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The College Choice Process
Of Nontraditional Students

by

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An Abstract of

The College Choice Process
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Non-traditional students are attending post-secondary institutions in the United States in record numbers. The college choice decision process of these students has attracted little research when compared to the existing research base for traditional-age students. During the 2000 academic year, nontraditional students at nine private colleges and universities were studied to determine aspects of the college selection process that these students considered important. Students also revealed their level of concern over financing educational costs along with their primary sources of funding. The students, all of whom were employed full-time and attending college classes during the evening, also provided self-reported data on their personal and professional objectives for continuing post-secondary education. Students considered the academic reputation of an institution and the convenience factors associated with their program of choice as important factors in their enrollment decision.
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Chapter One

For much of the history of higher education in the US, a college education has not been readily accessible to all types of students. This is particularly true for non-traditional students. For this study non-traditional students are defined as students who are 23 years of age or older and who are choosing to return to college after interrupting their initial college coursework (M.A. Holtz, personal communication, October 2000). Higher education, in one way or another, granted only limited access to the American public. Gender, geographic location, race, a certain college preparatory program of study, income level, religious affiliation, and even age of students are all factors that have determined access and entrance into a college or university.

By 1800, it is estimated that only a few thousand students were enrolled in higher educational institutions in the US (Potts, 1971). The vast majority of these students were enrolled in colleges or universities east of the Mississippi River. Higher education was a distinctively traditional-age, white-male, eastern-region phenomenon. This was due primarily to the population distribution of the US. In 1790, over 50% of the population resided in the Northeast. A review of the first federal census of 1790 reveals that most people living in the south also lived east of the Mississippi River (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975).
The Morrill Act of 1862, which created the land-grant university, aspired to provide higher education to all citizens who were willing and able to pursue it (Cohen, 1998). The Morrill Act was responsible for the establishment of about 70 universities and colleges (Domonkos, 1989). It would be decades, however, from the establishment of that Act until the time that college and university enrollment would increase substantially. Potts (1989) estimates that national college enrollment in 1860 ranged between 25,000 and 30,000 students. Cornell University, established in 1869 for example, enrolled 250 freshman in 1871. At the time, this was the largest freshman class in the history of U.S. higher education (Rudolph, 1990). This was also more than the total enrollment of three other colleges in New York (Rudolph, 1990). Westward expansion would accelerate, numerous states would join the union, and the population of the US would grow significantly before the first waves of broader access to higher education would occur. Even with this expanded access, non-traditional students were not yet a major subsample within the higher education student population.

It was not until the rise of the American junior college, with its emphasis on local education that stressed skill development and vocational/technical training, that a college education moved within the reach of substantially greater numbers of citizens. Joliet Junior College, Joliet, Illinois, was the first public junior college established in the US. Established in 1901, Joliet Junior College enrolled 85 students in the first year of its operation. By 1926, 25 years after Joliet's inception, 197 students were enrolled at Joliet (Wood, 1987). The junior college movement helped many students realize the dream of at least the first year or two of a college education, but enrollees were still primarily young, male, and fresh from completing secondary education experiences. The junior
college movement did open educational doors for more Americans, but non-traditional students had not yet found a way to enter into the post-secondary system.

The return of thousands of veterans from World War II provided the next large-scale opportunity for greater access to higher education in the US. A quick analysis of educational enrollment statistics reveals that enrollment in higher education institutions increased significantly in the years following the end of World War II. The availability of a new student market of veterans, combined with new sources of financing from millions of dollars from the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill), introduced many non-traditional students into the previously off-limits world of the college and university campus. The GI Bill helped pave the way for students over the age of 25 to begin to gain greater access to higher education in the US. But pursuing a college education still meant that a student, for the most part, would move to a campus that was probably located in a rural or small town area. It also meant that a non-traditional student would enroll full-time and sit in a classroom with traditional-age classmates. The curriculum, teaching methods, class schedule, and student services were all designed for the traditional-age student.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, older students, primarily women and part-time students, began to enroll in greater numbers in American colleges and universities. As a result, college enrollment in the US increased to 12.5 million in 1983 (Gerald & Hussar, 1997). Enrollment declined in 1984 and 1985 but then rebounded to 14.5 million by 1992. It is also important to note that in 1979 the number of women enrolled in higher education exceeded the number of enrolled men for the first time since higher education began in the US. Matheson et al. (1996) found that by 1995, students over the age of 25
constituted 45% of total student enrollment. By measures of age and sex, much greater access to higher education had been accomplished.

An analysis of the National Center for Education Statistics data (Gerald & Hussar, 1997) reveals that this aging of the higher education student population has increased steadily since 1970. More than two million (2.38) students over the age of 25 were enrolled in 1970. In 1980, 4.54 million non-traditional students were enrolled. By 1995, over six million students 25 and over were attending a college or university in the US.

These enrollment data confirm that students age 25 and older constitute a significant student population. In the time-span of 20 years, the very face of higher education has changed substantially, yet relatively little research exists to explain why adults were returning to college in record-breaking numbers. Moreover, it seems that there were few academic programs geared specifically to the needs of the adult student. Little research from the higher education community explained the needs and behaviors of this student group.

Projections of education statistics to 2010 suggest that student populations in the 25 and over age group will continue to increase (Snyder, 2000). The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that 6.7 million students in this category will be enrolled in the year 2010 comprising 39.4% of the total student population (Snyder, 2000). This student population has already demanded academic programs with formats that fit the busy schedule of a working adult. Since 1980 we have seen a proliferation of weeknight, weekend, every-other weekend, and executive-style academic programs offered to the non-traditional student population. Numerous satellite campuses have also sprung up all over the country. Many state university systems now have multiple campuses of the
same university located at various regions of a given state. These non-traditional students will continue to require academic programs that are tailored to their specific needs.

One other trend that is pertinent to this study should be mentioned at this point. The employment outlook and the labor market of the 1990s were very good. National statistics for unemployment were at a 20-year low with only 4.9% of the population unemployed in 1997. In 1998, 4.5% of the population was unemployed. Only 4.2% of the population was unemployed in 1999 (Council of Economic Advisers, 2002). As more non-traditional students are employed in a robust economy, more students have disposable income to use towards education and self-improvement. Since the awarding of certain financial aid programs depends upon level of income, non-traditional students who earn a moderate income may not be able to qualify for certain grants and scholarships. Non-traditional students, however, may not be as dependent on financial aid funds for their college attendance and financing. In addition, as U.S. companies perform well on the balance sheet, employees are more likely to receive educational benefits from their companies. Higher education administrators have been quick to provide programs for these students and their sponsoring companies.

Statement of the Problem

Record numbers of non-traditional students are enrolling in higher education, yet there is relatively little research on college choice factors for non-traditional students. Research in this area is important because non-traditional student college choice factors need to be identified and applied to student recruitment practices in order to provide continuing and increased access to higher education for this student group. This study
was designed to meet this need for research on this important and growing student population.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine a specialized group of non-traditional students and their college-choice factors and analyze the importance of these factors. In addition, student self-reported information was examined to determine the reasons adult students choose non-selective liberal arts colleges for degree completion programs. This study is important because statistical trends indicate that non-traditional student enrollment numbers will continue to increase over the first decade of the 21st century. This area of research is especially critical for private colleges and universities that compensated for traditional student enrollment declines in the 1980s and 90s by enrolling increasing numbers of the non-traditional student population. Given the enrollment pressures on Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General and the changing demographic trends in higher education over the last three decades, study on this topic is particularly appropriate.

The individual student was the unit of analysis for this study as opposed to national, regional, or institutional trends. Basic research was conducted to contribute to a better understanding of non-traditional student college choice factors. Unlike applied research, no immediate solution for a problem was sought. This was a descriptive, exploratory study. The results of this research help identify why non-traditional students choose to return to college and why they choose to return to a particular group of colleges. This research identified the reasons most frequently cited by non-traditional
students. Simple frequencies, reported in the aggregate, were reported for questionnaire items in chapter four.

Through this study, this author hoped to produce findings that are useful for strategic planning and enrollment purposes for college and university administrators. These findings can provide answers to the following research questions.

1. What are the student college choice factors among non-traditional students at this particular group of Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General?

2. What are the sources of funding for this population of students?

3. What are the non-traditional student's personal and professional objectives for returning to college to complete a degree?

With solid answers to such questions, higher education personnel can better serve the expanding non-traditional college student population.

Assumptions of the Study

This author brought several assumptions to this study. One assumption was that the data could be useful to college and university administrators in the marketing to and enrollment of this student population. It was also anticipated that the collected data might improve student service and recruitment practices. Another assumption was that non-traditional students pursue college enrollment for very different reasons than traditional-age students and that a crisis, or trigger event, usually influences a quick enrollment by a non-traditional student. It was also believed that this student group is less sensitive to tuition and other educational costs than their traditional counterparts. This author anticipated that the quality of an academic program was not one of the most important factors driving non-traditional college choice. This author also believed that
college location, proximity to student markets, and convenient academic formats are important factors in student college choice selections.

This author assumed that students would respond willingly and honestly to the enrolled student survey that was administered and that educational colleagues from selected sister institutions would assist in the administration and collection of the survey. Finally, this author anticipated that this study would be important not only to higher education administrators, but also to administrators in the Institute for Professional Development (IPD), the educational marketing company in which this researcher was employed.

**Delimitations**

This study focused only on non-traditional students who enrolled at a specialized group of Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General institutions that were affiliated with IPD. In addition, this study was further delimited by examining college choice factors of non-traditional students who chose to enroll for the specific purpose of completing a bachelor's degree, as opposed to enrolling in college courses for other reasons. This group of students also had experience with college selection processes while previously enrolled at institutions not affiliated with IPD. Students participating in this research project enrolled for degree completion programs during the summer and fall terms of 2000. Non-traditional students were asked to provide data regarding specific reasons for returning to college and for selecting particular colleges for that purpose.

**Limitations**

This was a cross-sectional study. The data were gathered during a relatively brief five-month period of 2000. As a result, this study was not able to reveal any trends or
shifts in non-traditional student college choice selection or patterns. This study may not be generalizable to institutional types other than Baccalaureate Colleges General. A narrowly defined student sub-population from a narrowly defined type of institution was studied. Generalizations to the broader student population are limited to this population of students.

Another limitation was the geographic disbursement of the participating institutions. Only 4 of the 23 institutions are located west of the Mississippi River. Of these four colleges and universities, no institution is located further west than Iowa. Employment status was another limiting factor in this study. Students who are employed full-time are the only students who are eligible for these IPD degree completion programs. Consequently, the results of this study cannot be generalized to other student groups.

Definition of Terms
An understanding of the following terms is critical to understanding this study.

Baccalaureate colleges general. The Carnegie classification for institutions that are primarily undergraduate colleges with a major emphasis on baccalaureate programs. During the period studied for classification, these institutions awarded less than half of their baccalaureate degrees in liberal arts fields.

Carnegie classification system. A system for classifying colleges and universities that was initially developed in 1970 and later revised in 1987, 1994, and 2000.

Consortium for the Advancement of Adult Higher Education (CAAHE). This group of colleges and universities exists to serve higher education through education
opportunities and services that are designed specifically for non-traditional students. The Consortium is comprised of the 22 colleges and universities that contract with IPD.

*Core program.* An academic program that consists of a predetermined number of courses that are offered in sequence without interruption.

*Degree completion program.* An academic program provided by CAAHE institutions that is designed specifically to enable a non-traditional student to complete a bachelor’s degree as quickly as possible.

*Moderate income.* An income between $35,000 and $55,000.

*Non-traditional student.* According to Mary Ann Holtz, the Director for Regulatory Services for IPD, most IPD/institutional joint degree completion programs require students to be 23 years old for admission. For this study, a non-traditional student is a student who is at least 23 years old.

*The Apollo Group.* A publicly-held company that provides educational opportunities for adult students.

*The Institute for Professional Development (IPD).* This is a company that is a subsidiary of the Apollo Group, Inc., a large, for-profit educational service provider. IPD partners with colleges and universities to provide a variety of services including recruitment, marketing, and curriculum development.

