

USE OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE IN ASSESSING
STUDENT/TUTOR RELATIONSHIPS AT AN OPEN LEARNING INSTITUTION

by

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory qualitative study focussed on the relationships between students taking courses at the Open Learning Agency in British Columbia, and their tutors. The main purpose of the study was to identify and describe the factors in the student/tutor relationship that students and tutors perceived to be important for student success in open learning courses. A secondary purpose was to ascertain whether there were differences in these identified factors for students enrolled in (i) University courses, (ii) Career/Technical/Vocational courses, and (iii) Adult Basic Education courses, and their tutors.

This descriptive study combined the use of the critical incident technique and a multiple triangulation strategy. Data were collected from three data sources by means of student interviews, tutor interviews, and student questionnaires. A total of 406 critical incidents were reported (295 facilitating and 111 hindering) that were classified into a categorization system containing 22 categories. Each category specified a factor that was identified by the data sources as having facilitated or hindered students' progress in their studies "at a distance." The multiple triangulation strategy showed the relative importance of the identified factors to each of the three data sources. This strategy also enabled plausible explanations to be made of the reasons why the data sources placed differing emphases on the identified factors.

The results of the study showed that the most important aspect of the student/tutor relationship was the quality of feedback the tutor provided on the student's assignments. The tutor's telephone manner and communications skills, and the tutor's ability to answer the student's questions concerning course content during telephone conversations were identified as the second and third most important factors.

The comparison of the student/tutor relationships in the University, Career/Technical/Vocational and Adult Basic Education groups showed that the differences appeared to be minimal.

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To Jack
for the fullness of life

and

to our daughters, Katherine and Jennifer

To Dr. Thomas O'Shea
for his excellent guidance, inspiration and support

To my family and friends
for their encouragement and assistance

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Open Learning Agency (OLA), Richmond, British Columbia was formed in April, 1988, amalgamating the former Open Learning Institute and the Knowledge Network. OLA is divided into three program components: The Knowledge Network, the Open University and the Open College.

The Knowledge Network is an educational television service that broadcasts tele-courses carrying college and university credit and a wide variety of general interest educational programs. The Open University is a British Columbia public university that offers programs of study leading to the following degrees: Bachelor of Arts--Major Program, Bachelor of Arts--General Program, Bachelor of General Studies, Bachelor of Arts in Administrative Studies, and Bachelor of Arts (General Science). The Open College offers a wide range of career, technical and vocational (CTV) courses and programs that lead to recognized certificates and diplomas in Business and Hospitality, Health and Human Services, and Technology and Trades. The Open College also offers Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in High School Completion and English as a Second Language.

OLA students are provided with a course manual, course units, an assignment file, and textbooks. Also included in the course package may be one or more of a wide variety of instructional aids, including audio cassettes, lab kits, slides, colour photographs, video tapes and computer software. Courses may be supported by scheduled labs or classes as well as tele-courses broadcast by the Knowledge Network.

Students are assigned a tutor who serves as a facilitator between the student and the course materials, by providing assistance and encouragement and assessing the student's progress. OLA tutors are responsible for initiating telephone calls to students and responding to students' telephone calls during established "office hours," as well as for marking students' assignments.

This exploratory qualitative study focusses on the relationship between students taking courses at OLA and their tutors. The main purpose of the study is to identify and describe the factors in the student/tutor relationship that students and tutors perceive to be important for student success in open learning courses. A secondary purpose is to ascertain whether there are differences in the identified factors for students enrolled in (i) University courses, (ii) CTV courses, and (iii) ABE courses and their tutors.

Student success is not necessarily the same as successful completion rates, as defined by OLA. Students may drop out of their courses, and

thus be considered as non-completers by OLA, but still have been successful in attaining their personal course goals. Adult learners participate in educational opportunities for a wide variety of reasons (Cross, 1981; Houle, 1961; Tough, 1979; Waniewicz, 1982). Some students achieve their personal course goals as soon as the package of materials is received in the mail. Others take courses solely to solve a problem and once they have learned enough to solve the problem, they withdraw from the course (Baath, 1984, pp. 31-32). Some students have no interest in receiving credit for the course and although they submit all the assignments they have no intention of writing the final examination. This is substantiated by a study conducted by Durward and Durward (1983) of 500 students at the Open Learning Institute. They reported that 46% of the 190 students who had not completed their courses said that they had benefited "a lot" from the courses (p. 14). In addition, they reported that almost 60% of the 190 non-completers said that they intended to take the course again at the Open Learning Institute at some time in the future.

This study partially replicates and extends (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 33) a research project carried out by Jane Brindley at Athabasca University, a distance education university in Alberta. Brindley (1987) examined the experiences of 40 students taking their first university course by distance education and identified the factors that facilitated or hindered each student's persistence in completing the course. Students' responses encompassed the realm of factors that influenced

their studies, including their interaction with the university, the encouragement and support that they received from outside the university, the course design, and the change in time available for study or the change in circumstances that prevented them from studying. Fifty percent of the students who participated in the study identified "personalized instructional support" as having a significant influence over their persistence on the course. The study showed, however, that "the effect of the tutor can be negative as often as it is positive" (p. 87).

This study replicates Brindley's project in that it uses the same data collection tool, that is, the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986) but it focusses solely on the category identified in the Brindley study as "personalized instructional support." This study extends the Brindley study in two main ways. Firstly, a multiple triangulation strategy (Denzin, 1970, pp. 297-313; Mathison, 1988) is used to obtain data from three sources by means of student interviews, tutor interviews, and student questionnaires. Secondly, whereas Brindley's subjects were enrolled in university courses, in this study three groups of OLA students--University; Career/Technical and Vocational; and Adult Basic Education--are compared to ascertain whether there are any differences in the student/tutor relationships between the three groups.

Purpose of the Study

The ultimate aim of this study is to assist in identifying the instructional support needs of OLA students. Currently, the principal form of instructional support provided to students taking OLA courses is telephone tutors. In order to achieve the ultimate aim of this study, it is important to understand the present support services by examining the relationships between OLA students and their tutors. This study provides an in-depth description of the interactions that occur between students and tutors. It identifies the ways in which tutors and students perceive that tutors facilitate and hinder students in their courses.

The critical incident technique has been used with considerable success in generating a comprehensive and detailed description of a particular activity (Woolsey, 1986, p. 242). It is used in this study to describe the interactions between individual students and their tutors. The critical incidents reported in this study provide an illuminating account of the details of specific interactions that took place between OLA students and their tutors during the March 1988 session.

A comparison is made of the relationships between students enrolled in (i) University, (ii) CTV and (iii) ABE courses, and their tutors. It

is believed that this may contribute important knowledge and understanding that may be useful to administrators in providing appropriate support to tutors. For example, if the student/tutor relationships are similar for the three groups, it may be appropriate to conduct the same tutor training sessions for all tutors. On the other hand, if there are major differences between the three groups, it may be more appropriate to carry out separate training sessions for each group of tutors.

This study addresses two questions:

- 1) What are the factors in the relationships between Open Learning Agency students and their tutors that students and tutors perceive to be important for student success?
- 2) What, if any, are the differences in these factors for Open Learning Agency students enrolled in (i) University courses, (ii) Career/Technical/ Vocational courses, and (iii) Adult Basic Education courses, and their tutors?

Significance of the Study

Whilst this qualitative research study does not report any concrete evidence about the effectiveness of telephone tutors, it does provide a

rich source of descriptive data that can be used by OLA administrators and tutors in helping them to understand students' experiences in their OLA courses. This study gives considerable insights into students' perceptions of the ways in which their tutors are helpful and unhelpful. It also provides insights into tutors' perceptions of the ways in which they facilitate and hinder students.

The results of this study may also be useful to researchers at OLA, and other organizations involved in open learning, in forming the basis of other exploratory research projects and in developing hypotheses for further studies. This thesis may also be informative to social researchers who are interested in using the critical incident technique and/or multiple triangulation.

Delimitations

Some caution should be exercised in generalizing the results of this study across institutions. Institutions involved in open learning and distance education have various student entrance requirement policies, use different definitions of student success and student drop-out, and assign differing roles and responsibilities to their tutors. However, it is believed that the results of this study may be of interest to all distance educators. Morgan (1984) states that qualitative studies have:

a generalisability, obviously not in a statistical sense, but in a phenomenological sense. The readers or users of the findings can recognize a relevance to themselves and to their own contexts. This type of research aims to raise people's awareness of activities and events in particular settings so that links and parallels can be drawn to inform practice in other settings and new contexts. (p. 265)

The results of this study can be generalized to OLA's student population that is studying "at a distance." The OLA acts as a coordinating body for open learning in British Columbia. As such, it cooperates with universities, colleges and provincial institutes in British Columbia in projects such as the Placemakers Project. Through this pilot project, the OLA provides an opportunity for students unable to obtain the courses of their choice at a lower mainland regional college to register in OLA courses and attend weekly group tutorials that replace the usual OLA telephone tutoring method (Open Learning Agency [OLA], 1988c, p. 2). This study, however, is concerned only with those students whose instructional support is provided by telephone tutors and who do not have any face-to-face interaction with their tutors.

There are a great many factors that influence student motivation and behaviour whilst taking an open learning course that are completely out of the control of tutors. Students may be frustrated by the late delivery of their course materials, which may or may not be complete. A change in work situation or family responsibilities may affect the time available for students to study. Students' personal self-motivation is

a significant factor in their success. Brindley's study (1987) addresses the wide variety of factors that affect students' total learning experiences. This study, however, focusses on only one aspect of students' milieux--their relationships with their tutors.

Definition of Terms

Critical Incident - any observable behaviour or activity that is identifiable and is perceived to make a difference to the student's success.

Facilitates - makes a difference to the outcome in a positive way.

Hinders - makes a difference to the outcome in a negative way.

CTV - Career/Technical/Vocational courses and programs offered by the Open College component of the Open Learning Agency.

ABE - Adult Basic Education programs offered by the Open College component of the Open Learning Agency.

Structure of the Study

Chapter 1 contains an introduction to the Open Learning Agency. It briefly describes the Brindley (1987) research project, which this study partially replicates and extends. The purpose of this study is described and the two research questions are stated. The significance of the study to OLA and to other organizations involved in open learning is explained. Delimitations of the study are specified, and the terms used in the study are defined.

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature relevant to this study. The review examines distance education, open learning, student/tutor interaction, and telephone tutoring. A review of the literature concerning the critical incident technique is provided, together with a brief review of triangulation as it pertains to this study.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this study. The student population is described. Details are provided of the procedures followed to obtain the student and tutor samples, to collect data, to categorize the critical incidents, and to obtain independent ratings of the categorization system. The final categorization system is presented in table form. In concluding this chapter, experiences gained by using the critical incident technique in this study are described.

Chapter 4 provides the results of the data obtained in the study in relation to the two research questions stated in the first chapter. In answering the first research question, the triangulation strategy used in this study is explained. Each of the categories are then described, excerpts from critical incidents are listed, a table illustrating the frequency of critical incidents reported is presented, the triangulation decision for each category is stated and the findings are discussed. The results of this study as they pertain to the second research question are then described.

Chapter 5 includes an overview of the study, and a discussion of the results pertaining to the two research questions. A conclusion and recommendations are then presented. Limitations of the study are outlined and implications for further study are discussed.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is divided into six main sections. In the first section distance education is described, and in the second section open learning is defined and explained. In the third section student/tutor interaction is discussed. The role of the telephone tutor is described in the fourth section, and research studies involving telephone tutors are reviewed. The critical incident technique is described in the fifth section, and studies conducted in open learning and distance education settings using this research methodology are reviewed. Finally, triangulation is described and an explanation of the multiple triangulation strategy used in this study is provided.

Distance Education

History

Although the roots of distance education can be traced back to Aristotle (Lowe, 1975, p. 115) and Biblical times (Gough, 1984, p. 20),

study by correspondence became popular in both Europe (Verner, 1964, p. 70) and North America (MacKenzie & Christensen, 1971) in the second half of the 19th Century. In Canada, the first prominent adult open learning system was the Antigonish Movement, initiated in 1935 (Rothe, 1986, p. 6). The first opportunities for post-secondary education in British Columbia by correspondence were offered by the University of British Columbia in 1949 (Educational Research Institute of British Columbia, 1982, p. 16). The Open Learning Institute was established in June, 1978, partially modelled after the British Open University. The mandate of the Institute was to provide educational opportunities to people throughout British Columbia who would not otherwise have access to these opportunities. There are currently three educational institutions in Canada that are devoted solely to post-secondary open learning or distance education: The Open Learning Agency in British Columbia, Athabasca University in Alberta and Télé-université in Quebec.

Identification

Distance Education has been beset with the problems of establishing a universally acceptable identification. The name "distance education" was generally adopted in the English-speaking world in 1982 when the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE) changed its name to International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) (Holmberg, 1986, p. 1). A number of terms that are still being used in various parts of the world and are commonly found in the literature include

"correspondence study," "home study," "independent study," "external studies," "extramural studies," and "distance teaching" (Gough, 1984, p. 20; Keegan, 1988, pp. 26-30; Rumble and Harry, 1982, p. 11).

Theoretical Approaches

Considerable debate continues in the establishment of an acceptable theory for distance education (Keegan, 1988). The autonomy and independence theorists, such as Charles Wedemeyer (U.S.A.) and Michael Moore (U.K.), believe that students choose distance education because they have a high demand for independence and autonomy. This theory supports the notion that students having these individual characteristics have every chance of succeeding with distance studies. The interaction and communication theorists, such as Börje Holmberg (Sweden/Federal Republic of Germany) and David Sewart (U.K.), view the student in a wider context. They believe that the separation of teacher and learner and planning by an educational organization are fundamental to all forms of distance education (Keegan, 1988, p. 8). They support the notion that the reasons why students enrol in distance education courses are determined not only by psychological factors within individuals, but also on the environment in which they live--including their family and occupational situations. Willén (1984, pp. 32-33) supports the interaction and communication theorists and points out that investigations that have been carried out do not support the hypothesis that students are autonomous, and she states that many students are

taking distance education courses because of practical reasons rather than because they prefer to study independently. In addition, many adults do need help in setting goals and establishing effective study habits. Whereas the autonomy and independence theories and the interaction and communication theories focus on the learner, the industrialization theory, pioneered by Otto Peters (Federal Republic of Germany), focusses on the characteristics of the system of distance education. Peters believes that distance education relies on effective communication and transportation systems, and the important factor is the course production process. Although the three theories have distinct emphases, they can be combined to provide an understanding of current distance education and open learning policies and practices.

While the theoretical debates continue, the current practices of many distance education organizations in the U.K. (Lewis, 1984; Spencer, 1980) and North America (Gross, 1979) have evolved to what is being termed "open learning" (Farrell & Haughey, 1986).

Open Learning

In the 1970's, the term "open learning" was not much more than an ideology. MacKenzie, Postgate and Scupham (1975) suggested that open learning ". . . eludes definition. But as an inscription to be carried in procession on a banner, gathering adherents and enthusiasms, it has

great potential" (p. 15). Open learning became an umbrella term covering a wide diversity of courses and programs, institutions and philosophies (Gross, 1979, p. 3). The underlying principle in open learning is to expand the freedom of learners (Wedemeyer, 1981, p. 62) by removing many of the traditional barriers to learning, such as prerequisites, credit transfer, time, and distance (OLA, 1988a, p. 1). Open learning can provide students with the opportunity to access a rich array of learning opportunities, and students are able to choose from a variety of formats, including independent self-learning, telephone tutoring, face-to-face interaction (individual or group), and peer-learning (individual or group). The course materials are usually provided in the form of print, but open learning can enable the student to choose from a variety of supplementary learning devices, depending on their preferred learning style, including audio communications, video communications, and computers.

Philosophically, open learning has evolved from the growing acceptance of the concept of lifelong learning (Boshier, 1980; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Faure, 1972). Various social, political and economic factors have resulted in the demand for educational opportunities to flourish. These include the knowledge explosion, the increased needs of women for training and education, the requirements for further training and education by the workforce in general as jobs are automated, and the amount of increased leisure time. Coupled with the fact that non-traditional educational systems such as open learning

and distance education systems have gained considerable acceptance in the last two decades, it now appears that they could serve as the vehicles by which lifelong learning and the learning society may become a reality.

At the practical level, open learning has been made possible because of the developments that have occurred in distance education. The improvements that have been made by distance education organizations in terms of the instructional design of learning materials, and the accessibility of computer and telecommunications technologies have the potential of increasing the popularity of open learning.

Daniel (1986) states that in Canada, open learning was developed by visionaries--people who were inspired by "a desire to create 'innovative learning systems'" (p. iv). Although open learning projects have been forced, mainly for economical reasons, to become less innovative and more useful, the scope for initiatives in open learning--at least in principle--appears to be limitless.

The Open Learning Agency is a prime example of an innovative learning system. Originally established as a distance education organization in June 1978, the Open Learning Institute was combined with the Knowledge Network on April 1, 1988, to form the Open Learning Agency. The Open Learning Agency Act (1987) sets out the purposes of OLA:

In collaboration with universities, institutions, boards of school trustees and other agencies concerned with education, to:

- a. provide an educational credit bank for students
 - b. coordinate the development of open learning education
 - c. use open learning methods to provide educational programs and service
 - d. carry out research related to open learning education, and
 - e. operate one or more broadcasting undertakings devoted primarily to the field of educational broadcasting.
- (p. 2)

The OLA works in close collaboration with the province's universities, colleges, institutions, school districts, businesses, and community and government agencies in developing and implementing open learning opportunities. For example, OLA is involved in a pilot project that will enable students at three community colleges in the interior of British Columbia to complete their degrees by enrolling in Open Learning Agency courses and participating in local face-to-face tutorial support (OLA, 1988c, p. 2). It has also received a federal government grant to establish an employer-based training initiative using open learning methods (OLA, 1989, p. 5).

Student/Tutor Interaction

The importance of effective student/tutor interaction has been recognized since the early days of correspondence study. Dr. William Harper, a prominent correspondence educator in the U.S.A. at the end of the 19th Century, states:

. . . the correspondence teacher must be painstaking, patient, sympathetic and alive; and . . . the correspondence pupil must be earnest, ambitious, appreciative, and likewise alive. Whatever a dead teacher may accomplish in the classroom, he can do nothing by correspondence. . . . (p. 9)

Students studying by open learning and distance education methods may face a number of difficulties that are generated by the system itself. Students may experience problems in managing their own learning, whilst others may feel isolated from their institution and from their fellow students, (Robinson, 1981). Many of the problems facing students can be minimized or resolved by having the support of a tutor who has subject matter expertise and effective communication skills. The tutor is able to assist students with the course content, to inspire and motivate them to continue the course, and to assist them in developing effective study skills.

