

STRESS AND SUCCESS: A PRELIMINARY STUDY  
OF INTER-RELATIONSHIPS IN A GRADUATE  
PROGRAM IN EDUCATION

by

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## ABSTRACT

The intensive, two-year Administrative Leadership Program at Simon Fraser University is somewhat atypical among graduate programs in educational administration in that its students are educators who, while engaging in their studies, concurrently maintain their regular, full-time commitments to the educational bodies by which they are employed. It was proposed that a number of factors implicit in this situation would combine to produce significant levels of stress, and that highly successful students would manage, through personal strategies or external agencies, to cope satisfactorily with this stress. The study was designed to investigate the validity of these propositions.

The literature on high achievers in graduate education is not extensive. Moreover, the extensive literature on stress was not found to have great relevance for the emphasis of this study. It was thus decided to adopt fairly intensive ethnographic, hypothesis-tailoring methods and apply these to a small sample in an attempt to derive and refine insights which would provide a useful base for further investigation.

This study reports data from six lengthy interviews with three highly successful students and their spouses. The information is rich and complex, but despite this it was possible to derive a number of tentative generalizations. Thus, it appeared that stress did not assume proportions injurious to academic achievement. The prime stressor seemed to be ambiguity, and because of the subjects' determination that their work be recognized as superior, this ambiguity was centred in particular in uncertainty regarding the appropriate criteria of excellence. Despite the strenuous dual student/educator role played by the subjects, fatigue did not appear to reach dysfunctional levels.

The data suggested that superior achievement and the mitigation of the conflicts and demands faced by the subjects were dependent in part on the interventions of spouse, faculty and cohort. In addition, there was evidence that certain personal attributes played an important part - chiefly the subject's high level of motivation (this provided a commitment to an imposing regime of work), and their careful attention to prioritization and planning. Where handled successfully, the effects of stress appeared to respond to combinations of the following: the verbalization of discomfort to spouse and/or colleague, reflection on the transitory nature of the demands, the use of respites from the program, and a sense of confidence that the challenges could all be met.

The study is in essence a micro-ethnography with a particular focus. It has provided some indication of the factors to be considered in the investigation of stress in a particular setting. The next step would be an attempt to verify its insights through the application of more easily quantifiable methods to a wider population.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Administrative Leadership Program at Simon Fraser University is somewhat atypical among graduate programs in educational administration in that it is designed for practising educators who are required to engage in a fairly intensive four-semester program of studies while maintaining their regular full-time commitments to the educational bodies by which they are employed. The resultant conjuncture of opposing demands on time and energy has been the subject of some discussion among those engaged in the program, and this study was spurred by an interest in examining the manner by which particularly successful students dealt with the conflicting demands and whatever stress might or might not have resulted.

The report which follows begins with a statement of the questions which might reasonably be asked in such an investigation and an explanation of the rationale which underlay them. There follows a sampling of the literature on high-achieving students in university education, but it will be noted that this has not proved to be of great help, since the focus of the majority of researchers has been on undergraduate (and particularly freshman) students. Even when graduate students were the subjects of investigation, the programs in which they were enrolled proved to be markedly unlike the Administrative Leadership Program at Simon Fraser University, and thus any comparisons could often provide only the most tentative of assistance. Similarly the examination of the literature on stress could do little more than yield some provocative but tentative insights, since much of it was found to be speculative and theoretical and was moreover written from a wide variety of disciplinary viewpoints.

In the second chapter the report shifts to a description of the methodology utilized in the course of this study, presents a defence of the qualitative techniques chosen, and acknowledges the methodological limitations for which allowances and adjustments had to be made. Thereafter the sample is described.

In Chapter 3 the data derived from the sample are presented in considerable detail, since the interviews which were the major vehicle of investigation generated a large body of relevant material whose inter-relationships appeared somewhat complex. Numerous verbatim excerpts from the interview transcripts were included in this chapter because it was felt that the subjects' own words often stated a point with a clarity on which an indirect quotation could not improve. Moreover, the liberal use of direct quotation presents the reader with the flavour of the interviews in a way which would be difficult to convey by any other means.

The concluding chapter of the report offers an analysis and summary of the data and points to some avenues of investigation which might prove useful to further studies of the Administrative Leadership Program or of other programs similar to it.

## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

The general purpose of this study was to determine and examine those attributes, personal and environmental, which characterize the experiences of certain students judged to be highly successful in Simon Fraser University's Administrative Leadership Program. In particular, the task was (i) to cast light on important experiential aspects of A.L.P. through detailed examination of the subjects' perceptions of their experiences in the program, (ii) to suggest some possible descriptors of the highly successful student, (iii) to discover and explore the subjects' perceptions of (a) critical stress points in the program, (b) the stress and support factors they encountered, and (c) the coping strategies they utilized, and finally, (iv) to suggest some tentative hypotheses regarding success in this program and other programs with similar characteristics. It was clear from the inception of the study that the descriptive element would be an important component, and although the small size of the sample permitted only very tentative conclusions to be drawn, it was hoped that this preliminary work would provide a useful ground for later work.

The study's emphasis on stress might profit from further discussion at this time. If selection procedures for A.L.P. are assumed to be fairly rigorous, it can be taken that entrants will possess sufficient innate ability and academic preparation to assure the likelihood of success. Nonetheless, there is some evidence<sup>1</sup> to suggest that the program is perceived as highly demanding and stressful by a significant fraction of the students who have entered it, and thus it was of interest to examine the nature and locus of the stresses and to review the strategies with which individual students attempted to cope with them. As noted earlier, this study concerned itself in particular with the perceptions of students judged to have been highly

successful since it was believed that these students were likely to embody most fully the attributes for which the program was designed. It was conceded, however, that this belief would necessarily be illusory unless the design and execution of the program did in fact possess internal coherence. The examination of this point lay beyond the scope of this study and the assumption was made that the coherence did in fact exist.

### The Program

The Administrative Leadership Program (A.L.P.) at Simon Fraser University is a two-year, four-semester program. At the time that the subjects of this study were enrolled, the academic demands consisted of three required courses and a research project in each year. Lectures in each course were completed during a five-hour session, 4:30 - 9:30 p.m., one night each week. Typically two courses were taken in each Fall Semester. Only one course was taken in the Spring Semester, thus providing time for that year's research project. In addition to the lectures, the course work involved outside reading and preparation of papers. Semester hours in the program totalled forty (thirty hours were allocated to course work and ten to the research projects).

Selection was by a committee of the faculty and, according to material prepared by Simon Fraser University, it was based on such criteria as undergraduate grades, past professional experience, aptitude for graduate work, and promotion potential. The annual intake at the time was approximately twenty from an annual application of up to one hundred.<sup>2</sup>

All students in the program were (and are) employed full-time in some aspect of education. In the cohort from which the subjects for this study were drawn, sixty percent were practising school-building administrators (principals and vice-principals), while the remainder were teachers in secondary or elementary schools.

## Basic Rationale

A number of assumptions determined the avenues initially explored by this study. As would be expected, these assumptions had primacy in shaping the questions used in the first interviews. As the study progressed, they were revised in greater or lesser degree.

Essentially the position taken was that the components of success in A.L.P., as in any undertaking, could be thought of as belonging to three broad categories - those which resided in or derived from the individual himself; those which resided in or derived from the social setting; and those which arose from interplay between the two. The a priori position was, then, that success in A.L.P. depended upon the relationships between

(i) innate or acquired attributes (personal health, academic ability, academic preparation, etc.)

(ii) motivation (the incentive factors - personal or societal - and their interplay)

(iii) the possession of a portfolio of appropriate coping strategies

(iv) high morale (dependent upon perceived success, this mainly derived from positive feedback from faculty and peers; there is also the implication of a considerable degree of congruence between personal and program goals)

(v) social support (implying adherence to patterns of behaviour seen as appropriate by important referent groups inside and outside the program)

(vi) the absence of major, debilitating demands from outside the program.

Once these assumptions had been formulated in their initial, rather general terms, the relevant literature was reviewed in an attempt to place the assumptions in such a context that they could be subjected to critical review before embarkation on the data-gathering phase of the study. The two main areas of emphasis were: (a) the characteristics of high achievers

in university-level education; and (b) recent investigation and thought regarding the phenomenon of stress.

### A Sampling of the Relevant Literature

There have been many studies of the attributes of superior students in higher education, but to date the conclusions by no means represent consensus, (possibly because the studies differ widely on a number of important points). Rothman and Flowers<sup>3</sup>, in a study of first year medical students found that successful students had great need for social recognition and understanding but were aloof, serious and cautious. An inclination towards reserve was also noted by Burgess<sup>4</sup>, who studied engineering students, and Davie<sup>5</sup>, who examined a random sample of undergraduates at Yale. Both found that socially passive and introverted students do better in scholastic matters than those who are more active. Contrary findings are reported, however, by Rosenberg, McHenry, and Rosenberg<sup>6</sup>, and Corlis<sup>7</sup>, who suggested that high achievement was related to social ease, extroversion, and popularity with peers in freshman students.

Interest in intellectual attributes has also produced somewhat conflicting results. Heist and Williams<sup>8</sup> discovered that high-achieving undergraduates were more strongly oriented towards inquiry and speculative and creative thought than were lower achievers. On the other hand, both Potter<sup>9</sup> and Mehrens<sup>10</sup> in their studies of the perceptions of graduate students in a variety of fields found that they rated themselves higher on non-intellectual traits than on intellectual. It is interesting, however, that Rossman and Kirk<sup>11</sup>, in a large study of undergraduates at the University of California (Berkeley), found that voluntary withdrawals were more intellectually oriented than persisting students.

A number of studies have focused on anxiety as an aspect of student personality, presumably on the assumption that anxiety is a debilitating

force. King<sup>12</sup>, in a replication of Musgrove's work in the United Kingdom<sup>13</sup>, noted that in a New Zealand university freshmen in the middle range of ability worried most. Powell and Jourard's research<sup>14</sup> suggests that unstable, maladjusted and anxious freshmen do less well academically, and their work is corroborated, among others, by Whitels<sup>15</sup>, Nisbet and Napier<sup>16</sup>, and Spielberger, Weitz, and Denny<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, a study by Anderson and Spencer<sup>18</sup> indicates that emotionally anxious college freshmen do as well or better than other students. Banks et al.<sup>19</sup> also found some association between stress and a high level of academic success among undergraduate chemistry students. These results are supported to some degree by Irvin<sup>20</sup>, whose more subtle study of architecture students concluded that anxiety may not be as unilaterally disruptive and debilitating as is often thought, and may on occasion work as a motivating force. Eysenck<sup>21</sup>, in a theoretical paper, points up some of the difficulties in reconciling the research investigating the relationships between anxiety and academic performance. He notes that in most studies there is no distinction made between "trait" and "state" anxiety. He asserts that trait anxiety as a drive stimulus can have contrasting effects, depending on whether it leads to task-relevant or task-irrelevant responses.

Two recent and more subtle studies have attempted to link anxiety to the experience of stress in higher education, and, as one might expect, the complexity of the picture increases as the number of variables is increased. Kielich<sup>22</sup> noted the critical nature of the weights assigned to investigator-identified stressors and subject-reported stressors. He also discovered that such other issues as the utility of coping devices and the relationship between individual stressors and stress over time were of profound importance. In the other study of graduate students in education, Coleman<sup>23</sup> concluded in part that while low anxiety individuals usually do better than those with high anxiety, high anxiety individuals do as well

under low stress as low anxiety people do under either low or high stress.

If the waters are muddied with respect to the attributes discussed to date, and it is likely that part of the explanation lies in the great diversity of populations studied, to say nothing of the range of methodologies, there still does appear to be one area of some general consensus. This is the matter of the relationships with peers and faculty (considered to be of considerable interest in this study, since students enter A.L.P. as a group and take a common set of courses together). Nisbet and Napier<sup>24</sup> in their study at the University of Glasgow found that favorable assessment of attitudes of staff and students was related to success. Nagi<sup>25</sup>, in an investigation of attrition among doctoral candidates, discovered that need for closer contact with the faculty was a significant factor (a finding supported at the undergraduate level by Smith<sup>26</sup>). In an attempt to produce a more definitive study of group cohesion, Sondalle<sup>27</sup> found that while attrition among college freshmen was reduced by clustering, there appeared to be no influence upon academic performance, student satisfaction, or stress levels. He concluded, however, that the environmental characteristics of the college at which the data were collected and the failure to ensure establishment of socio-psychological groups may have reduced the effectiveness of the study. On the other hand, Slocum's carefully structured research with juniors in Business Administration<sup>28</sup> found that not only did the clustered groups become more cohesive, but their members also achieved higher grades in all courses than did students in the control groups.

The studies cited above examine four general factors: the highly successful student's personality traits, his intellectual attributes, the role of anxiety, and the role played by faculty and colleagues. All have relevance to the basic assumptions noted above as determining the early course of this study. On the face of it, the evidence regarding the first



two factors is contradictory. With respect to personality, it will be noted that while extroversion was seen as a description of the more successful freshman, within the more exclusive groups (Yale undergraduates, engineering undergraduates, medical students) reserve seemed to have become characteristic of the more successful. If the evidence is accepted, then several questions arise: (i) Do the behaviours by which personality has been judged change after the freshman year? (ii) Do the extroverted cease to do as well? or (iii) Are these three more restricted groups markedly different from the commonality of university students?

Similarly, with regard to intellectual attributes, the greater interest in cognitive activities which was detected among high achieving undergraduates seemed on the face of it to be balanced by superior graduate students who rated themselves most highly in non-intellectual traits. One explanation is that the subjective, self-rating nature of the evidence offered vis-a-vis the graduates accounts for the discrepancy, and in addition one might speculate that the graduates' relatively low rating of their own intellectual traits was occasioned by an elevation of the standards by which they judged themselves.

With respect to anxiety as a factor in the achievement levels of superior students, it will have been noted that all the evidence cited refers to undergraduates. The discrepancies which appeared among the nine studies mentioned can be explained to some degree by suggesting that the relationship between anxiety and academic success is curvilinear - i.e. that rising anxiety, while initially functional, eventually reaches a point beyond which it becomes increasingly dysfunctional. The relationship appears reasonable and might be extended to many human activities, including graduate studies in education.

The one area where the evidence seems from the first to be fairly consistent is that related to the role played by the superior student's

peers and instructors. On the basis of the information given, it appears that the closer and more positive the relationships, the greater the likelihood for superior achievement.

This brief overview of some of the relevant literature has been offered in an attempt to indicate the conflicting conclusions reached by those who have researched the matter of student achievement in higher education. The relative paucity of studies at the graduate level forced the net to be cast widely, as already noted, and, the resultant broad range of levels studied (freshman to doctoral) raised important questions regarding the conclusions and their often apparent discrepancy. An additional concern in the planning of this study was that the methodologies employed in the studies cited above might themselves have imposed important limitations on the results, in that virtually all of the investigations were attempts at description or analysis through quantification. There was another approach available, however, and the present study was designed to throw some light on the subject through the application of qualitative methods. Since higher education must obviously be regarded as a process, perhaps it would be more fruitful to examine success in that process more holistically. Moreover, since a major emphasis of this study was on the coping behaviours exhibited by the subjects, it should be noted that much of the confusion in the literature discussing stress (see below) arises from stress being frequently viewed as the result of a discrete, specific stimulus rather than from a complex set of ever-changing conditions set in an on-going temporal context. If this latter view is the more defensible, then 'mastery of stress is not a single repertoire, but an active process over time in relationship to demands that are themselves changing. . . .'<sup>29</sup>

It was a moot point whether the subjects of this study would appear to be idiosyncratic in their personal attributes and their selection of coping strategies, or whether there would be indications of some signifi-

cant commonalities. However, it was hoped that in either case the evidence would be provocative and that the final analysis in its attempt at synthesis would point to insights of a holistic nature.

This study, then, while attempting to give some descriptive information regarding the subjects, has placed considerable emphasis on the procedures they utilized while meeting the challenges they faced in A.L.P. The goal was integrative rather than merely descriptive.

### Stress Models

If there are difficulties in attempting to conjure useful generalizations from that literature which examines the characteristics of high-achieving university students, a review of the field of stress literature poses its own challenges.

The term "stress" is used widely, both in everyday speech and in technical discussions within a number of disciplines. As a result of its use in this wide disparity of milieus, the term has come to possess a number of scholarly definitions while being used with imprecision in common parlance. A brief summary of some of the informed thinking on the subject would likely prove useful in this regard.

The best known name in the field of stress literature is probably that of Hans Selye of the University of Montreal, whose approach has been primarily directed at the physiological outcomes of stress. He uses the term stress in a less pejorative way than most writers:

\* Stress is the non-specific response of the body to any demand, whether it is caused by, or results in, pleasant or unpleasant conditions. Good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant are already specific features of our responses to a demand, just as cold or heat are specific variants of temperature changes. Stress as such, just as temperature as such, is all-inclusive, embodying both the positive and negative aspects of these concepts. We must, however, differentiate within the general concept of stress between the unpleasant or harmful variety, called "distress" . . . , and "eustress"! . . . During both eustress and distress the body undergoes virtually the same non-specific responses to the various positive or negative stimuli acting

upon it. However, the fact that eustress causes much less damage than distress graphically demonstrates that it is "how you take it" that determines, ultimately, whether one can adapt successfully to change. 30

Like most other authorities, Selye also clearly distinguishes between stress (the response of the organism) and the stressor (that which occasions the response). Moreover, he has also developed another concept which is useful within the context of this study: the general adaptation syndrome. He defines this as the manifestations of stress in the whole body, as they develop in time, and he sees the syndrome, if unrelieved, as evolving in three distinct stages: alarm reaction, stage of resistance, and stage of exhaustion.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike the present study, however, Selye's interest has been primarily in measuring physiological disturbances within the organism. A distinction is often made between physiological and psychological stress (in the latter case the tissues are not directly affected by the stimulus). Clearly, pure psychological stress is primarily a subjective process, by which a stimulus is judged to be either harmful or beneficial, and on the basis of the judgment the subject reacts in what seems to be an appropriate manner. It appears clear, however, that Selye would not agree that the distinction between physiological and psychological stress is the most important one. An aspect of his position which was basic to certain assumptions in this paper is that he considers the distinction between "distress" (negatively perceived stress) and "eustress" (positively perceived stress) as of much greater moment.

A number of authorities have proposed other conceptual models, and it will be noted that in all of these models, the term stress carries primarily negative connotations. (In the following six paragraphs I am at times heavily indebted to Scott and Howard's analysis.<sup>32</sup>)

A psychosomatic model of stress has been developed from work conducted by Alexander<sup>33</sup>, Dunbar<sup>34</sup>, and Grinker and Speigel<sup>35</sup>. It suggests that

when soluble conflicts are met in a more or less direct manner, they do not tend to result in significant, sustained organic change. Conflicts which prove insoluble or which are not confronted are thought to produce internal tensions which result in organic changes, although these changes may be discovered in some body system not obviously related to the stressor.

A similar model, proposed by Wolff and his associates<sup>36,37</sup>, differs principally in the introduction of the concept of "protective reaction patterns". Primarily physiological, this model suggests that, when the body's physical integrity is assaulted, a complex reaction occurs in an attempt to isolate and expell the threat. A number of other studies (e.g. Margolin<sup>38</sup>, Grace<sup>39</sup>, Ripley<sup>40</sup>) have worked within a similar but more mechanical model of stress, where stress is seen as an internalized response to an external demand, with stress producing distinct pathological changes and typical disorders of adaptation.

Other models are aimed at more specifically psychological and social levels of behaviour. Basowitz and associates<sup>41</sup> incorporated the concepts of "anxiety", "stress", and "stress situations" into a model based upon studies of men in combat. Anxiety is here defined as the experience of dread and foreboding, typically arising when the integrity of the organism is threatened. Empirical evidence was gathered to show that some stimuli are more likely to arouse anxiety than others, and from this a stimulus continuum was constructed. At one end lie stimuli whose threat was found to be highly idiosyncratic, while at the other are placed those stimuli which, because of their intensity and explicit threat, were considered to prove overwhelming for most organisms. "Stress" was assigned as a descriptor to the latter, more universal, end of the continuum.

Considerable reference will be made later in this study to Mechanic's research into stress and adaptation among graduate students<sup>42</sup>. At this time it would be useful, however, to consider the concepts underlying his work in

this area. Mechanic defines stress as "the discomforting responses of persons in particular situations"<sup>43</sup>, and suggests that whether a given situation gives rise to discomforting responses depends upon four factors: the individual's abilities and capacities; the skills and limitations derived from group practices and traditions; the degree of support provided by the social environment; and the social norms which define the utility of the above. The term "reversibility" is assigned by Mechanic to mastery of a threatening situation, and he theorizes that reversibility depends upon the adaptive devices or coping behaviours utilized by the subject. He uses the term "defence" to refer to a device used to manage the feelings generated by the situation or the coping behaviours.

A model with a more obvious psychological component has been produced by Dohrenwend<sup>44</sup> in an attempt to apply a modification of Selye's model to the study of mental disorder. Dohrenwend analyzes stress reactions and isolates five sets of factors: the external stressors causing imbalance within the organism; mediating or alleviating factors; the experience of stress; the adaptive syndrome (the attempt to cope); and the actual response, whether adaptive or maladaptive, which arises from external pressures.

A stress model arising from study of responses to highly traumatic events (specifically the experience of major surgery and of wartime air-raids) was constructed by Janis<sup>45</sup>. The excessive threat of the events reduces this model's relevance for this present study, but Janis identified eight factors, thought by him to determine the individual's response to the threat; these may have some pertinence here. The factors are: (i) the perceived characteristics of the stress stimuli, (ii) the individual's beliefs regarding the origins of the threat, (iii) expectations regarding possible avoidance or mitigation, (iv) expectations regarding the individual's social role in the situation, (v) the degree of identification with other threatened groups, (vi) social status of the subject and its relationship to

possible external aid; (vii) prior training in dealing with such a threat; (viii) personality characteristics (dependency needs, levels of anxiety, etc.)

It will be clear from even the cursory overview provided above, that thorough synthesis of stress theory presents a knotty problem. Not only are many of the studies highly field-specific and hence likely to be of limited generalizability, but, as noted earlier, the very definitions of the basic term stress differ widely. In addition, some of the models are based on data derived from the study of extreme and often traumatic situations, and thus have made little provision for the incorporation of those factors which possess significances but which lack dramatic impact.