*The Remainder of the Study*

In chapter two, the author provides a synopsis of research and literature related to this study. Historically-relevant data are summarized and discussed in order to provide a framework for the research and conclusions of this thesis. A more detailed rationale for this study is provided in the context of available research. A conceptual and theoretical
framework that supplies a unifying theme for the entire study is also explained and examined. This is compared to existing approaches to non-traditional college selection.

The author details research methodology, design, instrumentation, procedures, and analysis processes in chapter three. Descriptions of the research method and tool, along with research questions and variables are outlined and explained. Assumptions and limitations of the research methodology, field procedures for subjects, and field procedures for proctors are included.

Findings of the research are presented in chapter four. Answers for research questions and factual information are the primary emphasis of this chapter. Tables are provided to illustrate data.

The author discusses findings of the research, particularly in relation to current theory and literature, in chapter five. Various viewpoints are discussed and presented. A summary of the topics covered in the study is also a part of this chapter. Conclusions and ramifications are highlighted in this section. Finally, practical suggestions and recommendations for future research close the study.
Chapter Two

In this chapter the author provides a synopsis of the research and literature related to this study. Student college choice factors, as presented by other researchers, are identified for traditional and non-traditional students. Current and past literature is reviewed to determine if college choice factors have been identified for any student sub-populations. The literature was also reviewed to determine if such data are available for students that attend Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General. In addition, the literature was reviewed to determine if sources for student funding influence the enrollment decisions of non-traditional students. Current and past literature were examined to determine what motivates adult students to return to college. Finally, the author uses this chapter to provide a theoretical and conceptual framework for the rest of this study.

Historical Background

For a number of years researchers have examined student college choice factors. Much of the literature has been oriented toward the traditional, residential college student. Moreover, the literature has leaned heavily toward state universities that enroll thousands of students at each university. Hamrick and Hossler (1996) argued that, “in many respects research on student college choice is still in its infancy” (p. 179). It appears that the reasons that students choose to enroll at one college or university to the exclusion of others has become more important to college administrators as competition for student enrollment has increased. Hossler and Gallagher (1987) suggested that
administrators’ ability to manage enrollment is closely linked to an effective understanding of students’ college choice criteria. Wilson’s (1999) research confirmed that students choose a college based primarily on hearsay and image. For those administrators who did desire concrete reasons for student enrollment decisions, it would seem that a category such as “hearsay” did not provide anything firm on which to base student recruitment and marketing activities. Wilson (1999) suggested that admission representatives and college marketing efforts are less influential than a college’s image as criteria for college selection.

Sevier (1994) concluded that institutional image is among the most influential factors in a student’s decision to select a particular college or university over another. After surveying thousands of students for a number of years, Sevier offered that college location, cost, availability, and image are the top four reasons that students choose a particular college. Sevier’s analysis was directed at traditional-aged college students. Wilson (1999) observed that the image of a particular college strongly influences a student’s decision to enroll at a college or university. In a somewhat related observation, Theus (1993) noted that a student’s interpersonal communication with opinion leaders significantly influences the validity of institutional images and recruitment communication. This communication, in turn, can motivate students to select a particular college.

When it comes to the influence of specific people on a student’s college decision, Wilson (1999) identified parents as the people sought most for input by high school students. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) identified parental encouragement and student achievement as key influences on student educational plans. Cabrera and
La Nasa (2000) suggested that parental encouragement is pivotal for a student's educational aspirations and college choice.

Hossler (1991b) affirmed that a student's perception of institutional quality may be the single most important factor influencing the college selection process. Contributing to the college enrollment choice research, Kotler and Fox (1995) argued that a high school student possesses a set of perceptions about different colleges and universities. These perceptions are based on common attributes such as location, cost, social life, and academic quality. The perceptions held by the student contribute to the formation of an image of the institution in question. Kotler and Fox go on to say that a perception of institutional attributes, and not simply the possession of institutional information, drives a student's college decision. It is evident that traditional students are using a variety of sources to gather data and to form judgments in order to make a choice to attend a particular college or university.

Early in American higher education, colleges were built near villages, towns, or cities. This enabled schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth to take advantage of and to serve the surrounding population base. Thus, prior to the age of research, colleges placed some level of importance upon location. Kotler and Fox (1995) cited the location of a particular college or university as an important student college choice factor, as did Sevier (1994). Wilson (1999) noted that, “Factors closely associated with location are distance from home/family, in-state versus out-of-state tuition, quality of life in the surrounding town or city, population levels, and environmental factors such as climate” (p. 99).

It would seem that prospective students might use these associated factors in a
variety of ways in order to determine the level of importance that location plays in the college selection decision. Wilson (1999) also observed that location can influence the competing priorities of cost and affordability. In most cases, students will choose to attend an in-state versus an out-of-state institution. In an interesting corollary, the colleges and universities built as a result of the Land Grant Act of 1862 were located within states, that is a particular region, in order to serve the public within that given region. Current research shows that the accessibility of a college or university affects the enrollment of an institution and, likewise, influences a student’s college selection process.

Researchers have also determined that cost is a factor that influences the student college selection process. The affordability of college is often determined by whether the institution is privately owned, or state owned and operated. State universities typically have a significantly lower tuition rate than do private universities. Hossler (1991a) noted that large, public universities enjoy a competitive advantage in student recruitment because of low tuition costs. Wilson (1999) cited cost as another institutional element that influences image, and, according to Wilson, image is a key factor in the student college selection process. “The variety and quantity of scholarships and financial aid can also shape the perception of a college being more or less affordable than others” (p. 150). Hossler (2000) stated, “the amount of financial aid students are offered has an effect on the decisions they make as to which college or university to attend” (p. 81).

Sevier (1994) listed costs as one of the four most important reasons why students choose a particular institution. In a journal article to college presidents in 1996, Sevier
suggested that college presidents should ask a number of questions concerning an institution's price and the cost of attending an institution:

(a) How much do you charge for your product? (b) How does this price compare to your competition? (c) From the perspective of the student, what are the non-dollar costs of attending? (d) How effective is your financial aid program? (e) How do you package financial aid? (p. 10)

Sevier (1996) went on to suggest that students weigh the answers to these questions along with other factors when making a college decision. When it comes to the college selection process, Sevier observed that:

Humans are averse to risk and students are no different. They take comfort in the familiar. As a result they are much more likely to attend a college or university they were familiar with before beginning their search than one introduced through the search. (p. 13)

Sevier (2000) indicated that the relationship between student recruitment and financial aid will become stronger. According to Sevier, colleges and universities must become more strategic and intentional in the use of financial aid to attract students.

**Summary of Traditional Student College Choice Research**

A review of traditional student college choice research reveals that, at least with traditional-age students, the college decision process appears to be based upon a wide variety of factors. Factors such as tuition costs, location, availability of financial aid, the perceived image of a college, affordability, and hearsay can all contribute to the college selection process. The reputation for academic quality a student holds for a particular college also contributes to the decision process.

Grunde (1976) noted that even admissions professionals at many colleges were not fully aware of all the social dynamics behind the admission and college selection process at their particular college. Research also makes it clear that parents play a key
role in the college choice process of traditional students. With over 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States, prospective college students have much information to weigh, consider, and compare in choosing a college.

Research on Non-traditional Student College Choice

While much of the past college choice/selection research has focused on traditional residential students, some recent research is being directed towards the adult student population. The changing demographics of the U.S. population are among the factors contributing to this newer area of research. The U.S. population has aged significantly. In the early 1900s the median age of the U.S. population was 22.9 years; by 1990 it was 32.9 years (Murdock 1995). It is well documented that the aging of the baby boom generation (persons born between 1946-1964) will drive the median age even higher. Murdock predicts that by the year 2050 the median age of the population will be 38.1 years.

This changing demographic has contributed to adult student increases in higher education. By late 1995, 45% of undergraduates were adult students (Gerald & Hussar, 1997). By 1998, the overall percentage of non-traditional undergraduates had decreased slightly, but the total number of non-traditional students enrolled in post-secondary institutions had grown (Snyder, 2000). The U.S. Department of Education predicts a non-traditional enrollment of nearly 7 million by the year 2010 (Snyder, 2000). Ansalone (1999) attributed increases in adult student enrollment to the rapidly changing nature of jobs in the US stimulated by a shift from manufacturing to a service economy.

Increases in particular student populations invariably lead to an increase in interest in studying that particular population. Sissel, Hansman, and Kasworm (2001)
pointed out, however, that higher education culture and history have positioned adults as not being worthy of study. Sissel et al. stated that, "few critical questions have been posed of higher education as it relates to adults" (p. 23). As a result, there is far less adult student college choice research to draw upon.

Kotler and Fox (1995) noted that tuition, the financial lifeline for private educational institutions, increased rapidly in the 1980s. As colleges and universities vied for student tuition dollars, more sophisticated market research techniques were employed to secure stable or higher enrollments. Bialek (1998) stated that many institutions expanded efforts to serve non-traditional students to stabilize enrollments. Whether it was to stabilize enrollments, secure higher enrollments, or serve adults because it was the right thing to do, increasing adult student enrollment in higher education did prompt some increase in research on this student sub-population.

Aslanian and Brickell (1980) have documented the different concerns and questions that non-traditional students have concerning the college selection process. Bers and Smith (1987) identified significant personal events or dramatic changes at work as common reasons that non-traditional students return to college. Adult students and their families are becoming more sophisticated consumers of higher education (Sanders & Perfetto, 1993). This increased sophistication on the part of the adult student is being matched by increasingly sophisticated marketing, public relations, and recruitment activities by higher education institutions. Cookson (1989) suggested that colleges and universities must become adept at implementing new student enrollment plans that employ elements of marketing, recruitment, and public relations. Such emphasis by
colleges and universities has led to an increase in information regarding the needs of adult learners.

Sewall (1984) found that adults enroll in college for career reasons, the satisfaction of having a degree, and simply to learn. Sewall noted that job dissatisfaction often triggers an adult student’s return to college. The need for learning in adults is also affected by transitions and triggers (Aslanian, 1989). Some of these transitions and triggers are divorce, a new job, children leaving for college, and retirement. Transitions increase the need for learning because of a change or move from one status in life to another. Triggers initiate learning as a result of some significant or identifiable life event. This substantiates Hossler’s (1984) emphasis on the critical aspect of timing in the recruitment process.

Roundtree and Lambert (1992) conducted research on women in higher education and identified learning for self-satisfaction and learning for job-related reasons as the two most important motivations for women attending community colleges. In their study of community college students, Bers and Smith (1987) found that women frequently cited divorce or widowhood, or children going to college or leaving home as key events that caused them to return to college. In the same study, men were more likely to list job factors as reasons to return to school. A study of a Midwestern community college by Kiger and Johnson (1997), revealed that the primary reasons adult students enrolled in college were preparation for a new occupation and to increase earning potential. Kiger and Johnson also found that adults not primarily motivated by career or economic factors were most likely to disengage from the institution.
Students, however, do differ in their reasons for attending college. Behrman, Kletzer, McPherson, and Shapiro (1992) concluded that explaining institutional choice is a complex problem. In studying adult education and public policy related to higher education, O'Keefe (1976) cited job-related factors as the primary reason adults return to college. This included job advancement or job improvement. In studying adult student enrollment at Catholic women's colleges, O'Keefe (1984) noted that the fact that the colleges were Catholic and the fact that they were women's colleges received the lowest rankings as reasons for attending the colleges.

Bishop and Van Dyk (1975), however, took a different approach in explaining the phenomenon of large numbers of adults returning to college. These researchers did acknowledge that adults return to college to improve skills, but they also noted that more colleges have convenient locations and have increased adult-oriented course offerings. These two factors encouraged adults to enroll in increasing numbers. Amiri (1993) suggested that the decision to attend college by non-traditional students is influenced by several factors such as family, background characteristics, aptitude, and demographic profile, and personal experience. According to Amiri, the longer a student defers higher education, the less likely the student is to enroll at a later date.

In attempting to reveal the reasons that adults choose to attend particular colleges, O'Keefe (1976) noticed that three of the top reasons centered around convenience for the student. Students surveyed by O'Keefe listed location and environment, proximity to home and workplace, and scheduling of classes as top reasons for selecting a college. Reputation of the college also proved to be an important factor. Thoen (1983) found that adult female students often returned to college to fulfill an unmet need or as a response to
an object loss. Bers and Smith (1987), in their research on adult community college
students, found that the number one reason adults chose to attend a particular community
college was convenience.

