My name is Barb Bradbury and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration Program at Ohio University. I am conducting a study on students’ transition to college as experienced by those who are from one of the Appalachian counties in Ohio and who will be the first in their family to earn a Bachelor’s degree.

**Why am I doing this?**
With the knowledge gained from this study, I hope to increase understanding of this experience so that educators can better assist students in the future. And….I need your help!

**Needed:**
- Students who are 18 or older entering their first term of college
- Willing to participate in two separate interviews during the fall term

**What’s required?**
- Discuss your background and your experience adjusting to college. That’s it!
- Interviews will be audio taped and transcribed, but names will be changed and all information will be confidential.
- Participation is 100% voluntary and there are no negative consequences if you decide to withdraw from the study.

**How to sign up?**
- If you are interested, please complete the attached response form. Due to restrictions to the number of participants, it is possible that not everyone who volunteers will be chosen to participate in the study.
- Once I receive your form I will contact you to discuss the study and schedule the first interview, or alternatively, to thank you but let you know that I am not able to include you in the study.

Please feel free to contact me at 740/351-3245 or via email at bbradbury@shawnee.edu if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Barb Bradbury
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT RESPONSE FORM

NOTE: The term “first-generation college student” refers to students whose parent(s) did not receive a Bachelor’s degree.

__________ YES, I am a first-generation college student

__________ YES, I am 18 years of age or older

__________ YES, I am from 1 of the 29 Appalachian counties in Ohio

__________ YES, I am interested in participating in this study

PLEASE PRINT:

NAME________________________________________        SSU ID#______________

ADDRESS______________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

TELEPHONE___________________     E-MAIL_______________________________
APPENDIX C: STUDENT CONSENT FORM

I would like to participate in a research study conducted by Barb Bradbury, a doctoral student at Ohio University, which will explore the college transition experience of first-generation, Appalachian Ohio college students. I am a first-generation college student and am eighteen years or older. I have been informed that the faculty sponsor for this study is Assistant Professor Peter Mather, Counseling and Higher Education who can be contacted at Ohio University, College of Education, (740) 593-4454. I understand that my participation will involve 2 interviews approximately ninety-minutes long conducted by Barb Bradbury. I realize that the interviews will be audio-taped and the tapes will be transcribed and destroyed following conclusion of the study. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in the reporting of findings and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study therefore will be protected. I have the right to review tapes and to request that all or any portion of them be destroyed.

I also give permission for Barb Bradbury to access my academic record for the purposes of this study. I have been informed that the use of any data collected will follow standard data use procedures that protect the anonymity of participants. Data will be destroyed following the completion of the study.

I understand that participation in this study should pose no more than minimal risk to me as a participant. I understand, however, that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. The results of this study may help college personnel better understand students’ needs as they transition into college. Barb Bradbury has explained her role as researcher and that the research is for the purpose of completing the dissertation for her degree. She has explained to me and I understand she will remove herself from any situation where there is even potential for a conflict of interest with regard to my role as a student and her role as Director of Financial Aid.

I understand that participation is voluntary, and that I may choose to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. I have been informed that non-participation or withdrawal will not affect my academic standing or the services I am entitled to as a student at SSU. I have also been informed that not everyone who volunteers will be able to be chosen to participate in the study.

I have discussed my participation with Barb Bradbury and have had my questions answered to date. I can contact her at any time with additional questions or concerns at (740) 351-3245 or via e-mail at bbradbury@shawnee.edu Questions about my rights as a research participant can be directed to the Office of the Provost, Shawnee State University, (740) 351-3260. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Name (printed) ____________________________________ Date ________________

Signature _____________________________________________

Barbara Bradbury ________________________________ Date ________________
APPENDIX D: OHIO UNIVERSITY IRB

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2 - research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Category 4 - research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens if publicly available or recorded without identifiers

Project Title: Factors Influencing Integration of First-Generation, First-Year College Students from Ohio Appalachia

Project Director: Barbara Bradbury

Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Peter Mather

Department: Counseling and Higher Education

Robin Stack, C.I.P., Human Subjects Research Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance

7/26/07 Date
-----Original Message-----
From: Michael Field
Sent: Monday, July 16, 2007 1:13 PM
To: Barbara Bradbury
Subject: RE: Research Project - Bradbury - Approval

Barb: 

While I have not yet heard from all members of the IRB, I do have approval from the majority of them. Your proposal has been approved. There were a few suggestions from two of the members, and I will forward those suggestions to you since they may be useful.

Michael Field
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Shawnee State University
Portsmouth OH 45662
Tel: 740-351-3472

-----Original Message-----
From: Barbara Bradbury
Sent: Wednesday, July 11, 2007 11:52 AM
To: Institutional Review Board
Subject: Research Project

Please see the attached documents. My advisor, Dr. Peter Mather, will mail the signature page upon his return to Athens, Ohio tomorrow (July 12).

Thank you
Barb Bradbury
APPENDIX F: INITIAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Sample Questions and Prompts

1. What are some of your earliest memories about thinking about going to college?
   - When do you remember you began to think about it?
   - What did your family (or close friends) think about higher education?

2. What was it that made you decide you wanted to go to college?
   - How much education did your parents have?
   - How did you deal with barriers, if you were confronted by any?
   - What people or events influenced you positively in your plans?

3. What did you expect college to be like? Is it meeting your expectations so far?
   - What do you think about your courses or your professors, other staff?

4. What, if anything, did you think would be difficult in your transition to college?
   - How is this going now that you are here?

5. Tell me about other responsibilities you have to balance with school, e.g., work schedule, helping out at home, etc.
   - How is your level of stress and how deal with stress?
   - Are there financial stresses you deal with? Monetary support from home?
APPENDIX G: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROMPTS

A. Regroup and review discussion from first meeting

B. What factors influenced integration fall term? (Helped or hindered?)
   1. Social life (making friends, involvement in activities)
   2. Family life (parents, siblings, grandparents)
   3. Boyfriend/girlfriend
   4. Finances
   5. Other areas/issues
   6. Biggest Challenges now that first term over
      - How deal with them?
   7. Biggest assets/supports helping them to make the transition now that term is over

C. Any plans/goals for future changed – college major, career, plans for summer?

D. How did grades turn out for the term?
   - If pleased, what attribute that to?
   - If not satisfied, what can they do differently?

E. In retrospect, how did they feel about their first term in college?
   - What do they wish they’d done differently, if anything?
   - What concerns, if any, do they have regarding the next term?
   - What do they hope it will be like for them?