Fundamental to the interaction and communication theories is the importance of student support systems to student success. Sewart (1982) states:

The vast majority of students cannot succeed in a course through self-instructional material alone. Beyond the package of materials, there is a need for individualised advice, support, interpretation and mediation capable of meeting the diverse needs of the students. The success of distance education rests upon a correct balance between the teaching package and the advisory and mediating function. (p. 27)

Several studies have been conducted that support the interaction and communication theories. Kelly and Swift (1983) conducted a study of

over 3 000 students at the Open University and found that one in four students would have dropped out of at least one course without the help of the tutor. In a study of 38 newly registered students at Athabasca University, who were paid to complete weekly course monitor forms, Peruniak (1983) concluded that "distance education will be effective in the delivery of its courses to the extent that it preserves the integrity of a human element in the system (e.g. tutor)" (p. 75).

Baath (1984) attempted to analyse correspondence education in the light of a number of teaching models. He suggested that it was important for student/tutor interaction to take place at the beginning of the course to:

- be able to individualise the tutor's tuition with regard to the student's previous "reinforcement patterns" (Skinner), or
- facilitate the student's "mathemagenic activities" (Rothkopf), or
- be able to anchor the material of the first study units in the student's individual previous knowledge and "cognitive structure" (Ausubel), or
- get an idea of the student's comprehension of the basic concepts and principles of the course (Bruner), or
- establish a good personal relationship with the learner (Rogers). (p. 38)

Holmberg (cited in Garrison, 1987) has proposed a prescriptive teaching theory that emphasizes the communication process. He suggests that tutors are effective not only in the exchange of questions, answers and arguments in mediated communications, but also to the impact of feelings of belonging and cooperation. Tinto's model has been used by

distance educators to study the concept that student/tutor interactions are important in producing student commitment to the institution. It is hypothesized that a strengthened commitment is instrumental in student success, and a lack of commitment leads to withdrawal from the institution (Barker, et al., 1986; Sweet, 1986).

Telephone Tutoring

Telephone tutoring became popular in the 1970's, and has the advantage of enabling students and tutors to participate in immediate two-way communication.

Role of Telephone Tutors

The roles and responsibilities of telephone tutors vary from institution to institution (Ternier, 1984) and include teaching, administration, counselling, facilitating, motivating and record keeping (Coldeway, 1982, p. 31). Some institutions combine the role of tutor and counsellor and others separate the two personnel. Some tutors are involved in face-to-face instruction as well as telephone tutoring. Although OLA is placing an increasing emphasis on providing educational opportunities that allow for some face-to-face interaction between students and tutors, the principal support provided to students, in the majority of courses, is telephone tutors.

The role of telephone tutors at OLA is twofold. Tutors are responsible for marking and providing feedback on students' assignments, and for providing supplementary encouragement, support, and subject matter expertise to students by telephone. The tutor responsibilities (OLA, 1988c, p, 7) are:

1. Make initial contact with your students as soon as possible after student lists are received from the Student Records department.
2. Mark and grade all assignments for the course.
3. Forward to the Richmond registry all marked and graded assignments.
4. Answer student queries (placed either by telephone, by mail, or via the TMA form) on course material, or other related materials.
5. Maintain appropriate records on student achievement and student contact.
6. Participate in course evaluation as required.
7. Attend, and participate in tutor workshops.
8. Be available throughout the entire session in which students are assigned to you, except for the week vacation allowed under the terms of employment.
9. Send any extra notes or other tutor-initiated course material to the senior tutor or director for approval before forwarding to students.
10. Be available to mark exams on a regular basis.

Considerable advice has been offered to tutors in their role of providing feedback on students' assignments (Cole, Coats & Lentell, 1986; MacKenzie, 1974; Rhys, 1975). New tutors to open learning systems are often not familiar with providing instructional assistance to students in writing. This skill requires a much greater clarity of expression than is often needed by their counterparts in a traditional classroom situation where the teacher is able to say something several different ways until it is apparent that the message has been

understood. Open learning tutors do not have this luxury. Advice to tutors includes making explanations rather than judgements, being encouraging and supportive, and expressing themselves with clarity, conciseness and completeness (Open Learning Institute [OLI], 1984; Clennell, Peters & Sewart, 1988, p. 330; Cole, Coats & Lentell, 1986; OLA, 1988c, pp. 12-13; Store & Armstrong, 1981).

The role of the telephone tutor in providing encouragement, support and subject expertise by telephone, as a supplement to the learning materials, has been described by Flinck (1978). Although communication is restricted to auditory cues, such as voice, tone, tempo and inflection, voice quality and speech attributes (McInnis-Rankin & Brindley, 1986, p. 77), the telephone can be an effective communication instrument.

Effectiveness of Telephone Tutors

Empirical evidence provides strong indications that tutors who really try to help students and who constantly treat students in a friendly way as individual human beings, can affect the student's study perseverance to a very substantial extent (Baath, 1984, p. 38).

Although some research studies conducted in Europe during the 1970s by Ahlm, by Beijer and by Baath (cited in Flinck, 1978, pp. 29-30) showed that students were not very interested in telephone tutoring,

later research conducted by Willén (1981; 1984) reported that telephone tutoring was being effectively used in Swedish universities. Other research studies that have shown that telephone tutors had a positive influence on student success have been conducted by Flinck (1978), Rekkedal (1985), Spencer (1980) and Williams (1980). Gibbs and Durbridge (1976) carried out a qualitative research study at the Open University in England, where tutors are involved in face-to-face instruction, that illustrated the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful tutors. It was found that the tutor's personal style (being warm, concerned, friendly, emphathetic and understanding) contributed more to their effectiveness than did their tutoring and teaching abilities (knowledge of subject matter, ability to integrate material, and to select appropriate material and level in tutorials).

The majority of research involving telephone tutors has been conducted at the university level. However, at the National Extension College in England, Rouse (1986) studied student/tutor relationships at the college level, and his findings support the need for telephone contact between students and tutors. The majority of studies conducted at OLA involving students and tutors have included both college and university level courses. Sweet (1986) showed that direct telephone contact between OLI tutors and students "significantly influenced student commitment and persistence" (p. 201). However, in a separate study, Sweet (1982) stresses that, to be effective, tutors providing feedback to students by telephone must do so "in a context that is

supportive and encouraging" (pp. 3-4). Scales (1984) found that there was some support for the notion that there is a relationship between student persistence and telephone contact, and this was greater in the ABE and CTV groups. Durward and Durward's study (1983) showed that 90% of students were satisfied with their tutor's expertise, 93% were satisfied with the quality of comments on assignments, and 83% were satisfied with their tutor's telephone manner and ability to explain things.

It is apparent from empirical evidence and the research studies that have been conducted that telephone tutors do help some students to complete their studies. As Willén points out: ". . . however good the teaching material may be, some students are bound to fail in their studies unless we can also guarantee personal contact" (1984, p. 41) However, these studies do not show exactly how students are helped--or hindered--by their telephone tutors. At Athabasca University, Brindley (1987) was able to show how students were helped--and hindered--by all the various factors associated with learning at a distance. Her study reported that 50% of students interviewed indicated that the tutor had a significant impact on their studies, but that the effect could be negative as often as it could be positive (p. 87). Brindley's research is partially replicated and extended in this study in order to illustrate the ways in which tutors are helpful or hindering to students at OLA.

Critical Incident Technique

The research method chosen for this study is the critical incident technique. The roots of this technique can be traced back to the 1880s but the technique was developed in the United States during World War II. The critical incident technique was developed by Flanagan (1954) to obtain reports of specific behaviours of effective and ineffective pilot behaviour. The observations were collected and analysed to obtain a relatively objective and factual definition of effective piloting. The technique was used fairly extensively in business and industry and the health sciences in the 1950s to measure job performance. During the next two decades the technique was used to a moderate extent, but in the last few years there has been a renewed interest shown in this research methodology, and it is now considered to be a useful exploratory qualitative research method that can be adapted to many situations (Woolsey, 1986).

The most common application of the critical incident technique is to ask one group of people to describe critical incidents that relate to the performance of another group of people (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 509). The data is usually collected by interviews, and the critical incidents are then grouped to form a categorization system that is used to report the findings.

Flanagan (1954) and Woolsey (1986) outline five steps to be followed when conducting a study using the critical incident technique:

1. Determining the aim of the activity.

The aim must be stated in a simple and clear form. Wording of the aim is important because participants in the research study will be asked to provide critical incidents based on the aim statement.

2. Setting the plans, specifications and criteria for the information to be obtained.

At this stage, it is decided who the interviewer(s) will be, who will be interviewed, and which behaviours or experiences will be focussed on. The method(s) by which the critical incidents are to be collected must also be decided.

3. Collecting the data.

Data is usually collected by interviews, although various methods can be used including anecdotal records, observations and mailed questionnaires. Flanagan (1954) suggests that when questionnaires are used and subjects are

motivated to read the instructions carefully and answer conscientiously, this technique seems to give results which are not essentially different from those obtained by the interview method. (p. 343)

4. Analysing the thematic content of the data.

At the analysis stage, there are three main steps to be followed:

- selecting a general frame of reference, based on the intended use of the data;
- formulating the categories and subcategories, which is done inductively by sorting the critical incidents into groups of common meaning;
- determining the most appropriate level of generality or specificity to use in reporting the data. The categorization system may list a small number of general behaviours or a far greater number of specific behaviours.

Once the categorization system is completed, a sample of the critical incidents is sorted into categories and subcategories by independent raters to check the reliability of the categorization system. Andersson and Nilsson (cited in Woolsey, 1986, p. 250) suggest that it is acceptable if independent raters can correctly classify 75% to 85% of the critical incidents into the categories and 60% to 70% into the subcategories.

5. Reporting the findings.

The amount and type of information included depends on the purpose of the report. However, it is important that the categories and subcategories are given self-explanatory titles, which should be simple, brief and clear. Descriptions of the categories should convey a picture of the kind of critical incidents included in the category and must enhance the distinctiveness of the categories.

The critical incident technique has proved to be a reliable and valid research method. Andersson and Nilsson (1964) conducted a research project that analyzed the job of store managers in a Swedish grocery company. The data were also used to test the reliability and validity of the critical incident technique. They found that when two-thirds of the incidents had been classified, 95% of the subcategories had appeared. Different methods of data collection and different interviewers had little effect on the critical incidents collected. They also reviewed the literature that was used in the training of grocery store personnel but were not able to locate any additional, relevant information.

In the field of education, the critical incident technique has been used to develop a theory of educational professionalism (Leles, 1968) and to study the classroom behaviours of teachers that contribute to effective or ineffective teaching (Jensen, 1951). In distance

education, two studies have been conducted at the Open University in England using the critical incident technique. Thomas (1974) conducted a study to identify the characteristics that contribute to effective or ineffective counselling. Thomas obtained critical incidents by personally interviewing 12 senior counsellors. Twelve other senior counsellors reported critical incidents by completing report sheets. Two years later, Gibbs and Durbridge (1976) replicated Thomas's study by asking 22 staff tutors to identify effective and ineffective tutor characteristics at the Open University. In both of these studies the critical incident technique was used somewhat loosely. The interviews were unstructured and, in the case of the study on tutor effectiveness, a variety of interview formats was used. Thomas (1974) found that, in describing "good" or "poor" counsellors, senior counsellors had a tendency to report summary statements, rather than critical incidents that precisely described specific events. In order to represent the critical incidents adequately, Gibbs and Durbridge placed some in more than one category. The studies conducted by Thomas and by Gibbs and Durbridge used supervisors to describe the effectiveness of counsellors and tutors, respectively. Thomas advised that the initial plan was to collect critical incidents from students and counsellors as well as senior counsellors, but limitations on time and resources prevented him from being able to formulate a suitable approach for students and counsellors. Dachelet et al. (1981) suggest that critical incidents should be collected from individuals who are most competent and in the best position to make judgements. It could be argued that, in studies

concerned with the relationships between students and tutors (or students and counsellors), it is the consumers--the students--who are in the best position to evaluate the support being provided.

Brindley (1987) studied attrition and completion as viewed from the perspective of students taking distance education courses at Athabasca University. Using the critical incident technique, Brindley conducted interviews with 40 students who were enrolled in their first course. The names of five students were randomly sampled from eight selected courses. After classifying the 265 critical incidents collected into 13 categories, Brindley used the categorization system to discuss differences and similarities between completers and non-completers. Her study shows that students persist despite experiences that they perceive to be negative. As far as the non-completers are concerned, the study shows that in all probability there are avoidable drop-outs (pp. 104-105). Brindley concluded her study by making recommendations for retention strategies that could be implemented in the advising and counselling programs at Athabasca University.

Triangulation

Triangulation is the term used to describe the utilization of multiple research methods, data sources and/or researchers in studying the same object. It is commonly used in evaluation and research as a

strategy for improving the validity of the findings (Mathison, 1988). There are four basic types of triangulation: (1) data; (2) investigator; (3) theory; and (4) method (Denzin, 1970, pp. 301-310; Mathison, 1988, pp. 13-14).

1. Data triangulation

A study using data triangulation employs several data sources, the obvious example being the inclusion of more than one individual as a source of data (Mathison, 1988). Denzin also suggests that the subject be studied at different times of day or year and in different settings.

2. Investigator triangulation

Investigator triangulation refers to using several researchers to collect and analyse data.

3. Theory triangulation

Denzin admits that theoretical triangulation is problematic, and probably impossible in reality, but he includes it as he believes it is important for studies to be conducted with a theoretical perspective.

4. Method triangulation

There are two types of methodological triangulation. Within-method triangulation uses one research method, but several strategies are employed within that method to examine the data. Between-methods triangulation employs several data-gathering techniques in one study.

Multiple triangulation combines the use of more than one of these basic types of triangulation in one study.

In this study, multiple triangulation has been used, combining data triangulation (two groups of students and one group of tutors) and between-methods triangulation (two sets of telephone interviews and one set of mailed questionnaires).

Traditionally, triangulation has been used to attempt to improve the validity of research or evaluation findings. The aim of researchers has been to obtain data that is convergent. Mathison (1988) suggests an alternative conception of triangulation. She points out that there are "three outcomes that might result from a triangulation strategy." (p. 15) These are: convergent, when data from different sources agree; inconsistent, when the data is not confirming but not contradictory; and contradictory, when data produces opposing views. Mathison claims that, whereas traditionally it was felt that inconsistent and contradictory data were not useful, the real value of triangulation lies in providing

evidence that the researcher can use to construct plausible explanations of the data being studied.

This study has adopted Mathison's conception of triangulation but the terms have been adapted to meet the specific requirements of this research project. The terms used are convergent, analogous, divergent and inconclusive. The meaning of these terms, as they pertain to this study, is explained in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is divided into six sections. In the first section the student population is described. In the second section, the sampling procedures for students and tutors are detailed. The data collection procedures are explained in the third section. In the fourth section, the procedures used to categorize the critical incidents are described. The fifth section describes the independent rating process. The final categorization system is presented in table form, and a discussion of the experiences gained with using the critical incident technique in this study is provided in the sixth section.

Student Population

During the 1987/88 year, the total course enrolments at OLA were 20 061. On average students enrol in approximately 1.2 courses per session. Of the 20 061 course enrolments, 7 375 (37%) were in University courses, 8 787 (44%) were in CTV courses and 3 899 (19%) were in ABE courses. During the March, 1988 session, the total course enrolments were 3 323. Of those, 1 066 (32%) were in University

courses, 1 456 (44%) were in CTV courses and 801 (24%) were in ABE courses (OLA, 1988b).

The student population during 1987/88 was composed of 40% males and 60% females. Forty percent lived in the Lower Mainland, 11% in the Victoria area, 48% spread throughout the rest of the province, and 1% out-of-province. Eight percent were under 20 years old, 43% were aged 21-30, 33% were aged 31-40, 12% were aged 41-50 and 4% were aged over 50 (OLA, 1988b).

Sampling Procedures

This study employs a multiple triangulation strategy, combining data triangulation and between-methods triangulation (Denzin, 1970, pp. 301-310; Mathison, 1988, pp. 13-14). Data were collected from three sources--two groups of students and one group of tutors. Two methods were used: telephone interviews with the tutors and one group of students, and questionnaires with the other group of students.

Students

Computer print-outs were obtained from OLA of students who had enrolled in courses that officially started in March, 1988. OLA students may register and commence work on a course at any time

throughout the year but, for administrative purposes, they are scheduled into the next official course start dates--January 1, March 1, May 1, July 1, September 1, and November 1. Separate print-outs were obtained for students taking (i) University courses; (ii) CTV courses and (iii) ABE courses. The print-outs listed students by student number, starting with the lowest numbers; thus, the students who had been taking courses with the OLA for the longest time were at the top of the list.

I deleted from each print-out the names of students who (i) did not live in B.C.; (ii) were known to me; (iii) were enrolled in courses that included face-to-face interaction with their tutors; and (iv) were enrolled in more than one course so that the names of individual students only appeared once.

Systematic sampling (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 248) was used, with the starting number being randomly chosen. Pairs of student names were selected in case the student chosen was unable or unwilling to participate in the interview. Further systematic sampling was used to determine those students who would be asked to participate in the interview, and those who would be mailed questionnaires. Details of the sampling procedures for students are provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Sampling Procedures - Students

	University	CTV	ABE
Total number of students listed on print-outs, after deletions	830	1 251	563
Sample required	52	52	52
Names selected	15th & 16th	24th & 25th	10th & 11th
Starting number	11	11	6

Sample Obtained	52	52	52
Sample required for interviews	12	12	12
Names selected	4th & 5th	4th & 5th	4th & 5th
Starting number	1	2	1

Note. The remaining 40 names were used for the student questionnaires data source.

Tutors

Lists of University tutors, CTV tutors, and ABE tutors, who had been employed for four or more years at OLA, were obtained. The lists were in tutor number order; thus, the tutors who had been employed the longest were at the top of the list. I deleted from the lists the names of tutors who were known to me.

Systematic sampling was used to select tutors from each group (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 248), with the starting number being randomly chosen. Pairs of tutors were selected in case the tutor chosen was unable or unwilling to participate in the interview. Details of the sampling procedures for tutors are provided in Table 2.