*Summary of Non-traditional Student College Choice Research*

Researchers have found that non-traditional students, like their traditional
counterparts, return to college for a variety of reasons. There seems to be several
consistent themes in the research. Non-traditional students return to college due to life
changes or transitions. Triggering events such as job loss, divorce, and children leaving
home can all contribute to the college choice process for adult students. Adult students
seem to value convenience when it comes to their choice of a particular college or
university. Convenience of the location of the college, of class scheduling, and of
program availability all affect the college choice process.

In the research available, job factors appear to be important to students across a
variety of institutional types including community colleges, Catholic women’s colleges,
and state universities. Career advancement, job changes, and the possibility of increasing
career potential all motivate non-traditional students to return to the college classroom.

*Degree Completion Baccalaureate Programs*

It is important to understand the educational and institutional context of this
study. While limited research has been conducted regarding the increasing higher
education enrollment of non-traditional students, even less research has been conducted
regarding academic program and institutional selection of these non-traditional students.
Since this study focuses on the enrollment of non-traditional students in Carnegie
Baccalaureate General Colleges, it is critical that a description of these colleges and the types of programs available to adult students by these colleges be provided.

Of the 20 colleges and universities initially included in this study, all but one are considered Carnegie Baccalaureate General Colleges. According to *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (McCormick & Huber, 2000), these institutions are primarily undergraduate colleges with a major emphasis on baccalaureate programs that, during the period studied, awarded less than half of their baccalaureate degrees in the liberal arts fields.

**Summary**

Adult students attending college in large numbers is a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of higher education. Record numbers of non-traditional students are finally causing a slight increase in the amount of research devoted to this student category. Sissel et al. (2001) in desiring more research on this student population spoke to this issue:

> Because higher education has been anchored in its historical traditions of residential, selective education and because it is based in perceptions of a privileged place and role for young adult leadership development, this environment embraces full-time, residential youth. Little space, voice, and value are given to other groups and in particular those who are the most different from young students: adult learners. (p. 19)

Most of the research that does exist seems to be oriented towards large, state-operated institutions such as community colleges and four-year institutions. This study is important because of its focus on non-traditional students at private four-year colleges categorized as Carnegie Baccalaureate General Colleges.

**The Remainder of the Study**

In chapter three, the author details research methodology, design, instrumentation,
procedures, and analysis processes. Descriptions of the research method and tool, along with research questions and variables are outlined and explained. Assumptions and limitations of the research methodology, field procedures for subjects, and field procedures for proctors are included.

Findings of the research are presented in chapter four. Answers for research questions and factual information are the primary emphasis of this chapter. Tables are provided to illustrate data.

The author discusses findings of the research, particularly in relation to current theory and literature, in chapter five. Various viewpoints are discussed and presented. A summary of topics covered in the study is also a part of the final chapter. Conclusions and ramifications are highlighted in this section. Finally, practical suggestions and recommendations for future research close the study.
Chapter Three

In this chapter the author describes the type of research methodology utilized for this study, and the rationale for selecting it. The research design, research questions, and variables to be considered and studied are explained. The sample that was selected for the study is discussed. The process used in developing the survey instrument is detailed along with field procedures, data collection, data recording, data processing, and analysis. Finally, the author discusses the assumptions of the research methodology, along with its weaknesses and limitations.

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine non-traditional student college-choice factors and analyze the importance of these factors in the student decision process. In addition, student self-reported information was examined to determine the reasons adult students choose non-selective liberal arts colleges for degree completion programs. This study is important because statistical trends indicate that non-traditional student enrollment numbers will continue to increase during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Research Questions

There are several research questions that the author attempted to answer in this study. First, the author attempted to identify student college choice factors among non-
traditional students at Carnegie Baccalaureate General Colleges. In addition, student self-reported information was examined to determine the reasons non-traditional students choose non-selective liberal arts colleges for degree completion programs. This author also identified sources of non-traditional student college funding and students’ personal and professional objectives for returning to college. Specifically, this researcher attempted to answer three questions.

1. What are the student college choice factors among non-traditional students at a select group of Carnegie Baccalaureate General Colleges?

2. What are the sources of student funding for this population of students?

3. What are the non-traditional student’s personal and professional objectives for returning to college to complete a degree?

**Conceptual Framework**

The individual student was the unit of analysis for this study as opposed to national, regional, or institutional trends. Basic research was conducted to contribute to a better understanding of the non-traditional student college choice factors. This was a descriptive, exploratory study that was based to a small extent on work by Hossler et al. (1999). This work by Hossler et al. divides the student college choice process into three distinct phases of predisposition, search, and choice.

This study by this researcher focuses primarily on the choice phase of non-traditional student college choice. This study does take into account, however, that the group of students being studied are predisposed to further college education due to a variety of factors that will be summarized in chapter four of the study. This author also
constructed certain questionnaire items that gather information from the search stage of college choice decision.

Hossler et al. (1999) also acknowledge that social, economic, and educational factors contribute to the student college decision process. In a similar manner, this study discusses social and family issues, economic and job factors, and educational aspirations and expectations. These socioeconomic and educational areas of study influenced the choice of many questionnaire items. It was assumed that family structures, marital status, and the ability to fund post-secondary education plans might influence the adult student decision process. This study heavily considers the quantitative aspect of the college decision process. Student responses are quantified and presented in simple frequencies in the aggregate.

Research Methodology

The type of methodology used for this study was survey research. This methodology was selected because it allowed for large-scale observation and data collection on a selected group of subjects (Saslow, 1982). The use of a questionnaire also ensured that this researcher eliminated errors and biases that could occur through a less methodical approach to data gathering.

This researcher did consider other types of research but upon careful examination found that they would not be practical or possible given the constraints of this study. For example, telephone surveys were considered as a means of gathering data. This method of data gathering would have allowed the researcher an opportunity to clarify any questions that respondents may have encountered while answering survey questions. The expense of conducting telephone surveys and the high time demand required to conduct
telephone interviews caused the researcher to eliminate this possible method. Personal and group interviews were also considered and dismissed as a possible research tool. Once again, the expense and the time required to use this method eliminated interviewing from consideration. From a practical standpoint, this researcher is employed full-time and would not have been able to find the time to conduct such interviews nor to organize and train a staff of research assistants to conduct the interviews.

Research Sample

The research sample was obtained from religiously-affiliated, private colleges and universities that are affiliated with the IPD. There are 23 such institutions located in the US. These institutions have contracted with IPD to secure a variety of academic, marketing, and student services that include the hiring and training of faculty, training in curriculum writing, bursar office staffing, and financial aid training and staffing. IPD also provides marketing, admissions, and recruitment services to these institutions. Consultation in working with state or regional higher education accrediting agencies can also be provided. This population was also selected because of this researcher’s prior relationship to IPD.

In addition to a traditional student enrollment base, these 23 IPD-affiliated institutions provide specialized higher education programming designed specifically to attract non-traditional students. Non-traditional student enrollment at these institutions ranges from approximately 300 to 3,500 students. Of these 23 institutions, 20 provide an undergraduate degree completion program for non-traditional students. These 20 institutions were invited and agreed to participate in this research study. In the end, 9
IPD-affiliated colleges and universities returned student questionnaires to this researcher. A total of 14 campuses from these 9 colleges and universities returned questionnaires. Five of the 14 campuses that returned questionnaire were satellite or branch campuses. These satellite or branch campuses, in most cases, were located more than an hour’s drive from the main college or university campus.

This author chose non-traditional students as the subjects for this research because of their increasing numbers on college and university campuses and because of the need for data that explain why these students are choosing to enroll in higher education in record numbers. There are two significant aspects in classifying these students as non-traditional. First, the non-traditional students of this study could be anyone 23 years of age or older, the age at which students may be admitted to IPD-affiliated academic programs. Second, the non-traditional students in this study were enrolled full-time at their respective institutions. In fact, a student had to be enrolled full-time in order to qualify for one of these degree-completion programs.

Originally, 15 to 45 students from each institution were to be surveyed. This number of students was chosen because it takes a minimum of 15 students to begin a cohort group for any of these academic programs, and a minimum of two groups and a maximum of three groups from each school were surveyed. This number of groups was selected due to the narrow time frame in which the study would be conducted. Most of the institutions would begin only one to three cohort groups during the time frame. The maximum group size was 20 students. Eventually, between 12 and 58 students from each of the nine responding colleges and universities were surveyed for this study.
The degree completion programs in which the students in this sample were enrolled included a Bachelor of Science in business administration degree, a Bachelor of Science in management degree, and a Bachelor in business administration degree. To qualify for admission into one of these programs, a student generally must have earned a 2.0 college grade point average on a traditional 4.0 scale, where 2.0 represents a grade of C. Students also had to be at least 23 years old to enroll in these programs. Students also had to have completed between 30 and 60 semester hours of college coursework prior to entering the program. The majority of the IPD-affiliated colleges and universities had these three requirements, or very similar requirements, for admission into a degree completion program.

The students in this sample population were chosen because of their enrollment in colleges and universities affiliated with IPD. Students included in the study were selected because they were just beginning their enrollment at these institutions sometime during the summer and fall terms of 2000 (August to December). To qualify for the study, students had to be enrolled specifically in one of the programs explained above. These were all academic programs that enabled students to complete a degree in 18-24 months providing that a student has previously earned 30-60 semester credit hours of accredited college coursework.

The sample of students was selected by contacting enrollment officers at the 20 IPD-affiliated institutions that offered to participate in the study during August and December 2000, and securing student enrollment rosters for all students just beginning degree-completion programs. Any student who enrolled during this time period was selected for the study.
Design of Questionnaire

An in-class questionnaire was selected because the researcher anticipated a higher degree of student participation than from a mailed questionnaire. In addition, institutional administrators were not willing to release student information that included home addresses; therefore, a questionnaire could not be mailed directly to each student participant. An in-class questionnaire assured student confidentiality and only identified the particular institution at which a student completed the questionnaire. Due to the researcher’s employment within IPD, in-class questionnaires could be effectively administered because of the existence of IPD employees at each participating institution. A strong, central administrative structure within IPD also facilitated ease of communication through company email and telecommunication systems. This researcher, and the Director of Research at IPD, could coordinate the activities of proctors at participating institutions. These proctors were, for the most part, IPD personnel.

A questionnaire was administered because it was one of the more efficient ways to gather data from students and to summarize and compare the different characteristics and responses of these students, particularly when students are dispersed geographically, according to Saslow (1982). The questionnaire was six pages in length and was printed on both the front and back of three 8½” by 11” pieces of paper (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was designed to take less than 20 minutes to complete.

The majority of the questions allowed for responses in a Likert Scale format that called for a student to choose one of three or four possible responses. The majority of the items on the questionnaire were multiple choice, closed-ended questions that allowed
respondents to choose from the same options and also made scoring, coding, and analysis much more streamlined.

This researcher chose to model the questionnaire after the CIRP Freshman Survey. A copy of the CIRP Freshman Survey can be found via the Internet at www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/freshman.htm. After examining the CIRP Freshman Survey, this researcher included questions 2, 6, 15, 19, 20, 22, and 30 on the final instrument.

Prior to examining the CIRP Freshman Survey, however, the researcher had also developed preliminary questions while working as a contract manager/director of enrollment for IPD. Early drafts of the questionnaire were designed primarily to capture demographic and marketing data that were of importance to administrators at Olivet Nazarene University and IPD. Only a few of these questions solicited student college choice data. As the purpose of this study became more defined, additional questions were designed and included in order to capture data specifically related to this author's research questions. For example, questions three and four of the final questionnaire were added to capture sources of educational funding for non-traditional students. Question three asked students how much of their educational expenses they expected to cover from any of 11 possible funding sources. Question four asked students to rate their level of concern about financing their education.

Question 11 was added to obtain marital status. Students could self-identify as single, married, divorced, or widowed. Question 20 was added to secure student income levels. Six income categories were provided for student responses. A decision was also made to eliminate certain questions, such as marketing questions that sought information related specifically to local markets.
Research question number one sought to identify college-choice factors among non-traditional students at a select group of Carnegie Baccalaureate General Colleges. Data for research question number one were provided by questionnaire items 2, 4, 5, 20, 21, and 30.