Nonetheless, a number of themes with implications for the present study were abstracted. As noted, Selye and Janis both suggest that the individual's subjective view of the stressor goes far towards determining benefit or harm. Alexander, Dunbar, and Grinker and Spiegel speculate that when there is direct and successful resistance to a threat the injury to the organism is either minimized or completely prevented. Dohrenwend, Mechanic, and Janis emphasize the importance of mediating factors, and in particular those of a social nature, while Mechanic, Dohrenwend, and Janis have considered the importance of the role played by the organism's personal coping devices. Basowitz presents evidence to suggest that response to a specific stressor may range along a continuum from universal to highly idiosyncratic, and that anxiety itself derives from a threat to the integrity of the organism. With respect to this last point, the present study has utilized an extension of this insight, adjusting it from the threat to physical integrity which preoccupied Basowitz to a threat to psychological integrity, and in particular to the integrity of the individual's self concept.

Each of these themes was incorporated into the present study, and furnished important assistance in the articulation of the initial concepts from which the research grew. Reference to the interview schedules included

in the appendices will illustrate the point.

At this juncture it would be appropriate to state the working definition of stress which was devised for use in this study. Stress is here defined as: that condition resulting from encounters with stimuli (the stressors), which either place an undue physiological demand upon the organism or which, if psychological, are perceived as a threat to some aspect of the organism's integrity. This condition typically stimulates the organism to attempt mitigation or avoidance of the harm or threat through certain devices (the coping behaviours). (The reader will note that the intent is to distinguish between the stress agent, the reactive behaviour, and the stress itself, which is here seen as a distressful condition.)



## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

To this point the report has concerned itself with two of the three necessary preliminaries - the formulation of the basic thrusts of the inquiry, and the examination of those earlier investigations which might serve to provide useful contextual clues. There remains the selection of a methodology, a topic which furnishes the focus for this chapter. Essentially, the argument advanced in the succeeding pages is that ethnographic, hypothesis-tailoring research is a viable genre and that, given the state of current knowledge regarding highly successful students in graduate programs in Education, the only defensible approach for a study such as this is ethnographic in nature. On such a study, and others like it, and on their admittedly speculative conclusions further research utilizing more precise, quantifiable procedures can be based.

As the methodology was considered, it was decided that the time for such precision was not now. The early steps in virtually any area of scientific examination are tentative, and scientific progress is typically incremental. Thus, while each study may of itself provide little of the nature of a break-through, a sequence of studies may, if founded on a firm conceptual base, eventually produce findings of great import. At this point, however, investigation of the phenomenon was not felt to have reached a state of sufficient ideational equilibrium, and thus this study was designed and the methodology selected in an attempt to make a small contribution to the necessary stability of this conceptual base.

### The Qualitative Study

There has been a tendency within the behavioural sciences to express theories in terms of measurable variables. While this is laudable in the main, it can be carried to the point where, because of the methodological restrictions of quantification, many of the studies are forced to concern

themselves with trivial matters, rather than addressing those significant subjects which can at present be studied only through less precise qualitative procedures. Since, as noted earlier, the area on which this study focuses is already confused, the method to be chosen posed something of a problem.

In experimental methodology, the hypothesis should be stated prior to observation. Within the field of anthropology, however, the generation of a hypothesis more usually follows a period of observation and data collection.<sup>46</sup> Anthropological procedures have been viewed with a jaundiced eye by many social statisticians, since they see them as incapable of providing methodologically viable results with any degree of generalizability. Nevertheless, the position taken here is that these procedures are invaluable when seen as a tentative attempt to identify both the important variables and the categories which are necessary in the statement of a speculative hypothesis. Indeed, it is asserted that it is in fact the most defensible course when one is investigating complex phenomena in a setting as unusual as the Administrative Leadership Program. This point is given particular cogency, of course, by the already noted paucity of comparable studies.

The arguments of Overholt and Stallings<sup>47</sup> were important in determining much of the course of this study. They have insisted that in such an ethnographic study as this, the theory must initially be couched in rather general terms (unlike the specific hypothesis of the experimental researcher). Their view is that to be overly specific at too early a stage introduces the danger of ethnocentrism.

Because the hypothesis stands in an a priori relationship to the field of investigation, it also stands in an a priori relationship to the culture to be investigated. As such, it must be formulated in contexts and on the basis of assumptions foreign to that culture. <sup>48</sup>

Their analysis, then, is that the process should begin with rather general suppositions which are subjected to progressive refinement in light of the

evidence collected during the research. The thrust is to ensure successively better "fits" by revising and reformulating as the study progresses. Indeed, the hypotheses are manipulated

in order to arrive at statements that account for as many of the observed facts as possible with the greatest degree of economy, simplicity, and elegance possible. 49

When sufficiently refined, they may be stated as hypotheses which may be subjected to experimental verification.

In this study an illustration of this process can be found in the initiatives designed to locate those points in the program where the subjects believed they experienced most distress. It has not been anticipated that the research projects would provide the locus, but as early as the pilot interview there were indications that aspects of the projects were indeed stressful. From this it developed that for two of the subjects of the study, these exercises constituted the major stressors. As the interviews progressed it became evident that certain distressful elements associated with the projects also appeared in other parts of the program, constituting stressors whose generalizability might, and indeed did, form the basis for a tentative hypothesis.

A helpful and closely reasoned discussion of good qualitative research has been advanced by Glaser and Strauss<sup>50</sup>, and once again the present study was much influenced by their thinking. They argue for rooting social theory firmly in the data generated by the appropriate research, and then go on to develop a rationale for the use of general rather than specific comparative methods. In particular, they too see the method as based on a process which begins with tentative theoretical notions based on early analysis of the data. As more data are added to the pool, so early positions are discarded, refined, or modified, until a coherent substantive theory which fits the facts has been teased out. The procedure is, therefore, inductive rather than deductive.

Glaser and Strauss argue that theory firmly based on even partial evidence can usually withstand complete refutation - unlike many highly empirical studies whose conclusions consist of a tacked-on explanation derived from some logically deduced theory. Like Overholt and Stalling, they criticize much of what has been done in behavioural research as being based on inappropriate "grand theory" which has been imposed on the data. Their hope is that their construct will help to increase the utility of research in those areas where investigations have been limited to either highly abstract theorizing or the typical somewhat circumscribed quantitative study. As they see it, the difficulty lies in

testing a logico-deductive theory, which is dubiously related to the area of behavior it purports to explain, since it was merely thought up on the basis of a a priori assumption and a touch of common sense, peppered with a few old theoretical speculations made by the erudite. The verifier may find that the speculative theory has nothing to do with his evidence, unless he forces a connection. 51

In the view of Glaser and Strauss, comparative analysis can lead to two kinds of theory: substantive (developed for a substantive or empirical area of sociological enquiry, such as post graduate education, hospital care, juvenile delinquency, etc.) or formal (developed for a formal or conceptual area of enquiry, such as socialization, group roles, institutional organization, etc.) The present study falls, of course, within the former category. However, Glaser and Strauss assert quite unequivocally that, substantive or formal, theory must be grounded in data.

Substantive theory faithful to the empirical situation cannot, we believe, be formulated merely by applying a few ideas from an established formal theory to the substantive area. To be sure one goes out and studies an area with a particular sociological perspective, and with a focus, a general question, or a problem in mind. But he can (and we believe should) also study an area without any preconceived theory that dictates, prior to the research, "relevancies" in concepts and hypotheses. Indeed it is presumptuous to assume that one begins to know the relevant categories and hypotheses until the "first days in the field", at least, are over. A substantive theory generated from the data must first be formulated, in order to see which of diverse formal theories are, perhaps, applicable for furthering

additional substantive formulations. 52

They go on to say

Our approach, allowing substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first, on their own, enables the analyst to ascertain which, if any, existing formal theory may help him generate his substantive theories. He can then be more faithful to his data, rather than forcing it to fit a theory. He can be more objective and less theoretically biased. 53

Once again, analysis is pursued sequentially, with the initial revision being taken while the investigator is still gathering his data. The collection of later information is directed by the on-going analysis, with only the final refinement of the hypothesis deferred until after the field work is complete. (A succinct description of the process can be found in an analysis by Becker.<sup>54</sup>)

Several other authorities have addressed the utility of qualitative research similar to that undertaken in this study. Wolcott, who has used like methods, has noted the growing body of literature based upon anthropologically-oriented field studies in education.<sup>55</sup> Getzels has commented on the low numbers of subjects used in many important studies, remarking, "Some day I shall do a comprehensive piece with the title 'N=1' documenting that more, or at least as much, has come from studies with N=1 as with N=1000."<sup>56</sup> He proposes: "Let us not be too scornful of N=1; it is not the N that matters but what is done with it."<sup>57</sup> Lortie, taking a perspective similar to that of Glaser and Strauss, comments that research in at least one area

has missed important steps in its development; it is as if we were trying to chart particular acreage without a map of the general terrain. Lack of overview constrains our capacity to deal with change, for our image of "regular conditions", constructed from scattered instances of unrelated research, is blurred. It is not easy to separate trends from newly discovered patterns; we are likely to miss or exaggerate subtleties when prominent patterns of behavior and major variables are partially described and largely unanalyzed. 58

He goes on to ask, somewhat rhetorically,

Does the difficulty lie in an overly rigid definition of what constitutes publishable research? Have we fallen into an orthodoxy which requires that publication occur only when observations and findings fall into a particular format? 59

The research reported in the main body of this work could with some aptness be described as a micro-ethnographic case study, and as such should be regarded as anthropological in nature. Lutz and Ramsey claim unique theory-generating qualities for anthropological field methods.<sup>60</sup> Overholt and Stalling feel this position to be overstated, but concede the productivity of ethnographic methods in the generation of theory<sup>61</sup> (a stance supported by Harp and Richter<sup>62</sup>). Thus the research recorded in this report was developed as a case study in the hope that a holistic treatment would lead to the genesis of useful hypotheses about the characteristics possessed by highly successful students in this and other similar programs, the processes by which they achieve their high level of success, and the relationships between the two. However, although care was taken to make the study as accurate as possible (for discussion of this see below), it should be noted that the hypotheses resulting from such research must be regarded as tentative. This caveat is necessary since, as Becker and Geer have noted, the investigator's

conclusions often have a kind of prima facie validity, a "ring of truth", but the reader of his research has no way of knowing whether a solid basis of fact underlies this. . . .63

\* \* \* \* \*

Having described much of the thinking behind the methodology chosen, it is necessary to describe the process followed, the particular pitfalls to be guarded against, and the steps taken to avoid or minimize the distortions arising from these dangers.

## The Method

The selection of the subjects posed the initial problem. At the time that the study was begun (January, 1976), there were three cohorts which had completed the two year program. In consultation with another student conducting a similar study, it was agreed that one cohort of the three would be used for pilot investigations and that the two remaining cohorts would be assigned on the basis of which provided the most satisfactory pool for each of the studies.

The two faculty members who had taught the two cohorts and who were currently on campus were asked to assign each student in the cohorts to one of four categories (highly successful, marginally highly successful, successful, and marginally successful), based upon judged success in the program. (While this study is interested in only the students judged "highly successful", the other study took a wider view.) The faculty members kindly agreed to assist as requested. Since they had both been involved with the program from its inception, it was felt that they would possess a sensitivity to the values and goals underlying the institution and early implementation of the program, and hence little direction was given regarding the criteria for the one category relevant to this study other than to point to oral and written work and mastery of course content as factors, and to suggest that the number of those classed as "highly successful" should not exceed twenty per cent of the cohort. The cohort which eventually became the pool for this study yielded the names of four students judged "highly successful" by one faculty member, while five were judged to be "highly successful" by the other. Three names were common to both lists, and these three were selected as the subjects for this study.

The data gathering was to be by means of extended interviews, and prior to any contact with the three subjects a pilot interview was conducted with a high achieving student from the cohort designated for this purpose.

This interview, like the later ones, was somewhat open-ended, although an interview guide was used to ensure that all important topics were covered.

The pilot interview, conducted in April, 1976, was felt to yield sufficiently rich data (for the interview schedule see Appendix A). On the basis of the experience in the pilot interview, revisions were made to the schedule in an attempt to improve phrasing and sequencing, to remove unproductive or redundant questions, and to insert promising new questions. Contact was then made with the three subjects. The first approach was made by way of a letter explaining the purpose of the study and the data collecting procedure envisioned (see Appendix B). A follow-up phone call a week later enabled the subjects to enquire further into the rationale behind the study and the extent of their involvement in it.

The initial interviews were held in June of 1976 (for the interview schedule see Appendix C). One was in the interviewee's home (A1); the other two were at schools, one during the school day (B1) and one after classes (C1). All three interviews were taped, but notes were also taken. In one case the tape for the first half of the interview proved to be blank, and the somewhat onerous note-taking justified itself. These interviews were timed at 98 minutes (A1), 50 minutes (B1), and 77 minutes (C1). Typed transcripts were made from the tapes in the early part of the summer vacation, and this was followed by preliminary analysis to suggest common themes, and areas needing elucidation and expansion.

The second interviews were conducted in late August and early September, 1976 (for the schedule see Appendix D). These, like the first interviews, were guided (or focused) to ensure coverage of pertinent points. They were all held in the subjects' homes since spouses had also agreed to be interviewed at this time. The second interviews (subject and spouse combined) were timed at 98 minutes (A2), 106 minutes (B2), and 110 minutes (C2).

At first it had been planned to hold two separate interviews at this



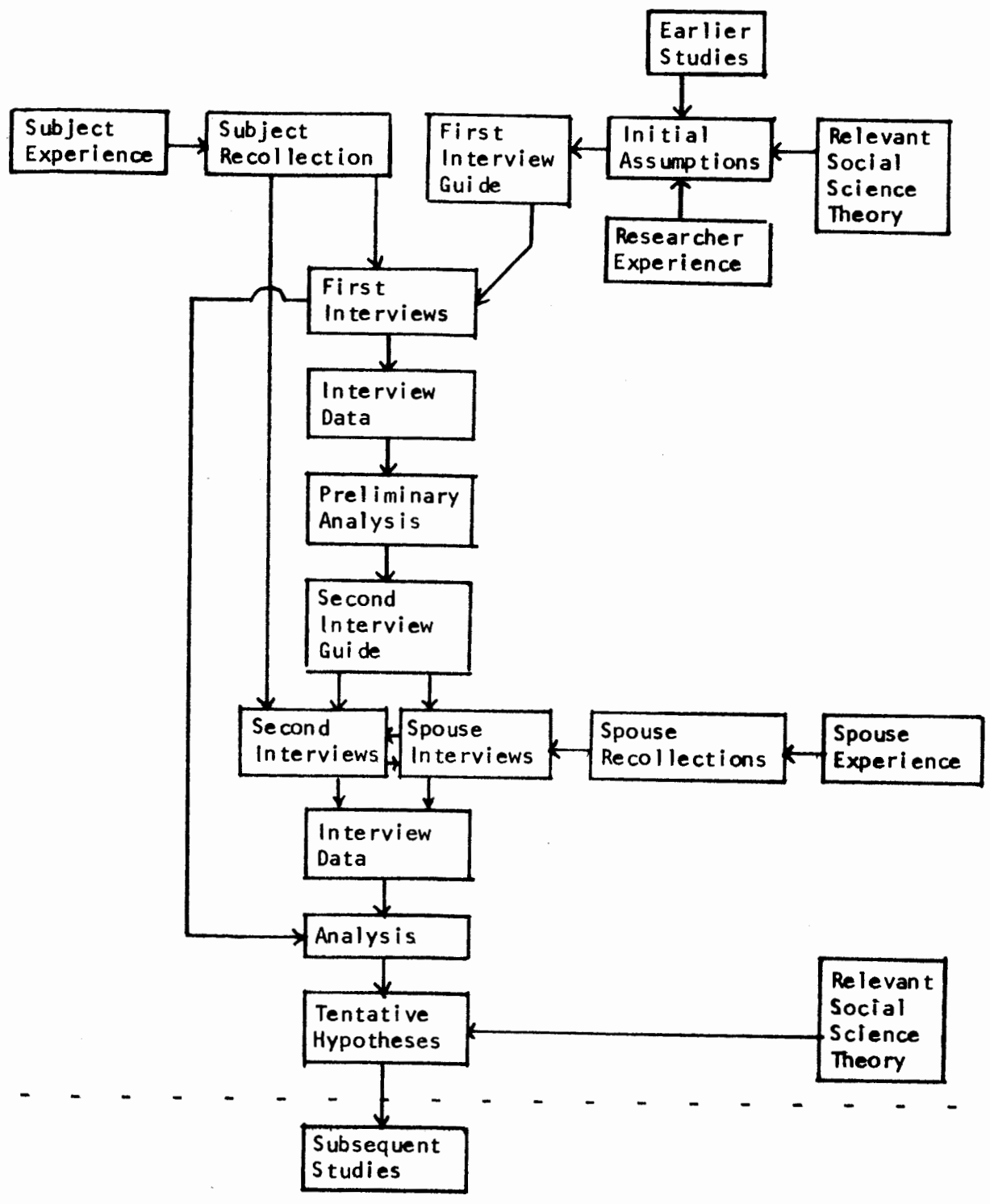
time, with the spouses interview following that with the major subject. In the event, it was decided to have the spouse present during the whole interview. This may account for the second interviews being rather richer and less interviewer-directed than the first ones were. A good deal of perception checking went on between subject and spouse, and many details were firmed up to a consensus as a result of the dialogue. Specific questions not addressed to the spouse during the three-cornered main interview were covered at the end of the session. After the subject/spouse interviews, a transcript of the first interview was left with each subject for review. Subjects were asked to bring any statements requiring clarification or revision to the interviewer's attention. Despite this, no such suggestions were received.

Following these interviews, transcripts were again typed and a thorough analysis of the data begun. Any further contacts with the subjects were brief and by phone, being concerned with checking minor details. Copies of each of their own interview transcripts were mailed to the interviewees after the second session, and they were invited to comment on any statements which seemed to them to need clarification or revision. Once again, no suggestions for clarification or revision were received.

A schematic representation of the process followed in this study appears in Figure 1,

As might be surmised, the question of rapport loomed large in the interviewer's mind, since, given the nature of the information sought, it was recognized that the interviewees might well have scruples at engaging in the study with any measure of candour. A number of factors and initiatives were therefore built into the interview process to address this concern. The interview schedules, and most particularly the first, were designed to lead circumspectly into any areas which might prove sensitive. The fact that the interviewer was himself engaged in the program appeared to provide

Figure 1  
Process Model - the Study



an entrée to discussion in that it allowed a measure of sharing, comparing, and contrasting of experiences to occur. The fact that there were two interviews in each case and that the second took place in the home and with the participation of the spouse may also have played a part in promoting greater ease and candour.

Moreover, the nature of the study and the method of the subjects' selection was fully explained, while the interviewees were assured that the fullest possible measure of anonymity would be afforded, both for themselves and for those others mentioned during the interviews. It was also explained that transcript material would not appear in this report except in the form of short excerpts. Finally, as noted above, by virtue of being given the opportunity of reviewing the transcripts as soon as they were available the subjects were aware that they would be in the position both of examining what had been said and of advising the interviewer of any material they felt was misleading or which they wished to be omitted from the study.

In the event, it was felt that the subjects and their spouses showed considerable openness in discussing their experiences vis-a-vis the Administrative Leadership Program. Indeed, it would be appropriate to acknowledge at this time the courtesy of all the interviewees - despite their own busy schedules and the length of the interviews, they were most helpful and interested in the study, and seemed anxious to recall in considerable detail the experiences they had undergone while engaged in the program. The debt owed to their co-operation is obviously fundamental to whatever utility this study may possess.

#### The Method - Discussion

Given that this investigation was to be qualitative, based on rich data from a very small population, and directed at the speculative derivation of insights into the processes by which the subjects dealt with the

demands of A.L.P., several potential weaknesses in the methodology required that particularly careful planning and consideration precede embarkation on the study.

Several of the difficulties obviously centred on problems related to accuracy of recall, and it might be argued that participant observation would have proved a more defensible technique.<sup>64</sup> However, it is clear that this would have placed severe temporal restrictions on the investigation. For example, had the author studied his own cohort, the critical early identification of highly successful students would have posed a monumental problem. Moreover, the nature of the program, with many demands being met in solitary rather than group settings, would have made the obligatory ongoing consultation and observation most difficult. Possibly the most practical objection, however, was that any participant study encompassing experiences during the full two years would inevitably force the preparation of the report to continue well past the date on which it would normally be due. On the other hand, it was clear that to base the research on experiences from only part of the two-year cycle would impose major weaknesses of its own.

An analysis by Zelditch has categorized interview techniques as "adequate with precautions, and efficient" with respect to identifying incidents and developing histories and "most efficient and hence best form" in terms of identifying institutionalized norms and statuses.<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, the argument urging the merits of participant observation is germane. It is the author's belief that his own participation in the Administrative Leadership Program, albeit in a different cohort with somewhat different experiences, gave him some approximation of the insights offered by participant observation. Moreover, it is possible that the richness of the actual discussions with the subjects and their manifest readiness to talk of their experiences and insights owed something to the sense of shared understandings and experiences.

Because of the subjectivity of the methodology, a major goal during the interview was the minimization of distortions in the raw data. Distortion is, of course, a greater danger when, as here, the interviewee is asked to look back over some time. Studies have indicated that information derived from recollection can be highly unreliable.<sup>66</sup> However, there is evidence that experiences associated with anxiety (like many discussed here) are recollected with greater accuracy<sup>67</sup>, that the possession of a higher level of education is associated with more accurate recall<sup>68</sup>, and that the inclusion of both spouses in interview procedures may lead to more accurate responses.<sup>69</sup>

It was recognized that there are many possible sources of error in interview response. Some are involuntary: the informant's memory may fall or become selective, subtle restructurings may arise from hindsight or rationalization, the wording used in the schedule may induce a response set. Other errors are voluntary: the informant may wish to influence the results of the research in a particular direction, he may be tempted into dramatizing events to add interest, he will likely be inclined to couch events in as self-justificatory a guise as possible. In addition, the stance taken by the interviewee may well change as he decides that the thrust of the questioning is becoming clear to him or as his affective relations with the interviewer undergo change.