Table 2
Sampling Procedures - Tutors

	University	CTV	ABE
Total number of tutors on lists, after deletions	26	37	28
Sample required	4	4	4
Names selected	6th & 7th	9th & 10th	7th & 8th
Starting number	3	9	6

Data Collection Procedures

The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986) was used to obtain critical incidents from the three data sources. Critical incidents were obtained from the tutors and one group of students by means of telephone interviews. A second group of students provided

critical incidents by means of a questionnaire. The data collection process is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3
Data Collection Process

Data Source 1	Data Source 2	Data Source 3
Student Interviews	Tutor Interviews	Student Questionnaires
LETTER Appendix 1	LETTER Appendix 4	LETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE Appendix 7
FIRST TELEPHONE CALL Appendix 2	FIRST TELEPHONE CALL Appendix 5	NO. MAILED U CTV ABE 40 40 40
TELEPHONE INTERVIEW Appendix 3	TELEPHONE INTERVIEW Appendix 6	FOLLOW UP LETTER Appendix 8
NO. OF INTERVIEWS U CTV ABE 12 12 12	NO. OF INTERVIEWS U CTV ABE 4 4 4	RESPONSE U CTV ABE 35 30 25 (88%) (75%) (63%)
Total of 36	Total of 12	Total of 90 (75%)

Student Interviews

A pilot study was conducted with three students whose names were taken from the computer print-outs, but who had not been selected for this study. The proposed standard format for student interviews was used, and no amendments were found necessary. Each interview was audio-taped and valuable experience in telephone interviewing was gained during the pilot study. At the end of each interview, I asked for feedback on the interview itself. During the pilot study, it became obvious that a student who was, for example, currently enrolled in a University course, may have previously taken ABE or CTV courses. At the beginning of each interview I therefore asked students about previous course enrolments. If they had taken courses in more than one group (University, CTV and ABE) I ensured that the critical incidents reported were recorded under the appropriate group.

The telephone was used so that students throughout the province could be interviewed. Letters were sent to each of the students that were selected to be interviewed, advising them of the research study and indicating that I would be telephoning them to ask if they would be willing to participate in the study and to set up a convenient time for the telephone interview to take place (see Appendix 1). The standard format of the initial telephone call is contained in Appendix 2.

A total of 22 students (nine University, seven CTV and six ABE students) declined to be interviewed. The most common reason cited was that they had not started the course and had not formed a relationship with their tutor (12 students). I attempted, unsuccessfully, to call three students on ten different occasions, two students were working away from home, two said they were too busy to participate, two declined without giving a reason, and one had moved without leaving a forwarding address. In these cases, a letter was sent to the second student of the pair of names selected.

I then conducted the interview at the arranged time. The standard format of the interview is contained in Appendix 3. Interviews were audiotaped and I made shorthand notes during the interview. The tape recordings were very useful in transcribing the interviews because they captured the tone of voice and inflections that gave meaning to the statements made by students. The shorthand notes were essential for the few moments when audiotaping was interrupted because of changing tapes, and also in cases where the interviewee's voice was very soft and didn't record well.

Critical incidents were written up on cards using both the audiotapes and the notes.

Tutor Interviews

Due to time restraints, a limited pilot study was conducted with one tutor, using the proposed standard format for tutor interviews. There was no evidence that any amendments to the interview format were necessary.

Interviews were conducted by telephone following similar procedures to those described for the student interviews.

A total of four tutors declined to be interviewed (all from the University group). One tutor was leaving on holiday the next day, one was out-of-town, one was in the middle of renovating his OLA office at home, and one was too busy. A letter was therefore sent to the second tutor of the pair of names selected.

The letter of introduction, the standard format of the initial telephone call and the standard format of the interview are contained in Appendices 4, 5 and 6.

Student Questionnaires

From the telephone interviews it was apparent that, whilst some students who had not started their courses had talked to their tutor on the telephone and, depending on the circumstances, were able to report

either facilitating or hindering critical incidents, the majority of students who declined to be interviewed did so because they had not established a relationship with their tutor. To avoid mailing questionnaires to students who, it was believed, were unlikely to be able to respond, a further step was taken in the sampling process for the student questionnaires. I used the OLA's computer system to ensure that the students who had been selected for the questionnaires had submitted two or more assignments. If the selected student did not meet this requirement, the second name of the selected pair of students was then checked. If this student had not completed the required assignments, then the name of the student that preceded the student originally selected was used. This pattern was followed until the name of a student who had completed two or more assignments was selected. I also took this opportunity to check the mailing addresses of students on the computer, as these records were more up-to-date than the computer print-out sheets that I had obtained several weeks earlier.

Critical incidents were obtained from the questionnaires by asking students to answer the two questions, "What has your tutor said or done which has been significantly helpful and encouraging to you in achieving what you wanted to in the course?" and "What has your tutor said or done which has been significantly unhelpful and discouraging to you in achieving what you wanted to in the course?" In addition, a number of other questions were asked in order to be able to clarify students' responses to the two main questions. The questions were written in a

check-question form, with an opportunity provided for students to explain the reasons for their responses.

A pilot study was conducted with two students. I extracted from the print-outs names of students who had not been selected for this study and who were living in my neighbourhood. I telephoned them to ask their assistance in the pilot study. I visited both of the students and requested them to complete the questionnaire. Several minor amendments were made to the questionnaire as a result of the pilot study.

The cover sheets containing instructions were colour coded for easy identification of the three groups of students. An identification number was placed on the instruction sheet to assist with follow-up procedures. Some students tore off the instruction page before returning the questionnaire but in all cases, except one, it was possible to identify the student. A copy of the questionnaire, including the covering letter and the instruction sheet, is contained in Appendix 7, and the follow-up letter can be found in Appendix 8. Twenty-five questionnaires from each group were required so 40 questionnaires were mailed to each group. Details of the response rates are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Response Rates for Student Questionnaires

	University (N = 40)		CTV (N = 40)		ABE (N = 40)		Total (N = 120)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<u>Questionnaires</u>								
Initial response	31	78	26	65	25	63	82	68
No response	9	22	14 ^a	35	15 ^a	37	38	32
<u>Follow-up Letters</u>								
Follow-up letters sent	9		13		14		36	
Response to follow-up	4	44	4	31	0 ^b	0	8	22
Total Response	35	88	30	75	25	63	90	75

^a One questionnaire returned by Post Office - student had moved.

^b Student's mother wrote to say that her daughter was teaching in Japan, and she had forwarded the questionnaire to her.

In all three groups, the original target of 25 questionnaires from each group was met or exceeded. According to Babbie (1983, p. 226) a response rate of 50% is adequate, 60% is good and 70% is very good. The response rates obtained ranged from 63% to 88% and provide a good indication to OLA that their students, particularly the University and CTV students, are a willing source of research data.

I edited the questionnaires and made notes of the items edited on three blank questionnaires--one for each group. The items that needed editing included questions that the student answered but, according to the instructions, should have been skipped, and responses to questions that contradicted the information they provided in the space allocated for comments for that particular question. I tabulated the results of the questionnaires, and these are contained in Appendix 9. The students' responses to the two main research questions (questions 32 and 33) were written up on cards as "critical incidents."

Procedures for Categorizing Critical Incidents

All the critical incidents were written up on colour-coded index cards to identify the group, the data source, and whether the incident was facilitating or hindering. I gave each student and tutor an identification number. (The University students that were interviewed were numbered SU1 through SU12. The University tutors were numbered TU1 through TU4. The University students that were sent questionnaires were numbered QU1 through QU40. This same system was followed for the CTV group--SCTV1 through SCTV12, TCTV1 through TCTV4 and QCTV1 through QCTV40 respectively--and the ABE group--SABE1 through SABE12, TABE1 through TABE4 and QABE1 through QABE40 respectively). These identification numbers were written on each card so that the source of the critical incident could be easily identified.

The three main steps involved in the analysis phase of the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986) are the selection of a general frame of reference, the formulation of the categories, and the determination of the most appropriate level of generality or specificity.

Frame of Reference

"There are countless ways in which a given set of incidents can be classified" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 344). The frame of reference is selected based on the intended use of the results. The aim of this study is to provide information to OLA administrators and tutors. As such, the frame of reference chosen is intended to be straightforward, so that it enhances communication. It is also aimed at being easy for administrators and tutors to relate to and, in the case of tutors, to identify with. The frame of reference chosen provides categories that enable administrators and tutors to understand the events that occur when students and tutors are interacting and to form an understanding of how certain tutor actions--or inactivities--are facilitating or hindering to students.

Some of the alternative frames of references that could possibly have been selected for a study of this nature could have resulted in the identification of the characteristics of tutors and/or students, the development of a study skills manual for students, the specification of

a job description for tutors, or the development of a tutor training program.

Formulation of the Categories

As Woolsey (1986) points out, "formulation of the categories is done inductively, by sorting the incidents into clusters that seem to group together" (p. 249). The formulation of categories for this study was particularly difficult because critical incidents were obtained from three data sources that were inevitably reported somewhat dissimilarly. I sorted the incident cards from each source separately. After many attempts to classify the critical incidents, a basic categorization system was formed for each data source. The three categorization systems were then reviewed and revised many times until one categorization system was formulated that encompassed all the critical incidents from each data source.

Level of Generality

The third step in the process is to determine the most appropriate level of specificity or generality to use in reporting the data. The original categorization system divided critical incidents into eight categories, with some categories being divided into a number of subcategories. There was a total of 22 categories/subcategories. Although Flanagan (1954) suggested that there should be the same number

of incidents in each category, more recently Woolsey (1986) believes that "forcing the data into superficially 'equal' categories would . . . (distort) them in other, more significant ways" (p. 250). This would certainly be the case in this study, particularly as collecting data from three sources inevitably resulted in some categories and subcategories having incidents reported by only one or two groups.

Independent Rating Process

After the original categorization system was formulated, the critical incidents were again reviewed from the data sources to ensure completeness and accuracy. Two independent raters were then asked to categorize a sample of the critical incidents to check the reliability of the system. A stratified sampling procedure (Borg & Gall, pp. 248-249) was used to ensure that critical incidents from each category and subcategory would be chosen. The system used for the independent rating process is illustrated in Table 5. By this system, 42 critical incidents (10% of total) were categorized by the independent raters.

Table 5

Stratified Sampling System used for Independent Rating Process

Total Number of Critical Incidents in Category/Subcategory	Number of Critical Incidents Randomly Sampled for Independent Rating
Less than 15	1
15 - 25	2
26 - 50	3
More than 50	4

The results of the independent rating are provided in Table 6.

Table 6

Results of Independent Rating of Categorization System

Raters	Concurrence of Categories %	Concurrence of Subcategories %
Myself and Independent Rater A	93	86
Myself and Independent Rater B	93	90
Independent Raters A and B	93	83
Myself and Independent Raters A and B	88	79

The results of the independent rating process exceed the acceptable rate suggested by Andersson and Nilsson (cited in Woolsey, 1986, p. 250) of 75% to 85% for correctly classifying categories and 60% to 70% for correctly classifying subcategories. Following a discussion of the categorization system with the raters after the rating process had been completed, minor amendments were made to it. Still further refinements were made to the categorization system at the time of writing the thesis, in order to enhance communication. The categories and subcategories were collapsed into categories, and the phraseology of the category headings was amended in order that each heading was meaningful in itself. The final categorization system, as shown in Table 7, has been organized into three areas: initial contact; feedback on assignments and telephone interaction.

Each category represents one factor in the student/tutor relationship that students and tutors perceive to be important for student success in open learning courses.

Critical Incident Technique

Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that one problem with qualitative research is that researchers tend not to share their experiences with reducing and analysing their data. It is therefore difficult for other researchers to follow the exact procedures used and to judge the merits

Table 7

Categorization System for the Critical Incidents

A. INITIAL CONTACT

1. Letters of introduction
2. Initial telephone conversations

B. FEEDBACK ON ASSIGNMENTS

3. Praising/critical comments on assignments
4. Quality of feedback on assignments
5. Turnaround time for assignments
6. Marks for assignments
7. Legibility of feedback on assignments
8. Tutors give students the opportunity to resubmit assignments
9. Tutors' responses to notes submitted by students with assignments
10. Tutors provide feedback on assignments by telephone

C. TELEPHONE INTERACTION

11. Tutors' availability during office hours
 12. Tutors' availability during out-of-office hours
 13. Tutors' telephone manners and communication skills
 14. Follow-up telephone calls
 15. Tutors' responses to questions concerning course content during telephone conversations
 16. Depth of telephone discussion concerning course content
 17. Tutors' persistence in ensuring students' understanding of course content during telephone conversations
 18. Telephone conversations concerning study skills
 19. Telephone conversations concerning assignment schedules
 20. Telephone conversations concerning examinations
 21. Tutors offer encouragement to students to continue course
 22. Telephone conversations concerning non-course-related matters
-

of the research. Although John Flanagan and Lorette Woolsey have provided invaluable information on the procedures for using the critical incident technique, the majority of research reports do not include descriptions of the positive and negative aspects of this research

methodology. For this reason I am providing a detailed description of some of the experiences gained with using the critical incident technique in this study.

In describing the categorization procedures, Andersson and Nilsson (1964) pointed out that the essential point in classifying critical incidents is that the category system chosen should be an obvious one. This seems to be the case for the final categorization system chosen in this study, and its simplicity belies the time-consuming process that took place in formulating the system. This appears to be a normal and necessary aspect of using the critical incident technique (Travers, 1964, p. 268; Woolsey, 1986, p. 248.)

A general rule of thumb in using the Critical Incident Technique is to collect incidents until redundancy appears. Flanagan (1954) suggests that, depending on the complexity of the data, it may require as few as 100 incidents or several thousands. It was apparent towards the completion of the student interviews that the incidents being collected were similar to those already reported. This was not necessarily the case in the tutor interviews or the questionnaires, but when the categorization system is reviewed as a whole, it becomes apparent that redundancy has probably occurred. It is doubtful that if more questionnaires were dispatched and more tutors were interviewed, any new categories would be formed.

A problem identified by Borg and Gall (1983, pp. 509-511) in using the critical incident technique is that of obtaining critical incidents that are truly critical. This was indeed a factor in this study. In collecting critical incidents from students, it was apparent that what was an important factor to one student was unimportant to another. I was obliged to make subjective decisions about how critical the critical incidents were to individual students. I omitted several critical incidents reported by students because I felt that there were not really important to the students. These critical incidents were usually reported towards the end of the telephone interviews when students were perhaps endeavouring to think of further critical incidents to report, rather than ones that came easily to mind.

In the case of the tutor interviews, the majority of tutors said that it was very difficult for them to know whether their actions were really helpful or hindering to students, except in the cases when students told them, either at the time or later. One tutor provided an illustration of this problem by describing a case where she felt she had really helped a student with an assignment problem during a telephone conversation, and had been able to motivate him. However, the tutor had no idea of how long the student would continue to feel motivated once he returned to his studies. Similarly, if students never start their courses, tutors do not know if they have said something to discourage the students during the initial telephone conversations, or whether there are factors in the students' personal lives that have prevented

them from studying. Therefore, the critical incidents reported by tutors were, in some cases, tutors' perceptions of occasions when they facilitated or hindered students. In other cases, the tutor was able to report critical incidents that they knew--because of feedback from the students involved-- had been critical to students.

Flanagan stresses that the definition of "significance" in terms of the critical incidents reported depends on the nature of the activity being studied. It is obviously more difficult to determine the significance of critical incidents in a subjective study of this nature than in one that examines behaviour in order to identify, for example, job specifications. Nevertheless, it is believed that the great majority of critical incidents reported in this study were critical--to a greater or lesser extent--to the individuals concerned.

An important point raised by Hardin (1955) is that, because critical incidents are based on reports of what actually took place, it is important for reliability that these are obtained as soon after their occurrence as possible. In this study, students were interviewed and mailed questionnaires during, approximately, their fourth month of study. Courses are intended to be completed within four months, but students are allowed up to six months to finish them. Very few of the students interviewed had completed their courses and written the examinations. As such, students were being asked to report critical incidents on the relationship that they were currently engaged in with

their tutors. Students who had taken more than one OLA course reported critical incidents concerning relationships with previous tutors. There may have been a problem with recall for these particular critical incidents although, in the great majority of cases, students seemed to very clear about the facts of the incidents. The problem of recall was obviously more difficult for tutors who had tutored a great many students over the years. In many cases, tutors provided examples of experiences with the students they were currently tutoring. In providing critical incidents concerning students who had taken courses several years ago, tutors were usually able to provide sufficient information regarding the particular situation, although they could not always remember specific details concerning, for example, the outcome of the incident--whether students had dropped out or successfully completed the course and passed the examination.

Although the frequencies of incidents collected for each category by source group is provided in Chapter 4 and collectively in Appendix 10, the reader is cautioned against attaching special significance to frequencies. Firstly, in some categories the frequency of critical incidents reported was low and it is thus difficult to make valid comparisons between data sources, and also between groups. Secondly, the data were obtained from three sources and it was apparent at the design stage of this study that frequencies of incidents obtained from each source may be dissimilar. For logistical reasons, it was necessary that the questionnaires would ask students to focus on one course and

their relationships with those particular tutors. Generally speaking, many students who were interviewed and who had taken only one or two courses cited relatively fewer incidents than students who had taken a number of courses. The criterion used in making the random selection of tutors was that they must have had four or more years experience as tutors at OLA, as it was felt that they would have a richer experience to draw on. However, in retrospect, it was found that in some cases they perhaps had too much experience. In a few cases, the tutors were unable to give detailed descriptions of specific critical incidents relating to individual students. For example, a number of tutors said in the interviews that they had received many notes from students over the years thanking them for their help in completing the course because of, say, the tutor's detailed feedback on assignments. This was written up as a general statement and was counted as one critical incident. In other cases, some tutors provided several examples of how a certain tutoring strategy had been helpful to individual students. For the purpose of consistency, these examples were combined and written up as one critical incident. This problem has been experienced in several studies using the critical incident technique (Rimon, 1979, p. 407; Thomas, 1974, p. 12).

I found that, in practice, establishing the categorization system was in fact a two-step procedure. First of all, the critical incidents were inductively sorted into clusters that eventually formed the categories. Once the categorization system was established, a second

step was necessary in order to ensure that the critical incidents had been categorized appropriately. Although the majority of critical incidents fell easily within the limits of the established categories, some difficulty was encountered in this second step in cases where critical incidents could fit into two or more categories. Gibbs and Durbridge (1976, p. 96) resolved the problem by placing critical incidents into more than one category, but I felt that this solution does not do justice to the principles of the critical incident technique. Part of the problem encountered is likely to be inherent in qualitative studies of this nature. After the telephone interviews were conducted with students and tutors, the critical incidents were written up on cards from the audiotapes and shorthand notes. The sorting of the critical incidents into categories was carried out several months later, by which time the original emphasis placed on various aspects of the statements contained within the critical incidents by the individual interviewees was forgotten. I found that written statements could often be interpreted in several different ways. During the second step of the categorization procedure, I listened to the audiotapes again and found that the original emphasis of some of the critical incidents reported by the interviewees had been lost in the written statements. In most cases listening to the audiotapes enabled me to fit the critical incidents into the appropriate categories. For this reason, the audiotapes were listened to several times during the analysis stage, and also at the time of writing the thesis, in an endeavour to ensure accuracy and completeness.