Research question two sought to identify the sources of funding for this population of students. Data for research question number two were provided by questionnaire items 3 and 4. Research question three was designed to capture the personal and professional objectives of non-traditional students returning to college to complete a degree. Data for research question number three was obtained from questionnaire items 6 and 8.

*Field Testing and Validation of Instrument*

In addition to a professor of higher education at The University of Toledo, this author also consulted with the business department chair, the chair of the psychology department, and the associate academic dean at Olivet Nazarene University to discuss the face and content validity of the questionnaire. These four individuals provided numerous and generous reviews of the questionnaire drafts and were invaluable with their assistance in constructing the final draft of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was field tested during the Spring term (January – May) of 2000. The questionnaire was tested on 60 students who comprised four cohort groups of students at Olivet Nazarene University, Kankakee, Illinois. These four groups of students were chosen because of their availability to the researcher and because they were adult students enrolled in college to complete a baccalaureate degree. The researcher was also
able to issue questionnaire completion instructions similar to those used in the final research project.

As a result of the field-testing, the researcher streamlined the proctor instructions and changed several questionnaire items. The most significant change was to eliminate most of the open-ended questions and construct the questions in such a way that students could answer according to a set of multiple choice responses.

Survey Implementation

Details for survey implementation were coordinated with the Director of Research for IPD, and with an academic administrator from each college and university that participated in the research project. Class times and locations, selection of proctors, specific instructions for distribution and collection of the questionnaire, and student cohort groups all had to be agreed upon by institution officials, the Director of Research for IPD, and this researcher. Student confidentiality was also guaranteed at this step of the research.

Survey proctors. This researcher identified a proctor at each university by working closely with the IPD contract manager. The contract manager is a person who acts as the primary liaison between the academic and admissions/marketing functions in the adult studies divisions of the participating universities. The contract manager at each university identified a proctor for this research project. In most situations, the proctor was a marketing representative, marketing manager, academic advisor, or contract manager. Each of these individuals, it should be noted, had specific responsibilities for adult students and was employed in the non-traditional segments of their particular
college or university. As a result, these individuals had a strong willingness to participate and help with this study.

Once the contract manager at each university identified a possible proctor, this researcher contacted the proctor by phone to verify his or her willingness to participate. This researcher provided a brief explanation of the research project to each proctor. This conversation was verified by email with a statement that written instructions would accompany the questionnaire packet. An IPD company-wide computer system enhanced all electronic communication.

Instructions. Written instructions for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires were provided for the proctor at each participating institution. The written instructions included a cover letter to the proctor (see Appendix B), a list of instructions that the proctor read prior to the distribution of the questionnaires (see Appendix C), and the student instructions that were included on the questionnaires (see Appendix D).

Distributing the questionnaires. This researcher distributed the questionnaires to proctors as soon as the Human Subjects Committee of The University of Toledo approved the questionnaire. Packages of questionnaires, including all instructions, were mailed to the proctor at each college or university. A follow-up telephone call was made to each proctor to ensure that materials and instructions had been received. In addition, the researcher emailed each proctor with a duplicate of the written instructions.

Proctors were instructed to take the questionnaires to the orientation sessions at each selected college or university and personally distribute one questionnaire to each student in the classroom. A number two pencil was also given to each student completing a questionnaire.
Timing of the survey administration. The proctors administered the questionnaires between August and December 2000. These five months were chosen because IPD-affiliated institutions typically start many degree-completion programs or classes during this time frame.

It was important that students had very little exposure to the college environment prior to completion of this questionnaire. Proctors administered the questionnaires at the very beginning of the first session that a particular group of students met. In most cases, this was at the orientation session. Proctors administered the questionnaires prior to any other input from college or university personnel. This minimized any undue influence, positive or negative, upon the students. Such influence could have biased the results because the students may have answered according to what they felt was wanted by the proctor or by college and university administrators. For example, if an administrator welcomed the class and informed the students that college officials were pleased that they chose to attend the college because it was close to the students' places of employment, then students may be inclined to list that as a reason for attending the college. That particular response, however, may not be the student's first honest response and, as a result, the data would be compromised.

The timing of the distribution of the questionnaires was particularly important because of the type of data gathered. Students were asked to provide answers to a variety of questions related to their college selection process. Students were asked to self report this information and it was essential that these self reports were as free from university influence as possible.
Once the members of the class were assembled and seated, the proctor greeted the class and began the questionnaire administration.

*Time allotment.* Proctors provided 15 minutes for distribution, completion, and collection of the questionnaires. Proctors monitored time with their own watch or with a classroom clock, if one was located in the classroom. Questionnaire completion instructions were also given during this 15-minute period. At the end of 15 minutes, proctors instructed students to return their questionnaires.

*The setting.* The setting for the administration of the questionnaires was the classroom that was provided by the IPD-affiliated college or university. In most situations, this was a classroom that was located in a classroom building or facility on the campus of the institution. In some situations, the college or university rented classroom space at an off-campus facility such as an office complex or conference center. In either case, the questionnaires were administered at this college-approved classroom.

The students, proctor, and other university personnel were present during the beginning of the class session. Once a welcome had been given, the proctor administered the questionnaires.

*Collecting and mailing the questionnaires.* The proctor at each IPD-affiliated college or university collected the completed questionnaires. The proctor placed the completed questionnaires in a self-addressed, registered, postage-paid envelope for return to this researcher. The completed questionnaires were returned to this researcher the day after the questionnaires were administered. The questionnaires were returned in a group by each participating institution. One identified proctor at each institution was responsible for returning the questionnaires.
Express or registered mail services were used in some cases to ensure speed of delivery and safety of transport. Specific instructions provided for the proctor are displayed in Appendices B and C. This researcher kept the returned questionnaires in one location until all participating sites had reported that the final group of students at their particular location had been surveyed and that the questionnaires had been mailed to the researcher.

Data Analysis

Simple frequencies were used to measure student questionnaire responses. Tables were used to convey research results. Each questionnaire was numbered and coded to identify the participating institution from which the questionnaires were mailed. No other sources of identification were assigned to the questionnaires. Student confidentiality was protected and a questionnaire could only be traced to the institution from which it originated.

Student responses to the questionnaires were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The coding was constructed and the data input so as also to allow for the measurement of frequency of response.

Assumptions

This author made several assumptions regarding survey methodology for this study. The author assumed that selected non-traditional students would be willing to participate in the study. The author assumed that students would respond honestly to questions on the enrolled student questionnaire and that students would complete the questionnaire in the allotted time-frame of 15 minutes. The author assumed that students would have a level of literacy that would enable them to complete the questionnaire
without much difficulty. The author also assumed that the questionnaire items were structured in such a way as to ensure the collection of useful, measurable data. Because student confidentiality was guaranteed, the author assumed that students would respond honestly and completely to the questionnaire. The author also assumed that educational colleagues from selected IPD institutions would assist in the administration and collection of the survey data.

*Limitations of Survey Methodology and Sample*

This was a cross-sectional study. The data were gathered during a relatively brief five-month period of the 2000 academic year. As a result, this study does not reveal any trends or shifts in non-traditional student college choice selection or enrollment patterns over time. This study may not be generalizable to institutional types other than Carnegie Baccalaureate General Colleges. A narrowly defined student sub-population from a narrowly defined type of institution was studied. The subjects who were studied were enrolled in religiously-affiliated private colleges and universities. Generalizations are limited to this population of students.

Another limitation was the geographic disbursement of the participating institutions. Only four of the institutions were located west of the Mississippi River. Of these four colleges and universities, no institution was located further west than Iowa. If student college choice differences exist by region, this study is not able to determine these for the southwestern, northwestern, and Rocky Mountain regions of the US.

Employment status was another limiting factor in this study. Students who were employed full-time were the only students eligible for these IPD degree-completion programs. Consequently, the results of this study may not be generalizable to other
student groups such as non-traditional students who are unemployed or employed only part-time.

The questionnaire was limited in that there were few open-ended questions. Only 7 of 31 questions allowed students the opportunity to submit an open response. The questions were also somewhat narrowly focused on the student college-choice decision process. The students were not asked to provide opinions or attitudes on a wide variety of topics. The questionnaire was also limited in that students' opinions and attitudes were primarily sought. A certain amount of subjectivity and response bias is evident in answers to such questions.

Even though a college official proctored the questionnaires, some students chose to abstain from participation, which proved to be a limitation. Another limitation is that some students may not have answered the questionnaire items honestly.

**Summary**

The methodology used for this study was survey research. This methodology enabled the author to gather data from nontraditional students enrolled at a specific group of colleges and universities in several different states. These colleges and universities were all affiliated with IPD. These colleges and universities were classified, for the most part, as Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General. An in-class questionnaire was selected in order to procure a high degree of participation from the nontraditional students. The questionnaire was modeled after the CIRP Freshman Survey as well as a questionnaire used by colleges affiliated with IPD. The questionnaire was field tested on three groups of nontraditional students at Olivet Nazarene University. The face and content validity of
the questionnaire was discussed with various faculty and administrators at Olivet Nazarene University and The University of Toledo.

The questionnaires were distributed to nontraditional students enrolled in degree completion programs at 20 different universities. A total of 15 campuses from 9 colleges and universities returned completed questionnaires. Students completed the questionnaires during their first class or orientation meeting. University officials proctored the questionnaires. Data from this cross-sectional study were gathered during a five-month period during the 2000 academic year. Completed questionnaires were returned to this researcher by mail. All data were recorded in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. A frequency analysis was tabulated and is discussed in the next chapter.

Preview of Chapters 4 and 5

The findings of this study are presented in chapter four. Evidence for each research question is documented and tables are used to illustrate data findings. In chapter five, this author ties together the findings in relation to the literature review and any relevant theory revealed through the literature review. A summary, along with implications for theory and practice are included in chapter five. Finally, the researcher discusses conclusions and recommendations for future practices, policies, and the need for additional research in this particular area of higher education.
Chapter Four

In this chapter the author writes about the findings of the study. Data that reveal the questionnaire results are presented. Answers to the research questions are provided and, where appropriate, illustrated. The author attempts to present information factually and reserves data interpretation and possible ramifications for the final chapter. A summary of this chapter and an outline for the final chapter are also included.

Sample Results

It was anticipated that 18 to 20 IPD/CAAHE institutions would participate in this research study. Of the 20 institutions that initially agreed to participate, nine institutions administered and returned the completed student questionnaires to this researcher. With the participation of separate learning centers or satellite campuses from these nine institutions, questionnaires were returned from 14 separate learning sites (see Table 1). A total of 279 questionnaires were completed and returned. The highest participation from a single institution was 58 returned questionnaires and the lowest participation was 12 returned questionnaires.

Demographic Information

The colleges and universities that participated in this study provided some variation of a degree completion program in business. See Table 2 for program selection of student research participants.
### Table 1

**Institutions That Participated in Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Questionnaires returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Averette College</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averette College (Richmond)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker University</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardinal Stritch University</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornerstone College</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fontbonne College</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fontbonne College (South County)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montreat University</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivet Nazarene University (Kankakee)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivet Nazarene University (Chicago)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter College (Atlanta)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter (Gwynette)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Penn University</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Penn University (Des Moines)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>279</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data for this study appear to mirror national post-secondary education data for non-traditional students. The majority of adult students (59.1%) included in this study were female, similar to national statistics (Aslanian, 2001). Participants were overwhelmingly white, or Caucasian, at 70.5%. Only 68 or 25.1% of the participants self
identified as black or African American and only 12 other individuals identified themselves as a member of a non-white or non-black race. Married students comprised 56.8% of the respondents.

Table 2

Student Participation by Degree Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree program</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BSM</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBA</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSBA or BABA</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not identified</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student ages ranged from a low of 20 years to a high of 58 years. The median age of student participants was 34 years. Over one-half (51.7%) of the participants were between the ages of 24 and 35. Most institutions that participated in the study required a student to be 23 years old in order to be admitted to a business degree completion program. As a result, only six students were younger than 23 years of age.

Another characteristic of non-traditional students is that they are typically holding down a part- or full-time job while attending classes. Students represented in the business programs of this study are required to be working full-time. Current employment status was not requested as a result of this requirement. Family income information was requested and 51.6% of the students reported a family income of between $35,000 and $80,000.
Students were asked to identify their field of employment. Almost three-fourths (72.4%) of the students reported employment in the business field. The educational background of the student participants was consistent. Most students (51.6%) had previously earned an associate's degree. Better than one-third (36.2%) of the students reported their highest level of education as a high school diploma.