It was recognized that detection of such errors in the basic data posed a significant problem, and the interviewer relied on two main checks. One was highly subjective and depended on the "feel" of the statements when viewed in the context of the interviews completed at that time. The other was more objective and consisted of examining a series of statements on an important theme for coherence. If discrepancies appeared within or between interviews, then further investigation was indicated. In most cases this consisted either of putting the question again in somewhat different form

or of seeking reaction from the spouse or another subject.

Several other concerns related to the issue of informant credibility and consistency also received attention both in process and analysis. Since the interview schedule was not followed slavishly, the question arises of whether a statement is volunteered spontaneously or offered in response to a direct question. Other things being equal, it is clear that a comment offered freely is likely to be of greater importance than one which occurs as a result of interviewer initiative. Thus, because the schedules were not allowed to dominate the interviews unduly, there was on occasions the opportunity for the discussions to develop quite as much from the initiative of the interviewee as from that of the interviewer. One result was that at times a good deal of time was spent on topics of only tangential relevance to the study. Another was that there were occasions when without prompting a subject volunteered a comment of great significance.

Another consideration was the significance of informant comment when derived from the context of a diadic interview (the initial interview) as opposed to a triadic (the second interview). This could be considered but not checked in the case of the spouses' responses, since these were all made in the triadic setting. However, the reliability of the prime informants' reported recollections was checked by repeated questioning on selected topics, both within and between interviews. Moreover, when an individual's recollections were judged to be of fundamental importance, they were typically offered to the spouse or another subject for reaction. Thus idiosyncratic, implausible, or inconsistent statements could be (and were) readily identified, challenged, and/or reinvestigated at a later time. In this area, the interviewer's personal experience as a student in the Program also served as a check on credibility. It is worth noting that in all three cases the spouses stated that they perceived the subjects' comments as they witnessed them in the second interviews to have

been accurate recall of the events and reactions experienced during the two years of the program. A typical point of view is reflected by the following excerpt:

- Q. Did you and he talk a great deal about the program, and, in general, what did he have to say?
- S. Pretty well exactly what he said to you. In listening to you talk about it, it all comes back rather clearly. . . .
- Q. His perception hasn't changed now that he's looking back at it from a remove . . . ?
- S. I wouldn't say so. What he said was pretty well what he expressed at the time. (SC2)

Since the interviews were not heavily structured and since the discussions sometimes led off down unexpected avenues, the interviewer's own experiences in A.L.P. and the possibility of resulting biases or prejudices were a matter for concern. Whether the subjects were cued or influenced is a matter of conjecture, and since such contamination can be subtle, even a careful examination of the written transcript may not reveal it. It is true that a very highly structured interview schedule combined with formal interview procedures would have helped reduce the danger of interviewer bias (particularly with reference to cueing), but much of what was of most significance in the interviews appeared to derive from the opportunity for flexibility and open-endedness. This would likely have been placed in jeopardy had a more structured approach been followed slavishly. However, the dangers of allowing interviewer subjectivity to compound that of the interviewee were very present in the author's mind, and perhaps the most persuasive evidence that undue influence was not exercised lies precisely in the interviewer's consciousness of the dangers and in the fact that the subjects' reported perceptions proved in many respects to be surprising to the interviewer.

Scruples regarding use of an admittedly subjective procedure were faced, then, in a number of ways. The first line of defence was a rigorous self-scrutiny on the part of the researcher. In addition, the careful analysis of tapes and written transcripts aided to some degree in determining whether interviewer bias was intruding.

Although the interview guides were not always followed precisely, the overall sequences were designed to encourage accurate recall. This was accomplished by structuring the progression of questions from those which were rather general scene-setters to those which had considerable specificity (a process termed "funnelling" by Kahn and Cannell<sup>70</sup>.) That the technique was not wholly unsuccessful was demonstrated several times as the interviewees remarked on their surprise at the clarity of their recollections.

Wolcott has described anthropologically-oriented field studies of the kind described here as high risk - low yield adventures.<sup>71</sup> The risk involves the possibility of later investigators failing to check the conclusions against a wider population. The yield relates to the distinct possibility that the data and insights will be trite and banal despite the time and effort expended in deriving them. Naturally it was hoped that the results would escape banality. However, an assumption underlying this research was that, since whatever insights it might yield would not likely constitute a critical breakthrough, it could possess real value only as part of a sequence of studies where the tentative hypotheses of such early work would furnish a base for more precise, more highly refined research at a later date. Thus, studies such as this might prove of assistance to those later investigations from which a greater measure of generalizability might emerge.



### The Sample

Two of the "highly successful" students who agreed to participate in the study were male, one was female. All were married at the time they entered the program. One couple had children prior to the beginning of the program, another was childless, and in the third case the first child was born during the course of the program.

All three subjects were practising classroom teachers when they entered, all three taught at the secondary level although each specialized in a different subject area, and all three were department heads. At the end of the first year one subject was appointed vice-principal and has subsequently become a principal. The other two have left the classroom for work in the area of curriculum.

The subjects were all born, raised, and educated in B.C. For two of them this upbringing and education was largely in rural and small town settings. The third was raised and educated in Vancouver. Each subject took his first degree at the University of British Columbia. Two subjects reported that they considered their undergraduate records to be lack-lustre, and one noted some difficulty in gaining entrance to the program because of this. Two had embarked on (but not completed) post-graduate studies prior to their enrolling in the Administrative Leadership Program. During the two years under examination, two spouses were also engaged in post-graduate studies.

At the outset of the data collection process, the subjects were advised that their anonymity would be preserved. Hence the cohort has not been identified and the subjects remain unnamed. Moreover, it will be appreciated that in the course of the somewhat lengthy interviews some comments were made which might be considered to reflect adversely on other students in the cohort or on faculty members. Concern was expressed by the subjects that these comments might be quoted in the thesis. Since the

primary focus of this study was on the subjects rather than on the program, the faculty, or the cohort, there is little reference to such adverse comments except in the most general terms. This concern of the subjects was also one reason for the interview transcripts not appearing as part of the appendix.

This omission would not occasion any surprise in the reader. In any study of this nature, ethical considerations are always a factor, although it was not likely that scruples of the order of those raised by Baumrind<sup>72</sup> would be raised here. In considering what illustrative material to include in the report of the data, which constitutes the next chapter, the author's stance was modelled on guidelines offered by the American Psychological Association's committee on ethical standards.<sup>73</sup>

### CHAPTER 3: THE DATA

As noted earlier in this report, the data upon which it rests were derived from six in-depth interviews, two with each subject. In each case the second interview also involved the spouse. Where necessary, clarification and amplification were obtained through brief supplementary conversations, usually by phone.

The material reported in this chapter has been organized around a number of themes which were felt likely to provide useful insights into the nature of the subjects' experiences in the Administrative Leadership Program. The sequence in which the material has been arranged is as follows:

(i) the subjects' approach to the program (reasons for choice, expectations, and goals)

(ii) the subjects' appraisal of the program (program design and utility, and overall evaluation)

(iii) specific stressors (program demands: periods of high and low stress, the research projects, ambiguity, competition; job demands; family demands)

(iv) distress (perceived nature, degree, and effects)

(v) the role of mediating factors (the outside job, the family, the faculty, the cohort)

(vi) personal factors (modes of coping with stress, personal attributes, personal attitudes to demands, strategies for satisfying demands and achieving high success)

Interspersed through the material presented below are a number of verbatim excerpts from the interview transcripts. Each is given a designation indicating the speaker and the interview from which it is derived. Thus (A1) indicates that subject A is speaking during the course of the first interview, while (SC2) indicates that the spouse of subject C is

speaking at the second interview. Occasionally there will be more than one speaker in an excerpt and where this is the case the subject is designated appropriately as A, B, or C, spouses are identified by S, and the interviewer by Q. It was felt that identifying the source of the statement would prove of interest to the reader who wished to review the conclusions in light of his own examination of the data presented.

### The Subjects' Set on Entry to the Program

A series of questions at the beginning of the first interview schedule investigated the subjects' recollections of their motives and attitudes when selecting the program (see Appendix C). To check on consistency of response and attitude, several aspects of this theme were also reviewed at the second interview (see Appendix D) and in conversation with the spouse (see Appendix E). No marked difference in response was noted in the reactions of the subjects from one interview to the next. Moreover, the spouses' replies to the same questions were strongly corroborative.

In the main, the proximity of Simon Fraser and the fact that the program left the summer months free of formal commitment seemed to have been the major factors in determining the choice of the program. Although one subject mentioned the reputation of the faculty as conferring an attraction, the other two did not appear to have made any real effort to research either the program or the teaching faculty before entry. One of the latter remarked,

I didn't know Simon Fraser University, so I didn't know who any of the people would be that were giving us instruction. And I didn't actually go up there to meet those people or anything like that. I didn't see any previous students, either, to ask. (A1)

Certainly, for these two subjects the question of the value of the Administrative Leadership Program vis-a-vis other programs in educational administration did not appear important. As one put it,

a master's is a master's, and it doesn't make any difference after you've got it. People don't ask you where you got it. (A1)

Despite the apparently casual basis for selection of the program, all subjects reported that they approached the experience with the expectation that it would be highly demanding. In reply to questions as to the rigour perceived to lie ahead of them, typical comments were:

you thought it was going to be very, very hard (A1),

and

I didn't feel that uncomfortable when I had to work hard. I expected it, . . . my expectations were that I would put in a lot of time. . . . (B2)

In the course of the first interviews there was considerable unanimity regarding the goals which prompted the subjects' decision to register in a master's program in educational administration. All three noted that a major objective was to gain entry to school administration and that the degree was seen as a necessary precondition. In one case, however, the reply proved to be less baldly pragmatic when the question was put again in the course of the second interview. At that time the subject commented that

I wanted a particular program which would be valuable to me in a field of endeavour or interest that was different from that I'd engaged in in the past; that would help me comprehend the total school system, the total educational system, as opposed to a particular discipline of it; and that would stimulate my interest so that I could do and keep my particular activities and work at a high calibre. (C2)

In another case, the reply to the same question at the second interview suggested a change of emphasis, in that the degree itself was now represented as its own justification, quite apart from any considerations of salary, advancement, or professional expertise:

You know, I didn't have any brilliant goals, as far as I remember it. I wanted a master's degree. It meant more money, but that wasn't really important. I wanted a master's degree because I wanted a master's degree. (A2)

(It should be noted that this was one of the few times when subjects revised

responses from one interview to the next.)

In general terms, then, for these students the evidence was that the prime attractions were the location of the university and the free summer session; that the expectation was that the course would be intensive and demanding; and that the prime motivation was the desire to gain entrance to school administration.

### The Subjects' Appraisal of the Program

All three subjects expressed satisfaction with the program. Typical of the early stages of the investigation was the following comment:

I have good feelings about the program. It was an awful lot of work and an intensified period of time, but I personally like that. (B1)

However, although there was close general agreement regarding the program, during the later Interviews some differences developed concerning certain of its aspects. While one subject found the program stimulating in the extreme (a point corroborated by his spouse), and another saw considerable professional growth in himself during the two years (corroborated in its turn by his spouse), the third reacted less positively:

It didn't challenge my way of looking at the world or any of those things. I did a course this summer . . . at (Canadian university). Now that course will do things to your mind! Once you were immersed in that course for a while . . . you get this vertigo. . . . And if you let yourself go into that, you could be an entirely different person. Now that experience was not in that program at all. I don't think it was designed to give it to you, either. (A2)

On the other hand, there was agreement on several aspects of program design. The fact that summers were free from course requirements was seen as an important benefit (as already noted, this had been a major factor in determining the original choice of the program). The unencumbered summers allowed the subjects to devote some time to families and to recuperate from the strains imposed by combining studies with a full-time job. The fact that the program, while intensive, was limited to two years was also seen

as an advantage. Two subjects mentioned that a third year at the same pitch would have been difficult for them to handle. A statement that summarized this position fairly precisely was:

if, after one year of it, someone had come along and said, "Oh, we've now decided to make this a three-year program, and you've got two more years to go," I would have packed it in. But the fact that it was two years, the fact that the summers were clear, the fact that you didn't have to go to summer school every day - that horrible bloody business which we've all been engaged in - was the main reason why I embarked on the Simon Fraser situation.  
 . . . (C2)

Also regarded with general approval was the fact that all the students in the cohort were practising educators and were given a good deal of opportunity to engage in extended class discussion, drawing on their experience and expertise:

I believe there are several inherent advantages in being in an academic environment with people who are currently working in the field . . . These people are practitioners, and they can bounce ideas sensibly off of each other. (SA2)

The most positive aspect was the cross-fertilization of minds, not just from the faculty but from others in the cohort - the administrators in particular were very conscious of developments in education. (C1)

In addition to the advantages thus to be derived from class discussion, there was the opportunity to take an idea from a class and test it immediately in a school setting.

It was amazing the things you could pick up and re-adapt and use in your classes for entirely different purposes. Also to test out things. We did questionnaires. . . and then we actually used the questionnaires . . . on our schools, and then brought them back and compared schools, and saw what the charting came out like and talked about it. So it wasn't just something out of a book. You had real schools to talk about. (A1)

Despite the structural benefits mentioned above (the free summers, the two year package), there was agreement that the time pressures imposed by the program model were often dysfunctional. This was felt particularly in terms of the reports and assigned readings:

You got into some of the readings and they were interesting and you would have liked to have been able to spend more time

digesting them and going through a little more detail, and following up with different readings. . . . But it was just not enough time. (B2)

Despite this, two subjects saw the time constraints as instrumental in determining a major personal learning: how to budget time and organize under pressure. Another major factor which was criticized frequently in the process of discussion of program design, and a topic which receives extended treatment later in this report, was that of the research projects. While the value of field work was conceded, there was an inclination to question the need for extended reports, particularly since these were seen as having to meet fairly rigid guidelines. One emphatic statement on the topic occurred in the interview process:

the drudgery of two theses was too much. The second served no useful purpose. It was just meaningless repetition. (C1)

The utility of the experiences provided by the program has already been touched on, and this topic re-appeared many times during the interviews. Although there was consensus regarding overall value, with all subjects volunteering remarks similar to that quoted above from transcript (A1), there were reservations regarding certain particulars. It was clear that for at least two of the three subjects there was the hope that the Administrative Leadership Program would provide a set of experiences designed to teach highly practical and specific skills:

there are lots of other really nuts-and-boltsy things that administrators do. And I don't think that the program was ever intended to do these, but I, looking back, wished they had. (A2)

However, despite this comment, the only topics of a maintenance nature to be specifically cited as desirable but lacking were scheduling and the preparation of school budgets. Greater relevance to the British Columbia situation was seen as a need in certain courses, while several sets of assigned readings were felt to be lacking in variety or even to constitute "busy work". It is interesting that one course in particular was cited as



simultaneously meriting both a more specific focus and a more extensive treatment of the subject matter. Another was felt because of its subject matter to be too slight to merit a full semester's attention.

During the interviews it developed that all three subjects were still wrestling with feelings of ambivalence regarding the utility of the program. There were a number of attempts to reconcile what was seen as a dichotomy between the "academic" and the "practical". As put by one subject, it was a question of whether the program was designed to produce academics or practitioners - a question which appeared to remain largely unresolved in the minds of those interviewed.

They certainly stressed the practical. . . . It wasn't always case, however. Sometimes they got very theoretical and very far away in left field in a couple of the courses. I mean, some of us couldn't see that this had any bearing on reality at all. . . . I can certainly, I suppose, get all tied up in the ideal theoretical, but it doesn't last, you know. It becomes silly. And whenever it did become that, I felt like jumping up in class and saying, "Bullshit! You know, this is all bullshit!" (C2)

Early in one interview, (A), in an attempt to come to grips with this ambivalence, noted that the choice faced by the faculty members was whether to emphasize the maintenance or the leadership functions of the administrator's role. The general agreement was that leadership was in fact the emphasis chosen and hence the courses emphasized current philosophy of administration and a study of key educational issues and concerns. This approach was seen as effective by all three:

I would think that I went into that program with a fairly narrow point of view about what schools are for and what my job as a teacher was. And I think that as a result of that program I certainly broadened my whole outlook and awareness. . . . (B2)

However, despite the fact that this was seen as an appropriate emphasis, there were still reservations about some components which were felt to be too theoretical, and it was suggested that more reference should be made to maintenance functions. It is possible that, since all three subjects entered the program as teachers rather than as administrators, the practi-

calities of daily school supervision loomed unduly large. It was noted that the hope was that

it would give you, if you did get an administrative position, a sense of confidence over the mundane. (A2)

It had been reported in an earlier interview, however, that practising administrators in the cohort had discounted the value of time spent on the review of maintenance functions, suggesting instead that these were better learnt on the job. This position was also taken by (B), who remarked:

I really didn't want someone to come in and show me how to make out forms or whatever. I wasn't looking for that kind of thing, so I think the theory part of it was fine so long as it had some practical leaning, something you felt you could apply if you felt the theory was good theory. (B2)

The difficulty appears to have been to determine where exactly to draw the line. In general, however, and whatever their reservations regarding individual courses, sets of readings, written assignments, etc., the three subjects appeared to share the view that through the program they achieved a satisfactory approximation of their objectives.

I hoped that through the Simon Fraser program I'd get some practical experience, experience that I'd be able to use if I got into administration. And I felt that I achieved those goals, and that the program certainly did to a good extent achieve those goals for me. (B2)

In summary, then, the subjects expressed satisfaction with the program. In particular, they valued the free summers, the short, intensive design of the program, and the opportunity to interact with fellow practitioners. Some criticism focused on time constraints, there was some difference of opinion as to the stimulation provided by the program, and in particular the value of the research projects was questioned. There was no absolute consensus regarding either the utility of the subject matter or the emphasis employed in presenting it (i.e. "theoretical" vs. "practical"), but the overall position was that the program had satisfactorily met the subjects' needs.

### Specific Stressors

Questions regarding the demands posed by the Administrative Leadership Program stimulated an interesting and varied set of responses. There was general agreement that the demands were there -

It was an awful lot of work and an intensified period of time (B1),

but there was also agreement that the demands lay in the volume of the work rather than in cognitive imperatives:

it wasn't intellectually challenging, but was enormously hard work (A1),

I really don't think that Simon Fraser program is so difficult from an academic point of view that a person who's got some motivation and wants to do it can't do it (B2),

when one once sat down and started to read and think, it wasn't difficult. (C2)

Whether or not the subjects were typical members of the cohort regarding this point is naturally open to question. When they were asked to comment on this, their replies ranged from an apparent ignorance regarding feelings of others in the cohort to statements that considerable difficulty had been experienced by several students:

You know, I can think of a couple of guys where it just became a real burden for them. They spent all their waking hours sort of doing it for two years, and that would be very, very difficult for them. (B2)

In addition, and despite their own disclaimers, a degree of intellectual challenge was seen as being present for at least some of the cohort:

for some of the people in the course I would expect that (the professor's) view of the world was fairly challenging. I mean, that's why the amount of irritation. . . . (A2)

An attempt was made to discover whether the subjects felt their readiness to embrace the challenges of the program was typical of the cohort as a whole. An unequivocal reaction was obtained from two, who saw themselves as quite atypical and who voiced real frustration that their level of commitment and achievement did not always seem to be expected and sometimes went

unacknowledged by the faculty:

- C. . . . it did annoy me in one course, because I was led to believe by the professor that certain things were necessary. And I did them, and did a tremendous amount of work on those, and I would say that there were only one or two other people in the class who did the same thing, and the rest didn't do it at all. And yet there didn't seem to be any particular demand made of those other people to do it. They didn't have to do it, apparently. . . . And I found that damned annoying in some ways. . . .
- Q. Was any recognition made of the difference?
- C. None. (C2)

A somewhat similar stance was adopted, presumably as a result of conversation in the home, by one spouse:

I think too, that in any of these programs there probably is a very large gap, which is to some extent frustrating, in terms of what individuals can get away with. (SA2)

The third subject, who with few exceptions seemed to be the most closely identified with the cohort, saw himself as nearer the group norms, spending more time on his studies than some, less than others.

Indeed, with regard to work, there were noticeable discrepancies in the subjects' views of the volume it assumed (in each case the recollection was confirmed by the spouse). One subject insisted that the program necessitated only minor adjustments in living patterns and that, for example, social and family activities were affected very little. For another the demands, although heavy, were not seen as unduly so, while for the third the program was felt to have consumed virtually every free moment. This last, while exploring the question of time demands, expressed himself in these words:

I don't imagine that if one is taking Administrative Leadership and one was actively engaged in committee work, that he could take the course. So for example somebody on salary agreements or something like that who was meeting two or three or four nights a week on that sort of thing, and having to run about the countryside, . . . there's no way you could take that course. (C2)

No doubt individual differences, varied situational factors, and the individual's choice of coping strategies had much to do with these divergent per-

ceptions of the work load. These factors are developed at some length later in this chapter and in Chapter 4.

The subjects were also questioned as to whether the demands of the program were recollected as being noticeably high or low at specific times in the two years. Periods of low stress did not appear to loom large in their recollections, although there was agreement that the second year, particularly the Fall semester, was somewhat less stressful than the norm. There was speculation that this was because they had by this stage developed more confidence in their capacities to meet the program's demands.

Certainly you felt much stronger as a group your second year in the program than you did in the first year. Basically because you were in your second year, you'd been successful in your courses in the first year, you probably weren't as concerned about marks (at least the pass/fail aspect of it) as you were in the first year, and you just felt you had a stronger base at that time. (B1)

The matter of passing or failing came up several times in the interviews. Although fear of failure was seen as a debilitating factor for certain other members of the cohort, none of the subjects noted a continuing, major, personal concern on the point. As one put it:

I believe that when a person is accepted into a graduate program, they've been accepted because they can be successful. It shouldn't really be a concern about whether you're going to pass or fail. There may be degrees or levels of how well you do in the program, but I think that basically everyone should be getting through the program if they're doing the work at a graduate level. (B2)

If the possibility of failure did in fact present the subjects with any major worries, it was apparently only during the initial weeks of the first semester, which was agreed to be a time of high stress. Although in retrospect much of this initial fear appeared to have been rationalized away as a hold-over from undergraduate days, one subject, at the prompting of his spouse, recollected an illustrative incident with some clarity:

Right away in the first semester he (the professor) made the statement . . . in the first lecture we had, he made the statement that he was going to raise all our anxiety levels - which

he promptly did. He said he was going to tap anyone on the shoulder who didn't have what he thought was the ability to maintain himself in that program. . . . So I was worried I was going to be tapped immediately. (Laughs) So was everybody else. (C2)

In the event, only one course was mentioned - and it was mentioned by all three - as causing general concern regarding the possibility of failure. The anxiety seemed to spring from the conjunction of three ingredients: a high volume of fairly difficult written assignments; minute analysis of these by the professor; and a "really judgmental" professorial stance. While these ingredients may have appeared elsewhere in the program, this course was apparently unique in incorporating all three. The subjects themselves expressed some ambivalence about the course, although none admitted to concern regarding passing it. Assuming their recollections to be reliable, it is possible that, since the course occurred during the second year of the program, they by then felt sufficiently secure in their own competence to be able to handle a level of anxiety which they perceived as assuming dysfunctional proportions for others.