This communication problem has the potential of being more prevalent when obtaining critical incidents from questionnaires, where there is sole reliance on interpreting written statements. Again, the majority of critical incidents were quite easy to categorize. In cases where the meaning of critical incidents could have been interpreted in several ways, it was often possible to obtain clues from the responses students made to the other questions in the questionnaire. For example, a student may have reported a critical incident as "The tutor was very helpful in answering my questions." That statement does not convey whether the student asked the questions during a telephone conversation or by writing a note on the Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) form. The student's response to the other questions in the questionnaire often clarified the critical incident. In this example, it was perhaps found that the student had never talked to the tutor on the phone but had indicated in response to questions 12 and 13 that the tutor provided thorough answers to the questions asked on the TMA.

Students were asked to provide critical incidents of experiences that, in their perception, either facilitated or hindered them in achieving their personal course goals. Tutors were asked to provide critical incidents of occasions when, in their perception, they either facilitated or hindered students' in their achievement of their personal course goals. Eighteen of the twenty two categories included both facilitating and hindering critical incidents. In many cases, the hindering critical incidents cited by students and tutors are the mirror

image of the facilitating critical incidents. For example, one student reported that receiving an initial telephone call from their tutor was helpful. This was recorded as a facilitating critical incident. Another student reported that not hearing from the tutor at the beginning of the course was discouraging. This is recorded as a hindering critical incident. In both instances, the students are voicing the same opinion--initial telephone calls are helpful. In reporting the results for each category in Chapter 4, a statement is made as to whether the hindering critical incidents are in fact mirror images of the facilitating critical incidents or whether they relate to other unhelpful or discouraging experiences.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section answers the main research question relating to the identification of facilitating and hindering factors in the student/tutor relationships. In this section, the multiple triangulation strategy used in this study is explained and the procedures that were carried out to make the triangulation decisions are described. An overview of the triangulation decisions for each of the categories is produced in table form. The results relating to each category are then provided. These results include a description of each category, excerpts from critical incidents, a table illustrating the frequency of critical incidents reported, the triangulation decision, and a discussion of the findings. The second section of this chapter relates to the secondary question posed in this research study, comparing the differences in the identified factors for students enrolled in (i) University courses, (ii) CTV courses, and (iii) ABE courses, and their tutors.

Facilitating and Hindering Factors in Student/Tutor Relationships

The critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986) was used to collect data, in the form of critical incidents, from the three data sources (two groups of students and one group of tutors). The length of the student interviews varied from 5 minutes to 90 minutes. The number of critical incidents reported by individual students ranged from one to twenty-three, with a mean of 5.3. The tutor interviews averaged approximately 75 minutes in length. The number of critical incidents reported by individual tutors ranged from four to thirteen, with a mean of 9.2. The majority of students providing critical incidents by means of questionnaires reported one critical incident and the highest number of critical incidents reported by individual students was three, with a mean of 1.2.

The total number of critical incidents reported was 406. Of these, 295 were facilitating and 111 were hindering. Details of the totals by data source and group are provided in Appendix 10. These critical incidents were sorted into groups of common meaning and the final categorization system consists of 22 categories. Each category describes one factor that is perceived by the data sources to be important for student success in open learning courses. The multiple triangulation strategy shows the relative importance of the identified factors to each of the three data sources.

Triangulation

This study employs a multiple triangulation strategy, combining data triangulation and between-methods triangulation (Denzin, 1970, pp. 301-310; Mathison, 1988, pp. 13-14). Data was collected from three sources--two groups of students and one group of tutors. Two methods were used: telephone interviews with the tutors and one group of students, and questionnaires with the second group of students.

Whilst Mathison's (1988) conception has been adopted for making triangulation decisions, the terminology has been amended to suit the requirements of this particular study. In making the triangulation decision, I considered two aspects (i) the frequency of critical incidents reported; and (ii) the content of the critical incidents. The following terms are used to describe the four triangulation decisions in this study:

"Convergent" when critical incidents are reported by all three data sources, and the frequency and content tend to be similar;

"Analogous" when critical incidents are reported by all three data sources, the content tends to be similar but the frequency is dissimilar;

"Divergent" when critical incidents are reported by all three data sources but the content of the critical incidents

reported by one data source tends to disagree with the content of the critical incidents reported by the other two data sources;

"Inconclusive" when critical incidents are reported by only one or two data sources.

Table 8 sets out the triangulation decision-making process as it pertains to this study.

Table 8
Triangulation Decision-Making Process

Number of Data Sources Reporting Critical Incidents	Frequency of Critical Incidents Reported by each Data Source ^a	Content of Critical Incidents	Triangulation Decision
3	Similar	Similar	Convergent
3	Dissimilar	Similar	Analogous
3	Similar or Dissimilar	Opposing	Divergent
Less than 3			Inconclusive

^a The frequency of critical incidents is considered to be dissimilar if one data source reports 10% or less of the total critical incidents in that category.

Categories

The format used in reporting the results is as follows:

1. A description of the category is provided.
2. Excerpts from critical incidents illustrating the category are presented. Bearing in mind that this is an exploratory study, a sufficient number of excerpts from critical incidents is given to provide a rich description of the information collected from each data source (student interviews, tutor interviews and student questionnaires) and from each group (University, CTV and ABE). Excerpts from critical incidents have been reported, rather than full citations, in order to avoid repetition.
3. A table is presented illustrating the frequency of critical incidents obtained from each data source (student interviews, tutor interviews and student questionnaires), broken down into groups (University, CTV and ABE), and divided into facilitating (F) and hindering (H) critical incidents.
4. The triangulation decision is stated. A comment is also made on the content of the hindering critical incidents to explain whether they are the mirror image of the facilitating critical incidents or whether they

refer to an unhelpful or discouraging experience relating to this factor.

5. A discussion of the findings is offered that includes recommendations on ways in which it would appear possible for tutors to enhance their relationships with students.

Table 9 provides an overview of the triangulation decisions for each of the categories.

Table 9

Triangulation Decisions

Triangulation Decision	Category
Convergent	2. Initial telephone conversations
Convergent	4. Quality of feedback on assignments
Convergent	5. Turnaround time for assignments
Convergent	6. Marks for assignments
Convergent	12. Tutors' availability during out-of-office hours
Convergent	13. Tutors' telephone manners and communication skills
Convergent	15. Tutors' responses to questions concerning course content during telephone conversations
Convergent	16. Depth of telephone discussions concerning course content
Convergent	17. Tutors' persistence in ensuring students' understanding of course content during telephone conversations
Convergent	18. Telephone conversations concerning study skills
Convergent	20. Telephone conversations concerning examinations
Convergent	21. Tutors offer encouragement to students to continue course
Analogous	1. Letters of introduction
Analogous	3. Praising/critical comments on assignments
Inconclusive	7. Legibility of feedback on assignments
Inconclusive	8. Tutors give students the opportunity to resubmit assignments
Inconclusive	9. Tutors' responses to notes submitted by students with assignments
Inconclusive	10. Tutors provide feedback on assignments by telephone
Inconclusive	11. Tutors' availability during office hours
Inconclusive	19. Telephone conversations concerning assignment schedules
Divergent	14. Follow-up telephone calls
Divergent	22. Telephone conversations concerning non-course-related matters

A. Initial Contact

First impressions may be of paramount importance in setting the tone of the student/tutor relationship. There are two forms of initial contact from the tutor to the student--a written letter and a telephone call. Students are also given the opportunity to initiate communication with the tutor at the beginning of the course by completing a voluntary student questionnaire that they can send to their tutor if they so wish.

1. Letters of Introduction

When tutors are hired, OLA provides them with a sample of an introductory letter and they are asked to prepare their own letter. OLA suggests that tutors should include some personal information about themselves and provide details about their office hours. This letter is then included in each student's package of course materials. Critical incidents in this category refer to how helpful or unhelpful the tutor's personal letter of introduction was to students.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U The tutor included some personal information about himself in the letter of introduction. It was encouraging because it made me feel the tutor was a person.
- U From the letter of introduction, I was able to get a picture of the tutor--which may or may not have been correct--but I had a feeling of who I was talking to. She sounded friendly, which made me feel more comfortable at phoning her. It broke the barrier of not wanting to call the first time. I felt she would welcome my call.

- U** In the letter of introduction, the tutor said I could call at any time. She said "If you are having a problem, that's the time to call."
- CTV** I appreciated learning from the letter of introduction that I could call my tutor at any time. Although I didn't have to take advantage of it, it made me feel very secure knowing that I had somewhere to turn if I had problems.
- ABE** The tutor sounded interesting, well qualified and well-rounded. I found it encouraging because he gave me the impression that he would be the sort of person I would like to be friends with.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

- U** The tutor gave no personal information about himself in the letter of introduction. I didn't know anything about him until I read a newspaper article about him. I felt awkward at phoning him as I had no idea who I was talking to--whether he was young or old, very professional or non-professional, friendly and unfriendly. He gave me the impression that it was up to the student to phone him. He never did phone me.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incident:

- U** Many students thank me for my letter of introduction. I follow the standard format, but I do give a bit of information about my background.

Table 10

Frequency of Critical Incidents - Letters of Introduction

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	5	1	1	0	1	0	7	1	8
CTV	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
ABE	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>
Data Source Totals	8	1	1	0	1	0	10	1	11
Data Source Totals F + H	9		1		1		= 11		

Triangulation Decision

Analogous: The contents of the critical incidents are similar, but the tutor interview and student questionnaire data sources reported less than 10% of the total number of critical incidents obtained in this category. The one hindering critical incident reported by a student refers to her tutor not including any personal information about himself in the letter of introduction.

Discussion

There were two items that were consistently referred to in the critical incidents reported in this category. Firstly, students appreciated receiving some personal information about their tutor. One of the problems inherent in communicating by telephone is the lack of knowledge of the physical appearance of the person at the other end of the telephone. Short (1974) suggests that, to overcome this problem, a photograph of the tutor should be included with the letter of introduction. From a practical point of view, this solution may be difficult and costly to administer. Secondly, students appreciated being encouraged to telephone their tutors. This factor was mentioned in several of the categories ("Initial telephone conversations," "Quality of feedback on assignments," and "Tutor provides feedback on assignments by telephone.") It is apparent that, whilst some students are aggressive in initiating telephone calls to their tutors, many

students are reluctant to call perhaps because they do not want to bother their tutor or would prefer to struggle on their own. Tutors providing encouragement to students to phone them may help students to overcome this barrier.

One student who was interviewed in this study expressed concern that the letter of introduction was just one of a number of items that were sent to her at the beginning of the course as a computer print-out. The student indicated that the letter was easy to overlook, and the fact that it was printed on a computer print-out rather than on a single sheet of letterhead paper detracted from its potential impact as a personal letter from the tutor. (This was not recorded as a critical incident as this aspect of the letters of introduction was considered to be an administrative matter and not directly related to the student/tutor relationship.)

2. Initial Telephone Conversations

One of the tutor's responsibilities is to make initial telephone calls to students as soon as possible after the student lists are received from OLA (1988c, p. 7). The initial telephone conversation is intended to enable tutors to establish a relationship with students and to encourage them to start work on their course. Critical incidents in this category refer to how helpful or unhelpful initial telephone calls

were and also describe occasions when the telephone calls were not made.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

U The tutor called and said "I am _____. When would be the easiest time for me to phone you?" I felt she was interested in me, and doing more than just marking papers.

U The tutor called me before I even got my package of materials and welcomed me to the course.

CTV The tutor called and introduced himself and let me know who he was. It broke the ice, and established a good relationship. It put me at ease and made me feel comfortable about phoning him. I didn't feel I was calling a total stranger.

CTV I haven't had time to start the course but the tutor has called several times. I haven't been at home to get the calls but I appreciate her phoning.

CTV The tutor asked me what my expectations were. He gave me a brief outline of what I would be doing, and told me what he expected of me.

ABE The tutor took the initiative to phone me which I found encouraging. He put me at ease right at the beginning. He encouraged me to phone him any time I have a problem.

ABE When my tutor phoned he was very open and I felt comfortable with him. He said that he enjoyed older people as students because they have a lot of life experience. It didn't matter to him that I only had a Grade 10 education and hadn't been to school for 50 years.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

U I started the course a few weeks early and when I didn't hear from my tutor I phoned her. It would have been very helpful to me as a new student to OLA if the tutor had contacted me first. She did say she was about to call me and I had beat her to it, but nevertheless it would have been more encouraging if she had called me first.

CTV When the tutor phoned at the beginning of the course, all she did was give me a list of instructions, e.g. "photocopy this, do this." I was very confused. I wrote it all down but I didn't understand what she was talking about. It wasn't at the right time. She didn't give me any encouragement.

ABE I didn't hear from my tutor. I phoned OLA and complained. The person said: "Don't take it so badly; phone him up." I did, although I think the tutor should take the initiative. I was discouraged as I think the tutor should take some interest in me.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** I make approximately four attempts to call the student at the beginning of the course, calling at different times of the day and on different days of the week. If I receive the first assignment from a student who I haven't been able to reach on the phone, I make a note on the TMA that I have been unsuccessful in finding them at home and ask them to call me. At least they know I have tried.
- U** I try to make the initial telephone call as soon as possible after I receive the list. I try not to make too many introductory calls at one time as I find I'm not as effective towards the end of the evening. I reach a point where I know I'm not going to be as positive as I would like, and I don't want to dampen the student's ardour.
- U** During the initial phone call I make a point of being friendly in my manner and tone of voice.
- CTV** I make long introductory calls--approximately 45 minutes. I talk about all sorts of things such as students' goals, motivation and commitment, as well as their family and work situation. I discuss the program as a whole--not just the specific course they are enrolled in. I try to develop a good rapport. If I don't make the introductory call, there's not the same feeling of commitment. We start off on the wrong foot.
- CTV** When I first became a tutor my initial telephone calls were very short and I used closed-ended questions. Now I'm much more confident and relaxed. I'm able to draw out the students, and they seem to be much more comfortable now. I think they feel that I'm receptive to them calling me.
- ABE** The introductory call produces positive results. One student commented: "I have registered for this course before but I didn't get a call from the tutor. Now that you have called me I feel more anxious to get going."

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** Tutor called me and welcomed me to the course. He indicated that, because of my previous course completions, I shouldn't have any problems with the course.
- ABE** Tutor called and encouraged me to phone if I need assistance.

Student Questionnaires - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** Tutors should call at least once in a course.
- ABE** My tutor called, but I was not home at the time. I feel that this lack of personal contact has discouraged me. In previous courses when the tutor phoned me, I felt like I was contacting a person when I mailed assignments.

Table 11

Frequency of Critical Incidents - Initial Telephone Conversations

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	2	1	4	0	1	1	7	2	9
CTV	3	2	2	0	1	0	6	2	8
ABE	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>
Data Source Totals	7	4	7	0	3	2	17	6	23
Data Source Totals F + H	11		7		5		= 23		

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. All hindering critical incidents, except one, related to the initial telephone call not being made. One student reported a negative experience concerning the initial telephone conversation.

Discussion

The tutor's telephone manner and communication skills (see category 13) are obviously of paramount importance during the initial telephone call as it is during this conversation that the tutor is most

able to influence the relationship that is established between student and tutor.

Critical incidents indicated that students appreciated:

- the tutor showing some interest in them
- being encouraged to telephone the tutor
- exchanging personal information with tutor
- being put at ease
- discussing the course as a whole.

B. Feedback on Assignments

Students are required to complete a number of assignments and submit them to their tutors. Assignments are mailed directly to the tutor, together with a three-part Tutor Marked Assignment (TMA) form (Appendix 11). The tutor provides feedback on the assignment and awards it a mark. As well as writing comments on the student's assignment, the tutor is required to summarize the comments on the TMA. The tutor completes and signs the TMA, retains one copy and forwards the assignment and two copies of the TMA to OLA. Tutors are required to complete this process within 72 hours of receipt of the assignment. At OLA, the marks for the assignment are logged into the computer, one copy of the TMA is retained at the registry, and the marked assignment and the top copy of the TMA is then mailed back to the student.

3. Praising/Critical Comments on Assignments

In this category critical incidents relate to the positive or negative comments that tutors made on assignments that either encouraged or discouraged students. Critical incidents describe occasions when tutors praised the students' work and when remarks were made by tutors that were perceived by students to be negative and critical.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** The tutor's comments were very positive, e.g. "An excellent beginning." It made me very keen and excited to do unit 2. It really helped.
- U** The tutor always starts her feedback with a positive comment, which I really need, e.g. "Good work. You are doing really well." I feel that she cares.
- CTV** When I received a grade of 85% or higher, the tutor stamped my assignment with various slogans (e.g. a star and the word "excellent" or a heart and the word "outstanding." When you opened the envelope you knew immediately if you had done well on the assignment. It made me feel great. I need strokes.
- CTV** The tutor wrote encouraging words on assignments, e.g. "Good work," or "Hope your exam went well." It made me feel that she was interested in me and wanted to help me. I felt she cared that I did well.
- ABE** The tutor's comments on assignments were very encouraging, e.g. "Don't worry, next time you will do better," "very good," etc.
- ABE** I was doing quite well in the course and the tutor wrote on the TMA that whenever she sees something from me in the mail she knows it will be a good assignment.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** The tutor didn't give any praise on the assignments and just wrote: "You should have done this . . ." I felt blasé and that there was no-one out there who really cared how I was doing.
- CTV** The tutor didn't give me any feedback. She didn't say anything to encourage me or build up my confidence. There were no personal remarks.

CTV The tutor's comments were critical and discouraging. The comments had a sharp tone and her manner was condescending. This rubbed me up the wrong way. I felt that if I had met her I wouldn't have liked her.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

ABE I give lots of positive reinforcement on TMAs.

ABE Praise of specific efforts always makes a student feel good because it lets them know that you have noticed them and it builds up their confidence. ABE students are insecure. They have fallen out of the educational system and have big holes in their egos. They have many insecurities and they lack confidence. If I can instil some confidence in them, then I am three-quarters of the way there. This is particularly true for women students, because they have had more problems getting jobs or have been in low-paying jobs, etc. They tend to lack any faith in their self-worth. They start out very tentatively in the first assignment but they gradually gain confidence and begin to discover that they can put ideas on paper that are considered seriously and are worth discussing. I never let the first assignment go by without praising it. I look for anything --even a single sentence--to praise.