Since these business programs were offered one day a week during evening hours, students commuted to campus as opposed to participating in a residential experience. More than half (55.9%) of student participants commuted between 5 and 25 minutes. More than three-fifths (63.8%) of participants reported that they would be willing to commute 16-45 minutes in order to access these degree programs.

Religious denominational affiliation or preference was requested of the surveyed students because all participating institutions claimed religious heritage and affiliation. Roman Catholics comprised the largest religious group of students at 26.2%. Baptist religious preference was identified by 23.7% of students. Over 9% of students listed other Christian as their religious preference and 7.9% listed Methodist. These were the four largest categories of religious affiliation identified by the student participants.

Research Question Results

This research sought to provide answers to three research questions. First, what are the college choice factors among non-traditional students at a select group of Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General? Second, what are the sources of funding for this population? And third, what are the personal and professional objectives for non-traditional students returning to college to complete a degree?
College Choice Factors

Of the 31 questionnaire items, several were designed to obtain data for each research question. Questionnaire item two was the first question designed to collect data for research question one regarding non-traditional student college choice. Questionnaire item two states, “Here are some reasons that students choose our program. Please RATE these reasons in terms of their importance in your college choice.” Students were provided six possible alternatives as reasons for choosing to enroll in the particular business degree completion programs. Students could rate their responses as very important, somewhat important, or unimportant. For the purposes of this data analysis and ease of interpretation, the “somewhat important” and “very important” categories have been combined throughout this study. This will show the presence of a factor versus the absence or unimportance of a factor. A percentage is provided for the presence or importance of an item.

Over three-quarters (77.1%) of the students said that the influence of a friend or relative was important in their decision to choose the program. Over three-fifths of the students thought that an employer referral was important in their college choice decision. Over one-half of respondents felt that radio advertising was important. Students rated the importance of direct mail (41.2%) and newspaper advertising (39.9%) lower than the four other factors. It is interesting to observe that “word of mouth” factors such as friend, relative, and employer referrals were considered more important than paid sources of advertising such as newspaper, radio, and direct mail. Responses to questionnaire item two are displayed in Table 3.
Table 3

Importance of College Choice Reasons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recommendation of friend/relative</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer referral</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio advertisement</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct mail to home or office</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper advertisement</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Responses of “very important” and “somewhat important” were combined to create the “important” category.

Questionnaire item five asked students to rate nine program features in terms of their importance to the enrollment decision. This question was designed to provide data for research question one regarding student college choice. When rating program features in terms of their importance to the enrollment decision, students responded positively to features that were oriented towards convenience. Over 98% of the students rated the time of class meeting as an important factor in their decision to enroll. The fact that the academic program was designed to maximize efficient use of time was important to 98.2% of students. The location of class meetings was an important program feature for 96.7% of the students. The remainder of the student responses to question number five are included in Table 4.

In questionnaire item six, students were asked to assess how important eight reasons were in their decision to enroll in these particular degree programs. Students
identified the academic reputation of the college as the most important of the eight reasons. Nine in 10 students (90%) said that the academic reputation was important.

Table 4

*Program Feature Importance on Enrollment Decision*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time of class meeting</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximize efficient use of my time</td>
<td>98.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of class meeting</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate academic and professional responsibilities</td>
<td>95.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty with work experience</td>
<td>94.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with fellow students</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar style of classes</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small class size</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive credit for work experience</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Responses of “very important” and “somewhat important” were combined to create the “important” category.

Over four-fifths of students (87.7%) said that it was important that these programs were a good value for the money. This was the first opportunity in the questionnaire for students to make any type of assessment regarding the cost of their education. While students indicated that the academic reputation of the college and the value for the money were important items, they also thought that enrolling in these particular colleges and programs was the only way available to complete a degree. Over three-quarters of the students
(79.5%) said that it was important that this was the only way to complete a degree. This reason seems to fit with convenience factors, such as time and location, in the previous question. Seven out of 10 student respondents said that it was important that these were the only programs available to meet their educational needs. In an interesting departure from a response to an earlier question, only 38.1% of the students felt that an employer recommendation was important in their decision to enroll in this program. The student responses to question number six are included in Table 5.

Table 5

*Reasons for Deciding to Choose a Degree Program*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic reputation of this college</td>
<td>90.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good value for money</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only way I can complete my degree</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only program that meets educational needs</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended by friend or relative</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is a Christian university</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop computer provided for use</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended by my employer</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Responses of “very important” and “somewhat important” were combined to create the “important” category.

Questionnaire item 31 was the final question designed to obtain information for research question one that dealt with non-traditional student college choice. Students were asked to rate a set of 14 criteria according to their importance in influencing the
student to return to college. Students were asked to rate the criteria as very, somewhat, or not important. As with the previous tables and data analysis, the “somewhat” and “very important” responses were combined into the “important” category for clarity of data presentation. Such an arrangement also provides a format for discussion whereby a key data element is important or present, or unimportant/absent.

Roughly 8 in 10 (80.9%) students cited academic reputation of the college as being important in their decision to return to college. Two of the next three most frequently mentioned responses are also related to the reputation of a college or university. Seventy-five percent of the students were influenced to return to college because graduates of a particular college get good jobs. In a similar category, 68.5% of respondents were influenced by the fact that a college produced well-respected graduates. It is difficult to accurately account for all factors that contribute to a college graduate securing employment. The academic reputation of a college, the fact that a college produces well-respected graduates, and the phenomenon of graduates getting good jobs are all related to the existing reputation of a particular higher education institution. Students rated these as three of the four most important influences on their decision to return to college.

The size of the college was important to over three-fifths (68.9%) of the respondents, as was employer financial assistance (67.2%). None of the other 10 possible influences on the college enrollment decision was considered important by more than half of the students. It is interesting to observe that even though all participating institutions have a religious heritage and affiliation, students did not consider this among the most important reasons that influenced their college decision. Over 4 in 10 (44.2%) students
felt that the spiritual climate of the college was important and 41.8% thought that the college’s religious affiliation was important. College tuition costs and the availability of college financial assistance were thought to be important by less than one-half of the students (42.6% and 47.2% respectively). The fact that respondents were not admitted to other institutions was not important to the college decision process. Nearly 9 in 10 (89.7%) students said that this was not important to their decision process. The student responses are included in Table 6.

Today’s non-traditional college student usually has more options available for continuing college course work than did past non-traditional students. An indication of the options available to students surfaced in their response to question 24, which asked if students had seriously considered enrolling at another institution. Fewer than 4 in 10 students (38.7%) responded that they had seriously considered enrolling elsewhere. In response to a similar question, over three-fifths (61.3%) of the students said they would enroll at a state university if a similar program were available. These students collectively applied at over 100 different institutions of higher education. Even though the questionnaire respondents eventually enrolled in this group of Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General, all of which are privately owned and operated, students, to some degree, did consider other alternatives for college enrollment.

**Student Funding**

Research question two sought to determine the sources of funding for this population of students. Questionnaire items three and four were constructed to obtain data regarding sources of funding for college tuition.
Table 6

*Criteria That Influenced Decision to Return to College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influenced decision</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic reputation</td>
<td>80.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates get good jobs</td>
<td>75.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of college</td>
<td>68.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well respected graduates</td>
<td>68.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer financial assistance</td>
<td>67.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend referred me</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College offered me financial assistance</td>
<td>47.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer or colleague referred me</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual climate of the college</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low tuition costs</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious affiliation of the college</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative referred me</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited by college representative</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not admitted anywhere else</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Responses of “very important” and “somewhat important” were combined to create the “Important” category.

Participants were asked to identify the type of funding that they expected to receive along with the amount of money they expected for that particular funding category. Students participating in this study identified a wide variety of sources for college funding.
Students identified employer tuition reimbursement as the most frequent source of funding. Over three-fifths (67%) of respondents identified this as a funding source. Of the 187 students who answered this portion of the question, 131 students indicated that they would receive more than $3,000 in employer tuition reimbursement. Since students are required to be employed full-time for admission into these degree programs, and since 72.4% of the students reported employment in the business sector, strong employer tuition reimbursement might be expected.

The second most frequently cited source of funding for these students was personal loans or personal funds. More than one-half (54.5%) of the students reported that they would pay for some portion of their educational expenses through personal loans or funds. Of the students who indicated using this source of funding, 30.9% stated that they would pay over $3,000 through these methods.

On the whole, large numbers of students did not specify state or federal grants; college-sponsored scholarships, or federal loans as large sources of funding for college expenses. Only 35.1% of students used a Pell or state grant. Fewer than 2 in 10 (18.6%) students used a college-sponsored scholarship or grant. Just over 15% of the students covered expenses through a Supplemental Opportunity Grant. Just over 1 in 10 (11.1%) students received military educational benefits with the greatest numbers of students identifying this category of funding receiving less than $500 toward educational expenses. Sources of student funding are summarized in Table 7.

In a related question, participants were asked to rate their level of concern about financing their college education. Approximately three-fourths (76%) of the respondents
Table 7

Sources of Student Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Percent of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer tuition reimbursement</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal loan or funds</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stafford loan</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pell or state grant</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military benefits</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College funded scholarship or grant</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds from family members</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other loans</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental Opportunity Grant</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perkins loan</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

identified some level of concern over financing their college education. This concern, shared by the majority of the student respondents, may explain in part, the many sources of funding used by this population of students. Non-traditional students, like their traditional counterparts, use a wide variety of funding sources in order to achieve educational goals.

Personal and Professional Objectives

Research question number three sought to determine non-traditional students' personal and professional objectives for returning to college to complete a degree.
Questionnaire items seven and nine provided students the opportunity to rate the importance of personal and professional objectives and what they hoped to gain by returning to college.

Students indicated that their hope to make a job change within their career was important. This item garnered the highest frequency rate of possible responses (93.6%). Students also identified the desire for professional respect as important (91.1%). The desire to acquire skills required for a job also produced a 91.1% frequency rating. When rating 10 possible professional objectives in question number seven, students rated the professional objective of obtaining a salary increase as the fourth most important. More than 9 in 10 students (90.8%) rated this as an important factor. Slightly less than 9 in 10 students (87.7%) hoped to gain a job promotion as a result of their education. Making a career change was important to more than four-fifths (83.8%) of the students. Many students (82.8%) were interested in learning about the ethical issues in their chosen profession. Over three-fourths (77.4%) of the participating respondents felt that preparation for graduate school was an important professional objective. And approximately three-fourth (75.1%) of the students thought that becoming more familiar with recent literature was important. Table 8 provides a listing of the frequency responses to question number seven.

Student participants were given the opportunity to rate personal objectives in terms of importance to their enrollment decision in question 9. Ten items were provided for the students to rate. In one of the strongest individual responses for any question or category, 250 of the 273 students rated the personal satisfaction of earning a degree as very important in their decision to enroll.
Table 8

*Professional Objectives for Returning to College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make job change within career</td>
<td>93.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain professional respect</td>
<td>91.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire skills required in my job</td>
<td>91.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain a salary increase</td>
<td>90.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain a promotion</td>
<td>87.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a career change</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain professional status</td>
<td>83.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand ethical issues in my profession</td>
<td>82.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for graduate school</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become more familiar with recent literature</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* "Very important" and "somewhat important" responses have been combined to form one "important" rating.

This represents more than 9 in 10 (91.6%) of the student participants. An additional 7% of the students thought that this item was somewhat important. Thus, 98.5% of the students rated this item as somewhat or very important. To be consistent with previous reporting of frequency responses in this research project, the very important and somewhat important categories were combined to form one response of important. This allows for either the presence/importance of an item or the absence/unimportance of an item.
There were other high ratings in response to this question. Just over 97% of the students stated that increasing their personal opportunities for growth was an important factor in their enrollment decision.

More than 9 in 10 of the student respondents rated four other objectives as being important in their decision to enroll. These four objectives in order of frequency are: accepting increased responsibility for my professional development (96.7%); increasing my self-confidence by increasing my skills and knowledge (96%); developing the habit of lifelong learning (93.4%); and gaining respect from others through my educational achievement (90.9%). A summary of student responses is included in Table 9.