There was an interesting difference of opinion on the matter of the two research projects. While one subject agreed that they were hard work, the measure of frustration and strain experienced appeared to be relatively slight. His case is discussed separately below. For the other two, however, the projects, and most particularly the first, were recollected as being moderately to highly stressful and in all likelihood the most punishing single element in the whole program.

You worked like a dog. During that time you shouldn't be spoken to. I was very, you know, emotional, because you were up until one or two o'clock in the morning trying to finish, to get done, and re-writing and all that kind of stuff. (A1)

One major difficulty was that the project deadlines conflicted with due dates for important assignments in the regular spring semester course. This might in itself have been manageable had this not also been a parti-

cularly busy time in the schools, and had most students by this juncture not lost, through fatigue, the resilience necessary to cope with the conflicting demands.

Although the two subjects agreed to a considerable measure on the above points, there were marked differences on others. For one, the educational returns from the research projects were not sufficient to justify the labour. This had obviously been discussed at some length in the family, since his wife made the same point, and, citing her own post-graduate work, questioned the quality of investigation upon which the reports were written.

My assessment of the project was that the professors were looking for innovative ideas to feed back into the system . . . and they were not necessarily scholarly and academic works. And they did not follow the rigid research rules that I was struggling under. So I said to (c), "They've got all the trappings of theses and they're not theses at all." And therefore I did not think it was reasonable to dress them up as theses and not demand the scholarly research. (SC2)

In addition to the aura of futility which here attended the projects, the exercise was also seen as highly stressful because of the succession of project deadlines crowding in on him. In both interviews, however, he commented that the burden would have been much harder to handle had it not been for the supervising faculty member:

it would have upset my applecart if I hadn't got (faculty) as my faculty advisor for the (projects), because he was very rigorous and very demanding in what he expected by a certain date. And you got it in because (faculty) was (faculty). (C2)

For the other subject who found projects a major hurdle it was precisely the lack of this sense of close supervision that was perceived as the root of the problem. Here deadlines did not seem to have been set nor expectations clarified. As the spouse put it:

there was a bunch of stress being placed on her to do something, and yet vaguely. What are you supposed to do? - "This isn't right, but by next Thursday I want you to have the right thing ready." (SA2)

In the subject's view, the supervisor's lack of precision meant that to the difficulty of grappling after an ill-defined model was added the trauma of falling behind project deadlines which were being successfully met by all other members of the cohort. In recollection it was a time of

re-writing, sitting up at the hill in the library in a cubicle with these things all around me, and trying to explain to (spouse) that I would have to fix it! I was very emotional for several days. Very. (A1)

Although it was possible to collaborate with other cohort members on the research projects, both of these subjects worked alone on theirs. For (A) in particular the sense of isolation was clearly very strong and, when exacerbated by uncertainty deriving from the imprecision of the advisor's instructions, it was recollected as becoming virtually overwhelming.

I was really unhappy. . . . Because I didn't have any concept of the scale we were working at. I didn't know anybody who had a master's and I was the only woman in the course, which maybe made me a little sensitive or something. I guess there was nobody in whom I could confide, except for (spouse), and say what sort of problems I was having. I was the only student under (faculty). Everybody else was under (faculty). During class time we didn't talk about the paper. I didn't meet the guys outside of class, because I would be meeting (spouse) right after class, when they would go off for beer. (A1)

It is interesting to note that this subject remarked that, frustrating and agonizing though the experience was, in retrospect it now appeared worthwhile, since the lack of close supervision and the isolation from others had in the long run increased her sense of self-sufficiency and competence. Her research papers belonged to no others, and this was seen in hindsight as sufficient justification for the trauma. Indeed, when advised of the move to permit substitution of a course for one of the projects, she argued strongly that there should be no tampering with the two-project requirement, since this provided the program's major challenge:

the only real hurdle in the whole program . . . I mean, we've already agreed on the intellectual challenge being not enormously demanding. In solid, grinding work it's fairly demanding, but the things that made hurdles to leap, that really demanded strain on your part were those papers. (A1)



(B), the subject who differed from the above regarding the abrasive aspects of the research projects, agreed that they were extremely time consuming, and he, like (C), questioned the value of going through the exercise twice. There was close similarity to (C) also in that the direction and advice offered by the faculty supervisor was felt to have been of great assistance. As a result the oral defence was approached with confidence.

What (faculty) said about our projects was, 'When you get past me' (words to this effect) 'you won't have any trouble going into your orals because your projects will be accepted and you'll have very little change to make. (B2)

I felt very good when we sat down to discuss our (projects) in front of the committee. I felt really confident at that time. I think probably the reason for that was that we'd done a good job with our papers . . . and we felt really confident about that. (B1)

This subject differed markedly from the others, however, in that in his case working on the projects was recollected as a somewhat pleasant experience, far removed from the drudgery and/or trauma they remembered. This more positive view was evident in an exchange with his spouse:

- S. Oh, I think you enjoyed working on the projects. You and (student) really . . .
- B. Yeah. We kind of had fun with them.
- S. Sure they did. They used to laugh about how many hours they were spending on it, but it didn't seem to make any difference to them. It wasn't like they were up at the university the whole time because they were either at (student)'s house or at our house.
- B. I did my projects with another fellow. Good guy, too, and we get along well and it was kind of fun to have someone else. (B2)

It may be significant that, unlike the others, this subject was not working alone. He emphasized that the studies were complex, requiring a great deal of time and work, but the sense of strain and tension which underlay the comments made by (A) and (C) seemed to be missing for him. Possibly the sense of shared responsibilities was an important palliative.

The pressure of time was a fairly constant theme during the inter-

views. It was, for example, seen as a major difficulty in the preparation of the projects, which

were enormously hard. But again it was a matter of how much work you had to do inside the period of time. (A1)

However, day-to-day classwork and assignments, and in particular one course which demanded a short but thoughtful weekly paper, were also seen as posing major sanctions in this regard. In addition, the long, twice-weekly class sessions were in themselves strenuous when added to the normal demands of the school day.

It (the class) is very stressful because it occurs at the end of the working day, when you are tired as hell anyhow (if you've been doing your job at school, that is). And five hours at the end of the day is a long haul, and to do that twice a week, plus all the necessary preparations and assignments . . . adds up to six nights a week, (and) is very, very demanding in itself. (C1)

As might have been expected, in the subjects' recollection the experience of psychological stress was often caused by ambiguity regarding expectations and procedures. This has already been mentioned with respect to the research projects, but it also appeared as a factor in other aspects of the program. Although the three subjects saw themselves as suffering less from ambiguity-derived stress than did some of their colleagues, there was considerable agreement that uncertainty in the early months of the program was indeed distressful. Even on this point, however, a subject's posture could change from interview to interview (this again being one of the few examples of apparent inconsistency to be found in the transcripts):

I got hold of the expectations very quickly - after the first class in each of the two courses. You would have had to be stupid not to have got the message. (C1)

In the first few months I didn't know what was expected, and because the feedback didn't come immediately, I wasn't sure that what I was doing was necessarily appropriate. (C2)

The uncertainty might be attributed in part to the lack of formal testing noted by several subjects, and one of the spouses clearly felt that a more explicit process of evaluation would have markedly reduced the distress.

In amplification of a statement by her husband, she stated that what was needed was

less psychological pressure and more obvious . . . testing or evaluation, that kind of thing. Although I think that's basic to graduate studies anyhow, at least in Education. There's a lot more psychological pressure. (SC2)

The lack of evaluative feedback was only one aspect of the uncertainty, however. For one subject it was more fundamental, encompassing a lack of focus and direction in the program as a whole:

there was no particular expressed objectives for the program as I saw it, from the faculty. None of the courses that I had had any outlined objectives in the terms that I call objectives. (C2)

Even so, this did not apparently cause any anxiety to the subject in question, although it was clearly seen as an unfortunate omission. The other two subjects did not appear to feel that the objectives needed to be stated in any formal way.

As noted earlier, uncertainty about the possibility of failure was another area which was discussed. None of the subjects admitted that this caused discomfort other than in the first semester, but there were indications that during these early days there were occasions when severe apprehension occurred. Not all of it was faculty-induced stress of the kind mentioned earlier. Some derived from comparing one-self with others in the cohort:

I had terrible anxiety there for about half of the first class, thinking, "My God, I'm in here with a whole bunch of geniuses and I simply can't compete with this sort of thing! (C2)

(A discussion of the wider role assumed by such comparative and competitive sources of stress appears somewhat later in this section.)

A representative reply to a question regarding concerns about meeting program expectations was the following:

After half-way through that first year, or at the end of the first year, we had a pretty good idea. At least at that time I felt I could handle the program. The stresses of passing/

failing were not there for me, and it was than just a matter of doing the work, of being prepared to put the time and effort in. I was going to get through the course, and I was going to get my degree, which was what it was all about at that time.  
(B1)

While others might feel frustrated and uncertain about the standards required for passing, the subjects apparently did not. Faculty were, by and large, seen both as approachable and as satisfactorily clear in outlining expectations. About only one course was much discomfort voiced, and even in that case two subjects disassociated themselves in greater or lesser degree from the antagonism attributed to the cohort at large, an antagonism seen as resulting from a somewhat manipulative approach on the part of the professor. Nonetheless, all three subjects commented on one incident in this course. It had obviously occasioned high feeling at the time and of the three, the most accepting statement was:

there was this rage through the whole class about this. Now in a way I think he set us up, because he was trying to demonstrate to us . . . They didn't like the trickery of it . . . you know, this feeling of not being sincere in it. Personally, I thought it was a good demonstration. (A1)

As a result of this and other incidents there was felt to be an unusual measure of uncertainty about the course in question:

The big thing, I guess, was that . . . we never knew exactly where we stood, and I think there was a feeling of not complete trust, you know. B2)

Thus, although the subjects stated they did not see themselves as suffering particularly from anxiety, there was in this case for many of the students a distinct fear of failure and doubts as to how exactly to guard against it.

That was a course where people didn't know. There was pressure on from whether you were going to pass or fail. . . . You know, some of the fellows were quite up-tight: "Now, what happens if I don't get through this course?" And the way things were going there for a while, you know, many of the people probably wondered whether they were going to get through it. (B2)

It is interesting to note that the course took place during the second year

of the Administrative Leadership Program, when one might have expected confidence to have been at its highest for all in the cohort.

Although uncertainties regarding passing or failing had become minor after the early months, for all three of the subjects and for two in particular there remained confusion and concern as to what standards needed to be met for work to be judged superior:

well, they explain enough to say, "This is what you have to do to pass." But, I mean everyone is pretty confident they can pass. It's "What do you need to be thought of as a really, really good student here?" (A1)

There seemed to be concensus that there was very little offered in this regard. A process of osmosis, combined with minute attention to what seemed to provoke positive faculty response, was seen as the means by which some idea of what constituted superior work was gained.

The importance assigned to grades was an interesting topic. All three of the subjects, indeed the whole class, received B's in one of the two courses in the first semester. That this was a sore point and a profound disappointment was attested by the frequency with which the topic came up during the six interviews. Despite this, the two subjects who discussed marks most frequently and who were most trenchant in their comments on this universality of B's initially attributed their interest in superior levels of achievement to an abstract ideal of "superior" work: work which did not fall short of their appreciation of their own capabilities. As the topic was discussed, however, it was increasingly apparent that there was a need to have this superior standard duly recognized by the faculty in terms of the assignment of A grades. Nonetheless, to a considerable degree these subjects argued that there was little or no sense of competition with other members of the cohort. They were, in effect, "self-competitive".

The third subject rejected this view with respect to both himself and the other two subjects. He saw the cohort and all three subjects as

being consciously competitive with other students and very much aware of the marks awarded to others:

I think there's a fairly competitive group of fellows. I think that's true enough. (B2)

I can't buy people saying they weren't concerned about their marks. Because, although it wasn't flaunted in front of people, people were interested in the marks other people got. (B1)

It seems clear from even a cursory reading of the transcripts that there was in all three a need to excel. The motivations may have differed (this point receives extended discussion below), but the need to pursue a universally recognized standard of excellence seems to have provided some of the stress experienced by these subjects. That it was self-imposed stress did not appear to reduce its impact.

That was the only B I got, and that somehow or other, you know, was really annoying to me, as I know it was to (A). Because otherwise we would have had a straight four point. (C2)

Coupled with this striving for high achievement in G.P.A., there was some irritation that the standards the subjects imposed on themselves were not expected of all students in the cohort.

I'm sure that I would demand a hell of a lot more of the students, obviously, than was demanded of us. Even though some of us did it on our own, I would ensure, and I . . . I think I would make it bloody well a lot tougher in that respect. Anybody who didn't shape up would be out of the God-damned thing in a hell of a hurry. (C2)

This statement in itself seems to render doubtful the early assertions of pure 'self-motivation'.

To this point the stressors reviewed have been related to the program itself. There were, however, at least two other obvious possible sources of stress during the two years the subjects spent in the Administrative Leadership Program. As noted earlier, like other members of their cohort all three were full-time practising educators in the public school system and therefore one potential stressor was the school itself. Several questions probed the degree to which the full-time occupation contributed to

whatever difficulties might have been experienced.

In general the response was that there had been no conflict between university and school, other than periodic difficulties in fitting all the demands into the available time. One subject attributed the lack of serious difficulty largely to his long experience in the particular school and to his experience with the subject matter he was teaching. Even so, his feelings were not altogether unmixed.

I did feel fairly guilty about my administrative duties in the school. I really felt frequently that I wasn't doing justice to my work there. On the one hand I think the course helped me, because I introduced things into our own school system, as a result of that course, which I thought were worthwhile. On the other hand there were a lot of picayune kinds of things I wasn't doing that I think I should have been doing and I used to feel guilty about. (C2)

For another the impact of the program on his everyday job was seen as limited in nature, although,

let's face it, if you are taking a program such as this, it does take away some of the time you would normally like to be spending at the school or at your job. (B1)

For this subject there was no suggestion of uneasiness regarding the time borrowed from that normally devoted to school matters. He recognized, however, that his experiences were not typical of all.

I don't feel I let it affect my job. . . . I know some people who would really disagree, that they found it really affected all aspects of their life more than what it may have mine. (B1)

The remaining subject reported that throughout the two years she maintained a very heavy schedule of outside activities, most of them directly related to her school commitments.

I did the school newspaper, I did the bridge club, I did the public-speaking competition for the district one year, and just for the school the other year, the radio shows, the school newspaper article that went into the local newspaper every week, department head of three departments, those outside (teachers' association) positions that I held. (A2)

In her remarks there did not appear to be a feeling that the program's demands came into strong opposition with those of the school or the classroom,

although it is possible to read some ambivalence into her comments regarding one device she adopted in search of a solution.

I did hire a marker, though. . . . A marker . . . to mark one half of my papers. I still marked the other half, but there was so much. And it's the thing I like least doing, so you can see I kept all my clubs and abandoned my marking! . . . I didn't abandon it - I still marked! The only concession I made to the whole degree and I didn't mark all my papers. But, you see, I didn't cut down on the number of assignments to the kids. (A1)

Like (C), this subject felt that in fact the program introduced her to a number of ideas which she then implemented in the school. These, however, appear to have been largely administrative in nature and in terms of innovation in the classroom there is the impression that this was for her a somewhat static period:

instead of teaching something which requires enormous hours of preparation, I wouldn't initiate a new thing I'd never taught before. Because that means so many hours of preparing lessons.  
(A1)

Indeed she appeared to suggest that she had stretched herself as far as was comfortable when she noted that she had rejected two offers of promotion (one to an elementary vice-principalship and the other to a senior secondary teaching position), feeling that both would have required extensive preparation, since they would have involved teaching at new levels. However, since the postings were refused, there was in fact stability in her teaching assignments during the two years, and there did not seem to be any sense of discomfort other than possibly with reference to the marker.

The other obvious possible source of stress was the family itself, but once again this was not admitted to have been a cause of any real difficulty. All three subjects were married, but family size and composition varied somewhat, a fact which appeared to be of importance. In one case the couple had no children and were obviously both prepared to make considerable adjustments in order to meet the demands of the program. Another subject, despite the presence of a young child, reported no familial strain, with the



impact of the program not having had much effect, other than the restriction of social life.

I think that anyone that plans to go into that program has to be prepared to sacrifice some social life, and not only the person who's taking the classes, but husband or wife, if they are married, are going to have to be prepared to sacrifice as well. (B1)

In the third case, and it is possibly significant that in this family there were more and older children, there was some feeling that family life had suffered.

I'm not sure that I did handle it all, when it comes right down to it. I handled the university, I handled my job, and probably let my family go. (C2)

The situation was almost certainly exacerbated in that this was also one of the two couples where both husband and wife were concurrently engaged in gaining a higher degree:

my wife, who is highly academic, was doing her post-graduate degree at (Canadian university) during part of the time I was at S.F.U., With the demands of the family, this was a very tough time. We both understood the other's situation, but even so it was very difficult. (C1)

The other couple in this double-degree situation were childless and, as already noted (see (A) above), had therefore a greater range of options to call upon when facing their difficulties. Certainly all three subjects saw the possession of a young family as a potential source of difficulty for anyone engaged in the program.

In discussing the specific stressors, then, the subjects entered an area which generated more provocative data. They felt in general that the challenge posed by the program lay in the sheer volume of work rather than in the quality of the intellectual demand, although their positions differed somewhat on both scores. There were few times when psychological pressure was felt to be low, but all agreed that the first few months of the program were difficult, while two recollected that the research projects were very stressful. Discussion of the projects with one subject emphasized the

idea that uncertainty was a seriously dysfunctional force, a concept that was given wider applicability as other program components were examined. Although fear of failure did not apparently cause difficulty, the desire to achieve a high standard was a particular concern. This desire seemed to gain its force from both a wish to meet self-imposed standards and a desire to receive appropriate recognition from the faculty. In general there did not appear to be a clash between the subjects' tri-partite responsibilities to the program, and to their schools and to their families. However, one subject intimated that he had perhaps been overly parsimonious in the attention given to his family during the two years.

### Stress

The above review of the specific stressors reported in the interviews leads one, then, to a consideration of the evidence for the resultant stress. It was anticipated that there might be a certain recalcitrance when the investigation touched on what obviously might be somewhat painful memories, and indeed, the topic of stress was not as productive as had been expected. However, on occasion the subjects responded with a degree of openness, and there were several useful responses to the questions.

Here once more there were wide discrepancies as the subjects re-examined the degree and nature of the stress they had experienced. Although none claimed to have escaped stress completely, for one the degree of stress seemed quite acceptable and not worthy of extended comment.

You know, I felt my stresses, but I felt stresses at other times more severely than what I did in the two years of that program.  
(B1)

He noted that minor symptoms of stress might indeed have appeared (short-temper with colleagues, family, etc., for example), but did not recollect behavioural or physiological evidence of undue stress, a perception which was confirmed by the spouse. However, the danger was recognized and seen

as something to accept and guard against.

I think that it's something that a person in a program like that has to be careful of. . . . I guess that if you're going to take part in a program like that you're going to have to be prepared to have some stress times, and to be able to handle them. (B1)

In contrast, another subject noted that on occasion the combination of fatigue, uncertainty, and frustration led to periods characterized by somewhat emotional behaviour.

Well, I guess I might as well be helpful. There were at least two nights of tears. . . . Yeah, at least two nights when we were up-tight enough so that they were very teary times. (A1)

Moreover, this subject touched on what, in Selye's terms, appeared to be a form of eustress, in this case profound intellectual stimulation. Interestingly, this appeared to be distrusted and was therefore treated with caution.

I get psyched up for (challenges), but I don't get overly. Like I don't get so psyched up that I can't function. Um. I don't like that feeling . . . that churning feeling in your stomach when you're doing . . . I don't like that. So a tiny bit of dread of maybe getting that feeling. (A2)

This was in marked contrast to the remaining subject, who seemed constrained by no such scruple. Seen by both of the other subjects as the intellectual leader and most successful member of the cohort, he appeared to have embraced the challenges and to have deliberately stimulated himself in an attempt to meet them in supremely successful ways. An illuminating series of excerpts from this subject's second interview will serve to state the position as seen by him and his wife.

I guess it's a kind of fear. . . . In order to succeed in a program like that I have to . . . get high and on the ball, as it were, like the great Christly organization man . . . it's a fear that if you don't maintain that kind of intellectual sort of high, if you ever let down, you're going to forget the whole thing and just not want to tolerate it at all. (C2)

It appears, however, that his assumption of this feverish level of existence was not confined to the demands of the program alone, and spread into his home life.

I know how this stress was manifested with him. He never stopped going. He would go wanting highs. The same highs he was getting at university he wanted at home. He couldn't face a casual evening. He wanted to be at that same pitch, and if he couldn't be at that pitch he'd create that around him. (SC2)

The couple saw this as having placed their marriage under very considerable strain, as well as being the cause of the subject's developing the ulcer which was diagnosed shortly after the end of the program. Indeed, he reported that even the conclusion of the program did not terminate the excitation, and that as a result he encountered some considerable distress.

I was on a head-trip all the time, and you know that in a year or so after that I got into some pretty bad mental states - totally as a result of that high I was in. I was getting screwed up mentally. (C2)

His wife estimated that it took two years from the end of the program for him to return to his normal, more comfortable modes and levels of functioning.

It was interesting that despite this frank discussion of the degree of stress he suffered, both he and his wife saw a high level of distress as being inherent in any post-graduate program of worth, and expressed that view separately at different interviews. Nonetheless, and based partly on her own experiences in post-graduate studies, the spouse saw the pressures faced by her husband, whether self-induced or otherwise as being unusual in degree.