ABE Praise is very important. It often results in comments from students, such as "that's really encouraging," "that makes me want to continue with the course," "I'm so glad to hear that," "It's nice to know I'm doing well," or "I'm doing much better than I did at high school." Praise is particularly appreciated by people who didn't do well and weren't motivated in high school. They are the ones who benefit from the praise. They say "I just didn't do that well in high school and it's so nice to be getting better marks." They make the comparison between their high school experiences and the open learning situation.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents

CTV When I first started tutoring, one student made the same error in three subsequent assignments even though I pointed out the error. On the third assignment I wrote: "As I mentioned to you twice previously, you are doing this incorrectly." I didn't hear from the student. Eventually I called and she said "I must be really stupid to keep making the same mistake." From that experience I have learned to couch my comments in very nice polite language. The interpretation of written communication is so different than a face-to-face interaction when you are saying something with a smile on your face.

ABE A student submitted an essay which wasn't on the required subject matter. I felt she had done the essay for another course, had it marked and then adapted it slightly for this course. I made a comment on the TMA to that effect as we are required to justify the marks given. I didn't think I was very critical, but she did. Her main criticism of me was that I had included the comment on the TMA

which was a permanent record in the OLA registry. This bothered her. She didn't deny that it wasn't an original essay.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** All criticism is very constructive--everything is phrased as a positive instead of a negative.
- CTV** When I received an encouraging comment on one assignment, it gave me the added boost I needed to get through the next assignment.
- ABE** On the first assignment the tutor wrote "I am confident you will do well in this course" and he always puts something like "Overall, very good content, or "Keep up the impressive work."

Table 12

Frequency of Critical Incidents - Praising/Critical Comments on Assignments

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	4	1	0	0	3	0	7	1	8
CTV	7	2	0	1	9	1	16	4	20
ABE	<u>7</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>22</u>
Data Source Totals	18	3	3	2	22	2	43	7	50
Data Source Totals F + H	21		5		24		= 50		

Triangulation Decision

Analogous: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources, but tutors reported 10% of the total number of critical incidents in this category. Two students reported hindering critical

incidents referring to praise not being given by the tutors. Three students and two tutors reported critical incidents referring to comments being perceived by the student as critical and negative.

Discussion

This category had the second highest number of critical incidents reported in it, which indicates that tutors praising students' work is a very important factor in the student/tutor relationship. The importance of the motivational aspects of the tutor's work is well documented (Baath & Wangdahl, 1976). Bartels reported that both graduates and drop-outs at the FernUniversität were dissatisfied by the fact that very rarely did students receive praise for an assignment in which they had done particularly well (1985, p. 44). However, some caution may be warranted, especially at the university level. Cole, Coats and Lentell suggest that Open University students want "encouragement and reassurance about their own ability, but balanced with honesty" (1986, p. 16). MacKenzie suggested that praising comments such as "well done" and "keep it up" were "diffuse benevolence," and "such cheery exhortations made me cringe as a fatally condescending form of jolly along" (1974, p. 48). The importance of tutors not flattering students, particularly at the university level, is worthy of note. Indeed, in the student questionnaires conducted in this study, one University student indicated that she found the praising comments made on her assignments to be cliché.

While tutors may need to be wary of being too profuse in their praising comments, this study indicated that the great majority of students appreciated, and are encouraged by, praising comments. It is possible that, if tutors were able to form an opinion of the student's self concept during the initial telephone conversation, they may be able to get a feeling of how much praise and encouragement individual students require.

4. Quality of Feedback on Assignments

Critical incidents in this category refer to how thorough or inadequate the tutor's feedback on assignments was and how helpful or unhelpful it was to the student.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U The tutor's comments on my essay assignments were direct and to the point. The tutor told me how I could improve my essay. I was able to understand exactly what was required. This helped me with my next assignments.
- U The tutor wrote down the right answer and then went through all the steps.
- U I appreciated getting one or two paragraphs of generalized comments about what are the strengths and weaknesses of the paper and my writing style. The tutor gave me more information about something by saying: "Yes, but did you look at this." The tutor also tried to expand on what I've said. Extensive comments let me know that the tutor has really read the assignment. Comments are far more useful than a higher grade.
- CTV The tutor sends "model answers" to assignments which are very helpful. These include additional information and indicate where information is located in text and course materials relating to

areas where I'm having problems. The "model answers" also tell me where I can find further research.

CTV The tutor explained where I'd gone wrong and suggested ways to improve it. I learn by my mistakes.

ABE The tutor numbered each paragraph of my essay and would then refer to each paragraph by number on the TMA. He would write, for example, "You could have supported this idea with more details," "This paragraph is a little weak." He pointed out punctuation errors.

ABE The tutor wrote a long explanation of one question I got wrong--he wrote it out on the back of the sheet.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

U The tutor didn't make any comments on my second assignment, whereas she had made lots on my first assignment. It took a long time to get the second assignment back. I had the feeling that she had got behind and then whipped through the assignments and didn't have time to mark them.

U The tutor's comments are limited to a few tips and a grade. This is dissatisfying even if I get a good mark. I would prefer a "B" with lots of comments than an "A" with no comments.

U In earlier assignments the tutor encouraged me to editorialize and add different points of view in my analysis. So, in a later assignment, I introduced a lateral way of looking at something but he totally rejected it, saying it was unfounded and couldn't be proved.

U The tutor used a computer for marking assignments. He would write numbers on the essay and then on the TMA he would write the number and print out the boilerplates from his computer. He used a specific pattern for marking. I had the feeling that he wrote much the same for each student. It was not personalized.

ABE I'm taking the course because I want to improve my English, not for credit. I would have preferred her to point out my errors so that I can learn from them. If I'm not sure how to do something I sometimes do it one way just to find out whether it's right or wrong--I take that risk--but she doesn't comment on it so I still don't know if it's correct or not.

ABE Tutor told me the answer was wrong and gave me the right answer, but didn't show me how to get the right answer. I went over and over the question but I kept getting the same answer. I should have phoned the tutor to find out. I'm too "chicken" to phone, and I don't know how he would explain a math problem over the phone.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

U I refer to the text to show students grammatical and sentence structure problems. I point out the strengths and weaknesses, and how to improve the grade, style and content.

U In this upper level course, the first assignment does not have marks that count toward the course. I make very extensive comments

on this assignment as I think it is only fair to point out if I think there is a serious problem in the student's ability to complete the course, especially as there are no pre-requisites and only approximately 1 out of 15 students complete this course per year. I often fail the first assignment. I express my frankest opinion. If the students are confident enough, they can take my detailed comments and use them in the next assignments. I write on the assignments "You are clearly interested in this subject but unfortunately your work doesn't meet the standards required by the course." I then give detailed explanations of what the standards are and why the assignment doesn't meet them.

CTV I try and help students relate the course materials to their work experience by asking questions about whether a certain situation has occurred in their workplace and, if so, how did they view it. One student was a receptionist in a small office and her desk was in a position so that she heard a number of communications between supervisors and staff. I asked her in the feedback on the assignment if she had ever experienced a certain situation and what she would do if she was the supervisor. She found my questions to be particularly relevant. She replied: "Isn't it interesting that you mentioned these subjects because they have created friction in our office."

CTV I write a considerable amount, in fair detail, in making comments on assignments. The student's age, sex, education, and work experience have a great impact on their studies in courses related to management and supervision. If the student is 17 or 18, I have to explain many, many relationships and situations that I don't have to do with a more mature person. Older students can see more in the course materials and I can make the course more meaningful to them.

CTV I have prepared a set of comment sheets, one for each of the six assignments, that provides supplementary information to the unit. I include positive comments about aspects of the assignments that students have done well in, and corrective statements. I also explain where to find further references in the course materials or text and where to find additional exercises, etc. I update these one page (double-sided) comment sheets regularly, and send them to students in addition to my extensive feedback on each individual assignment. Students find them really useful for checking to see how they did in comparison to other students and for review prior to the examination.

ABE I make a conscious effort to gear my comments to the student's reading level. I choose my vocabulary carefully. I use a writing style that is relevant, without talking down to students. I introduce terminology and use it in context so that students will be able to define it.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

U A student was having difficulty with the course. She worked hard and was curious, and we talked a lot on the phone, but I thought

she would benefit from a more basic course. I suggested this on the TMA in the middle of the course. She completed the course and then wrote a letter of protest to OLA blaming me for many things. I will never again suggest to students that they should take a different course.

CTV If I know nothing about the student (age, sex, education and work experience), with the best of intentions, I may write something to the student that they find unclear, irrelevant, disconcerting or discouraging. If I don't receive the voluntary questionnaire from the student, I have to go on my reading of the person, based on what they have submitted. For example, a mature, educated woman student told me she didn't appreciate me underlining parts of her assignment in red ink and making comments in the margin relative to the parts that I had underlined. She didn't think I had a right to do that. She said she knew what she wrote and if I didn't like it, then we could disagree. I was doing this with the best of intentions because I thought this would be helpful to her.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

U Very thorough - she shows me other ways of arriving at an answer.
CTV Helpful in understanding the course and questions that I got wrong.
ABE She helped me strengthen my essays.

Student Questionnaires - Hindering Critical Incidents:

U On the first essay, the tutor said "too many quotes" and on the last one he said "not enough." It was a little confusing.
CTV There have been times that I have made several mistakes. He puts crosses everywhere instead of showing me the correct way.
CTV The tutor's marking often seems too "picky" to me and it discourages me from looking further than key phrases in lessons for information because it seems that he wishes to read only one response and perhaps it is important to him that the response is what he expects--nothing new or even varied.
ABE Even though the criticisms help me, I'd prefer if they were more concerned with content and interpretation of the literature rather than the actual structure of the essay.

Table 13

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Quality of Feedback on Assignments

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	8	4	2	1	11	3	21	8	29
CTV	5	0	4	1	3	2	12	3	15
ABE	<u>7</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>14</u>
Data Source Totals	20	6	8	2	16	6	44	14	58
Data Source Totals F + H	26		10		22		= 58		

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. Six students cited hindering critical incidents referring to the tutor not providing sufficient feedback. Six students and two tutors cited hindering critical incidents relating to occasions when the tutor confused the student or the student was dissatisfied with the feedback.

Discussion

The highest number of critical incidents were reported in this category. Critical incidents suggested that students were appreciative of tutors:

- explaining why items were wrong and how to correct or improve them
- making references to the text and course materials, as well as to related materials if appropriate
- providing pre-produced comment sheets or model answers, in addition to regular feedback on the TMAs and comments on the assignments
- gearing comments to the student's level
- encouraging students to phone.

Critical incidents also indicated that tutors who use computers for producing comments on TMAs should ensure that feedback is personalized, for example, by using the student's name, and making reference to particular aspects of the individual student's work.

The provision of appropriate feedback on assignments was an important factor to students. Tutors who are able to determine the amount of feedback required by individual students during the initial telephone conversation are in a better position to fulfill the needs of their students. Tutors could do this by discussing students' previous experiences with open learning courses, and attempting to ascertain

their expectations and preferences with respect to the quantity and quality of feedback they would prefer on their assignments (Baath & Wangdahl, 1976, p. 16). It would be more difficult, but not impossible, to discuss this subject with students who have had no previous experience with open learning courses. With careful discussion, tutors may be able to ascertain the most appropriate feedback for the individual student. Tutors could also ask students, during follow-up telephone conversations, whether they are finding the feedback on assignments to be helpful, and in what ways the tutor could better support the students in this respect.

5. Turnaround Time for Assignments

Critical incidents in this category refer to the benefits to the student of a prompt turnaround time, and also to the problems that arose when assignments were delayed.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

CTV The tutor marked every assignment the day he received it and OLA mailed it back to me the next day, so the tutor must hand deliver assignments to OLA.

CTV The tutor phoned to apologise that she was behind in marking assignments because of family problems. It made me realize she was human too.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

U I would wait until the very last minute to hand deliver my assignments to my tutor in Vancouver. No matter how long I waited,

my previous assignment didn't get back until my next one was submitted. I handed in the first assignment early, then I did the second assignment and waited right until the deadline to hand it in. Three days later, the first assignment came back. In his feedback, the tutor said "In the second assignment, I would like you to look at these points and include this and that." But it was too late. That happened with every assignment.

CTV The turnaround time is 4, 5 or 6 weeks. I therefore wasn't able to correct mistakes from previous assignments and I compounded the mistakes.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incident:

CTV I try to mark assignments the same day I receive them or the day after.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

U Too long a time lag in sending assignments back is unhelpful to students. They have told me that it makes them feel uncertain.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incident:

ABE All assignments were quickly returned so that I had them all available for my examination studies.

Table 14

Frequency of Critical Incidents - Turnaround time for Assignments

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	3	3
CTV	2	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	4
ABE	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>
Data Source Totals	2	3	1	1	1	0	4	4	8
Data Source Totals F + H	5		2		1		= 8		

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. The four hindering critical incidents describe the problems experienced by students when there was a slow turnaround time. The ratio of 4:4 facilitating to hindering critical incidents in this category provides an indication that a prompt turnaround time may be appreciated by students as often as a slow turnaround time may cause problems for students.

Discussion

It would appear that OLA may have benefited from studies that were conducted in the early 1970s that demonstrated that a fast turnaround time for assignments is an important factor for students (Baath, 1984, p.35). OLA requires tutors to mark and forward students' assignments within 72 hours of receiving them from students. The current procedures result in assignments passing through the Canada Post Office mail system three times (student to tutor; tutor to OLA; OLA to student). Obviously tutors have no influence on the efficiency of the mail system, but the results of this study either boost one's confidence in Canada Post, or indicate students' acceptance of longer turnaround times. Other studies conducted at OLA showed that the turnaround time is generally very prompt. Durward and Durward (1983) reported that 51% of students received their assignments back within one week of mailing them and 34% received their assignments back within two weeks. Of the 500 students

interviewed, 89% reported being satisfied with the turnaround time for their assignments. A separate study of 202 OLA students, conducted by Barker et al. (1986, p. 25), reported the average turnaround time to be 13 days.

A computer communications network is being introduced at OLA that has the potential of enabling tutors to provide immediate feedback by computer to students. Until this network is established, tutors could minimize the effect of a slow turnaround time by telephoning students with feedback on assignments, particularly in cases where tutors have included instructions or suggestions that have a bearing on the next assignment or when tutors have been unable to mark assignments within the required 72 hours because of sickness or other difficulties.

6. Marks for Assignments

Critical incidents in this category refer to how encouraged or discouraged students felt about the marks awarded for their assignments. Also included in this category are critical incidents describing the problems that arose connected with assignment marks.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incident:

CTV Getting high marks is encouraging. The tutor did not deduct many marks for errors.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** The tutor deducted five marks for what appeared to be a very minor point. I was asked to fill in all the blanks and to tick all the items that applied to me. I ticked all the items that applied to me, but left the other spaces blank. I was discouraged when she deducted 5 (out of 20) marks for something so minor--just because I didn't tick something in every column. I hate to think I rely so much on my marks, but I got very cheesed off with the course and I haven't submitted anything for two months.
- U** I was disappointed with the marks I received on my second assignment. I didn't put any effort into the first assignment and got 95%. I put a lot of effort into the second assignment and got 81%. I realized I would have to put even more effort into the course. I have been unwilling to do that, although I hope to start the course again now.
- U** I realized that the tutor was not going to fail me but I was obviously not going to score top marks, because if my writing ideas didn't conform to his pre-conceived ideas about the story then it wouldn't be accepted as a good piece of writing.
- CTV** Part way through a course the tutor dropped out and I was assigned a replacement. The first tutor marked me low on the first three assignments (68%, 60% and 70%) and I was very discouraged and had given up working really hard. My second tutor marked me higher on the fourth, fifth and sixth assignments (78%, 86% and 85%). Getting higher marks really made me work hard. However, I was discouraged and confused by the different marking styles and wondered which tutor was marking me "correctly" and whose assessment I should believe.
- CTV** When I received an assignment back that had a lower mark than I expected (deserved or undeserved) I felt negative towards my work, and took a break for a couple of days.
- ABE** In one of my first courses, one of the questions was badly worded. It was worth 5% or 10% of the marks. Based on my own understanding of the question, I had done it correctly. I phoned the tutor and complained as, at that time, I thought 5 or 10 marks might be crucial to my final result. The tutor was argumentative and defensive. Eventually I phoned an administrator at OLA and after a number of phone calls and a letter, the mark was changed. It was a frustrating experience.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** When I first became a tutor I had a student who started out very poorly. At that time I marked much harder than I do now, and the student got a very poor mark for his first assignment. I tutored him for four courses and he improved and became an "A" student. I think the initial hard marking was very motivating to him, as he wanted to do well. He was in the Armed Services, and was upgrading himself. He started with ABE courses and then moved to University courses. I think he felt I was interested in him as a student.

ABE Students are discouraged by bad marks, so I tend to mark higher just to keep them in the course and to make them feel good. Students consider 70% to be a failure.

ABE I tend to mark quite high, as long as its realistic. I give students the benefit of the doubt.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

ABE I have had a few instances over the years of students who felt they deserved a better grade. In those few cases, I was accused of having personal prejudice or problems that have caused me to lower the grade on that basis, instead of giving the grade that the work merited. This has happened three or four times in eight years, but hasn't occurred for a long time now. One student wrote long nasty letters saying that I didn't know what I was doing, and that I had a grudge against him. His letters were quite irrational.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

U The tutor has given me good marks on my assignments. That is what really matters to me.

CTV This tutor gives me a percentage mark and a grade on each assignment. In previous courses I was given the percentage only and had to figure out the grade.

Student Questionnaires - Hindering Critical Incident:

U A breakdown of marks received would be helpful.

Table 15
 Frequency of Critical Incidents - Marks for Assignments

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	0	3	1	0	3	2	4	5	9
CTV	1	2	0	0	2	0	3	2	5
ABE	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>
Data Source Totals	1	6	4	1	6	2	11	9	20
Data Source Totals F + H		7		5		8	=		20

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. Six hindering critical incidents referred to students being discouraged by what they perceived to be lower marks than they deserved. Three hindering critical incidents referred to administrative problems encountered by students connected with marks.

Discussion

Results of this study showed that marks are a fairly important factor for students. Critical incidents indicated that students expect

to receive high marks (80% - 100%) and marks of 70% or less are considered by students to be a "failure".