Nearly 85% of students thought that becoming a more cultured person was important in their decision to return to college. Raising a family was important to 74.3% of the student respondents. Becoming a community leader was an important enrollment decision factor to nearly three-fifths (59.2%) of students and influencing the political structure was important to only 58.8%.

Professional and personal objectives that were important in the enrollment decision received a much higher frequency response than did objectives that were more altruistic such as influencing the political structure or becoming a community leader.

Summary

The student college choice decision is complex and requires serious thought and consideration on the part of students, parents, and researchers alike. College choice research, particularly non-traditional college choice research, is still in its infancy. Most of the research pertaining to non-traditional college students has been conducted with
Table 9

*Personal Objectives for Returning to College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gain personal satisfaction by earning degree</td>
<td>98.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase opportunities for personal growth</td>
<td>97.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept personal responsibility for professional development</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase self-confidence by increasing skills and knowledge</td>
<td>96.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop habit of lifelong learning</td>
<td>93.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain respect through educational achievement</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become a more cultured person</td>
<td>84.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raise a family</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become a community leader</td>
<td>59.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence the political structure</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* "Very important" and "somewhat important" responses have been combined to create one "important" category.

students at large, state universities, or at community colleges. This study sought to expand the base of research that exists for non-traditional students, but particularly for non-traditional students at Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General. The preliminary findings of this research seem consistent with current research on the larger population of non-traditional students. Consistent with existing research on non-traditional students, this research found that non-traditional students are concerned with college choice factors
that relate primarily to convenience (Bishop & Van Dyk, 1975) and academic reputation (O'Keefe, 1976). Other college choice factors appear to be less important.

More than 95% of student participants considered the class meeting time and location as being important in their decision to enroll in college. It is evident from these strong numbers that this group of students may not have been able to participate in educational programs that were less conveniently located and provided at times other than 6 to 10 p.m. in the evening.

The academic reputation of a particular educational institution also proved to be a key element in the college choice process for this group of non-traditional students. On two separate questions, academic reputation was rated the most important of 8 and 14 criteria respectively. Non-traditional students want a quality academic program that is respected in the workplace and in the public at large.

In an interesting twist to this researcher, student participants did not seem to be particularly concerned with the fact that they were enrolling at religiously-affiliated institutions. A little more than one-half considered the Christian affiliation of a particular college as important. This represents a significant difference from the importance of academic reputation (90%). Students appear to be more concerned about the academic quality of the education as opposed to the religious affiliation of the institution.

When considering a potential college or program, word of mouth advertising seems to be far more important than paid advertising sources such as radio, direct mail, and newspaper advertising (39.9%). The recommendation of a friend or relative (77.1%) or professional colleague (62%) rated much higher in importance than did paid sources.
These students appear to be quite utilitarian in their educational pursuits. Professional and personal reasons, such as a better career (93.6%) or higher salary (90.8%), for returning to college rated much higher than altruistic reasons such as becoming a community leader (59.2%) and influencing the political structure (58.8%).

Funding for college expenses seems to be primarily the burden and responsibility of the returning non-traditional student. These students received little assistance in the way of Pell, Supplemental Opportunity, or state sponsored grants. Students also received little financial assistance from the colleges and universities in which they enrolled. Students did have some other funding sources such as employer tuition reimbursement available. Employer tuition reimbursement, personal loans, and other personal funds were the primary sources of tuition funding for these students. This may help explain why students list professional activities, including making more money, as among their personal and professional objectives for returning to college to help repay the costs they incur in attending college.

Remainder of the Study

Looking to chapter five of this study, the author discusses findings of the research, particularly in relation to literature about student college choice factors. Various viewpoints are discussed and presented. The author also provides an analysis of the key findings along with the significance of the findings. A summary of topics covered in this study is also a part of chapter five. Conclusions and possible ramifications of the study based on the findings of the study are highlighted in the chapter. Finally, the author outlines practical suggestions and recommendations for future research.
Chapter Five

In this chapter, this researcher discusses the relevance of the research findings. The research findings are tied to the review of the literature, particularly in the area of college choice factors for non-traditional students. This researcher also provides a summary of the first several chapters of this thesis. In addition, conclusions are presented that relate the research findings to the field of higher education. Finally, recommendations are made as a result of careful reflection upon this research and upon the current literature. Recommendations include suggestions to college and university administrators, new research questions that may need to be asked, and forward looking statements regarding non-traditional students in higher education.

Discussion of Research Findings

This research sought to provide answers to three research questions. First, what are the college choice factors among non-traditional students at a select group of Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General? Second, what are the sources of funding for this population? Third, what are the non-traditional students' personal and professional objectives for returning to college to complete a degree? Student questionnaire results provided a variety of possible answers for consideration.

College Choice Factors

Several questionnaire items were designed to obtain data for the research question
related to college choice factors. Question two asked students to rate several reasons in terms of importance to the college choice process. Students were provided six possible alternatives as reasons for choosing to enroll in a particular business degree program. The top three reasons identified by students are as follows: Over three-quarters (77.1%) of the students said that the influence of a friend or relative was important in their decision to choose the program. Over three-fifths of the students thought that an employer referral was important in their college choice decision. Over one-half of the survey respondents felt that radio advertising was important.

Hossler et al. (1999), Wilson (1999), Cabrera and La Nasa (2000), and others have noted the importance of parental influence on the college decision of traditional students. This research study did not list "parents" as a potential influence on the college decision process of non-traditional students but did ask students to rate the possible influences of friends, relatives, or employers. It is interesting to note that non-traditional students thought that a friend's opinion was important in their decision to enroll in a particular college program. For this group of students the opinions of key individuals in their lives contributed to the college choice decision. The key individual may not only be "personal" but professional. The referral of an employer, considered important by three-fifths of respondents, might point to the strong link between the job aspirations and the need for continuing post-secondary education of non-traditional students. This will be covered in greater detail later in the chapter.

Several implications can be made from these questionnaire results. First, post-secondary educators and administrators should keep in mind the important role played by key individuals involved in the lives of non-traditional students. These key individuals
affect the college choice decision. Students value the opinions held by friends and employers. Next, college officials might make concerted efforts to recruit, network, and develop a public relations campaign with significant industry leaders. If students value employer opinions, then post-secondary educational institutions should develop relationships with these employers. Since over one-half of the respondents consider radio advertisement important, college and university officials should determine the most effective ways to use radio in advertisement and communication strategies that successfully reach non-traditional students.

Questionnaire item five was also designed to provide data for research question one regarding student college choice. Students were asked to rate nine program features in terms of their importance to the enrollment decision. When rating program features, students responded positively to features oriented toward convenience. The top three student responses each dealt with convenience. Over 98% of students rated the time of class meeting as an important factor. The fact that an academic program was designed to maximize efficient use of time was important to over 9 in 10 (98.2%) of the students. The location of class meetings was an important program feature for 96.7% of the students. Kottler and Fox (1995), Sevier (1994), Wilson (1999), and O'Keefe (1976) noted the importance of college location in a student’s college decision. The student responses in this research project confirmed this earlier research.

Several suggestions for policy implications can be drawn from these student responses. Since students spoke so strongly, over 96% on all three responses, higher education officials must ensure that programs for non-traditional students are provided at a convenient location. Each of the nine colleges and universities that participated in this
research, for example, can be studied to determine the strategies used to select locations for non-traditional class offerings. In addition, these colleges and universities could be polled regarding the time of class meetings. All programs of these participating institutions provided classes during evening hours. From this study, it is evident that working adults prefer evening class hours.

It may be necessary to examine faculty-teaching loads and shift some teaching responsibilities to the evening. If adults prefer evening class times, they may need other university services either before or after their evening classes. Student services such as admissions, financial aid, and the bursar’s office may need to consider post-5:00 p.m. hours in order to service the growing non-traditional student market. According to questionnaire responses, non-traditional students want to maximize the efficient use of their time. Policy implications may require that colleges and universities become partners in this endeavor; partners that truly seek the solutions that are best for students.

In question six, students were asked to assess how important eight reasons were in their decision to enroll in these particular degree programs. Students identified the academic reputation of the college as the most important of the eight reasons. Since institutional image is closely linked to academic quality, this student response coincides with Sevier’s (1994) analysis that institutional image is the most influential factor in a student’s decision to select a college. Hossler (1991b) affirms that a student’s perception of institutional quality, academic reputation, may be the single most important factor influencing the college selection process.

Over four-fifths of the students said that it was important that these college programs were a good value for the money and over three-fourths of the respondents
indicated that it was important that this program was the only way to complete their degree. These top two responses to question six along with the top response of academic reputation raise possible policy implications for university personnel. Since students spoke so strongly about academic reputation, it is critical that institutions that choose to specifically and purposefully serve this non-traditional market must provide quality academic experiences that students will rate as such. Students who enrolled in these higher-priced, private institutions demonstrated that they would pay higher tuition prices for what they perceived as programs from institutions with strong academic reputations. It is this researcher’s opinion that the student’s perception of “value for the money” is contingent upon the student’s perception of institutional academic quality.

Question 31 was the final question designed to obtain information for the research question related to college choice. Students were asked to rate a set of 14 criteria according to their importance in influencing the student to return to college. The top three criteria as rated by students are as follows: (a) Over four-fifths of the students cited academic reputation of the college as being important in their decision to return to college, (b) Three-fourths of the students said that the fact that graduates of a particular institution get good jobs was important in their decision, and (c) Nearly 69% said that the size of the college was important in their decision to return to college.

Once again, this group of non-traditional students noted the importance of a college’s academic reputation in the college decision process. Students rated this item as more important than 13 other possible responses. Since the importance of academic reputation surfaced in two separate questions, university officials might want to pay particular attention to what students might be saying. When students rate academic
reputation even higher than graduates getting good jobs, serious consideration should be
given to providing the best quality academic experience possible to this population of
students. One further policy implication in this area is that university officials would be
wise to view non-traditional students as serious educational consumers who have high
expectations for their academic experience. The days of quickly creating a class, or a
series of classes, to capitalize on the possible tuition revenue from a growing population
of students may be behind us. On the other hand, institutions that stay current with non-
traditional student research will realize that this growing population can be served with
quality academic programs that are conveniently accessed.

*Student Educational Funding*

Research question two sought to determine the sources of funding for this
population of students. Questionnaire items three and four were constructed to obtain
data regarding sources of funding for college tuition. Survey participants were asked to
identify the type of funding that they expected to receive along with the amount of money
they expected for that particular funding category. Students participating in this study
identified a wide variety of sources for college funding.

Students identified the following as the top three sources for funding. Over three-
fifths of the students identified employer-sponsored tuition reimbursement as the largest
source of funding. Of the 187 students who answered this question, 131 students said
they would receive more than $3,000 in employer tuition reimbursement. Over one-half
of the students indicated that personal loans or personal funds would be used to pay
educational expenses. Less than one half (48%) of the students identified a Stafford loan
as a funding source.
In a related question, more than 4 in 10 (41.9%) respondents expressed major concern over financing their education. An additional 32% expressed some concern. When these two totals are combined, nearly three-fourths of the students (73.9%) had some level of concern about financing their education. Several researchers (Hossler, 2000; Sevier, 1994, 2000; Wilson, 1999) have identified the importance of college costs to the student college choice decision. This study of non-traditional students appears to affirm this research. When nearly three-fourths of the student respondents express concern over financing their education, then one might draw the conclusion that college costs are an important factor in the decision process. It is also interesting to note that a large number of students received employer tuition reimbursement for educational expenses (67%) and over three-fifths of the survey respondents (62%) considered an employer referral important in their college decision process.

There are several implications to consider as a result of the research findings to these particular questionnaire items. First, non-traditional students are primarily responsible for their own educational expenses. It is true that employer reimbursement proved to be the largest source of funding, but this is simply another source that comes to and through the individual student as a benefit. Students are funding their own educational expenses through employer reimbursement, private loans and funds, and Stafford Loans. The individual student recipients will have to pay back the Stafford loans.