Thus, it was plain that stress was a factor which all the subjects recollected facing, but on the evidence offered in the interviews the degree of stress seemed to have varied considerably. The ulcer suffered by (C) was the only stress-related physiological outcome mentioned; nonetheless there were recollections of behavioural symptoms which the subjects attributed to stress.

### Mediating Factors

It is clear from the foregoing that while there was some common ground with regard to stressors, the levels of stress recollected by the subjects appear to be decidedly idiosyncratic. The last two sections of this examination of the data are an attempt to bring together evidence regarding the reasons for this diversity of experience.

In an early interview, and in making personal appraisal of success in the program, one subject stated:

I think that everything has to go together for that program to work. I think that if a person were in a situation where, after putting in the hours at the university, you came home and the wife was bitching because you hadn't been home that evening, and you found you weren't getting help from the professors, and trouble at work, and all these kinds of things, I think it would be too much for a person to handle. (B1)

In this statement he touched on three of the four external agents which the study originally suggested might play significant roles in assisting or hindering progress through the program: i.e. colleagues at work, the family, and the faculty. The fourth external agency envisaged by this study as having importance was the cohort. The remaining factor in the equation - the individual's personal attributes - is the topic of the final section of this chapter.

While the sense of precariousness described in the protocol immediately above was not put as clearly by the other subjects, there was some evidence to indicate that several agents were capable of playing roles of the importance hypothesized. Of the four, colleagues at work appeared to be of marginal importance and was mentioned infrequently. However, (B), who it will be recollected enjoyed the projects the most, did remark that the staffs of the schools in which his basic research was performed were extremely supportive. Another subject commented on the patient way in which his teaching colleagues must have made allowances for certain behaviours he saw as arising from his experiences in the program:

my close associates in my department and in associated departments were extremely compassionate and tolerant with me when I must have been very intolerant - because I would come down with these highs and talk and jazz them up about things and provoke them into arguments just so I could respond. They must have got sick and tired (inaudible) and wished I'd drop dead. (C2)

With the exception of these two instances, no subject assigned teaching colleagues a role of importance.

A quite different perception was evidenced, however, when the discussion turned to support within the family. Apart from two references to the understanding and concern of the extended family (parents, in-laws, etc.), comments here all referred to the sustaining role played by spouses. In all three instances this was stated to be an extremely important if not crucial factor in determining the measure of success attained by the subjects, although the roles assumed by the spouses all differed somewhat. Thus, in (C)'s case his wife's contribution was noted as lying chiefly in doing a good deal of typing, proof-reading, and critical analysis of the subject's papers.

She did read everything and gave me positive feedback, I suppose. When they were well written she said they were well written. And if they weren't well written in her estimation, then I'd be mad, and try to convince her that they bloody-well were well written, and at the same time think madly of ways I could change them. (Laughter) (C2)

He saw his wife as a highly gifted writer who performed signal service in enabling him to tighten up his own writing. (One should note that he was seen as the most polished writer in the cohort by the other two subjects.) In this case, the spouse also reported that she read all the assigned readings so that she and her husband could discuss them at length together, prior to class discussion. Significantly, her husband placed a high premium on his oral contributions in class.

A quite different emphasis emerged from comments made by (B). Here, although his wife apparently provided some of the assistance noted above, her most important support was in terms of morale. This couple represented

itself as being very close, and the wife clearly saw her role largely in the light of providing a quiet and stable home climate which would allow (B) to maximize his success in the program. In the interviews (B) frequently referred to himself and his wife as a team which had made a joint commitment to the program.

I didn't have any pressures from home as far as putting in all this time and not spending it with the family - which I think would be a pressure for someone if there wasn't a good understanding at home. I think that could be a real problem, because many Saturdays and many Sundays and many nights were spent in study rather than in taking your family out. But that was a sacrifice I was prepared to make and my wife was prepared to make, so it worked out fine from that point of view. (B1)

In his view, the fact that his wife had already become used to his heavy extra-curricular commitment to the schools in which he had taught was important in easing her adjustment to his preoccupation with the program. The acceptance of the loss of outside social life and the assumption of an undue share of the parenting were not the only contributions she made, however.

You know, my wife's a sounding board for me. When I've something on my mind, I sit down and talk to her and make my bitches and complaints to her, and she listens and offers a few words of encouragement, and that's fine, you know. You have to have that. I don't think there's any question of that. (B1)

In the light of the combined demands of school and university, (B) saw the stability of the home as crucial.

Let's face it. Most of the people in that program have got some sort of pressure on the job that they're already doing, and they've got added pressures, considerably added pressure, as a result of being on the program. So you're going to have to have things fairly well established and stable at home. (B2)

For (A) the concept of teaming was also important, but here, apparently, the spouse contributed both moral and tangible supports. Thus, he was represented as acting as a sounding board and emotional stay when the demands seemed unusually daunting, but during the course of the two interviews, many services of a concrete nature were also mentioned. At times

these concrete services assisted in meeting school-related demands:

if I needed something written, then (spouse) could write me a draft of it - letters and things like that - and then I would just re-write little sections I wanted changed, and that would be it. Which is really nice when you're swamped in work. (A2)

The spouse was also reported to have been co-opted on a considerable number of occasions to mark pupils' work and to assist in running the large number of extra-curricular school activities with which (A) remained associated during the two years.

As in the other two cases this spouse proof-read and commented on written work to be submitted to the university. Assistance went further than this, however, and on occasion he participated in the early preparatory work on papers and projects.

He would help me with my research. Like we'd go up there and I'd look up lists of articles and he would go hunt them up, bring all the books down, and then I'd say the criteria I was looking for and he would read through articles and make me notes of what I should be looking at, and junk like that. Which was really nice. (A2)

Of particular importance here was the fact that his flexible working conditions allowed him to take time from his normal working hours to assist in the above ways when the subject was under particularly severe time constraints.

Although (A) assigned particular importance to the help she received from her husband, he discounted it to some degree and emphasized that the help was returned in kind when he was feeling the pressures of his own, concurrent, post-graduate studies.

I think I was very helpful, but I don't think I was really necessary. It would have got done if I wasn't there. It might have made it a little easier, under certain circumstances, to meet deadlines, because we're talking about the help I gave her. Well, that help was returned when I started to do things. She'd do joe-job research for me too, so I think that she'd have made it. She'd have got through without my help. (SA2)

Indeed, it is likely that the fact that this couple, unencumbered as they were by children, were simultaneously engaged in post-graduate studies was



of significance. From what (A) had to say, there evidently was both a sense of shared purpose (somewhat akin to that mentioned by (B)) and a mutual understanding of the nature and strains of post-graduate study:

A. We were both doing it together. That made a big difference.

Q. And he understands.

A. Yes. He was having the same problems. (A1)

The third agent investigated for its mediating qualities was the faculty itself. Some reference has already been made to the role of the supervisors of the research projects. As noted, for two of the subjects the explicit expectations held by the supervisor were seen as being of great assistance. Moreover, in each of these cases there was little hesitation in seeking assistance when difficulties arose.

If we were having trouble we would go over to (faculty)'s house. He'd sit down and help us with it and did a very good job for us there. (B1)

As already remarked, however, for (A) the relationship with the senior supervisor was recollected somewhat differently, and her uncertainty about expectations and deadlines was represented as having been highly stressful.

In each of the initial interviews, however, there was an attempt to probe the extent to which faculty members were seen as contributing to the success enjoyed by the subjects within the wider context of the program as a whole. One remarked,

I would certainly think that in all cases they were very conscientious, and certainly tried to be supportive, and I should think in most cases were. Some were more interesting than others and I would think that as far as putting on a class at a graduate level, some were more competent than others. (B1)

Earlier in the same interview he had alluded several times to the ease with which he could approach faculty members for advice.

I really found the profs. to be very approachable and certainly very willing to give whatever help they could. (B1)

A similar but even more positive comment came from (C), who described the faculty as:

Very capable people and highly prepared for the most part. Certainly knowledgeable in their fields. Particularly enthusiastic about the courses, at that time, and very humanitarian. I think this is very important. I didn't see too many evidences in the faculty as I knew it of the kind of academic wilting flowers I've seen elsewhere in other faculties in other universities. (C1)

Significantly, (C), when evaluating the factors which contributed to his success in the program, ranked the faculty as first in importance (a ranking he confirmed when asked the same question at the second interview several months later.)

A different stance was taken by (A), who, while in general echoing the above evaluations of the faculty, seemed to have felt some psychological distance vis-a-vis the instructors:

They were all pretty cool emotionally, actually, when you think back on it. (A1)

Her recollections were of interest in that she, when facing difficulties in the program, did not consider consulting the faculty members (neither did she contemplate approaching others in the cohort for advice). Terms such as "humanitarian" and "supportive" were not applied to the faculty at large by (A): her analysis was phrased largely in terms of course organization, competence, expectations of students, and intellectual rigor, with the faculty members being categorized over a wide spectrum.

Looking at the program as a whole, the subjects agreed that in the same way that close supervision and the provision of clear deadlines and expectations were capable of mitigating the pressures of the projects, so they were able to ease many of the strains arising in the courses. In this case, however, there was agreement that the assistance was generally present.

I think that basically the professors outlined pretty clearly what we would be doing in the course, what our reading requirements were going to be, and the effort we were going to have to put forth in order to meet the requirements of the course. I think that if they do that, then you know where you stand and it's up to you. (B1)

Nonetheless, the provision of clear deadlines was not in itself enough to ensure comfort. This was made clear in the discussion of one course which was felt to have caused a great deal of distress throughout the cohort. Here the deadlines, while clear, were tied to what was perceived as somewhat unrealistic temporal expectations.

I think probably the major problem was (the professor) was putting deadlines on you, that it had to be in at such and such a time, and the scope of the assignments were fairly extensive. And maybe that was getting into the whole workload kind of thing. (B2)

The final agent which was thought likely to have played a mediatory role in the subjects' encounter with the program was the cohort itself. It was conjectured that colleagues in the program were in a position to affect an individual's experiences in three major ways: by offering comfort and assistance, by acting as an important referent group, and by acting as a lobby to pressure faculty members regarding course expectations or emphases.

That there was some evidence for the cohort attempting to act in the latter manner is attested by one subject's recollection of a series of incidents where he was placed in the uncomfortable position of being expected to approach a faculty member as spokesman for a sub-group in the cohort.

They knew that I knew (faculty) and so I became a go-between. I didn't particularly enjoy that, being found in that position. (C2)

Reference was also made to the cohort attempting to affect course direction and emphasis. These interventions were not, however, seen as particularly effective:

there was no sense of our control of direction in any of the courses, come to think of it. (A1)

There was no time when we changed a course outline. (A1)

- Q. . . . was there an opportunity in that course or other courses for you to advise the professors when you felt that there was this slippage? And what sort of reaction did you get?
- B. In fairness to this fellow, there certainly was that opportunity, but the course didn't change very much. (B1)

On the other hand, attempts to ameliorate demands were believed to be more commonly successful, even when not altogether justified. They were seen as minor in scope, however, usually relating to the adjustment of deadlines or the alteration of the parameters of an assignment.

There was certainly a grouching among the people about assignments and things, particularly when you were doing two courses. . . . But I usually felt that it was smart of them to do that, if they could get away with it. They were mainly complaining to reduce the number of requirements, and not that they couldn't actually meet the requirements. But if they complained loud enough, then the requirements were almost always reduced, and therefore why not complain? (A2)

Although, as noted above, the subjects did not see the cohort as playing a significant role in the alteration of basic emphases in course content, there did appear to be some success in minor covert interventions:

I would think that in the second year of the program, especially, . . . people became a little more confident, and the class was getting a little more adept at leading some classes in the direction they felt were more appropriate. (B1)

He also referred to an instance in the second year where the cohort mediated between individual students and a professor:

I remember the first (course) we had up there with (faculty). We'd turned a paper in the time before - we were supposed to do it in pairs. So the fellow I did mine with and I received our papers back and we were just looking them over and we were still fairly nervous with the program. We were speaking very quietly, but (faculty) kind of blasted us and then really kind of chewed us out because we didn't have enough time for people who were just going to be talking when he was talking, or something like this. It was a beauty, you see. What was really interesting was . . . I guess it was over a year later. Yes, it was in the fourth semester we had (faculty) for the course. He did that again, not myself and the other fellow, but to someone else. It was really interesting how that group had changed and how they sort of came at (faculty). You know, "Settle down there, (faculty)," and this kind of shot him right down. He couldn't really believe it at the time. This group of people were not about to take the kind of business, you know. (Laughs) (B2)

This anecdote (which he had also related in the first interview) appears to provide confirmation of the growth of a sense of confidence and solidarity within the group. On the evidence of this same subject, it appeared that the incident was not an isolated one:

I have seen it when certain individuals were being hit a little hard - (student), I guess, for one at one time - where people sort of said to (faculty), "Slow down a little bit. It's not fair the criticism that you're giving." And also took some time to decide what, with certain people like (student) . . . try to keep them on track as far as the courses were concerned. Keep his mental state . . . (B2)

This sense of corporate concern seems to have played an important role in the cohort, and was on occasion extended to the provision of counsel and concrete assistance in meeting program requirements.

We were all finding the same kinds of demands and we were able to help one another out and give each other encouragement and even specific advice in certain instances. (C2)

The morale-building aspects of cohort support also received mention:

We got along very well together. We had a very fraternal kind of feeling. . . . And that again is an inspiration to continue and be highly involved, because you stimulate each other and you bolster each other, and you empathize and sympathize with each other. It was a good group. (C1)

For the two subjects who have been quoted thus far on this topic, the cohort seems to have played an important role ((C), for example, ranked it as second in importance in determining his success in the program). In the case of (A), however, while the cohesion was seen as existing and serving as a useful support to most members, these benefits were not felt.

- Q. Were there any times, though, when the cohort was useful to you? Can you think of any instances?  
 A. Not a single one. I can't think of any time when I really turned to somebody and got help for anything. Actually, I never even thought to ask. (A2)

In (A)'s eyes, the main benefit derived from the group was that all members were practising educators, who were able to keep discussion on a suitably practical level, although in her case the stimulation the others felt they derived from in- and out-of-class discussion seems to have been largely missing. Indeed, to a considerable extent she saw herself as outside the mainstream of the cohort's life and more isolated from her colleagues than were the other two. That there might have been an element of personal choice in this is indicated by several of her comments which indicated that

she preferred to be viewed as an independent worker, un beholden to anyone else in faculty or cohort.

On the other hand, the comments of the spouse of one of the other subjects may be of relevance here, since she saw the cohort as markedly narcissistic in its preoccupation with itself. In referring to the several social affairs organized during the two years, she said,

I felt very much an outsider at any occasion when I was present, to the extent that I felt totally excluded. And I had the feeling that other spouses felt the same way. Now, that is a very honest comment, and it may be just the kind of person I am. But I felt that they were so close to one another that they always spoke together. They hardly spoke to anyone else. (SC2)

Certainly her husband had earlier expressed, though somewhat jocularly, some sense of the exclusiveness he felt clung to this group.

We sort of felt we were, you know, the elite little group, and we were extremely fond of our own company. We spent a lot of time together as a group. We really did appreciate the fact that we were so great together. (Laughs) There weren't really any pineapples and jerks in our group, and yet we felt there were some jerks in the master-teacher group that we had to share a couple of classes with, and were over-joyed they weren't in our group. (C2)

It is difficult to escape the impression that this essentially masculine group had developed into something like an exclusive club, where others, even the one woman who was nominally a part of it, might well at times have felt relegated to the periphery.

Thus, while the subjects' experiences clearly varied considerably vis-a-vis the cohort, it was recognized by all as an actual or potential factor in ameliorating the stresses placed on individuals in the program. The sense of corporate identity was felt to have developed early and to have assumed particular significance for most cohort members during the last three semesters. As noted, however, in terms of the individual subject's experience, its importance appeared to vary markedly.

In this section, then, the subjects' appraisal of the importance of a number of support factors has been discussed, and from the evidence it

seems likely that support from at least one of these agencies was a vital component of their success. The only source of aid hypothesized as important, but in fact to be discounted by the subjects, was colleagues at work. In all three cases, the influence of spouses was seen as highly significant, with their contributions appearing to be of two kinds: concrete aid (typing, proof-reading, etc.) and moral support (sympathetic listening, maintaining an appropriate home climate, etc.) Faculty were seen as being generally supportive and, by two of the three subjects, as being easily approached. The same two subjects also perceived the cohort as providing an important positive influence on their experience of the program. The growth of a powerful group cohesion and the cohort's increasing readiness to intervene on behalf of its members was noted. For the one subject who felt some exclusion from the cohort and a degree of emotional distance from the faculty, the supportive role played by the spouse assumed very great importance.

### Personal Components

To this point the discussion has focused on success factors of a situational nature. There remain those which were personal or idiosyncratic. Examination of the data contained in the six interviews indicated that these aspects of success fell under four general rubrics: individual reactions to stress; individual attitudes towards program demands; strategies for meeting demands; and, finally, those personal attributes which the subjects considered to have contributed to their high success level. It is recognized that these four themes overlap each other to some degree; nonetheless, they seem useful rough generalizations.

It appeared from the discussions that all three subjects had spent some time in considering their attitudes towards the stressors, both program-related and external. For all of them the device of sharing the stress with

others - usually spouses or members of the cohort - was a powerful ameliorative. (A) reported particular reliance on this as a basic cathartic device.

I fret, I verbally fret. Most of my concerns about it will come out verbally and I don't keep them inside, bottling them up. (A2)

Q. When you talk about crises, how did you know it was a crisis?

S. She would mention it.

Q. She verbalizes.

S. Verbalizes . . . or explained to me why disaster was about to occur if I didn't do this or that. Seeming like constantly. (SA2)

In this case the anxiety was expressed primarily to the spouse, and it appeared to be stated strongly on occasion, since, in response to a question as to how the pressures were handled, the subject stated,

(by a) lot of screaming and yelling and hard work. Screaming and yelling - at (spouse), though, not at the prof. (A1)

In contrast, the other two subjects appeared to use both spouse and cohort as defusing devices, and their recollections did not appear to contain any hint of the overt emotionality noted above. Indeed, for them a different device may have played a significant role, in that both represented themselves as acting and reacting rather imperturbably and dispassionately:

They always thought that I was really cool, always controlled, always very pleased with what was taking place. That wasn't necessarily always true. . . . (C1)

Indeed, here the ability to maintain a measure of real equability was seen as crucial:

You know, I think you have to be pretty stable to get through a program like that - be in a pretty stable position to be able to handle it. (B2)

Clearly, this calm and tranquil demeanour may on occasion have been assumed rather than real, and if so it is interesting to speculate on what benefits may have been derived from it. It is possible that the chief good was seen in terms of self-respect, since even the subject who reported the most reliance on verbalization of anxiety commented on the need to draw the line somewhere, so that some options remained in terms of the salvage of face.



I think you always hold back a little bit. If something doesn't go well, then you don't want your ego laid out so far on the line that if anything goes wrong you're not going to be able to survive the experience. (A2)

The rationale for this cool and reasoned reaction to stress appeared to have drawn strength from two sources. On the one hand the subjects saw stress (and by this they meant Selye's distress) as the inevitable concomitant of any worthwhile learning situation. On the other there was the knowledge that the discomfort occasioned by stressors in the program had finite limits and would conclude with the not too distant end of the program. For two of the subjects in particular there appeared to be a talismanic quality to the reassurances they gave themselves in this regard. One remarked,

I always say around here, 'Well, it isn't really going to make a difference a year from now, because, you know, a year from now things work out.' Maybe the same way with (the program). You know, it will get over. You know you're not going to do this for all your life. And when you're slugging away at it you're a week closer or a day closer, or whatever it is, to the end. (B2)

The other appeared to rely upon an illustrative anecdote:

I kept this little story in mind. A guy goes to the psychiatrist. He feels inadequate, he feels unfulfilled. After numerous sessions at \$50 an hour they come to the conclusion that he hasn't been doing what he wants to do. So the psychiatrist said to him, "If you had your druthers, tell me, what would you do?" And he said, "If I had my druthers, I would be a civil engineer." The psychiatrist said to him, "Why don't you become one?" He said, "Listen, at my age? With my family obligations? I'd have to take correspondence courses and night school. My God!" he said, "I'm thirty-five now. I wouldn't be a civil engineer until I was forty-five years of age." The psychiatrist said to him, "Tell me. How old will you be in ten years if you don't?" So I kept that little fact in mind. Looking ahead two years at that kind of intense involvement with a course was rather disturbing unless one looked back two years. And two years looking back is no bloody time at all. . . . (C1)

From their comments it was also clear that the ability to compartmentalize their lives was of consequence to two of the subjects: for them it was important that the program and its demands could be put aside and ignored when necessary, if even only for a short time. For the third, (C), this device was apparently impossible, and it was perhaps significant that

it was he for whom the stress was apparently most damaging. This need for compartmentalization reflected something of the concensus noted earlier regarding the value of the free summers. It seemed likely that they were so valued by all three subjects because the hiatus provided a very real compartmentalization, a complete remission of the demands of the program.

It had originally been speculated that the subjects would have used a schedule of regular respites as a strategy for handling their feelings of stress. It was further conjectured that physical exercise might well prove to be a common device. This assumption was only partially sustained by the findings, however, since only (B) reported relying on regular physical activity as a means of mitigating the effects of the pressures. Nonetheless, for him it was a basic device.

Well, personally, what I would do, I'd get out and get some good activity going. I'd just leave it alone for a period of time, and I guess that's the way I try to handle stress. I get out and play some basketball with some fellows or do some running or do something. (B1)

(B)'s wife confirmed the importance with which he regarded this strategy.

Of the two other subjects, (A) stated there was no regularly scheduled attempt to mitigate the effects of stress, although both she and her husband felt that their full and varied round of activities was not significantly compromised by the demands of the program, and this diversity provided sufficient relief. (C) and his wife, however, during discussion in the second interview recollected that one evening a week was set aside as a scheduled time of relaxation:

- C. Maybe Friday night was the night I took off, the same as you did, Geoff. I can't recall now. . . . Yeah, Friday night we . . .
- S. Hamburgers. (Laughs)
- C. We used to have hamburgers. That's right.
- S. Watch t.v.
- C. The kids would be downstairs with their hamburgers and we'd be upstairs . . .
- S. With our hamburgers.
- C. . . . with our hamburgers and on to t.v. and we'd sort of relax and goof off. That was, I guess, our relaxation and

my relaxation from Simon Fraser. (C2)

For (C) this one evening of hamburgers and t.v. was apparently the only planned respite, and no physical regimen was used.