In the Brindley (1987) study, only facilitating critical incidents were reported in the "Marks Received" Category, although it was indicated that Athabasca counsellors have received complaints from students about the negative impact of low marks on persistence.

Tutors are encouraged to develop systematic grading systems and discuss them with their senior tutors and other tutors in the same subject area (OLA, 1988c, p. 14). Establishing an appropriate system is often difficult. The dilemma appears to be whether to mark higher for motivational reasons or to mark for excellence. The problem with awarding higher marks than deserved in order to encourage students is that it may backfire if students are given a false impression of their knowledge of the subject matter and they do not do as well as expected in their final examination. It is apparent that students generally have high expectations of the marks they feel they should receive. Perhaps the problem could be somewhat mitigated if tutors provided a detailed explanation of the mark awarded. Store and Armstrong (1981) suggest that the student should be provided with the details of the distribution of marks across all students in the course. This suggestion may be difficult for tutors to administer, but it may be possible to give the student some information about how his work compares with those of other students. Store and Armstrong also suggest the use of checklists

(p. 153) to indicate to students the exact criteria that the tutor is using to mark the assignments.

7. Legibility of Feedback on Assignments

Critical incidents in this category refer to the difficulty students had in understanding their tutor's handwriting.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** I find it difficult to read my tutor's handwriting. He has bad handwriting. When I have been able to decipher it, it makes a lot of sense. I wrote him a note to say that I take the trouble to type my assignments and I felt he could at least help out by writing clearly. His handwriting improved until the last assignment when he used a blunt felt pen which was really hard to read.
- CTV** The tutor's writing is illegible. It is a difficult course and it is important to know where I'm going wrong. I intend to phone and tell him about it, and ask him to print.

Student Questionnaires - Hindering Critical Incident:

- U** His writing could definitely improve.

Table 16

Frequency of Critical Incidents - Legibility of Feedback on Assignments

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	2
CTV	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
ABE	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Data Source Totals	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	3	3
Data Source Totals F + H		2		0		1	=	3	

Triangulation Decision

Inconclusive: As expected, no tutors reported critical incidents concerning their poor handwriting. Only hindering critical incidents were reported in this category.

Discussion

This category contains the lowest number of critical incidents, and illegible handwriting would therefore appear to be of minor importance to students. However, for the small percentage of students who did experience this problem, it was very discouraging not to be able to read

the tutor's feedback. The importance of tutors providing clearly written feedback on assignments is obvious. Tutors with poor handwriting should consider printing or use a typewriter or computer.

8. Tutors give Students the Opportunity to Resubmit Assignments

In this category, critical incidents refer to occasions when students had submitted assignments that clearly did not meet the necessary standards and tutors provided an opportunity for students to resubmit the assignments.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incident:

CTV When I submitted an assignment which was "off-base" the tutor returned it and said, "If you wouldn't mind redoing this assignment, I will mark it again." This encouraged me to take more care with future assignments, to make sure I was "on-base." I thought it was very nice of her to give me a second try.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incident:

CTV If a student has obviously failed an assignment, I phone the student and offer to return it unmarked for rewriting and resubmission. If they choose to re-do it, I send it back to them unmarked. I suggest to them that when they get the assignment back they phone me and we will go through it step-by-step.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

ABE A student completely misunderstood an assignment. It was worth no marks. I wrote and said she had completely misunderstood the nature of the assignment so I'm not going to grade it. I asked her to phone so we could discuss it and I could make sure she knew what was required. It was very clearly expressed. A few weeks later she phoned. She was very upset. She had written the exam thinking that she had ruined her chances in the course because of the

assignment. I felt very badly about it. I had been very explicit in the letter, but she had misunderstood my message. I should have phoned her, but I was marking her assignment late at night. She did rewrite the assignment and did much better.

ABE When I receive assignments and think that students have plagiarized, I phone (as well as write a note on the TMAs) and tell them that I would like an essay of their own--not something they have copied, and I ask them to resubmit the assignments. I explain that they are not going to learn how to write an essay unless they write their own material. I don't hear again from most of them.

Table 17

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Tutors give Students the Opportunity to Resubmit Assignments

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CTV	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
ABE	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>
Data Source Totals	1	0	1	2	0	0	2	2	4
Data Source Totals F + H		1		3		0	=		4

Triangulation Decision

Inconclusive: Dissimilar critical incidents were reported by two data sources. Tutors reported two hindering critical incidents referring to problems that arose when they returned assignments for students to resubmit.

Discussion

It appears from the small number of critical incidents reported that this is not an important factor for students. Tutors telephoning students first to discuss the assignment and asking them if they would like to have the opportunity to resubmit the assignment would probably be helpful to some students. The phone call may prepare students and reduce the negative impact of having "failed" which may be the reaction if students receive the assignment back without any warning.

9. Tutors' Responses to Notes Submitted by Students with Assignments

On the TMA form a box is provided for students to write comments or ask questions. Critical incidents in this category refer to the tutor's responsiveness to the comments and/or questions students asked on the TMAs or in separate notes that they submitted with the assignments.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents

- U** I wrote a note to my tutor on the TMA asking how I was doing in comparison with other students. His comments, to the effect that this was a particularly difficult section and most students were experiencing the same difficulties, were a real boost for me.
- ABE** I asked the tutor questions on the TMA and she explained the answers really well. She was clear and gave lots of detail.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents

- U** I asked my tutor a question on the TMA about the format of my answer but she didn't respond. As this is the first course I have taken I had no idea what was expected. I was very confused.

- U** In one of the assignments, there were 50 multiple choice questions. I was required to do the first 40 for the assignment. After completing the whole 50, I wrote a note to the tutor in bold handwriting saying: "Recognizing that this is not part of the grade, would you mind writing a note indicating whether or not I have answered these questions correctly for my own information." The note was totally ignored.
- CTV** The tutor didn't answer the question I asked on the TMA--at least not to my satisfaction.

Table 18

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Tutors' Responses to Notes Submitted by Students With Assignments

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	4	5
CTV	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
ABE	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
Data Source Totals	3	6	0	0	0	0	3	6	9
Data Source Totals F + H	9		0		0		= 9		

Triangulation Decision:

Inconclusive: Similar critical incidents were received from one data source--the student interviews. Five of the critical hindering incidents reported that tutors had not responded to the students' notes, and one referred to the student being dissatisfied with the tutor's response.

Discussion:

Administrators at OLA apparently appreciate the importance of two-way communication between students and tutors as a space is provided on the TMA for the students to make comments or ask questions about the assignment or other matters. However, for the communication to be effective it is essential that it is two-way. Critical incidents reported by students who were interviewed indicate that tutors acknowledging students' comments and answering their questions enhances communication. Students who do not receive a response to their communications are unlikely to make comments or ask questions on subsequent TMAs. No critical incidents were received from tutors in this category, which is perhaps an indication that they are unaware of the importance of this factor to some students.

10. Tutors Provide Feedback on Assignments by Telephone

Critical incidents in this category refer to occasions when tutors telephoned students to provide feedback on specific assignments. Some tutors found it difficult to discuss assignments with students if the students did not have the assignments in front of them. Tutors overcame this problem by returning the assignments and making a request on the TMA for students to phone once they received the assignments back. Thus, critical incidents in this category also refer to occasions when tutors urged students to phone them after receiving the assignment back.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- CTV** The tutor would write in her comments on assignments, "I've made a few suggestions on your work. If you have any questions about it, please don't hesitate to call me."
- CTV** The tutor didn't think I quite understood an item. He asked me to phone when I got the assignment back to discuss it with him.
- ABE** The tutor telephoned after I received the first assignment back. He said he had enjoyed my assignment and that I had done a good job. He told me where I could have improved; areas where I didn't go into enough detail. It gave me confidence because I knew what I had to do the next time. I was thrilled "right out of my tree" that he phoned. I thought it was really neat.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

- U** The tutor suggested on the TMA that I call him and discuss a problem I was having with footnotes. When I did call him, he was unresponsive and didn't want to talk or didn't have anything to say. There were lots of long pauses in the conversation. On later assignments he still asked me to call him if I had problems. I wondered whether this was a genuine offer or a "boilerplate" which his computer printed on all assignments.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** I always phone students in the senior level course if they have done a super first assignment.
- U** Students like to be able to phone and get their marks immediately, especially if they are working on a tight schedule. They will phone me a few days after they have sent in their assignment. I also give students feedback on the phone. I give them as much information as possible as then they feel they have more control, which is more motivating to them.
- CTV** Students are asked to keep copies of their assignments but I find they don't. If students are having problems, I write extensive comments and ask them to call me after they have received the assignment back. Trying to phone them when I have the work in front of me but they don't, just doesn't work.
- CTV** Occasionally, I have had really good students who have missed the point on their assignments. After I mail the assignment back, I send them a personal letter on notepaper saying "I realize that you are probably feeling a little down about the assignment. Please phone me. I'd really like to talk to you about it." I think the note makes students realize that I do care, and that I'm not just a voice on the telephone. It usually prompts them to phone.

CTV I frequently take the initiative to phone a student after having received and marked an assignment particularly when I anticipate that they are having a great deal of difficulty, they are waffling around the subject not having grasped it, or they are sounding discouraged. Timing is important and I will call even if it's not my office evening. I say something like "I'm just phoning you this evening because I have a feeling from your last assignment that you are having some difficulty focussing on the subject. I am just wondering if I can offer some assistance to you." If students are confused, I want to catch them before they get too far in their studies. Students have responded very well to these telephone calls. Many students have said that they are glad that I called because they didn't see the particular point before.

Table 19

Frequency of Critical Incidents-
Tutors Provide Feedback on Assignments by Telephone

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	0	1	3	0	0	0	3	1	4
CTV	3	0	4	0	0	0	7	0	7
ABE	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
Data Source Totals	5	1	7	0	0	0	12	1	13
Data Source Totals F + H	6		7		0		= 13		

Triangulation Decision

Inconclusive: Similar critical incidents were received from two data sources only. The one hindering critical incident referred to an occasion when the tutor urged the student to telephone him about an

assignment but was subsequently unresponsive when the student did telephone.

Discussion

Critical incidents in this category indicate that students appreciated receiving feedback on specific assignments by telephone, and being encouraged to telephone their tutors about the assignments after they received them back in the mail. Store and Armstrong (1981) suggest that when feedback on assignments is provided by telephone the tutors have an opportunity to comment at greater length than is usually possible within the constraints of written communication and tutors and students are able to negotiate meaning (p. 154). Scales (1984) believes that the negative impact of comments on a poor assignment can be minimized if tutors phone students before mailing the assignments (p. 269).

C. Telephone Interaction

The OLA provides tutors with telephones in their homes and students can make collect calls free of charge.

11. Tutors' availability During Office Hours

Tutors are required to establish office hours when the tutor is available for telephone consultation. Generally speaking, tutors set up office hours on two evenings of the week for two hour periods. Critical incidents relate to the difficulty or ease of reaching tutors during office hours.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** My tutor's office hours were 6:00-8:00 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays. At the beginning of the course I tried to call him. From 7:00-7:45 p.m. his line was busy and then I called several times from 7:45 p.m. but there was no answer. I found it very frustrating because his office hours didn't coincide with my schedule so it was difficult for me to arrange to call him.
- CTV** It was often difficult to reach the tutor during office hours as the line was busy. I would have to phone three or four times.
- ABE** I have called the tutor during office hours but she has not answered the phone. This has meant that I've had to wait until the next office hours to call again.
- ABE** About 25% of the times that I tried to reach my tutor during office hours I was unable to contact her. I found out afterwards that it was because she was sick or out-of-town. At the time I was quite angry. I felt discouraged and frustrated because I try to plan my own schedule in order to talk to her in office hours. It really reduced my efficiency and progress. It's time-wasting. I just didn't want to carry on with something else while this other problem was hanging over my head. It often made me stop working for that evening.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

- U** Occasionally I may not be at home during my office hours, which is unhelpful to students. If I'm not available I arrange for someone to cover for me. One summer, two years ago, I was away for a week. I had notified OLA, but the students had not been notified. I know there were many complaints.

Table 20

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Tutors' Availability During office hours

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	4	4
CTV	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
ABE	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>
Data Source Totals	0	9	0	1	0	0	0	10	10
Data Source Totals F + H		9		1		0	=	10	

Triangulation Decision

Inconclusive: Critical incidents were not received from the student questionnaire data source. Only hindering critical incidents were reported in this category, and all of them refer to the difficulties experienced by students when tutors did not answer their phones during office hours or when the line was busy.

Discussion

It appears that not being able to reach tutors during the office hours was a problem for some students. Tutors could perhaps assist students by either letting them know when they are going to be unavailable, arranging for someone else to answer the phone, or leaving a message on a telephone answering machine.

12. Tutors' Availability During Out-of-Office Hours

Some tutors, particularly those who are retired or are working at home, invite students to call them at any time. Some tutors suggest to students that they leave messages on their telephone answering machines at any time and the tutors will return the calls as soon as possible.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** I have called in out-of-office hours. I apologised for calling. He said, "That's O.K. No problem." He helped me out.
- U** The tutor was always available except for certain hours in the day when she was writing.
- CTV** I called at the weekend to ask about something about the exam I was studying for. The tutor was away, but I left a message and he called me when he got home. I felt he really cared by being available. It's hard to go on if you have unanswered questions and it's nice to be able to call if you really have to.
- CTV** The tutor encouraged me to phone during out-of-office hours which was very helpful when I was stuck. I could leave a message on the answering machine.
- ABE** It was helpful to be able to contact the tutor in "out-of-office" hours. The tutor had an answering machine, and she would call me when she could, usually the same day or the next day. This enabled

me to progress more quickly through the course than I might have otherwise. I was able to reach an understanding more quickly than if I had to wait until the next office hours.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** With my busy schedule, it was difficult to telephone my tutor during office hours, which were in the evening. I would have liked to have been able to talk to my tutor during the day.
- CTV** It was discouraging to be working on a course and to run up against a problem and not to be able to discuss it with the tutor until the next scheduled office hours. He had an answering machine on his phone but he wouldn't return the call until the next office hours so I just had to wait.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** Due to my varied commitments, I can never establish office hours that hold for more than a couple of months. I have an answering machine, which has been marvellous--once I figured out how to receive collect calls. Students leave a message and tell me when it's convenient for me to call them back.
- U** If students call in out-of-office hours I answer the phone. If it is convenient, I will talk to the student; otherwise I arrange to phone back.
- CTV** I am at home during the day and invite students to phone at any time if they have a question. If I'm at home I will answer the phone. If I'm busy or out, students leave a message on the telephone answering machine and I get back to them fairly quickly. One student was very reluctant to leave a message. She said she just couldn't talk to a machine. One time she was trying to get through to me but she wouldn't leave a message. When she finally reached me, I said, "Look, you must leave a message. I could have spoken to you days ago." She did it once, and then she was fine. She thanked me for helping her overcome her stumbling block. She realized what a lot of time she had wasted.
- ABE** A student called on Christmas Day. I answered the phone. He had nothing else to do except work on his course and he was stuck on something.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incident:

- ABE** She made me feel comfortable at calling her at any time, and she seemed glad to help me.

Table 21
 Frequency of Critical Incidents -
 Tutors' Availability During Out-of-Office Hours

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	2	2	3	0	0	0	5	2	7
CTV	2	5	3	0	0	0	5	5	10
ABE	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>6</u>
Data Source Totals	5	7	8	0	3	0	16	7	23
Data Source Totals F + H	12		8		3		= 23		

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. All hindering critical incidents describe the problems and frustrations students experienced if they did not feel they could call the tutor in out-of-office hours and thus had to wait until the next office hours to contact the tutor.

Discussion

It is apparent that many tutors are willing to accept calls from students during out-of-office hours. Question 5 of the questionnaire in this study indicated that 50% of OLA tutors invite students to call in out-of-office hours. Heselton's study conducted at OLI in 1985 showed similar findings in that 40% of telephone calls initiated by students were made in out-of-office hours. It appears that a number of OLA tutors install telephone answering machines, at their own expense, to allow students to leave messages. Tutors can then return the call at their convenience. Allowing telephone calls during out-of-office hours depends on tutors' inclinations as well as the time and resources available to them. However, the results of this study indicate that this service is appreciated, or would be appreciated, by many students.

13. Tutors' Telephone Manners and Communication Skills

Critical incidents in this category refer to occasions when various aspects of the tutor's manner and personality were significantly encouraging or discouraging to students. Critical incidents also refer to communication barriers that were formed because of language, accent, or speed of speech problems.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** The tutor had time for me. He would talk for 15-20 minutes. I didn't feel rushed. He would ask me if I had any other questions. He talked and explained things. He was very relaxed. If he had been abrupt and just answered the questions, I would have felt rushed. He gave such detailed answers to my questions.
- CTV** The tutor was easy to talk to and I felt very comfortable at contacting her.
- CTV** The tutor's manner is very relaxed on the phone. I feel uncomfortable with talking long-distance because of the expense, and think that I should rush, but my tutor makes me feel very relaxed about it all.
- ABE** The tutor realized that I was feeling very frustrated with the errors in the course materials. I felt she really understood my frustration. She was much more than a voice on the phone. I felt close to her. I felt comfortable and could be frank with her.
- ABE** I am German and as English is not my first language I made a point of explaining to my tutor that she may have problems understanding me. My tutor is Chinese but her English is very good. I didn't have any problems understanding her. She said she didn't have a problem understanding me. I found this hard to believe, but I was encouraged to know that. She talks very slowly and tries to make it easy for me. She is very kind.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** The tutor was arrogant and his manner was hurried. He obviously wanted to get off the phone. He even said that he had other things to do and other people to call. He gave me the impression that he didn't have a lot of time for me and he made me feel my questions were unnecessary.
- CTV** The tutor had a foreign accent which made conversations very awkward. He would explain something and I wouldn't know what he had said. Sometimes I would ask him to repeat it, and at other times I would just leave it.
- CTV** The tutor rushed me on the phone. His manner and the way he rushed through the answers gave me the impression that he was busy and didn't want to increase the expense of long-distance calls.
- ABE** My tutor was so energetic the first time I talked to her on the phone and she talked quite quickly so I didn't always understand what she said. I was a bit overwhelmed by her energy which made me feel too shy to call her. I felt I could communicate better with her in writing than on the phone.
- ABE** The tutor was kind of off-hand on the phone. He was discourteous. It was as though I was a minor irritation that had to be dealt with. He may have had a bad day.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** I find I can help students over the phone. The voice, rather than the written word, can make a difference. The spoken word is said out loud and the tone of voice can convey the meaning. The body language is missing, but the tone of voice can somehow make the communication more meaningful.
- CTV** Sometimes I'm just too stressed and too tired to talk on the phone. I know I won't be helpful. If it's not an urgent matter, I ask students if I can call back the next day. I make a note of their questions and then make a point of calling them back.
- ABE** A student called and asked a very obvious question about instructions for carrying out an assignment. She explained in great depth why she was not sure what the instructions meant. I was very patient with her. If I wasn't patient, I would probably lose a lot of students.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

- ABE** One student was a chronic complainer. She phoned to complain about the textbook and the assignments. I asked her what I could do to help, but she didn't want me to help her. She just wanted to tell me that she wasn't happy with the course. She did O.K. on her assignments, but always wanted to get 100% and to get 80% was a disaster to her. In the end she went to the local high school and took the course. She called me to say she was happy there and was the top student in the class. My impression was that she was getting a lot of help and encouragement from the teacher. I realized afterwards that I should have accepted her feelings. She felt she wasn't doing well. I should have told her that she wasn't doing as well as she could but that with a lot of work she could improve. When she said she was worried about something, I shouldn't have said "Don't worry", as that was discouraging to this student. I should have accepted her feelings, whatever they were.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- CTV** She was extremely pleasant to converse with, and indicated that she cared about how well I was doing in the course.
- ABE** I cannot say enough good things about my tutor. She is very positive. I have a bad attitude at times and say "if I finish" and she always says "when you finish." This lady sincerely believes in me and my abilities, more than myself.