Keep in mind that the research sample was comprised of students from Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General, all of which were private institutions. Few students identified college-funded scholarships or grants as a source for financing their education.
So while these students chose to attend private colleges and universities, very few college and university funds were used to assist these students with educational expenses. One long-term implication for these institutions is that they appear to be attracting a very limited student base. That is, they are primarily attracting students who can pay for educational expenses. They do not seem to be attracting students from lower income segments or students who are qualifying for state or Pell Grants.

It is possible that a slower economy, one in which there could be fewer educational benefit dollars to use for employees, may affect future enrollments. This researcher suggests that colleges and universities begin identifying institutional sponsored funding for students with lower income levels. Such funding could help broaden the student enrollment base and enable the institutions to serve a more diverse clientele.

Since such a large number of students expressed concern over financing their education (73.9%), there may be implications for financial aid and bursar offices. Training may need to be provided for financial aid staff to enable them to effectively counsel students regarding educational debt and the sources of funding available to pay for expenses. This training needs to be specific to non-traditional students and the specific concerns expressed by these students. Personnel in bursar offices should also consider creative financing arrangements for non-traditional students. Since so many students from this research study used personal funds to cover educational expenses, institutions might consider payment plans that are tailored to non-traditional students.
Personal and Professional Objectives

Research question number three sought to determine non-traditional students' personal and professional objectives for returning to college to complete a degree. Questionnaire items seven and nine provided students the opportunity to rate the importance of personal and professional objectives and what students hoped to gain by returning to college. Research suggests that non-traditional students return to college primarily for career or job related reasons (Bers & Smith, 1987; Kiger & Johnson, 1997; O'Keefe, 1976; Roundtree & Lambert, 1992; Sewall, 1984). This study seems to support the findings of earlier research. The non-traditional students who were surveyed for this study felt that job-related issues were important in their decision to return to college.

When asked what they hoped to gain by returning to college, the students selected the following as the three most important items they hoped to gain. First, more than 9 in 10 (93.6%) students said that it was important for them to gain a job change within their career by returning to college. There was a tie for the second highest response with over 91% of the students indicating that they wanted to gain professional respect, while the same percentage of students hoped to acquire skills that are required for their jobs. The third highest response was related to salaries. Over 90% of the students hoped to gain a salary increase as a result of their decision to return to college.

It makes sense that students would rate job or career reasons with a high level of importance as they considered their decision to return to college. These study participants were required to be employed full-time in order to gain admission into the participating institutions. In addition, over three-fifths of the respondents received some type of employer tuition reimbursement to pay education costs. There seems to be an
incentive among this group of students to continue post-secondary education in order to
advance their careers. The fact that all of these students enrolled in business programs
adds further to this line of thinking. Tuition reimbursement, possibility for career
advancement, conveniently located business degree programs, and evening classes all
appear to have provided adequate motivation for these students to continue their post-
secondary educational experiences.

Student participants were given the opportunity to rate personal objectives in
terms of importance to their enrollment decision in question number nine. Students could
rate 10 items. In one of the strongest individual survey responses for any question or
category, 98.5% of the students rated the personal satisfaction of earning a degree as
important in their decision to enroll. Just over 97% of the students stated that increasing
their personal opportunities for growth was an important factor in their enrollment
decision. For the third highest response in this category, 96.7% of the students said that it
was important for them to accept personal responsibility for their professional
development.

Several implications might be drawn from the personal and professional
objectives rated as important by the student respondents. When considering the top
professional objectives expressed by these students, it would be wise for institutions to
focus on the development of educational programs that students can translate directly into
gaining employment or improving their current employment situation. Students assigned
little importance to altruistic objectives such as improving society or influencing the
political structure. Students were much more practical in their top objectives. University
sponsored programs should capitalize on students’ desire to gain employment or improve their employment situation.

Another implication for policy makers at colleges and universities concerns the skills and abilities that students desire to obtain as a result of their educational experience. This researcher again suggests that university members should work closely with business and industry to determine the specific skills and abilities desired for employees. Educational institutions could translate this information into appropriate educational programs that would benefit business, industry, and employees who are continuing their post-secondary education. Finally, since these non-traditional students considered salary increases important, colleges and universities should give thought to developing very proactive career service centers that specifically serve non-traditional students. Such centers could provide career counseling, career management services, and other career services that are identified as necessary. These centers could maintain alumni salary information and assist students in salary negotiation and career management and enhancement strategies.

Summary

The history of American higher education is a history that has not always been welcoming to diverse groups of students. From the founding of Harvard in 1636 until the early 1900s, it could be argued that higher education was primarily for white, young, male students. The Morill Act of 1862 did broaden the possibility of enrolling greater numbers of students in higher education, particularly students from a wider geographic representation in the US. It was not until the advent of the community college, however, that higher education became accessible to a greater portion of the American population.
Joliet Junior College, as the first public junior college, helped lead the way in the new community college movement.

The return of veterans from World War II also provided a unique opportunity for greater access to higher education in the US. The Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (GI Bill) provided funding for this student population. Higher education reached new enrollment totals with the addition of servicemen and women and higher education also opened the door for students who were older than the traditional college student. Students over the age of 25 began enrolling in colleges and universities in previously unseen numbers. By the 1970s and 1980s, adults were enrolling in record numbers.

Projections of education statistics to 2010 suggest that student populations in the 25 and over age group will continue to increase (Snyder, 2000). It is estimated that nearly 7 million non-traditional students will be enrolled in higher education institutions. Many universities have already begun to serve the non-traditional student population with programs that are user friendly for this population. Evening programs, weekend programs, and accelerated degree programs all help to attract this population of students.

With the increasing enrollment of non-traditional students, there is also a need to increase the amount of research that is conducted with this population. Much of the research on college students has focused on the traditional-age college student (18-21). This is particularly true for college choice research. Most of this research has dealt exclusively with college students younger than the age of 25. This, in part, is the reason that this research project on non-traditional student college choice was particularly important. The little research that has been conducted with non-traditional students focused on students enrolled at large, state universities or at community colleges. Little
research existed on non-traditional students enrolled at Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General.

Research on traditional student college choice indicates that the college choice decision is complex. A variety of factors such as college location, the academic reputation of a college, parental involvement and influence, college costs, the perceived image of a college, and a student’s perception of institutional quality all contribute to the college decision process. Research on non-traditional students suggests that these students enroll primarily for reasons of convenience, job and career, and transitions in their lives. It would seem to make sense that non-traditional students might be attracted to degree programs that maximize convenience and make it as easy as possible for these students to transition back into higher education.

The distribution of a questionnaire to non-traditional students at 20 Carnegie Baccalaureate General Colleges provided an opportunity to capture information on non-traditional student college choice factors. This data collection, and the resulting analysis of frequencies, provided excellent data that enabled closer study of non-traditional students and their motivations for returning to college. The participation of institutions that are affiliated with IPD provided a set of colleges and universities that had experience working with adult students to provide degree programs that meet the needs of this group of non-traditional students. Since this researcher was an employee of IPD at the time of this study, such an arrangement made it possible for this researcher to communicate regularly with these institutions.

The findings of this study confirm much of the earlier research on non-traditional student college choice factors. Student participants in this study strongly affirmed the
importance of the academic reputation of a college in their college selection process. Participants were also very concerned about features of the college program that made it as convenient as possible for them to complete their degree. Times of class meetings, the location of the college or college’s class site, and the possibility of obtaining salary increases as a result of their education were all important to non-traditional students. Students, while not necessarily sensitive to tuition costs, did have concerns about financing their education. Employer tuition assistance and personal funds by way of loans provided the bulk of educational assistance. Features of convenience and academic reputation were more important in students’ college choice decision than the religious affiliation of the college. Students felt that admission recruiters, newspaper advertising, and direct mail had minimal importance in their decision to enroll at the college of their choice. Students were far more concerned with employment skills and abilities, earning more money, and gaining respect. These are professional objectives that would seem to match the pursuit of a business degree.

Conclusions

This particular sub-population of non-traditional students considered the academic reputation of a college or university one of the most important reasons to choose a particular degree program. Student participants rated this feature as the most important feature in choosing a program or selecting a college, on two separate questionnaire items. The feature, the academic reputation of a college, was rated as more important than the fact that graduates of a college might be well respected and get a good job, more important than the religious affiliation of a college, and more important than financial assistance provided by an employer or the college. One of the assumptions of this
researcher was that non-traditional students would not be very concerned about the academic reputation of a college or university when considering enrollment in that college or university. The findings of this research refute that assumption.

Features of convenience are important to non-traditional students as they consider continuing their post-secondary enrollment. The location of a college or class site, the time of a class meeting, and the efficient use of students' time are all considerations that students weighed in the enrollment decision process. College business programs that were part of this research study held evening classes at 6:00 p.m. This class time allowed non-traditional students who were employed full-time the opportunity to pursue a degree in the evening hours.

This population of non-traditional students did not seem to be price or cost sensitive when choosing to enroll in these degree programs. Students did express concern over the funding of educational expenses. Employer tuition assistance and personal funds proved to be the two most popular sources of educational funding. The religious affiliation of the participating colleges did not rate as an important factor in non-traditional students' enrollment decisions. Three-fifths of all students indicated that they would choose a similar program at a state university if it were available. This seems to confirm the low importance of religious and spiritual influence since state universities must take a more neutral stance on such issues.

Recommendations

First, this author recommends that research continue with the non-traditional population of students. This population seems to be underrepresented in the research that currently exists on college students. It is also important to continue research specifically
on the non-traditional student college choice process. This population has different concerns and needs than those of traditional students. Research could be designed in such a way as to include non-traditional students at a variety of institutional types beyond Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General. Such research would provide more comprehensive data on the non-traditional college choice process. Policy makers at different institutional types would benefit, as they would be able to tailor student services, academic programs, and academic services that were oriented towards non-traditional students.

This researcher also recommends that academic programs for non-traditional students be designed with the adult student’s busy schedule in mind. Class times, and the efficient use of adult students’ time, are critical issues for this group of students. Evening classes, weekend classes, classes that are offered every other weekend and other creative alternatives could be explored. The population of non-traditional students who participated in this study preferred evening classes, yet other students may desire different alternatives. Since data from Carnegie Baccalaureate Colleges General may not be generalizeable to other institutional types, other institutions will have to determine how to best serve students enrolled at their institutions.

It is also recommended that faculty and administrators of participating colleges, and of similar colleges and universities, place the role of spirituality and religion in an appropriate context. Non-traditional students seem to be placing little emphasis on the fact that the institution in which they chose to enroll has a religious connection. The students placed far greater value on the academic reputation of the college than on the religious affiliation of the college.
This author recommends that more time be spent on creating an academic program and an institution of academic quality than on marketing and advertising the institution. Survey participants placed little importance on newspaper advertising and direct mail. Instead, it appears that students formed opinions and made decisions based on perceived academic quality. Recommendations of friends, relatives, and employers were also important in the non-traditional student college choice decision. This is where institutions should invest effort if they desire to attract and service non-traditional students.

Finally, this author recommends that more questions concerning non-traditional students should be asked. Why, specifically, did this population of non-traditional students seem to be less price-sensitive than are traditional students and their families? What contributes to a non-traditional student’s perception of academic quality? Would students be interested in similarly formatted programs in a different major or field of study? Would students enroll at a local community college if such programs were provided? The answer to these questions, and to other questions yet to be asked, would contribute to greater understanding of this expanding population of students.

The last 20 years of higher education enrollment patterns have demonstrated that non-traditional students want higher education. The task of the higher education community will be to find ways to provide quality academic programs, in creative ways and formats, to service this population of students.
References


Appendix A
Educational Research Survey

Your response to the following questions will help us meet your needs and the needs of future students. Please read each question carefully and select the answer that represents your honest opinion. Please answer candidly. We are very interested in your personal responses. If you are unable to answer a question, please continue to the next question.

Use a #2 lead pencil to mark your answers clearly. This survey is being done as part of a master’s thesis at the University of Toledo and information will be shared for educational purposes. Please do not write your name, social security number, or any other form of personal identification on the survey.

When you are finished answering the questions, please return the survey to the University representative who issued the survey. Your completion and submission of this survey indicates your consent to participate in this study. Thank you for your assistance in this research project.