- C. (Physical activity)'s something, you see, that I didn't do. I should have done something like that, but . . .
- S. He kept up the intellectual end.
- C. I didn't get any physical outlet and that was bad. So I was on a headtrip all the time. . . .

It is instructive to examine the attitudes with which the subjects met the claims the program placed on their time and energy. All three articulated the feeling that all the challenges should be accepted, and that it was up to the students to meet them as best they could. Typical comments were:

You can't blame anyone else for the fact that the program isn't quite right as far as you're concerned. (C2)

I guess maybe I don't like complainers. I've seen it in Education where I think people unfortunately do too much complaining and not enough effort. . . . (B2)

Like, you know, it's your program. If I'm taking your program you've got a right to say what I'm supposed to do, and when I'm supposed to do it. (A1)

For (B) the fact that he had initially been refused entry to A.L.P. served as a major stimulus. Because of this rejection it became important to prove, both to himself and to those who finally admitted him, that he was fully capable of handling the program. The need to prove himself may also have served as an inducement for (C), who explained that, partly because of his undergraduate record (which he saw as somewhat lack-lustre), anything less than a high level of performance caused him to feel guilty. That the incentive may have been the rowel rather than the carrot was suggested by the following:

I don't enjoy perspiring. I'd rather not, but I feel so completely worthless and useless when I know I'm not doing the job. I don't like that feeling, and so I attempt to overcome it by goading myself into a fairly high degree of effort. (C2)

While for both of the above at least part of the motivation seemed

to be to make a point in terms of self-respect, (A) adopted a somewhat different position. When commenting on strategies used to meet escalating program demands, she made the following statement:

I tend to try harder. I always feel they can't break me. I'll get them in the end. They're not going to get me - I'll get them. Not vengeance - I mean I'll win. I'll make it. (A1)

This determination was apparently allied with and bolstered by a confidence that not only would the task be accomplished, but accomplished well.

You know, I haven't ever in my life been in any situation where I couldn't do what it was, and do it quite well, so that people would say, 'You've done a really marvellous job of that.' (A1)

(In the course of conversation with her husband at the second interview (A) noted that the only personal failure she could recollect had been in a course in scuba-diving - a failure which still rankled, according to her husband.) Although the other subjects did not admit to any marked lack of confidence either in the program or elsewhere, neither did they express the same sanguine expectations expressed by (A). However, when she expressed herself on the matter of assigning blame for difficulties encountered ("I tend to blame myself if something is not working right" (A1)), her position was very close to that enunciated by (C) in a later interview:

I never have been able, at least not for many years (I did when I was younger and more naive and silly), I've never been able to blame a teacher for the lack of stimulation in the course. I think that is particularly my own problem. If it's not stimulating then it's my fault, not his. Even though he is a complete jerk there is certainly something I can ask or do that will make it interesting. (C2)

This note was not sounded by (B).

During the second interview the subjects were advised that some students had complained of having to jump through what appeared to be capriciously placed hoops. Reactions to this statement were invited. In reply, all three commented that they felt there were isolated instances when this had occurred, but that such incidents were merely something to be accepted and adjusted to, since they were probably inevitable. (A) expanded on this

at some length, stating that the expectations were the professor's to set, and that her feelings as a student were not germane.

I guess hoop-jumping generally doesn't bother me that much. . . . I mean, you volunteered for this thing. I could be slightly masochistic, but if that's where they want to place their hoop, then they've got a right. They're offering the course. (A2)

That this was in fact her attitude was confirmed by the spouse, who commented,

I think she's perfectly willing to . . . - you say "jump". My question is, "How high?" You know, as long as that is a definitive part of the course. You know, she's perfectly willing to consider it's a pretty stupid request, but nevertheless, if it's part of the course, she'll . . . (SA2)

(A)'s apparent need to accept whatever was offered in the program was strikingly illustrated by an anecdote offered by (C):

I asked (A) one time, as a matter of fact, how many times she felt like jumping up and saying "Bullshit!" and she said, "Oh, no! I could never do that, never do that!" And I said, "Why not?" She said, "If I even thought that, I'd have to quit. I just couldn't keep on."

Thus, the husband seemed to suggest that even if critical of an aspect of the program (A) would be most unlikely to voice disapproval, and her fellow student reported that she appeared strongly impelled to deny, even to herself, that there was anything to criticize.

When the subjects were questioned regarding the policies they employed in order to meet the challenges of the program, three major themes emerged. These themes were common to all, and in reading the transcripts it is impossible not to be struck by the manner in which the subjects' remarks echo each other.

Predictably, a commitment to hard work was one ingredient, and from time to time this was seen as being necessarily of a particularly high level:

somehow with this course . . . with that thing, you see, you were getting all those assignments due next week. I did start them right away. We would go to the library and start right away on them. . . . They wouldn't be done till they were due, but I'd be working on them like crazy, right from the beginning. (A2)

Nonetheless, even the normal week's assignments seemed to demand many hours of time from these students:

- Q. Were you a three-day-a-week man? Or a six-day-a-week man?  
Or . . .
- C. No. I guess six days a week, wouldn't you say?
- S. Oh, yeah. It seemed more like seven - eight if possible.  
(C2)

It was clear from their comments, however, that even before entry all three had anticipated that the work level would be heavy and that they had adjusted themselves accordingly. Part of this adjustment lay in recognizing that normal patterns of life would have to be changed somewhat. This was accepted as normal and proper:

if it's important enough, then you have to sacrifice other things. And for me (the program) was important enough. (B2)

Readiness to develop an organized pattern of work proved to be the second major theme, and, given this, the accumulation of demands from inside and outside the program was not seen as particularly daunting:

it's the proverbial story of the man who you want to do a job for you. If you want someone to do a job, you find the busiest bugger you can. And the busiest bugger you can find is the guy who's going to do that job too. Because he has to be organized, and he's stimulated to be highly efficient in his use of time.  
(C1)

Spouses were also most explicit on the subject.

I'd say he was quite organized. I think that was highly important. (SB2)

She's much more organized than I am. You know, I have this checklist in my mind that I try to remember as I go through life. But she writes it all down and has it all memorized. (SA2)

The third theme, that of planning, was developed at some length by the subjects, each emphasizing somewhat different aspects. For (B) it primarily meant assigning priorities and budgeting time:

I think from my experience you had to sort of decide where you were going to put your effort - you know, which was the most important part - and go at it (B2),

some of the guys had more trouble than others maybe, because they didn't make as good use of their time as they could.

Some of us would spend five or six or seven hours on an assignment, and someone else could be spending fourteen or fifteen hours on the same assignment. (B2)

For (A) it extended to encompass much more than the organization of study patterns. For her, any and all temporal demands were seen as a package whose ingredients could be adjusted as circumstances merited.

I can do anything. If you want it done, I can do it. I'll just figure out another way to re-organize my life. (A1)

Of the three, this subject showed most readiness to discuss the insights underlying the techniques she employed in meeting the program requirements. That her principles altered as circumstances changed seemed clear from the two quotations immediately below:

I consider all the things that may go wrong and try to cover for them in advance . . . actually I tend to over-plan. I try to cover all the holes, rather than leaving some to be handled at last minute plug-ins. . . . (A2),

it wasn't organized in the sense like you sometimes mean organized, and saying, "Monday I'll do this and Tuesday I'll do that." It was more like crisis to crisis organizing. . . . So I plan backwards from the crisis point. Like if the thing has got to be there Friday, I say, "When do I start on this one?" . . . I'd make a list of all the things that had to be done and sort of do it on a critical path. Like, "What are the absolutely critical points at which I must have things done?" (A2)

(This subject saw the latter technique as one of the major learnings she had gained from the program.) In this case the spouse was often involved in much of the labour, and he described the process similarly, but with what appeared to be somewhat less detachment.

You know, (the goals) will all be achieved, but there will be these great and recurring crises, as we try to meet this one as we are still working forward to pick up the next one, which is due the day after tomorrow sort of thing. (SA2)

Scattered throughout the interviews are terms which the subjects felt to be keys to success in the program: e.g. "checklist", "systematic process", "organization", "priority", "schedule", "efficient", "structure", and "planning". For (C) the last term was apparently seen in large measure

as a rejection of procrastination, a proclivity to which he felt himself decidedly prone. This proved to be the third theme, since all subjects agreed that dilatoriness was completely dysfunctional within the Administrative Leadership Program.

I think I'd like to underscore the word planning, and I would like to indicate that to me that means meeting one's particular set of obligations and responsibilities immediately. There wasn't any time for procrastination at all. (C2)

(C) suggested that leisureliness was a luxury somewhat precluded by the unending stream of assignments, but it appeared that he personally went further than aiming for mere promptness, and as a result of starting upon assignments as soon as they were given he was on occasion able to hand in work early.

(B)'s position was similar to that taken by (C), but he emphasized that for him the commitment, while immediate, did not mean plunging headlong into the performance of the task.

I like to think it out, but once I've thought it out I like to get down and do it, and try to work at it until I get it done. (B2)

That this initial mulling over of the task was in fact the norm for this subject was confirmed by his wife:

He'll think about what he's going to do, and then get at it. (SB2)

This instantaneous commitment to the assignment was seen by (A) in terms of a desire for immediate completion:

I like to get it over with. I like to get the whole thing done once I've started. Like usually I'll try to persuade (spouse) to work to two o'clock in the morning or something like that in order to get it finished. Actually, I'll do that almost to a fault - you know, once I've started, wanting to get it off my hands. (A2)

Moreover, this predilection for speed was not confined to written assignments along:

I usually tried to do the readings almost as soon as we were given them. Like that evening or the next evening. . . . (A2)



(C), in describing his reaction to an unsatisfying undergraduate record (due, he felt to his being "completely undisciplined, lazy, completely unorganized, the biggest procrastinator" (C2)), made a statement that may perhaps serve as a summation of what all three said on the matter of their style of work:

when I went to do graduate work in (discipline) at another university, I decided to change all my particular habits - to study, to work hard, to do things when they had to be done, and to become organized. And I discovered that doing that I could make outstanding marks in everything I took. And doing that gave me a great feeling of satisfaction. . . . (C2)

While the foregoing discussion has reviewed useful evidence regarding some factors felt by the subjects to have been important not only for their successful completion of the program but for the degree of success they enjoyed, it is also instructive to examine their comments when questioned regarding what they perceived to be the specific personal attributes which allowed them to succeed so markedly. Thus, in both sets of interviews the researcher probed with some interest the question of whether the possession of a high order of innate intelligence was perceived as being an important factor. It was interesting that during the first interview series only (A) admitted to viewing this as a relevant factor, and did so only when led on the matter:

- A. It suddenly made me think that in emphasizing persistence . . .  
 (Pause)  
 Q. I'm going to lead you. I think you're trying to find some way of phrasing that you think you're a pretty competent person.  
 A. Yeah. (Laughs)  
 (A1)

During the second interview sequence (B) introduced the topic himself without prompting, although he was obviously not prepared to expand upon it, and qualified his remarks with the moderating adjective "reasonable":

I feel like I've got reasonable intelligence. I may not have always done as well in school as I would have liked to, but I still think that you have to have reasonable intelligence to handle that program. (B2)

That his high degree of success might be felt to be due to superior rather than "reasonable" intelligence was not admitted in the interview.

Their disinclination to introduce high intellectual ability as a component of their success suggested the possibility that the topic was charged with feelings of embarrassment and discomfort. This seems to be implicit in a statement by (C), responding to a direct question on the subject:

Well, that's a bugger of a question to answer, you know. . . . Well, I don't know, Geoff, I really don't know. I mean, to be absolutely honest, I don't know - because I think I'm bright. I really do. I think that I'm a bright person, but again I don't know why. To be really honest and frank, I don't know why. I think that I'm brighter than a hell of a lot of other people, and that may be strictly an absurd ego-centricity that isn't merited by the facts. (C2)

After speculating on the nature of intelligence he went on to note that it may be evidenced in many ways, only some of which were possessed by himself.

The possibility that a somewhat natural reticence on the matter was part of the obstacle to its arising more spontaneously was voiced more directly in another interview. At the same time a second possibility was raised - that a high level of academic competence was a quality shared by all students accepted into the program.

- A. We're not brought up to think you should say things like "You have to bright." . . .
- S. One of the reasons it might not be mentioned is because it's a given as far as admission is concerned - that a certain level of intelligence has been attained. And I think that working from a certain level of intelligence . . . you know, entrance is a high level of intelligence, and from there application is probably far more important. . . . Pure genius in that group is not necessarily going to make you any better than the lowest intellect who works like a dog.
- A. But the lowest intellect isn't going to be very low.
- S. No, that's what I mean. (A2)

As noted earlier (where it appeared as part of the discussion of stress), (C) reacted to this perception of the need for hard work by goading himself into an "intellectual sort of high". Although the other subjects

recognized that much hard work was needed, (C) was apparently alone in feeling that the commitment had to be complete, that there could be no holding back:

if one is engaged in that particular program the only way they could find it tolerable is to get absolutely involved with it.  
(C2)

The word "absolutely" seemed to be the operative term, and here the testimony of (C)'s wife seemed germane in that she seemed to describe an experience somewhat different in degree from that of the others.

I think during the two years he was on the program he was very, very turned on. There was no doubt about that. He was more enthusiastic and excited than he'd been for some years previous.  
(SC2)

Surprisingly, in the transcripts there is little reference to the need for specific skills. One subject merely noted the utility of speed reading while another felt that an ability to write well and a facility in analytic dialogue had proven useful. The third noted no special program-related skills, but throughout the interviews returned to what were obviously for him the major requisites: motivation and hard work. These themes were also emphasized by his wife.

I would say you really have to want the master's and really know that this was the course you wanted to take and be ready to do a lot of work for it. Because I think someone would have to be highly motivated before they could do it and carry it through.  
(SB2)

In his case, the impetus for this high level of motivation appears to have derived initially from the rejection of his first application for entrance to the program.

It was even more important for me to get into the program when I was initially rejected, and it probably became even more important for me to be successful in the program when I was initially rejected. (B1)

As a result he was "mentally ready" when he embarked on the program, accepting and enjoying the challenge. Another factor was (B)'s feeling that he should ensure that there was adequate recompense for the sacri-

fices he and his family were making.

You know, it was something that was going to take a good deal of my time, and if I was going to be putting forth that effort and sacrificing on my part and my family's part, then I had to make it worthwhile. (B1)

Another spur, apparently common to all three but most easily acknowledged by (B) was that of competition with others.

Well, I can remember very clearly, you know, applying for the program and a couple of other fellows that I knew applying at the same time, and them being accepted and me not being accepted, originally, and that really ticked me off, you know. Because I felt that I certainly had the same abilities as they may have, and I felt that I could be as successful in that program as they could. . . . So I was motivated when I went in I think. . . . You know, I was ready to be successful in that program. (B2)

(This receives extended examination below.) Also operative was the belief that, once committed to any task, one should not skimp on effort:

I like to think that if a job is worth doing, it's worth doing as well as you can (B2),

a motive which was expressed in somewhat similar terms by the other subjects, one of whom selected as the third most important factor in his success "my own particular enthusiasm for doing the job well" (C1), while the third put it thus:

A. You mean, why should I have tried to do superior work?

Q. Yes.

A. I try to do good work.

Q. Are you like this in everything?

A. Yes.

S. Inherent over-achiever.

A. Yes, inherent over-achiever. (Laughs) Quote from him, not me. (A2)

For (A) and (C) an interesting dichotomy appeared in comments about what prompted their desire to do particularly well in the program. On the other hand they saw themselves as somewhat insulated from what the other students were doing, depending heavily on a self-generated desire to reach some sort of abstract measure of excellence. This position is reflected in such statements as

I probably did more (work) than many, because I am very self-competitive. I was not particularly conscious of how others were doing. (C1)

You've got self-motivated people. . . . But I think that (the subjects) all know there is a lower level of acceptance possible. (SA2)

However, this stance was confused by what appeared to be a very real need to have their achievement recognized in a tangible way.

S. I think that she has a real need to achieve, and in order to do that she's perfectly willing to put forth great gobs of energy and time. And . . . I don't know how you describe it . . . a desire to get A's. I don't know, maybe that's a crass way of putting it, but I think it's . . .

Q. She aims for the highest levels.

S. Right.

A. I don't only want to get A's, though.

S. I said it was a crass way of putting it. (A2)

The need for recognition was explored at some length with (A), who examined her motives with some interest and at some length.

It's important to me personally to do well, in the sense that I try to figure out in what way to get an A. . . . (A2)

If you're not going to give me an A when I'm working damned hard, . . . then I'm going to be frustrated as heck, and angry and irritable, and try to figure out what in heck you want. (A2)

S. I think that you have a real need, you really work to go out and get an A. Whereas another person would go out to pass.

A. Yeah. And you think I do it in order to get the A?

S. Yes.

A. Not in order to do a good job?

S. I think they're interchangeable. If you do a good job you get an A.

A. But I wouldn't be satisfied with doing a good job that wasn't recognized by somebody else?

S. Right. You can put the same amount of effort in . . .

A. He's right. I want to do a good job, but I want the other person to recognize that it's a good job, because that'll bestow upon me an accolade: "You have done a good job."  
(A2)

Where the prime impulse lay was clearly a difficult question, and it was not resolved for this subject - Did it lie in the intrinsic satisfaction of producing work of outstanding merit, or did it lie in the tangible expression of the official accolade?

Much the same difficulty was encountered in attempting to unravel

the matter with (C) who noted in himself both the striving after some abstract standard of excellence and the strong desire for meritorious grades. Some of his ambivalence appears in the following quotation:

If you're a self-competitive person, as I am, and you want to do excellent work . . . I wanted to get an A; there wasn't anything I was going to settle for less than an A. . . . (C1)

When exploring the issue again at the second interview, he continued to have difficulty in separating the two incentives:

everybody likes a pat on the back - I like it just as well as the next person. And yet I know intrinsically when I've done a good job and when I haven't. And if I haven't done a good job and somebody says, "That was a great job", and so on, I feel like a sham. Conversely, when I've done what I think is a very good job and it's not appreciated, I'm annoyed. (C2)

It is possible that for (A) and (C) both stimuli were necessary and that although their statements tended to emphasize the role played by the "self-competitive" motive, recognition by others remained an important factor. (B) did not seem to be troubled by this ambivalence, and, while continuing to do his best, appeared prepared to rely on the judgment of the faculty regarding the excellence of his work.

It will be evident that the factors which here have been classed as of a personal nature were of a fair diversity, although some notable commonalities did appear with reference to attitudinal components and coping strategies. Thus the subjects tended to accept challenges without demur or hesitation and with a strong determination to achieve at levels which both they and the faculty could recognize as superior. In two cases, self-respect seemed to rest in marked degree on this joint recognition. The policies they adopted in reaching these superior levels of achievement were primarily hard work, organization, and an immediate commitment to the assigned task. Relief from the stresses of the program seemed to have been sought by one subject through ventilating the discomfort and by the other two possibly by refusing to acknowledge it. Stress-relief was also sought

through the use of physical activity, engagement in many non-program activities to provide a measure of variety, and compartmentalization of program-related activities so that they would not become all-encompassing. There was little reference to the value of specific academic skills, but there was general, although grudging, agreement that innate academic ability was probably of some importance. It appeared that being both highly motivated and a self-starter were two more easily acknowledged descriptors.

#### CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The previous chapter has presented in some detail the data considered to be of greatest significance. It will have been noted that the nature of the material has made it difficult to provide a summary possessing the cogency usually attained in statistical studies, where tables and formulae are able to afford an air of useful compression and coherence. As noted in an earlier chapter, a study such as this does not usually attempt to match the standards of comparability and systematic collection encountered in good quantitative investigations, nor does it always furnish sufficient proof for the skeptic, who is aware that data selection and emphasis lie in the hands of the researcher. Nonetheless, the alternative of presenting for the readers' perusal the entire body of data generated by such a study is clearly out of the question. Given this difficulty it is perhaps appropriate to re-emphasize that many of the conclusions which follow should be seen as tentative and of greatest use in suggesting productive lines for further investigation.

Nevertheless, throughout the study, and particularly in the discussion of the data which follows, an attempt has been made to identify and refine those generalizations which may serve to illuminate the nature of the experiences of highly successful students in Simon Fraser University's Administrative Leadership Program. While examining the data presented in Chapter 3, the reader will have noted that despite the apparent homogeneity of the sample there were many times when discrepancies in experience became evident. In this chapter there will be some attempt to suggest possible reconciliations of these differences and, where possible, to point beyond them to generalizations which may eventually prove to be useful, but which are offered very tentatively at this juncture. Whether this attempt has produced viable insights or whether it has merely generated



artifacts of the observer's techniques and prejudices, will, one hopes, be determined by later studies.

Before turning to discussion of the data, it would be useful to review briefly the basic thrust of this investigation. As noted earlier, it was designed (i) to examine the experiences of a small number of highly successful students in a somewhat atypical post-graduate program in educational administration, (ii) to attempt to identify the factors which contributed to their success, and (iii) to seek insights as to the stress encountered and the coping strategies and mediating agents mobilized to combat the stressors.

Of even greater moment, perhaps, is the matter of the working definition of stress employed in this study. As noted in Chapter 1, little consensus was discovered in the literature regarding the nature of stress. To review a few examples: Basowitz and associates<sup>74</sup> have seen it as a quality implicit in a situation and independent of the individual's reaction to it, Dunbar<sup>75</sup> saw it as an attribute of a stimulus, Alexander<sup>76</sup> and Wolff<sup>77</sup> as both a quality of the stimulus and of the individual's response, Selye<sup>78</sup>, Dohrenwend<sup>79</sup>, and Margolin<sup>80</sup> as that intervening state which is the individual's internal reaction to the stressor, and Mechanic<sup>81</sup> as the discomforting responses of persons in particular situations.