Student Questionnaires - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** I called the tutor about a question I had on a lesson. His answer or tone almost implied that I was ignorant. How else could I find out if I didn't ask.
- CTV** Talking and treating you like you already know the material can sometimes be discouraging, because you may feel embarrassed to admit you don't know what the tutor is talking about.
- ABE** She is friendly and easy to understand.

Table 22

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Tutors' Telephone Manners and Communication Skills

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	3	3	3	0	0	2	5	6	11
CTV	4	2	1	0	1	1	6	3	9
ABE	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>13</u>
Data Source Totals	10	8	6	1	5	3	21	12	33
Data Source Totals F + H	18		7		8		=	33	

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. Seven hindering critical incidents reported by students relate to negative aspects of the tutor's manner, and four relate to communication problems involving speed of speech and accents. The one hindering critical incident reported by the tutor describes a situation where the tutor perceived that her lack of empathy had been a hindrance to the student.

Discussion

This category had the third highest number of critical incidents reported in it, which indicates that tutors having pleasant telephone manners and effective communications skills is an important factor to students. Durward and Durward's study (1983) supports this finding as 83% of the 500 OLA students interviewed were satisfied with their tutor's telephone manner.

The quality of telephone conversations can be affected by many external factors concerning the personal lives of the two individuals who are interacting. Two tutors interviewed in this study mentioned that they try to avoid talking to students if they are feeling very tired or stressed, and arrange to call them back at a mutually convenient time.

14. Follow-Up Telephone Calls

Critical incidents in this category refer to the amount of telephone conversations that took place between students and tutors. Critical incidents fell along the continuum from frequent telephone interaction to no telephone contact (which was hindering to students who required it but was desirable to those students who wished to have no contact).

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incident:

U The tutor phoned a couple of times to see how I was doing. This is helpful because I know he has made the effort to try and get hold of me.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

U I had no contact with the tutor on the phone. I didn't have anyone to discuss the course with. I didn't phone the tutor because I felt it would have been difficult to discuss the subject matter on the phone and I didn't think that an in-depth discussion was the kind of thing you phoned the tutor about.

U I am having a lot of difficulty with the course and really need some encouragement. If my tutor had phoned and given me some encouragement it would have really helped. I have been prevented from working on my course because of my bad back and I have applied for an extention. I need the credits so I will finish the course despite the tutor but it would have helped if she had phoned me. It would have shown that she cared.

CTV I never talked to my tutor on the phone. It would have been helpful if the tutor had called once or twice a week, even for three minutes, to ask "why haven't you started the course?" or "Why haven't you sent in your assignment." If the tutor was pounding me I would do better. I would live up to the tutor's expectations.

ABE I recently moved and was unable to submit any assignments for a month. I was disappointed that my tutor didn't phone to see why I hadn't submitted any work. I wondered if she would have noticed if I had never submitted another assignment and dropped out. It would have been really encouraging if she had phoned and asked me how I was doing.

ABE The tutor has never phoned me back after the first time I called him. I think he should at least phone to see how I'm getting along. He's not taking any interest in me.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

U The personal one-to-one relationship is very valuable. Students often make reference to the fact that they like having a contact--someone to talk to. Some students are reluctant to call me. I try and help them overcome this reluctance by calling them. Most students say "I'm glad you called." This is an important function for a tutor.

CTV It usually comes through during the introductory call as to whether students want a lot of phone contact or if they prefer not to have any.

CTV Some students get bogged down after a while. I make a phone call to say "How are you. I've been thinking of you," just so they know someone is there. I ask them if there is anything I can do to help them. I keep the conversation short. If after two follow-up calls I don't think they are going to continue, I advise them that, unless they are willing to make a serious commitment, there is no point in pursuing the course. I suggest that they may like to withdraw and take the course again some time in the future. I am really blunt. Students either drop out or start doing something.

ABE Some students call me twice a week, whilst others just don't want to be bothered with phone calls. I pick up on this and don't call them unless its really necessary.

ABE I make follow-up calls if I haven't received anything for 6-8 weeks. I used to call after 4 weeks, but I have found that students have been unable to work because of visitors or sick children and by the time they pull themselves together a month has passed. When there has been a gap of 6-8 weeks--whatever the reason--50% of the students will not continue. The other 50% will say something like "I'm so glad you phoned. I thought I had left it too long, but if I haven't I would like to get back to my studies."

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

U I made a follow-up call to a student who told me that he had enrolled in a distance education course precisely so that he could have no human contact at all.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incident:

ABE She has phoned me twice to ask how I was doing and it was good incentive to get the work done.

ABE I felt that I could quite easily have called him more often for help, but I chose to try the work on my own.

Student Questionnaires - Hindering Critical Incidents:

U I would have answered Question 31 (Do you feel that your tutor cares about how well you are doing in the course) "Yes, a lot" if the tutor had ever called me just to keep track. The sense of being alone and having to make all efforts to communicate myself could be defeating when I was stuck.

U He never called me back after the first time.

CTV I think the tutor should call if she has not heard from the student for a while.

Table 23

Frequency of Critical Incidents - Follow-up Telephone Calls

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	1	2	2	1	0	2	3	5	8
CTV	0	2	2	0	1	1	3	3	6
ABE	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>9</u>
Data Source Totals	2	6	6	1	4	4	12	11	23
Data Source Totals F + H	8		7		8		= 23		

Triangulation Decision

Divergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by the two student data sources, but critical incidents reported by the tutor data source tended to disagree with those received by the students. All hindering critical incidents reported by students relate to students being dissatisfied because there was no telephone interaction or because an insufficient number of follow-up calls were initiated by the tutor. The one hindering critical incident reported by the tutor related to the fact that she called a student who preferred not to have telephone interaction.

Discussion

All students reporting critical incidents in this category indicated a desire for follow-up telephone calls. Tutors, however, reported that some students wanted telephone contact and others preferred not to have any. Durward and Durward's study (1983) reported that 41% of University students would like to be called regularly by their tutor as compared with 36% of ABE students and 27% of CTV students.

It may be possible for tutors to establish students' perceived needs with regard to follow-up telephone calls, at the beginning of the course which may help tutors to decide how frequently follow-up telephone calls should be made. The independent learner may indicate a preference for no telephone contact whereas other open learning students may benefit from regular contact. An informal contract could be established between student and tutor, that could be renegotiated during the course if desired.

OLA tutors are asked to establish a reasonable level of telephone contact (OLA, 1988c, p. 9). They are requested to try to contact students at least three times during the session--an introductory call, a mid-term call for reinforcement and motivation, and a pre-examination call.

Making a great number of follow-up telephone calls can be difficult for tutors. Initiating calls during their office hours may present problems for students trying to reach the tutor and it may be inconvenient for tutors to make telephone calls during out-of-office hours. Tutors may find that some of the students who they think would benefit from telephone contact are hard to reach. Based on the part-time nature of their contracts, tutors must make a personal decision with regard to how much time and resources they are able to devote to follow-up telephone calls.

15. Tutors' Responses to Questions Concerning Course Content During Telephone Conversations

Critical incidents in this category refer to telephone interaction that was concerned with tutors answering students' questions and making explanations. The critical incidents are concerned with a relatively one-way communication between students and tutors, where the tutors were the providers of information and students were the recipients. Critical incidents also refer to occasions when tutors perceived it was in the students' best interests not to answer their questions, and encouraged them to seek their own answers.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** The tutor answered questions well when I phoned him. When I asked him a specific question, he wouldn't just answer that one question--he would talk about the whole concept. He would give examples. He was very good at explaining. It really helped. You only know so much so you only know enough to ask a certain question. When the tutor talks, I learn much more than the specific item I asked about. The first time I called him he just talked and talked. I thought: "I didn't ask for all this but it's great."
- CTV** The tutor answered all my questions on the phone.
- CTV** The tutor was an excellent teacher. One of the last assignment involved a puzzle, which I couldn't do. I phoned the tutor, but he just told me to keep working at it. I didn't like that because my time is valuable, but I dug in my heels and did solve it. I learned a lot. The tutor had done me a great favour by not answering my questions. We laughed about it afterwards.
- ABE** The tutor gave very good explanations on the phone, in a very understanding way. She explained it in a simple way and I couldn't help but understand it.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** I asked my tutor questions about the early chapters in the text. He just told me to read the next chapter. This made me angry.
- U** I asked the tutor a question. I didn't understand the concept. It didn't seem that he was willing to explain it. He said, "You will understand it later. You don't need to know all that detail now on how that formula works." I wanted to know. I felt he was stifling me because he wasn't telling me. I felt frustrated.
- CTV** The tutor didn't answer my question on the phone to my satisfaction. He didn't answer it specifically. I tried several times, but with no success.
- ABE** It was difficult for the tutor to help me with a problem I was having over the phone. The tutor couldn't give me any advice over the phone because she couldn't see what I was doing (drawing isobars on a weather map). I found this discouraging. Eventually I worked it out myself.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** I spend time answering students' questions. I go through the text line by line and make sure I understand where they are getting their questions from.
- CTV** I advise students to always be prepared for the telephone conversation, i.e. don't phone from a pay phone when your notes are at home! Make sure you have your books in front of you--I can't help you very much unless we can both see what we're talking about.

I also suggest to students that they write a list of the questions they want to ask me. This helps them to focus.

ABE If students are having problems with a specific portion of this course, I refer them to a library book.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

U Some students expect to learn the subject, to a large extent, from the telephone interaction with the tutor. I make it clear to students that I'm not going to be teaching the subject, but I am here to deal with any specific difficulties. There are some students that persist, but I try and gently cut off the conversations.

CTV A student complained that I was very nice to her on the phone and gave her lots of advice but, when she got her assignments back, she thought I'd marked them very hard. This student used to call me frequently to discuss the assignment she was working on. I felt she was wanting me to give her information that other students weren't getting and to give her the answers to assignments. I didn't do this as it's unfair to those students who plough through the work on their own and do the best they can on the assignment. I answered her questions, but I didn't give her the answers to the assignments and I didn't direct her to other areas of the assignments where she should perhaps have been focussing. She expected to get 100% for every assignment.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

U My tutor has answered my questions to my satisfaction and as far as she was able without telling me how to write the essay.

CTV My tutor has a very clear way of explaining any questions I've asked him about the course.

ABE Explains questions very well.

Student Questionnaires - Hindering Critical Incident:

U When I phoned to ask my tutor a question at the beginning of the course, he answered my very specific questions with generalized, vague answers.

Table 24

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Tutors' Responses to Questions Concerning Course Content
During Telephone Conversations

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	1	1	2	1	2	1	5	3	8
CTV	2	1	2	1	4	0	8	2	10
ABE	<u>6</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>11</u>
Data Source Totals	9	5	5	2	7	1	21	8	29
Data Source Totals F + H	14		7		8		=	29	

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. The six hindering critical incidents reported by students refer to occasions when students felt that tutors answered questions inadequately or unsatisfactorily. The two hindering critical incidents reported by tutors refer to occasions when the tutors felt the students were wanting too much help.

Discussion

Answering students' questions on the telephone is obviously an important function of the tutor and one that is appreciated by students. Several of the critical incidents reported suggest that it is important for tutors to dignify all questions asked by students, even if they do not perceive the need for students to know the information requested. However, it is apparent that there are some students who, from the tutor's perspective, are too demanding and expect more from the tutor than he/she is prepared to give.

Establishing good relationships with students during initial telephone calls and becoming knowledgeable about students' needs and learning styles would probably help tutors to know whether students are likely to benefit from a simple straightforward answer or whether a detailed explanation would be more appropriate.

16. Depth of Telephone Discussions Concerning Course Content

Critical incidents in this category refer to telephone conversations during which tutors and students participated in in-depth discussions. The critical incidents are concerned with two-way communication. The relationships between students and tutors described in this category tended to be that of peers working together.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** I phoned my tutor and had my books in front of me and the assignment questions. I asked my tutor "On this question, what is this, and what is that" and "How come this is the answer, and what is the truth." I like to be able to have the same dialogue that I would have with a classroom instructor. This was helpful.
- U** One of the course requirements was that after you had submitted the assignment, you had to telephone the tutor who would select one of the questions and you would have a dialogue about it. This was very helpful in the learning process. It was very enlightening. The discussion formed part of the mark.
- CTV** I was going down the wrong road in my figuring and the tutor straightened me out. We talked back and forth and he saw where I was in the dark and he pointed out a few things to me.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

- U** I phoned my tutor and asked him some questions. After we had talked for 5-8 minutes, he would say, "Well, it sounds to me like you know this well enough, and there are other people trying to call me." I felt I didn't have a handle on the subject and wanted to discuss it in more depth, but he was really limiting in his time. I felt I would have done better if I could have had more discussions with the tutor.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** Many telephone calls merely involve "kitchen work" (answering questions about mundane matters that are necessary but not very inspiring). Some telephone conversations go beyond this. Some students feel comfortable talking to me in depth, beyond the perfunctory level, and become involved in a discussion. It can become like a tennis match--back and forth--and is great fun. The student will sound enthusiastic. I come off the phone feeling great. Students have written to say this has been very helpful.
- U** Students who initiate telephone calls and spend time discussing the course on the phone tend to be the ones who are most rewarded. Students really appreciate discussing the course on the phone as it enables them to get more out of the course.
- CTV** Most of the students in this course are young mothers wanting to enter the workforce or women with grown-up families wanting to re-enter the workforce. The final assignment is a job search and students have to write a letter of application, prepare a resumé, and attend five interviews. Many students are unsure of themselves and don't know how to boost themselves so that they sound as though they are good candidates for jobs. They phone me and discuss their situation. I help them to discover various things in their personal lives that employers may think are valid experiences (being a Brownie leader, doing volunteer work, being involved in their children's school, selling Avon products, etc.) I have

helped many students to gain confidence in themselves by talking to them on the phone.

ABE Students will often say that they enjoyed the dictionary work in the course or found it interesting. I often react enthusiastically, as I love the dictionary. I agree with the student and say that I think it's great fun to look up words and find out where they originated, etc. This results in an enthusiastic interchange.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incident:

U Her willingness to discuss ideas on the phone when I called was helpful and encouraging.

Table 25

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Depth of Telephone Discussions Concerning Course Content

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	4	1	4	0	2	0	10	1	11
CTV	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
ABE	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
Data Source Totals	5	1	7	0	2	0	14	1	15
Data Source Totals F + H	6		7		2		= 15		

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar Critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. The one hindering critical incident relates to an occasion when the student was dissatisfied because she wanted to spend more time discussing the subject matter with the tutor.

Discussion

In-depth discussions can obviously be of great assistance to students and can often be stimulating and enjoyable to tutors as well. It appears that, by participating in in-depth discussions, students and tutors can form relatively deep relationships. Problems can arise because of time-pressures. A student who phones during office hours wanting to have a lengthy discussion may be preventing other students from reaching their tutor. In this case, it may be possible for tutors to arrange to call the student back after office hours.

17. Tutors' Persistence in Ensuring Students' Understanding of Course Content During Telephone Conversations

This category describes critical incidents where tutors expended considerable effort in ensuring that students understood the subject matter during telephone conversations.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** My tutor was patient and persistent on the telephone. When I tended to give up she persisted until I understood.
- CTV** The tutor was very patient when I had difficulty seeing a specific point that turned out to be very simple. He didn't get frustrated. He said it was a simple detail and I just wasn't seeing it. He walked me through it until I understood it. I remember thinking, after the course, that he was very good about that.
- ABE** When discussing a problem with my tutor on the phone, we would both have our books open at the same page. She would work through the problem until I had grasped it.
- ABE** On the phone, the tutor was very thorough and made sure I understood a particular idea or method. I don't want to sound stupid over the phone so I'm inclined to agree to things even if I don't understand them. I feel terrible admitting that there's something I just don't understand after we've been through it. My tutor is very thorough and makes sure I do understand it.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

- U** When discussing difficulties I was having with the text book, my tutor left me feeling that it was my own fault for not understanding it. I didn't know how to change my thinking so that I would understand it.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- ABE** I try to be very patient with students. A student kept phoning to check with me that she understood what she was reading. She would tell me everything she had learned. It was helpful to her but boring to me.
- ABE** If students don't grasp a very important aspect of the course from the course materials, then I make a point of telephoning them to explain the formula. They often comment later "Now I can see how it is done. I just never realized how to do it." I see the results of this phone call in their next assignment.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incidents

- CTV** My tutor was able to provide patience in explaining on the phone the steps necessary to correct and understand the assignments.
- ABE** My tutor shows a great deal of patience. She is willing to explain things endlessly.

Table 26

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Tutors' Persistence in Ensuring Students' Understanding
of Course Content During Telephone Conversations

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
CTV	2	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	3
ABE	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>9</u>
Data Source Totals	8	1	2	0	3	0	13	1	14
Data Source Totals F + H	9		2		3		= 14		

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. The one hindering critical incident relates to a student being dissatisfied because the tutor didn't make sure he understood the text material.

Discussion

Students apparently are appreciative of their tutors' efforts to ensure that they understand the course content. Tutors may need to use

questioning techniques to enable them to realize when students are not grasping the information being given to them. Again, tutors who have established a good rapport with their students are more likely to be perceptive to students' communication behaviours (for example, a hesitation) that may indicate a lack of understanding.