1. Which degree program have you enrolled in? (Please circle your response)
   1  BSM  3  BSBA or BABA
   2  BBA  4  Other

2. Here are some reasons that students choose our program. Please RATE these reasons in terms of their importance in your college choice. On a scale of 1 to 3, 1 is very important, 2 is somewhat important, 3 is unimportant. Circle a response for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Recommendation of friend or relative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Employer referral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Newspaper advertisement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Radio Advertisement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Direct Mail to my home or office</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. How much of your educational expense do you expect to cover from the sources listed below? Please PLACE a corresponding number in each category that applies. For example, place a number 1 in any category that will cover $1 to $499 of expenses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Personal loan/Personal funds</td>
<td>1. $1 - $499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Stafford Loan</td>
<td>2. $500 - $1,499</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Scholarship</td>
<td>3. $1,500 - $3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Pell grant or State grant</td>
<td>4. Over $3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Funds from family members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Supplemental opportunity grant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. College scholarship or grant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Perkins loan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Other loan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Employer Tuition reimbursement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. VA or other military benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Please RATE your level of concern about financing your college education.
   a. None
   b. Some
   c. Major
5. Please RATE the following features of this program in **terms of their importance** to your decision to enroll. On a scale of 1 - 3, 1 is very important, 2 is somewhat important, 3 is not important. Circle your response for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>V</th>
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<th>N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Time of class meeting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Location of class meeting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Small class size</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Seminar/workshop style of classes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Opportunity to receive credit for prior work experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Opportunity to interact with fellow students who are working professionals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Opportunity to work with faculty who have real work experience in my field</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Opportunity to coordinate my academic and my professional responsibilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. The program is designed to maximize efficient use of my time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. In deciding to choose this degree program, **how important to you** was each of the following reasons? 1 is very important, 2 is somewhat important, and 3 is not important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>V</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. This program was a good value for the money</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. This program was recommended by my employer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. This program was recommended by a friend or relative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. This is the only available program that meets my educational needs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. This is the only way I can complete my degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. The fact that this is a Christian university</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. The fact that a laptop computer was provided for my use (answer only if applicable)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. The academic reputation of this college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**PROFESSIONAL OBJECTIVES**

7. What do you hope to gain by returning to college? Please RATE the following objectives in terms of their importance to you. On a scale of 1 – 3, 1 is very important, 2 is somewhat important, and 3 is not important. Circle the number that matches your response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>V</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Become more familiar with the recent literature in my profession</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Understand ethical issues in my profession</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Acquire skills required in my job</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Obtain a promotion</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Obtain a salary increase</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Make a career change</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Make a job change within my career</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Gain professional respect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Gain professional status</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Prepare for graduate school</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
8. Listed below are abilities that are desirable for functioning in professional roles. How do you RATE your competence in these areas at the present time? On a scale of 1 – 4, 1 is excellent, 2 is above average, 3 is average, and 4 is below average. Circle the number that matches your response.

   a. Interacting effectively with other individuals
   b. Acting effectively in group situations
   c. Making oral presentations to groups
   d. Listening
   e. Leading (taking initiative, motivating others)
   f. Planning
   g. Organizing (allocating time, resources, etc.)
   h. Decision making
   i. Conducting research
   j. Computer skills
   k. Written communication

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<td>j</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

PERSONAL OBJECTIVES

9. Please RATE the following personal items in terms of their importance to your decision to enroll. On a scale of 1 – 3, 1 is very important, 2 is somewhat important, and 3 is not important. Please circle the number that matches your response.

<table>
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<td>j</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please CIRCLE the categories that best describe you.

10. What is your sex?
    1. Male
    2. Female

11. What is your marital status
    1. Single
    2. Married
    3. Divorced
    4. Widowed
12. Number of Dependents
   1. One
   2. Two
   3. Three
   4. Four or more
   5. None

13. What ethnic category describes you best?
   1. Asian, Pacific Islander, or Filipino
   2. Black or African American
   3. Hispanic, Chicano or Spanish-speaking American
   4. White or Caucasian
   5. Other

14. How old are you? _______

15. Please CIRCLE one category that best reflects your current career.
   a. Artist
   b. Business
   c. Business (clerical)
   d. Business (management or executive)
   e. Business (owner or proprietor)
   f. Business (sales rep or buyer)
   g. Clergy
   h. College Teacher
   i. Doctor
   j. Education
   k. Engineer
   l. Farmer or Forester
   m. Health professional
   n. Homemaker
   o. Lawyer
   p. Nurse
   q. Research Scientist
   r. Social/Welfare worker
   s. Skilled worker
   t. Semi-skilled worker
   u. Unskilled worker
   v. Unemployed
   w. Other

16. How many years of school have you completed? (HS diploma = 12 yr.) _______

17. What was the highest degree you have earned?
   a. High school diploma
   b. Vocational certificate
   c. Associate's degree or equivalent
   d. Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S.)

18. How many years have you spent in your present career? _______

19. How much time has passed since your last promotion? _______

20. What is your family's approximate income group?
   1. Under $20,000
   2. $20,000-$34,000
   3. $35,000-$64,000
   4. $65,000-$80,000
   5. $81,000-$100,000
   6. Over $100,000
21. How many minutes do you spend commuting to campus?
   1. Under 5 minutes
   2. 5-15 minutes
   3. 16-25 minutes
   4. 26-45 minutes
   5. Over 45 minutes

22. What is the maximum time you would drive to complete your college degree?
   A  Under 15 minutes
   B  16-30 minutes
   C  31-45 minutes
   D  46 - 60 minutes
   E  Other _______

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

23. Besides this University/College, please list the other universities at which you applied.

24. Did you seriously consider enrolling at another college or university?
   a. Yes  b. No

25. If yes, please write the name of the college or university.

26. If a similar program or degree were available at a state university, would you apply?
   a. Yes  b. No

27. What were the three primary factors that caused you to choose this University over the others where you considered enrolling? Please list the most important reason first, then the next most important reason, etc.
   1. ______________________________________________________
   2. ______________________________________________________
   3. ______________________________________________________

28. What is the highest degree you plan to obtain?
   1. Bachelor's (BA or BS)
   2. Master's (MA or MS)
   3. Ph.D. or Ed.D
   4. M.Div
   5. Other

29. What is your religious preference? Please circle only one response.
   a. Baptist
   b. Buddhist
   c. Eastern Orthodox
   d. Episcopalian
   e. Islamic
   f. Jewish
   g. LDS (Mormon)
   h. Lutheran
   i. Methodist
   j. Nazarene
   k. Presbyterian
   l. Quaker
   m. Roman Catholic
   n. Seventh Day Adventist
   o. United Church of Christ
   p. Wesleyan
   q. Other Christian
   r. Other Protestant
   s. Other Religion
   t. None
   u. Don't know
30. What is the religious affiliation of the college to which you are enrolling? Please circle one response.
   a. Baptist  
   b. Buddhist  
   c. Eastern Orthodox  
   d. Episcopal  
   e. Islamic  
   f. Jewish  
   g. LDS (Mormon)  
   h. Lutheran  
   i. Methodist  
   j. Nazarene  
   k. Presbyterian  
   l. Quaker  
   m. Roman Catholic  
   n. Seventh Day Adventist  
   o. United Church of Christ  
   p. Wesleyan  
   q. Other Christian  
   r. Other Protestant  
   s. Other Religion  
   t. None  

31. Please RATE the importance of the following criteria as they influenced your decision to return to college. On a scale of 1-3, 1 is very important, 2 is somewhat important, and 3 was not important in affecting your decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative referred me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend referred me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer or colleague referred me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College offered me financial assistance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer offered me financial assistance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low tuition costs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruited by college representative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates are well respected</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates get good jobs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of the college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious affiliation of the college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual climate of the college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic reputation of the college</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not admitted anywhere else</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for completing the survey. Please return the survey to the University representative who distributed the survey to you at the beginning of this class session.
Appendix B
Cover Letter to Proctors

Date

University Representative
Participating Institution
Address

Dear University Representative:

Thank you for your participation in the administration of this survey. The work of higher education professionals like you is critical in the ongoing improvement of higher education. Each year more students enroll in colleges and universities because they know the personal and professional benefits that education can play in their lives and it is professionals like you who play a key role in facilitating their enrollment.

The survey that you will distribute at your next business or management bachelor’s degree completion program will secure information that will help this researcher, and the broader field of higher education, understand the adult student college selection process. As you may know, non-traditional adult students comprise nearly 50% of all students enrolled in higher education today. Interestingly enough, however, the amount of research dedicated to this growing student population has not grown nearly as fast as the student enrollment. That’s why the research provided by this research project is so critical to the field of higher education.

In the packet that accompanies this letter, you will also find a detailed list of instructions for the distribution and proctoring of this survey. I want to thank you in advance for your attention to the details of these instructions. It is very important that all instructions are followed so that it is possible for this study to be reproduced by another researcher in the future. To become familiar with the instructions, please read them well in advance of survey distribution to the students. This will allow you plenty of time to call me if you have any questions or need clarification on anything.

Once again, thank you for your willingness to assist in this way. If you are interested in the results of this research project, please contact me and I will be happy to send you a copy of the results upon completion.

Sincerely,

Randy Tunblin
Contract Manager IPD/Olivet
Master’s Candidate, University of Toledo
Appendix C
Instructions for Proctors

Instructions to Proctor College Student Selection Survey

1. Open packet of surveys and ensure that there are enough surveys to allow each student in the upcoming bachelor's degree completion class to participate. Twenty-five surveys are included in the packet. If additional copies are necessary, please contact Randy Tumblin, Contract Manager at IPD/Olivet.

2. Check packet for “Student Survey Completion Instructions.” Review these instructions now and return them to the packet. Read these instructions to student survey participants immediately prior to distribution of the survey.

3. Distribute the survey at the next two class starts for degree completion programs.

4. Work with your program director to ensure that you can distribute the survey at the beginning of the orientation session. It is critical that students complete this survey prior to input or influence by any college or university personnel, including administrators or professors.

5. Take the surveys, #2 pencils, instruction sheet, and the pre-addressed Federal Express survey collection folder to the first night the bachelor’s degree completion group meets (orientation session).

6. Once the entire class is seated and ready for the orientation session to begin, read the “Student Survey Completion Instructions” and distribute the surveys and the pencils.

7. Please ensure that students use #2 pencils for survey completion. Pens and markers will prohibit Scantron readings.

8. Remain in the room during survey completion.

9. Do not influence student responses in any way. Provide a clarification on a question or section of the survey only if specifically requested by a student participant.

10. It is anticipated that the survey will take 20 minutes to complete. If, after twenty minutes, some students have not completed the survey, inform them that you will collect the surveys in five more minutes.

11. At the end of twenty-five minutes collect all surveys and pencils.

12. Please do not try to make a review and analysis of any data on the survey.

13. In front of the student participants, place all completed surveys in the self-addressed envelope. Place an explanation in the envelope to identify the type of group surveyed such as: Bachelor's in Business Administration, or Bachelor of Science in Management, and the institution’s name. Seal the envelope.

14. Keep the completed surveys in your possession until you return to your office. Upon returning to your office the next day, please arrange for a Federal Express pick-up of the surveys.

15. Confirm via email or phone call to Randy Tumblin that the surveys have been sent to:
   Randy Tumblin
   Olivet Nazarene University
   Graduate and Adult Studies
   397 East Burke
   Bourbonnais, IL 60914
Appendix D
Student Instructions

STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETION OF SURVEY

Please read the following instructions to students just prior to distribution and completion of the survey.

In the last decade, college and university adult student enrollment has increased dramatically. Your enrollment in this particular program is evidence of increased enrollments across the country. To help us and the broader higher education community understand these enrollment patterns, we would like your assistance in completing a confidential survey that will help us gather some information from you, and from students just like you, around the country. In fact, students at over twenty similar colleges and universities are completing this same survey in the next four weeks.

This survey is being done as part of a master’s thesis at the University of Toledo and information will be shared for educational purposes. The information will only be used to understand the college selection process of large groups of students, specifically adult non-traditional students. Please do not put your name, social security number, or any other university identification number on this survey.

In order for the information from the survey to be as useful as possible, please fully complete the survey to the best of your ability.

Use a number 2 pencil to complete the survey and mark your answers clearly. Do not make any additional marks or comments of any kind on the survey. When you have finished, return your completed the survey to the proctor (that’s me). Do you have any questions at this time?

As you complete the survey, please let me know if you have any questions or if I can help clarify anything.