To ensure that some aspects of the discussion of this study's data assume a degree of precision which would otherwise be lacking, and for the purpose of the argument which follows, it would be appropriate to review the definition of stress offered in Chapter 1. It is here defined as: that condition resulting from encounters with stimuli (the stressors) which either place an undue physiological demand upon the organism or which, if psychological, are perceived as a threat to some aspect of the organism's integrity. This condition typically stimulates the organism to attempt mitigation or avoidance of the harm or threat through certain devices (the coping behaviours).

The distinctions between the stress agent, the reactive behaviour, and stress itself are thus clarified for purposes of this study. It will be noted that in some respects the definition parallels Selye's concept of distress<sup>81</sup> in that only those stimuli which are negative in their effect are here considered to be relevant.

### Discussion

It had originally been hoped that this study would be able to contrast the experiences of both highly successful and unsuccessful students. In terms of stress, the thinking had been that factors from home, job, and program would for the highly successful combine in an equation such as

$$f_h + f_j + f_p = s \text{ (optimum stress)}$$

where stress is conceived in Selye's nonspecific terms, and regarded as carrying neither negative nor positive connotations per se. On the assumption that selection procedures would have precluded the enrolment of those whose aptitude rendered them grossly unsuited for the academic challenges, it was conjectured that for the less successful students the equation would appear as

$$f_h + f_j + f_p > s \text{ (hyperstress)}$$

or possibly

$$f_h + f_j + f_p < s \text{ (hypostress)}$$

Although the pool of unsuccessful students was too small to permit the comparative study to be performed as originally visualized, the concepts contained in the above equations have remained useful. Thus, even when stress is redefined in specific terms, as in this study, it is simplistic to assume that the total absence of stress is the optimum condition. Indeed a degree of stress, even when perceived as threat, may result in heightened performance (see, for example, Hochbaum's appraisal<sup>83</sup>).

On the basis of the data collected from the subjects of this study,

it appears that the importance of home- and job-related stress factors can be discounted, since the subjects rejected both as sources of significant discomfort. This leaves the program as the prime source of stress. The evidence offered by the subjects and their spouses appears to indicate that, academically speaking, this program-related stress was positively correlated with achievement. Thus, all three subjects noted the presence of stress, but for (A) and (B) the evidence suggested that this never reached dysfunctional levels, either inside the program or outside it. For (C), however, there was some suggestion that the demands of the program did prove excessive, since his testimony and that of his wife referred to some marital tension and both a post-program ulcer and a state of being "screwed up mentally". On the other hand, it is interesting that on the basis of his performance (C), the subject who appeared to have experienced most stress, was perceived by both (A) and (B) as being the most successful member of the cohort.

Whether greater stress was experienced by the markedly less successful members of the cohort is not, of course, examined in this study. If, however, they did in fact experience greater stress, this would be consistent with the argument offered earlier - i.e. that the relationship between achievement and stress is curvi-linear, with lower levels of anxiety being positively related to performance, middle ranges bearing little relationship, and upper levels being negatively related.

Despite the original assumption, then, for the subjects of this study the serious stressors did not seem to derive from home or occupation, and thus stress appeared to be almost exclusively program-induced. Moreover, there was little to suggest that stress ever reached a level where it either exceeded the subjects' capacity to cope or exerted noticeably negative influences on their academic progress. Given the academic performance criteria upon which the example was selected, this was not surprising.

For one subject, however, there did appear to be negative, stress-induced outcomes in other areas than academic achievement.

It was emphasized in the presentation of the data in Chapter 3 that the demands faced by the subjects were two-fold in origin, as were the means available for their resolution: i.e. both demands and means had their roots variously in the subject himself and in circumstances and persons around him. Some of these relationships are represented in somewhat simplified form in the flow diagram, Figure 2 (see Appendix G).

The incidence of ambiguity as reported by the subjects has been cited in some detail in the previous chapter, and this factor appeared to constitute the major stressor. It surfaced most strikingly in (A)'s experiences with the first research project, but all subjects encountered it at various times in the program, most notably perhaps during the early months. It might have been expected that the sheer volume of work (acknowledged to be heavy) would also be perceived as an important stressor, but the strong reliance placed by the subjects on planning and organization and the sense of competence which they seemed to enjoy during much of the two years appeared to have reduced this threat markedly. Ignorance of standards and procedures was clearly seen as much more serious, and, for these students, as possibly the only major source of stress. That it was heightened for two subjects by particularly high, self-imposed expectations does not alter the argument.

George<sup>84</sup> has noted that, in contrast to the models of "pure" rationality formulated in statistical decision theory, it is often in practice difficult to anticipate the utility of a course of action. In his analysis of stress in political decision-making, he details the cognitive limits on rational choice, noting that the politician must often operate on the basis of incomplete and possibly erroneous information, that his knowledge of ends-means relationships is generally inadequate to permit confident

predictions regarding the consequences of a choice of action, and that it is difficult for him to formulate a simple scheme of criteria or values on which to select the best option.

George's analysis clearly has implications for fields other than politics, and some of the data collected in this study have indicated that his insights may well have relevance to the experiences of students in higher education. The subjects' recollected uncertainty and concern about the standards of work expected of them, their initial uneasiness about the required modus operandi, and their doubts about their abilities to meet the demands have all been noted. The discomfort experienced by (A) and (C) when wrestling with the possibility that they and the faculty might not agree regarding the superior quality of their work suggests the cogency of George's rationale, but the nature of the benefit conferred by good information was most vividly conveyed by the variance between the stress levels reported by (B) and (C), who received systematic instruction in the preparation of research projects, and (A), who apparently did not. Corroboration of George's position has been derived in fields other than politics. For example, the effectiveness of the reduction of stress through instruction has been noted in clinical studies in medicine - see, for example reports regarding the treatment of post-operative pain (Egbert<sup>85</sup>) and the psychological trauma of illness (Janis and Leventhal<sup>86</sup>).

The role played by the possession of good information has implications for the process by which the subjects dealt with their stressors. Selye, viewing the matter from a primarily physiological vantage, has described what he terms the general adaptive syndrome, which he defines as the manifestations of stress in the whole body, as they develop in time. His position is that the syndrome evolves through three distinct stages: alarm reaction, stage of resistance, and stage of exhaustion<sup>87</sup>. In extending the process to the current study, it might be argued that, as stress

appeared in the main to be successfully resolved by the subject, it progressed through only the two initial phases - i.e. alarm reaction and stage of resistance (where good information and mobilization of adequate resources provided satisfactory solutions).

Since considerable data were collected on the external factors and coping behaviours which served to mitigate stress for the subjects, it would be timely to review them at this point. Despite the specific examples of ambiguity cited earlier in this discussion, the subjects were agreed that by and large they received the information and direction they needed from the faculty, and, despite (A)'s experiences, it appears that in general the faculty made themselves available and were accepting of approaches by the students. In only one instance was there the suggestion that the subjects and/or the cohort lacked confidence in the instructor, and significantly this course was recollected as a somewhat negative experience. General counsel and information were also provided by the spouses, and quite apart from their assistance in morale and clerical matters, two were able, because of their own enrolment in post-graduate programs, to offer specific and credible advice on expectations and procedures. Access to somewhat similar support was also provided by the cohort, and although the subjects utilized faculty, spouse, and cohort in different ways and in different degrees, each of them relied heavily on one, two or all three of these agents.

The strategies selected by the subjects appeared congruent with the information to which they had access. Typically, once the nature of the challenge was clear, these students committed themselves to a regimen of hard work based on careful organization and husbanding of resources. Nonetheless, stress still was perceived to have occurred, and, when not tied to ambiguity, seemed the result of time pressure and (possibly) fatigue. Other than by organization, the two subjects who reported themselves as having suffered least from stress appeared to have combatted it by effecting

a separation between the program and the rest of life, thus ensuring that their studies did not assume an overwhelming dominance.

Reference has been made to the consequences arising from the perception of a threat to the integrity of the organism. The literature on psychological stress has also emphasized the role played by frustration.<sup>88</sup> In terms of this study, frustration may be viewed as arising from either uncertainty (already discussed at some length under the rubric of ambiguity) or from the inability to attain desired goals. Clearly the major goal for the subjects was to complete the program and to do so with a measure of success which both they and the faculty would regard as superior. Given the high-success criterion on which the sample was selected, it is not surprising that neither of these proved a lasting source of stress. That the case would have been otherwise had the official recognition been withheld is suggested by the subjects' concern regarding the course in which only B's were awarded, and in particular by the anxiety recollected by the two subjects who commented on their anxious attempts to determine what precisely was required for 'A work'.

As noted above, the fatigue associated with the incessant demands on the students' time was also perceived as one source of possible stress. It was not clear from the recollections of subjects or spouses what severity of fatigue was in fact encountered, although it seemed likely that some in fact did occur. However, the experience of fatigue appears to have important subjective elements of a self-limiting nature, and studies have shown that an individual's mental capabilities may considerably surpass the limits he commonly attributes to the effects of over-exertion.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, there is no evidence in the data offered here that any of the subjects experienced in noticeable measure the effects of true fatigue, which typically impairs, in sequence, the functions of creative thinking, formal reasoning, and memory.

There is evidence, however, that high motivation is a major factor in reducing the perceived level of both physical and mental fatigue<sup>90</sup>. When motivation levels are low, fatigue is commonly perceived early; when they are high, fatigue may not be apparent until complete exhaustion intervenes. There is little question as to the high level of motivation which sustained the subjects during their two years in the program. The goal of obtaining entry to school administration, the general acceptance of the subject matter as interesting and relevant, the strong desire to demonstrate an unusual level of competence, the need to satisfy their own critical expectations, all combined to produce a high motivational level. Given this, the fact that superior levels of inspiration may serve to obscure the symptoms of true fatigue is conceded. However, this is discounted in the case of the subjects, since because of their success in the program it must be considered unlikely to have proved other than marginally dysfunctional, if that.

Tests have indicated, on the other hand, that boredom may play a more important role than fatigue in the impairment of mental efficiency<sup>91</sup>. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the program was not seen as unrelievedly stimulating, the evidence demonstrates that the subjects did not recollect it to have been boring. Indeed, the data indicate that, for these three at least, the subject matter and teaching methods were largely appropriate.

### Three Holistic Synopses

To this point the discussion has examined the evidence largely from the perspective of the sample as a whole. At this time it would be useful to summarize the situational and personal components subject by subject, since the interrelationships between the components are almost certainly of importance.

Subject (A) entered the program expecting and prepared for hard work. Her feeling was that the program met her goals satisfactorily and her



comments were positive in the main. She appeared to rely for advice and support almost exclusively on her husband, who was concurrently engaged in his own post-graduate studies. This couple, who were childless, reported that they were able to dovetail their talents and energies, offering tangible assistance to each other in their studies and acting very much as a team. (A) was thus able to maintain a large number of extra-curricular school activities in addition to her teaching commitments and post-graduate studies, and in addition she and her husband did not note a reduction in their social life. She felt somewhat isolated from her colleagues in the program and at some psychological distance from the faculty. Whether this was a result or cause of her husband's role assuming such importance is a moot point. She represented herself as a person who liked to solve her problems for herself.

Like the other subjects, (A) saw herself as committed, hard working and organized. Moreover the prospect of anything less than a high measure of success in any personal venture was clearly unacceptable to her, and she was prepared to go to considerable lengths to ensure satisfactory results. Thus, other than her uncertainties about the research project, the major stressor was doubt about the faculty's standards regarding superior work. Program-related stress was handled by maintaining a variety of outside interests and activities which were very largely divorced from her studies, and by a faith that, no matter what challenges were thrown at her, she could always meet them successfully. The function of verbalization of anxiety and frustration to her husband was not clear: possibly it was helpful in itself, or possibly the hope was that he would assume some responsibility for the solution. It appeared that, during the two years, (A)'s life at home and at school was stable and free from extraneous crises.

In the case of subject (B), positive relations with faculty and cohort were represented as important, and for him these agents acted as

major referents. The spouse's role was seen as of greatest importance in terms of maintaining a supportive home environment and bolstering morale. The concept of the couple acting as a team here again appeared to be important. Here too there were no extraneous crises of a personal (e.g. health), family, or school nature reported.

(B) saw the program as relevant and interesting and described the stressors as of relatively minor significance, occurring mainly in relation to time pressures and ameliorated by the sense of their ephemeral nature. The research projects were reported to have been enjoyable - possible because shared with another student. (B) represented his motivation as being very high, with at least its early impetus coming from a desire to demonstrate that, after the initial rejection, admittance to the program was indeed merited. (B) expected that the demands of the program would be heavy and thus entered prepared to be committed, to work hard, and to be as organized as possible. This attitude was seen by him as fundamental to his success. There were indications that the demands of the program intruded into both school and family life to some degree (this couple had at the time a single, young child). Relief from the effects of stress was largely sought through a regimen of physical activity.

(C) emphasized the contribution made to his success by the faculty and the cohort even more than did (B), and indeed he ranked them as the two major positive influences. His wife's contribution was also seen as most significant, however, in this case appearing to focus primarily on academic assistance: proof-reading, criticism, discussion, etc. In this area the wife's own post-graduate studies doubtlessly played a part, although the fact that husband and wife were concurrently engaged in these programs also appeared to be the cause of some difficulty - possibly because this was a larger family with older children. There were no extra-program crises reported.

Although (C) was the subject who described the program most glowingly, he was, of the three, the one who appeared most likely to have encountered real stress: witness the ulcer and the "pretty bad mental states". The origins of the stress are not clear, but it may have derived from the self-imposed pressure to produce work of a universally recognized superiority, and the self-induced "intellectual high" which was used to maintain this standard. Significantly, (C)'s testimony was emphatic that this self-stimulation was not a course which was automatic or even easy for him. However, he apparently entered the program recognizing the demands which he would face. Once again hard work, planning, and an immediate commitment to the task were seen as bases for the coping strategies, and the evidence is that for two years the program and his attempts to achieve high success within it dominated (C)'s life at the expense of family, and, to a lesser degree, school. Other than the single evening a week reserved for t.v. and hamburgers, the talismanic reflection that the program had clear temporal limits, and possibly his faith in his work habits, (C) was not able to identify any definite defences against the effects of stress.

### Summary

In terms of their performance in the Administrative Leadership Program, and on the assumption that the relationship between stress and performance is indeed curvilinear, it appears likely that the stress experienced by the subjects did not pass beyond the apogee of the stress-performance curve, and thus that it did not seriously exceed functional levels. Similarly, if the previously noted extension of Selye's general adaptation syndrome is used, the evidence is that stress was resolved in the second (resistance) stage and did not progress into the stage of exhaustion. If the effects of stress are viewed in a wider context than that of the program, however, it appears possible that for one subject they did reach dysfunctional

levels, despite the fact that this appears not to have been reflected in lower levels of academic performance.

Unlike ambiguity and its associated anxieties, fatigue seems to have proven only a minor stressor, although it may have played a contributory role by reducing the subjects' resilience and impairing their capacity to employ effective coping strategies. However, uncertainty and worry appear to have carried far greater negative possibilities because of their more direct implications for psychological stress. Force is added to this conjecture by Weiss' work with animals<sup>92</sup>. His research has suggested that physical stressors lack the depressive elements exerted by those psychological stressors which possess a strong "helplessness" component.

The three agents which seem to have proven noticeably effective in mitigating the effects of the stressors were the faculty, the cohort, and the spouses. For various reasons each of these assumed a different level of significance for each subject. In terms of their own personal resources the subjects relied in varying degree on their personal faith in their own capabilities (innate or acquired), on their motivation (which ensured a high level of commitment and hard work), and on careful attention to prioritizing and planning their efforts. Stress itself appeared to be handled somewhat through verbalization to spouse or colleague, but more particularly through the reflection that the program and its pressures were transitory and would eventually pass, and through the judicious use of the summer break and outside interests to provide temporary respite. A further consideration is that it has been argued in the stress literature that stressors do not become psychologically stressful until they are perceived to exceed the capabilities available to combat them<sup>93</sup>. Since the subjects appeared to have developed a lively appreciation of their competence to handle the challenges, this also may serve to account for their seeming escape from damaging levels of stress.

The dangers of generalizing about a population of three are recognized, but nevertheless some common attributes seem to have surfaced from the data: (i) the subjects reported the strong desire to produce work which both they and the faculty would agree demonstrated a high level of competence; (ii) they saw themselves as ready to make heavy sacrifices in order to achieve this goal; (iii) disclaimers to the contrary, competition with others in the cohort seemed to play a significant role; (iv) despite some reluctance to concede that they viewed themselves as academically able above the norm, the subjects did eventually reach some consensus on the point, and certainly the impression the observer gained from the interview was that these were indeed very able, highly inquisitive persons with a wide range of interests.

In addition, the subjects appeared highly accepting of the program and seemed prepared to discharge the requirements imposed on them without demur. Any difficulties encountered were seen as peculiarly their own, and not as deriving from inadequacies in either the program or the faculty. They chose the program for pragmatic reasons and at least initially their prime goal was to advance themselves in the educational hierarchy. Their main criticisms were that differences in the quality of students' work were not always recognized, and that more orientation was required regarding expectations and procedures. Where the research projects were prepared alone, there appeared to be a heightened sense of strain. All three recognized the significance of the faculty, the cohort, and their spouses in providing support services, although their individual use of these agents varied markedly. Their approaches to their studies were pragmatic and reasoned, and their sense of personal competence precluded the fear of failure in the program (although not the fear of falling below the standards they had set themselves). They saw themselves as hard working and committed, and as sufficiently organized to juggle the multiplicity of demands on their time.

Other than their own somewhat abstract appraisals of what constituted academic excellence, and despite some allusions to spouse and cohort, the prime referent regarding standards appeared to be the faculty.

Comparison of the above with the findings of four earlier sets of research will be of some interest here. It should be recollected, however, that no studies of programs comparable to the Administrative Leadership Program were discovered in the literature, and thus the extent to which these comparisons are valid is open to some question. Rothman and Flowers examined the personality correlates of a group of 174 first year medical students at a Canadian university<sup>94</sup>. They noted that students with higher final scores in their first year in medicine tended to aspire to accomplish difficult tasks and to maintain high standards, were willing to persevere and work long hours, desired to be held in high esteem, were concerned about their reputations, and were intellectually curious in many areas of knowledge. They also described their subjects as being aloof, bright, serious, and cautious.

Among other findings, Heiss, in a broad study of 2251 doctoral students in fifty-six departments at a university in the United States<sup>95</sup>, reported the following: a third of the respondents noted the need for more adequate orientation regarding the program; a like number would have liked more direction regarding the research project and dissertation (a quarter noted the stress imposed by the difficulty of selecting a topic, with about an eighth stating that they felt unprepared for the discipline of research); nine-tenths emphasized the value of personal contact with advisers, with "feeling tone" appearing more important than the advice received; a slight minority of the respondents believed that over half of the graduate students were highly competitive grade-seekers; and partly to offset their inadequate orientation, students in several departments formed associations designed to serve as channels of communication.

Becker and Geer, in their study of student culture in a medical school in the United States<sup>96</sup>, have noted its role in providing students with both a rationale for appropriate performance goals and a base for resisting faculty expectations. These findings are congruent with those of Mechanic<sup>97</sup>, who also refers to Festinger<sup>98</sup> as noting the increased occurrence of social comparison in those situations where criteria for evaluating oneself are somewhat obscure. (This conclusion supports the argument that the subjects of this study were, because of their early uneasiness about grading standards, more interested in the grades of others in the cohort than they in fact admitted.) Among other findings in his extensive study of twenty-two students undergoing their preliminary examinations for Ph. D. candidacy at a U.S. university, Mechanic noted that the most effective students were those who were highly motivated and who were able to control their anxiety, and that easy access to faculty was a cogent defence against many program-related fears. The dynamics within the students' families also received extended examination from Mechanic, and here he observed that in families that adapted well to the examination pressures: (i) most spouses absolved the students of their usual familial responsibilities; (ii) there was a reduction in familial stress if the spouse was a student or had outside interests of his/her own to pursue; and (iii) that spouses offered support, accepted the students' definitions of the situation without argument, and demonstrated a readiness to share in the students' anxieties.

These four studies, then, despite the fact that they focused on full-time doctoral students in a variety of settings, lend support to some of the tentative conclusions derived from the data assembled in this report. Thus, a number of the findings regarding personal attributes and attitudes appear similar, as do the roles assumed by the faculty, the spouse, and the student referent group (in this study, the cohort). It appears, then, that

despite the atypical nature of the Administrative Leadership Program, it is not unlike many other post-graduate programs in terms of the importance of these particular personal and situational factors.

The other aspect of this study, that relating to stress, suggests that there is little evidence that stress levels, whether program-imposed, extra-curricular, or self-imposed, seriously exceeded the functional. Indeed, the major effect of the stressors may well have been to contribute to improved performance.

### Implications

The scope of this study was necessarily restricted in that it limited itself to a small sample of students believed to represent most precisely the academic goals inherent in the Administrative Leadership Program. Later studies may wish to examine other strata or, indeed, to employ a weighted sampling of the whole cohort. Such a study might parallel this one in its selection of emphases, or it might wish to single out a particular topic - e.g. personality attributes, student attitudes, the role of student/spouse/faculty/cohort relationships - or a combination of topics.

Student attitudes, and particularly the tendency to approach a task with interest and the intent of performing well, seem a promising subject, particularly in light of Atkinson and Feather's development of an elaborate and subtle rationale on the topic<sup>99</sup>. It appears that their hypotheses may have considerable relevance to this study since the tentative findings here reflect their assumptions with a measure of fidelity. Moreover, the fact that the evidence in this study appears to minimize the dysfunctional aspects of stress should not preclude further research on that topic, since several questions remain: e.g. was this sample's experience vis-a-vis stress typical for the majority of highly successful students? would its experience be consistent with that of students from other strata?



One of the assumptions of this study was that it would be difficult for individuals to reconcile their roles as students, educators, and members of families. The evidence offered here is not clear on the subject, and it appears that a study utilizing the insights of role theory might provide assistance in illuminating some of the expectations and perceptions, ideal and actual, faced by an individual in the program as he simultaneously plays his parts of student, educator, and family member within the time and energy constraints imposed by the two-year program.

For those who design and administer the experiences offered to students in the Administrative Leadership Program, this report may have proved to be of some interest. Once again it is necessary to repeat the cavil regarding the limitations imposed by the size and composition of the sample. Nonetheless, the information and conclusions regarding the subjects' attributes, their attitudes and coping strategies may be provocative. Thus, for those who read this report from the perspective of implementation and design, one set of concerns may well be tied to the incidence and effect of ambiguity. Its management would appear to be in the provision of extensive, on-going orientation, partly through the selection of faculty who, in addition to their academic qualifications, are prepared to foster their own in- and out-of-class interaction with students. Moreover, the provision of formal or informal mechanisms for easy access to the faculty would seem advisable (particularly since, as these students are not on campus during normal hours, direct contact is necessarily restricted).

It may be felt here that the provision of the faculty associate should suffice, but it was evident from the comments of the subjects of this study that confidence on important matters was felt to derive only from direct contact with the relevant professor or supervisor. Thus it appears likely, for instance, that the faculty associate would not be able to play a very useful part in the elucidation of academic standards. It

seems equally evident that, for the sake of students interested in producing high quality work, faculty expectations should subsume not only the standards relating to passing a course, but also those considered to represent "A" work. It is recognized that this latter might be difficult to articulate with great precision, but presumably many of the relevant factors could be outlined, and possibly some worthy models provided.

In the light of the evidence regarding the important role played by spouses, consideration might well be given to providing them also with appropriate orientation. At the very minimum, a briefing at the beginning of the program might be provided to spouses, so that expectations regarding work-load, the probable effects on family life, and the crucial nature of spouse support could all be well understood in the home.

One objection to much of the above might well be that there is a danger of spoon-feeding students, and that at a graduate level students should be prepared to resolve most of their difficulties through personal initiative. The force of this argument is recognized, but those who advance it should recollect that, within the context of an intensive program such as that considered here, time constraints and the multiplicity of roles assumed by the students (graduate student, practising educator, and possibly spouse and parent) serve to limit their options considerably. If the quality of their post-graduate education is not to be compromised, it is important that time and energy should not be squandered on inappropriate work or in dealing with undue anxiety.

This study's tentative conclusions regarding the characteristics of highly successful students in the Administrative Leadership Program also have some implications for the process of student selection. It is presumed that there is already some effort to select students of suitably high academic potential through documentation of previous studies, the writing of the Miller Analogy Test, etc. It is not clear, however, whether other

attributes are considered as carefully. If not, procedures might be adopted in an attempt to provide evidence regarding organizational and attitudinal factors of the sort which appeared to assume importance for the subjects of this study. (The difficulties implicit in devising such procedures are recognized.) Other factors - e.g. personal health and the influence of situational components from school and home - might prove too sensitive to investigate, but, since their influence appears important, they might well be considered. At the very least, any adequate pre-orientation process should bring their significance to the attention of the prospective student and spouse.

On the basis of this study, it appears clear that the research project is a major concern for students in the Administrative Leadership Program. In the time that has passed since the experiences reported by the subjects interviewed here, changes in the regulations have provided students with several options. Thus, at this time not only may a single study of thesis proportions be substituted for the two research projects, but it is also possible to complete a single project and insert an approved course in the place of the other. This does not, however, completely remove the cogency of earlier comments regarding the limitations placed on students by time and energy constraints. It appears that, if the projects are to be completed on schedule, two factors should be considered. One is the provision of supervision of the order reported by (B) and (C) (i.e. an on-going, face-to-face dialogue between supervisor and student regarding the parameters of the research design, the report composition, and the relevant scheduling), and the other is the possibility that heightened expectations of the research projects may have developed in the minds of both faculty and students over the years. Certainly the fact that in recent years a considerable number of students have not completed their projects until considerably after the target date suggests that either or both of these

factors may be operative.

It should be recognized, moreover, that heightened expectations may also have played a role vis-a-vis the courses. Given the time constraints already noted, this might well also have had the effect of delaying work on the research project, since deadlines for the later are in practice somewhat more flexible. Certainly, students in more recent cohorts have noted difficulties in finding time to complete the project during the spring semester despite the fact that they typically carry only one course at the time.

It may be objected that these comments are becoming increasingly removed from the data upon which the main body of this study is based. This is conceded, and the author recognizes that many of them must be considered highly speculative and to a degree affected by his own experiences in the Administrative Leadership Program. They do not appear to be incongruent with the data offered in this study, however, nor are they discordant with the studies cited earlier in this chapter. They are offered in view of the ample evidence that during its short life the program has been somewhat responsive to pressure for change, and in the hope that they will be considered as a contribution to the pool of information upon which future evolution might be based.

More generally, it might be noted that in terms of this study, and despite its apparent atypicality of design, Simon Fraser University's Administrative Leadership Program seems to offer its students a milieu whose components are very similar to those of other post-graduate programs. (It is recognized, nonetheless, that the relative impact of these components may vary somewhat.) Moreover, the tentative descriptors of highly successful students in this program seem to be compatible with other evidence cited in this chapter<sup>100</sup>. On the evidence of this study, therefore, one might hypothesize that those who design graduate programs should generally, and in addition to their other considerations, attempt to: (1) devise a

selection process capable of identifying able, hard-working, motivated, and organized students whose outside life is likely to remain stable during the course of their studies; (2) provide pre-orientation by which student and spouse may both be made aware of the demands likely to be faced during the program; (3) incorporate devices to reduce student uncertainty and anxiety, so that the utility of time and energy may be maximized; (4) ensure that faculty are aware of and receptive to the need for dialogue with students; and (5) wherever possible enable student groupings to play an appropriate supportive role (witness that played by the cohort in this study).

#### A Retrospective Comment on the Methodology

In the second chapter the arguments for and against the employment of qualitative study of an ethnographic, hypothesis-tailoring nature were reviewed, and the point was made that research of this kind is not the norm in studies in Education. In retrospect it seems that, given luck and good judgment, many of the same conclusions might have been derived from a study utilizing typical quantitative methods and a larger sample. On the other hand, it would have been more difficult to control the effects of designer bias, distortions of emphasis would have been more likely, considerable time might have been wasted (e.g. in investigating in depth the influence of possible home- and job-related stressors), the importance of some factors might have been obscured (e.g. the central role apparently played by ambiguity), and some might have been missed completely (e.g. the significance of self-imposed standards).

Face-to-face interviews incorporating a deliberately open-ended component are extremely time-consuming and thus it was necessary to limit the size of the sample. However, it is the author's opinion that whatever might have been gained through the use of a larger sample and a more easily

quantified instrument would have been more than offset by a reduction in the utility of the data. For instance, it is difficult to envisage the generation of the same amount of integrated evidence through questionnaires, there would have been less opportunity to ensure that responses were truly comparable, and the cross-checking of perceptions would have been virtually impossible.

The choice before the researcher always lies between the development and the verification of hypotheses. As already noted, in the literature there is a paucity of material bearing clear relevance to the milieu and emphasis of this study. Thus it appears that at this point the choice was most properly to engage in hypothesis development through micro-ethnography. Now that this adaptation of anthropological methodology has provided some indication of the factors to be considered in the investigation of stress in the setting examined, verification with a wider population and the use of traditional methods and more precise instruments will likely prove easier.

APPENDICES

- A - Guide (Pilot Interview)
- B - Introductory Letter
- C - Guide (First Interview)
- D - Guide (Second Interview - subject)
- E - Guide (Second Interview - spouse)
- F - Worries of University Students (adapted Musgrove)
- G - Figure 2 (Process Model - the subject)

APPENDIX AGuide (Pilot Interview)

(March, 1976)

Warm-up

1. What particular recollections do you have of A.L.P., now that it is well behind you?
2. How did you come to hear about the program? Do you remember what perceptions you had about it before you entered?
3. Now that you are through, are you consulted by others who are considering the program? What do you say to them?
4. What were the main satisfactions you derived from being in the program? What dissatisfactions?
5. How would you describe the demands of the program? (Difficult to meet? challenging? easy to meet?)
6. Do you feel that your goals and the program's were congruent? (Could you elaborate?)

Background

7. This material will be disguised in the case history, but could you give me a thumbnail sketch of your life until the time you entered university? (Birthdate, birthplace, where raised, schooling, parental occupations).
8. What was your background in higher education when you entered A.L.P.? (Universities? areas of specialization?)
9. What did you do between your last full-time university studies and entering A.L.P.? (Changes of job, schools, etc., and reasons.)
10. When you entered A.L.P., what was your job? Was that satisfying to you?
11. Did your job situation change while you were in the program? (How? Any effects on your studies?)
12. What factors influenced you pro or con in your decision to apply for the program? (Design of the program? Personal goals, whether immediate or longterm?)

Interpersonal

13. Were there any noteworthy changes in your outside life while you were in A.L.P.? (Birth of a child? marriage? death in the family?) When? What were the effects on your studies?
14. How did A.L.P. affect your outside life? (Relations with spouse? children? extended family? friends? outside interests?)
15. How do you feel about this now in retrospect?
16. Did people outside the program give you support and assistance? What sort of support? Who? (Spouse, other family members, colleagues, etc.)
17. What were your perceptions of the other students in the cohort? Individually? Collectively? (Supportive? competitive? aloof? friendly?)



sharing?)

18. Did the cohort develop any group cohesiveness? How much? What effects did this have? (On you? other students? the faculty?)
19. What were your perceptions of the faculty with whom you came into contact? (Supportive? aloof? competent?)

#### Stress Points/Coping Strategies

20. During the program did you have a pretty good idea of expectations and how you were meeting them? Why?
21. Can you remember specific times when you felt particularly positive about A.L.P. and your place in it? (When? Why?)
22. Can you remember specific times when you felt particularly negative about A.L.P. and your place in it? (When? Why?) Were these feelings resolved? Do you remember how?
23. Were there periods which were marked by lack of pressure, when course demands seemed completely manageable? (When? Why?)
24. Were there specific times when you felt particular pressure, when the demands you faced seemed somewhat daunting? (When? Why?)
25. What helped you deal with this pressure? (Personal action? assistance of others?)
26. How did this pressure alter your ability to meet your obligations? (In A.L.P.? at work? at home?)
27. Were there times when factors outside the program made things particularly difficult? (What? when? how?) Were they job related? family related?
28. How did you deal with these factors? (Personal action? support from others?)
29. We have been talking for some time about pressures. Were there things that made you aware you were under some pressure? (Subjective feelings? the perceptions of others? physiological symptoms?)

#### Wrap-Up

30. In retrospect, can you identify for me the factors which were crucial to your successful completion of A.L.P.? (Personal attitudes? the design of the program? support from others? external factors?)
31. To what degree do you feel your experiences in A.L.P. were typical for your cohort?

APPENDIX B

489 East Osborne Road,  
North Vancouver, B.C.,  
V7N 1M4,  
May 26, 1976

Dear

I am currently registered in the Administrative Leadership Program at S.F.U., and the thesis I am preparing under the sponsorship of Dr. Don Erickson has as its focus the examination of several specific aspects of the program from the perspective of those who have completed it. My study depends on interviewing three graduates from the (year) cohort. The choice is somewhat circumscribed since I wish to work with graduates who have been described as "highly successful" by the faculty, and since there is consensus on only three names from the cohort.

Needless to say, your name is one of the three and I am equally obviously hopeful that you will be able to accommodate me in the matter. Nevertheless, I am writing so that should you wish to think the matter over, you will have some time to do so before I contact you by phone.

I must apologize for inflicting myself on you, but this sort of imposition seems to be a concomitant of being in graduate studies.

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Wilkins

APPENDIX CGuide (First Interview)

(June, 1976)

1. What particular recollections do you have of A.L.P. now that it is well behind you?
2. What factors influenced you in your decision to apply for the program? (Program design? immediate or long-term goals?)
3. Now that you are through, are you consulted by others who are considering the program? What do you say to them?
4. What were the main satisfactions you derived from being in the program? What dissatisfactions?
5. Do you feel that your goals and the program's were congruent? Could you explain?
6. How would you describe the demands of the program? (Tough? challenging? easy?) Did they peak? When?
7. Could you give me a little background about yourself up to the time you entered A.L.P.?
8. Did any significant occupational changes occur while you were in A.L.P.? (Effects?)
9. Were there any noteworthy changes in your outside life? (Births? marriage? deaths?) (Effects?)
10. During A.L.P. did you have a pretty good idea of expectations and how you were meeting them?
11. Did you have the feeling you were constricted, or did you have adequate freedom of action?
12. Can you remember specific times when you felt particularly positive about A.L.P. and your place in it? (When? why?)
13. Can you remember specific times when you felt particularly negative about A.L.P.? (When? why? how resolved?)
14. Were there periods marked by lack of pressure, when demands seemed completely manageable? (When? why?)
15. Were there specific times of particular pressure, when demands seemed somewhat daunting? (When? why?)
16. Did this pressure affect your ability to meet your obligations? (In A.L.P.? at work? at home?)
17. What helped you deal with this pressure? (Personal action? assistance from others?)
18. Did people outside A.L.P. give you support and assistance? (Family? colleagues?)
19. What were your perceptions of others in the cohort? Individually? Collectively? (Supportive? competitive? aloof? sharing?)
20. Did the cohort develop any group cohesiveness? What effect did this have? (On you? on others? on the faculty?)
21. Was there much talk in the cohort about the pressures? What was said?

22. Was there much talk with the faculty or at home about the pressures? What was said?
23. What were your perceptions of the faculty? (Aloof? supportive? competent?)
24. We have been talking for some time about pressures. Were there things which made you aware you were under some pressure? (Subjective feelings? the perceptions of others? physiological symptoms?)
25. In retrospect, can you identify the factors crucial to your successful completion of A.L.P.? (Personal attributes? program design? the support of others?)
26. To what degree do you feel your experiences were typical for your cohort?
27. Are there any other things you think you would have wanted to say to me?

APPENDIX DGuide (Second Interview)

(August, 1976)

1. To start off with, I'd like to touch on a topic we talked about before - the matter of goals. What did you hope to get from the program, and did these goals turn out to be important in motivating you during A.L.P.?
2. Musgrove, in studies with students at the University of Bradford, used a checklist which in part listed the worries or concerns on this sheet. Were any of these applicable to your experience in A.L.P.? any talked of in the cohort? (to what degree debilitating or disruptive? how handled?)
3. Obviously the standard of work you submitted impressed the faculty. What factors do you think prompted you to do superior work? (Personal ideal of quality? faculty expectations? cohort norms?)
4. I gathered from our first interview that it was really very important to you personally to do well in A.L.P. Why was it so important? (Does this same motive operate in other spheres of endeavour?)
5. To what degree did your previous academic career influence your success in A.L.P.? (How? how would A.L.P. compare with your previous university training?)
6. In the first interviews I got the impression that the demands of the program were perceived as quantitative rather than qualitative (lots to do rather than tough things to do). What were the intellectual demands? was A.L.P. a mind expanding experience? (Where did the intellectual demands lie - lectures? readings? assignments? projects? were you yourself surprised by the high standard of your own work?)
7. While I'm on this topic, why was the weekly assignment from (faculty) perceived as such a strain when it was just a page in length? (Intellectual demand?)
8. My impression from the first interviews was that energy, planning, and endurance were the major requisites for doing well in A.L.P. Do you feel you want to add anything to that list?
9. In capsule form, how would you describe yourself as a student? (Are you a doer - "do it now" - or do you like to sit and let things percolate, to mull them over?)
10. Now I'd like you to think back and try to visualize a typical week in A.L.P. How would you have ordered it in terms of time and effort?
11. Were you in the habit of regularly throwing in some relaxation or variety for a safety-valve, or did you react pretty much on an ad hoc basis as things came along?
12. At various times in the first interviews we discussed the choice between emphasizing the theoretical and the practical in the program. Did you see A.L.P. as leaning one way or the other? (Was this a stimulus for you?)
13. One thing which came through pretty clearly in all three interviews was that for most people the project was manageable largely because deadlines were clear and very close supervision was exercised by (faculty). Were these factors (clear deadlines and close supervision) present in

the rest of A.L.P., and how helpful were they there?

14. Some people have complained of having to jump through when they considered to be capriciously placed hoops. What is your reaction to that?
15. One common source of stress is facing ambiguous or unknown situations. Were there times when you felt this pressure? (e.g. first few months, first project, oral defence, time when (faculty) rejected all papers, or (faculty) gave only B's)
16. When you entered the program did you expect it to be rigorous? How did you prepare yourself for the experience?
17. In more general terms, what is your response to a challenge? What is the mental set with which you approach it?
18. In all this flux, in the process of juggling all the balls (A.L.P., job, family) how did you maintain your balance, the idea you could handle it all? (Did you have some aphorism - "It'll all be the same in a hundred years"?)
19. In one interview someone remarked that everything had to mesh pretty exactly for success; there was not a lot of discretionary room for manoeuver. Would you agree? (Did you ever consider something going seriously wrong in the scenario? what? what strategies did you consider?)
20. Someone commented that one comfort was that there were clear temporal limits - "It's just two years, and I have the summer to recuperate in." How important was that to you?
21. A couple of allusions were made to support from spouses. Can you remember any concrete instances where your wife (husband) was an important help to you?
22. (A) - you relied very little on the cohort for support. However, can you think of any time when you did use it so? or acted to assist someone else?  
 (B) - you mentioned the cohort members offered "comfort for each other in times of stress". Can you think of any specific instances? (What was the process?)  
 (C) - in one of the first interviews someone else mentioned members of the cohort offering "comfort for each other in time of stress". Can you yourself think of any such instances? (What was the process?)
23. In our first interview I asked you to identify those factors you felt were crucial for your success in the program. Would you try that question again for me now?

APPENDIX EInterview Guide (Spouse)

(August, 1976)

1. Why do you think (subject) went into A.L.P.? What was he/she looking for? Did he/she find it?
2. Did you and (subject) talk much about the program? What in general did he/she have to say?
3. How did (subject) seem to feel about the classes? the work-load? the faculty? the cohort?
4. From what you observed, how would you advise someone considering going into the program?
5. Why do you think (subject) did so well in the program? What factors contributed to his/her success?
6. What strategies did (subject) employ in coping with the demands of the program?
7. What evidences of stress did you observe? To what factors inside or outside the program did this stress seem related? What techniques did (subject) use to handle the stress?
8. How did (subject) being in A.L.P. affect you (and your family)? What adjustments did you have to make? How do you feel (subject) felt about this?
9. To what degree and in what ways do you feel that you personally contributed to (subject's) success?

APPENDIX FWorries of University Students (adapted, Musgrove)

Feeling you're not working as hard as you should

The thought of exams

Feeling overwhelmed by academic work

Being bored by some of your work

Being unsure of your abilities

Difficulty in understanding lectures

Lack of guidance in your work by staff

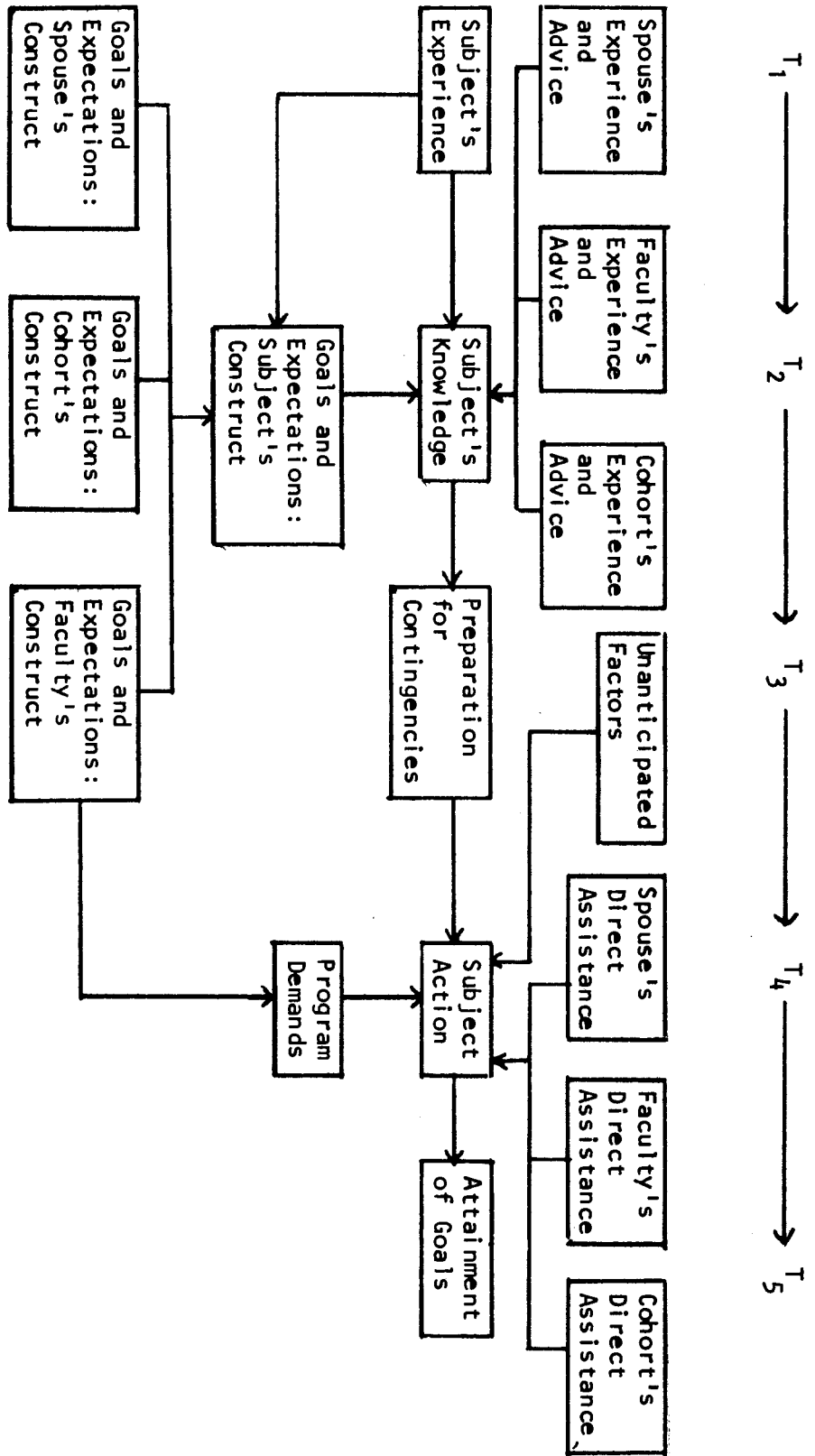
The manner or attitude of a lecturer

Difficulty in doing written work or exercises



APPENDIX G

Figure 2  
Process Model - the Subject



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