18. Telephone Conversations Concerning Study Skills

As well as providing feedback on assignments and providing assistance to students on course related matters, tutors can play a major role in helping students to establish effective study techniques and schedules.

Critical incidents in this category relate to suggestions the tutors made to students on study skills and techniques, and on ways to approach the course as a whole. Included are critical incidents relating to opportunities provided to students for peer-learning.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

CTV The tutor helped me to focus on important aspects of the course. He phoned periodically and gave me pointers on which parts of the course were difficult and which were easier; what to concentrate on and what to skim briefly through; and he gave me some foresight about what I will have to do as the course progresses.

CTV The tutor made good suggestions about ideas for study habits, such as. find a quiet place to do your studying; go into a room where there is no-one else, sit down and concentrate. I felt that he cared.

ABE The tutor gave me some really good tips on how to study, i.e. read all the questions in the assignment first, then when you are reading the course materials you can pick up these points. Also, read the summary before you answer the questions as a lot of answers are contained in the summary.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

CTV Many students are very busy and have no time to study. I suggest to them that they decide how much time they need to commit to studying and then look ahead in their calendar and book off their study time in advance. Study then becomes a priority in their lives. I also advise students of innovative study techniques that other students have used. For example, one student was working full-time and had five children. She wrote out questions concerning the most important items from the course units on index cards and asked her work colleagues and family to ask her questions from the cards during coffee breaks and at dinner time. Other students have read information from the course materials into a tape recorder which they play whilst they are travelling in their car or working in the kitchen. Another student wrote questions on post-it notes, with the answers on the reverse side, which helped her to learn the material.

ABE A student, who was a single mother, said that she didn't have anyone to talk to about the course. I looked in my register and found that there was another student from the same area taking the course. I gave the second student the first student's name and telephone number. They teamed up and found it very helpful to study together.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

CTV The tutor pointed out that there is a design to the way information is presented in the course and was helpful in suggesting ways to pinpoint main ideas.

ABE The tutor suggested I give myself a schedule for my work and also re-read my assignment questions twice before answering. He also suggested I use a pencil.

Table 27
 Frequency of Critical Incidents -
 Telephone Conversations Concerning Study Skills

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CTV	2	0	1	0	1	0	4	0	4
ABE	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>
Data Source Totals	3	0	2	0	2	0	7	0	7
Data Source Totals F + H	3		2		2 =		7		

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. Only facilitating critical incidents were reported in this category.

Discussion

Critical incidents in this category showed that some students appreciated the help they received from their tutors in suggesting effective study habits. Tutors could serve their students well by enquiring about students' current study habits during initial telephone

calls and, if necessary, providing assistance or referring them to an OLA advisor. It would be an appropriate time to suggest to students that if they do experience difficulties with studying during the course to discuss it with the tutor or advisor. If tutors perceive that study skills may be a problem area for a particular student, the subject could be discussed during follow-up telephone conversations.

19. Telephone Conversations Concerning Assignment Schedules

Students are provided with a schedule by the OLA that sets out a suggested timetable for submitting assignments. Critical incidents in this category refer to discussions between students and tutors about the assignment schedules.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** When I telephoned the tutor to discuss my course schedule, he was very understanding about my situation and why I was going to be late with assignments.
- CTV** The tutor gave me pointers on my schedule for submitting assignments.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

- CTV** The tutor put a time limit on assignments. It seemed to be critical to this tutor, whereas I've found out since that the schedule is flexible.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** For some courses there are apparently very strict timetables for submitting assignments. One student sent her assignments by courier costing approximately \$21.00, because she thought she had

to have it in by the deadline. I phoned and told her that it was not necessary, unless she had a lot of money to waste. I try and set students up on a schedule that they feel comfortable with.

CTV Some students who miss an assignment date are ready to give up until I explain to them that these are not really due dates but just guidelines. Once they realize that there is flexibility in the dates for mailing assignments, it encourages some students to carry on.

Table 28

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Telephone Conversations Concerning Assignment Schedules

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	2
CTV	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	3
ABE	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Data Source Totals	2	1	2	0	0	0	4	1	5
Data Source Totals F + H	3		2		0		= 5		

Triangulation Decision

Inconclusive: Similar critical incidents were reported by the tutors and students who were interviewed, but none were received from the student questionnaire data source. The one hindering critical incident refers to a student's negative experiences when the tutor insisted on him following the assignment schedule.

Discussion

Critical incidents in this category indicate that students appreciated the tutor showing some flexibility in enforcing the assignment schedule. Studies have been conducted that show that students who are paced by institutional deadlines and schedules have higher completion rates (Coldeway, 1982, p. 33). Perhaps a discussion at the beginning of the course about the intent of the assignment schedule would be helpful to students. Obviously there is some misunderstanding as some students and tutors appear to be under the impression that the schedule is strictly enforced, and others believe that it is to be used as a guideline only.

20. Telephone Conversations Concerning Examinations

Critical incidents in this category refer to occasions when tutors assisted students to overcome examination anxiety and to study for the examination. Also included in this category are critical incidents relating to occasions when tutors were helpful and hindering to students in administrative matters connected with examinations.

Excerpts from critical incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents

- U** The tutor said that if I needed to know, for future course planning, whether I had passed or failed my exam she would tell me this over the phone, although she would not be able to tell me the

mark. This was very helpful because I needed to know so that I could register in other courses or plan to rewrite this exam. I appreciated her making herself available.

CTV The tutor helped me to prepare for the exam by giving me advice on how to prepare myself psychologically (enter room; get organized and adjusted; feel comfortable; take time; read through exam; get a feeling about it and then proceed without rushing). He also encouraged me by saying that anyone who had got through the assignments could usually do alright in the exam.

ABE Just before the exam, the tutor phoned and gave me some suggestions on the exam. He told me how the exam was written and assured me that I didn't have to memorize everything.

Student Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

U After the final exam, I tried, unsuccessfully, to get hold of my tutor. I wanted to know what I did wrong in my exam, whether there are any books I can read and to discuss the course as a whole. I think it would be a good idea for students to be given an opportunity to talk to tutors after the exam.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents

U I discuss general features of the exam with students, but not specific content, and advise them of the format of the examination. This helps students overcome exam anxiety. A standard exam is also included in the course materials.

U During the initial telephone call I spend five minutes talking about the examination. I tell them that their assignment marks tend to be rather high and this has the unfortunate psychological effect that they think they know the material much better than they do. I suggest that two weeks before the examination, students undertake an extensive review. Just prior to the examination, I spend some time discussing exam techniques with students and explaining how the examination is structured.

CTV I have too many students to phone each one before the exam, but I make a note of people who I think need to be called and try and phone them. I know they are hyped up and have exam anxiety. I tell them the format of the exam and what the exam setting will be like.

CTV Students have phoned me about problems that have occurred in the exam centre. For example, the invigilator was smoking and it was supposed to be a non-smoking room. The smoke really bothered the student. She didn't feel she could say anything to the invigilator, but she called me after the exam and I followed it up.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incident:

CTV Some students complete the last assignment and I assume they are going to take the exam, but they don't. Perhaps if I had phoned, it would have given them the boost they needed.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incident:

ABE The tutor helped me study for the exam by suggesting what parts I should study.

Student Questionnaires - Hindering Critical Incidents:

U Not enough preparation for final exam. What we did in assignments and what was asked in the exam were two different things. Need to have refresher and review conversation before exam.

Table 29

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Telephone Conversations Concerning Examinations

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	1	1	2	0	0	1	3	2	5
CTV	3	0	4	1	1	0	8	1	9
ABE	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>
Data Source Totals	5	1	6	1	3	1	14	3	17
Data Source Totals F + H	6		7		4		= 17		

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. Two of the hindering critical incidents referred to the tutor not phoning prior to the exam, and one referred to the student wishing to discuss the exam after the fact but was unable to reach the tutor.

Discussion

Critical incidents in this category showed that it was helpful to students to discuss the examination with their tutors, not only to learn something about the format of the examination and what to expect, but also to relieve some of the examination anxiety that is often experienced. Again, the initial telephone call is an ideal time to find out which students are likely to be apprehensive about the examination, and to make a note of those students that would probably benefit from a telephone call just prior to the examination. Obviously a pre-examination call to all students is the ideal practice, and one that is encouraged by OLA (1988c, p. 19).

21. Tutors Offer Encouragement to Students to Continue Course

In this category critical incidents refer to occasions when tutors made an effort to encourage students to continue their course. In some cases, tutors encouraged students to request an extension or to re-enrol in the course. OLA courses are designed to be taken over a four month period, although students have the option of taking an additional two months to complete the course. If students have been unable to work on the course for more than six weeks, because of a lengthy illness or other extenuating circumstances, they can apply to an OLA advisor for an extension.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** I was having difficulty with the course which was very tough. My tutor phoned and encouraged me by telling me that I had some very good ideas, it was a tough course and I was doing very well. She motivated me to keep going.
- CTV** When I was feeling discouraged, the tutor gave me ambition to continue the course by telling me how good I was and he compared my marks with those of other students.
- ABE** The tutor phoned and was very cheerful and encouraging. She assured me that I would finish the course, and encouraged me to keep up what I was doing.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** I had a good student who wrote me a note to say that she had withdrawn from the course. She lived on a farm and had several children. I phoned her and asked if it was absolutely necessary for her to withdraw as she was doing so well. She explained that she felt her studies were imposing on her home responsibilities. I made some suggestions on how she could reorganize her timetable so that she could take some time when she was fresh to devote to studying, and still accomplish her chores. She followed my suggestions and completed the course. She was really helped by talking to someone from outside the family who could be objective.
- CTV** A student phoned and was devastated by a personal experience. I referred her to professionals for help and advised her to put her books away in a closet. I suggested she make a note on the calendar for two months time to remind herself and then if she felt up to it she could continue the course then. She got an extension and completed the course. She said it was the best advice she could have been given. I try and put myself in the student's place and consider what's best for them.
- ABE** Many students are taking OLA courses for the first time. I encourage them to keep on working at their course. There may be illness in the family or work problems. I try to be empathetic. I help them keep the course in perspective by recognizing that it is only part of their other obligations. I try to help them with study strategies so that they can continue their course.
- ABE** A number of elderly people are taking courses just to keep themselves stimulated. They show up as incomplete on the records because they don't write the exams. They often have health problems that slow them down. I encourage them to continue the course and to re-register.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

CTV When I seem about to give up she is very encouraging and helps me to get on the right track again.

ABE My tutor always encouraged me to continue and gave me helpful ideas when I was stuck.

Table 30

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Tutors Offer Encouragement to Students to Continue Course

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	2	0	3	0	2	0	7	0	7
CTV	1	0	1	0	2	0	4	0	4
ABE	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>
Data Source Totals	3	0	7	0	5	0	15	0	15
Data Source Totals F + H	3		7		5		= 15		

Triangulation Decision

Convergent: Similar critical incidents were reported by all three data sources. Only facilitating critical incidents were reported.

Discussion

The importance of the tutor supporting and strengthening students' motivation to complete their courses (Baath & Wangdahl, 1976) is strongly reflected in this category. Critical incidents suggest that there were occasions when students neglected their course and appreciated being encouraged to return to their studies. Obviously, if there are external factors involved, such as a change in the time students have available for study because of family or work circumstances, there is usually very little that tutors can do. In the case of extenuating circumstances, such as sickness, tutors can encourage students to apply for an extension, an option that students may not have realized was a possibility, or may have overlooked due to other pressures. Sensitive tutors, who have established a good rapport with the students, are in a better position to be able to provide appropriate support and encouragement to students or to realize that there is nothing that can be done to encourage them to continue the course in this session.

22. Telephone Conversations Concerning Non-Course-Related Matters

Critical incidents in this category refer to telephone conversations between students and tutors where they discussed matters that did not relate to the course. The topics of conversations included student's personal welfare, concerns, problems, career goals, and every-day matters.

Excerpts from Critical Incidents

Student Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- CTV** The tutor chatted about non-course-related matters, i.e. personal matters, future career goals, books I had read, etc. This is very encouraging as it makes tutors human.
- ABE** The tutor took a personal interest in me. She would ask me on the phone how things were going and what plans I had for the weekend, etc. She didn't overdo it, but just showed some interest in me as a student.

Tutor Interviews - Facilitating Critical Incidents:

- U** Although talking about personal matters has to be minimized for financial reasons, a brief mention takes only seconds and makes the relationship more human. One student had a series of major medical problems and took 10 months to complete the course. I would take the time to mention the problems. It is the human side of it--on the telephone--that is the most important one.
- U** I often discuss personal matters with students. All of us have problems from time to time which impose on everything else we do--to our detriment. Tutors offer, in effect, a form of release when they listen to what is troubling students and impeding their progress. Too many things come up unexpectedly, and it becomes too much for some students and they need to unload. I listen to students.
- CTV** Sometimes I need to be a counsellor. One student phoned to say she hadn't got her examination application in on time. I asked her if there was a problem and she told me about a personal crisis. She was very upset and I talked to her for quite a while. I'm not trained to deal with things like that but I can imagine how I would have felt if I'd been her.
- ABE** It is possible that, because I listen to students who want to talk about their personal problems they may feel that I am their mentor, which may be a factor in motivating them to continue their course. I think it helps. I feel I have a "mother image" and many students are young mothers who like to discuss their family problems. I don't give advice, but I do listen. I sometimes recommend that they phone an advisor.
- ABE** Many ABE students need social contact. Many of them are living on their own and are lonely--they are perhaps women on welfare with children at home or men out of work. One student said that I was the only intelligent person she could talk to. Generally, I make a point of finding out what the student's family commitments are and what their goals are. This is an important aspect of the relationship.
- ABE** One student was in his early 20's and wasn't sure what he wanted to do or what direction he wanted to take in his studies. I was very patient and listened to him. I asked him some questions and made him think about himself. He had no family and only peers to talk

to. We talked a number of times. He eventually decided to enrol at BCIT. He told me I'd been really helpful as I had made him think, and that he felt much more positive about himself. I felt the time I spent talking to him was worth it.

Tutor Interviews - Hindering Critical Incidents:

- U** Some students are simply lonely at home and want to talk to someone. I certainly cannot justify financially the time to spend talking to them. That being the case, I try to cut the call fairly quickly if I possibly can. I try to be as gentle as possible, but it has to be done. On two occasions, I never had any more assignments from the students. One other student stopped chatting but she continued to call very regularly to ask questions which I think she could have figured out herself.
- CTV** I have had students phone twice a week just to chat. I discourage them from doing it. I tell students that I'm not a trained counsellor and that there are students who need to talk to me about the course material. I refer them to OLA advisors or other professionals.
- ABE** Students can sometimes take advantage of a sympathetic ear. Occasionally there are students who really like to talk at length (40-50 minutes). I don't want to discourage them as often the tutor is the only person they can talk to. There have been one or two students who I have really had problems with. I tell them I have other commitments.

Student Questionnaires - Facilitating Critical Incident:

- ABE** My tutor is not only helpful in my course but also in other areas of conversation.

Table 31

Frequency of Critical Incidents -
Telephone Conversations Concerning Non-Course-related Matters

	Student Interviews		Tutor Interviews		Student Questionnaires		Group Totals		
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
University	0	0	2	1	0	0	2	1	3
CTV	1	0	2	2	0	0	3	2	5
ABE	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>8</u>
Data Source Totals	2	0	9	4	1	0	12	4	16
Data Source Totals F + H	2		13		1		=	16	

Triangulation Decision

Divergent: Critical incidents were reported by all three data sources, but a far greater number were received from the tutor data source. All hindering critical incidents were reported by tutors and described the difficulties experienced when students wanted to spend too much time discussing non-course-related matters--or simply wanted to chat.

Discussion

Tutors appear to perceive that being able to discuss non-course-related matters facilitates the progress of some OLA students in achieving their personal course goals. Tutors recognize the importance of students having someone to talk to and are willing to discuss personal matters, career goals, work-related matters, etc. with students. However, some tutors discourage students from chatting.

Critical incidents in this category show that tutors considered discussions concerning non-course-related matters to be an important factor to students. On face value, the results would indicate that students do not think that discussing non-course-related matters is an important factor to them. These results may have occurred because students were reluctant to admit that they discussed personal matters. Similar findings are reported by Heselton (1985). Of the 498 OLA students and 60 OLA tutors who responded to Heselton's questionnaire, 2.4% of the students "sometimes, "usually" or "always" discussed non-course-related matters, whereas 10% of tutors indicated that non-course-related matters were discussed "sometimes." A study conducted by Flinck (1978, p. 111) demonstrated that students discussed personal and social problems with tutors, and such telephone calls lasted much longer. The amount of time and resources that tutors wish to expend on discussing matters not related to the course is a personal decision for each tutor.

Comparison of University, CTV and ABE Groups

The secondary purpose of this study was to ascertain whether there were any differences in the facilitating and hindering factors identified by the three data sources for OLA students enrolled in (i) University courses, (ii) CTV courses, and (iii) ABE courses, and their tutors.

Critical Incidents

At the outset of this study it was anticipated that the frequency of critical incidents reported in each category would be sufficiently high to be able to form some conclusions about the differences in the relationships between tutors and students in the three groups. As can be seen in Tables 10 to 31, for the majority of categories, the frequencies of the "group totals" are too low to be able to make any valid comparisons between the three groups. In the majority of categories, the content of the critical incidents reported by each group was similar in nature. There are three possible exceptions:

Praising/Critical Comments on Assignments

As can be seen from Table 12, three ABE tutors stressed the importance of providing praising comments on assignments, whereas no University or CTV tutors perceived that praising comments were significantly helpful or encouraging to students. Fewer University students than either CTV or ABE students reported that praising comments were significantly helpful or encouraging to them. It could be surmised, therefore, that tutors providing praising comments on assignments is of less importance to the University group than the CTV or ABE groups.

Depth of Telephone Discussions Concerning Course Content

There is some indication (see Table 25) that the University group places more importance, than the CTV and ABE groups, on participating in in-depth discussions concerning course content.

Tutors' Persistence in Ensuring Students' Understanding of Course Content During Telephone Conversations

This study provides some indication (see Table 26) that the ABE tutors, more than their CTV or University counterparts, ensure that their students gain an understanding of matters relating to the course content during telephone conversations.

In the remaining 19 categories, the differences in the relationships between students and tutors in the (i) University, (ii) CTV, and (iii) ABE groups appear to be minimal.

Although, the secondary purpose of this study cannot be addressed, as originally intended, from the data collected, this research study does provide some information that enables suggestions to be made about possible differences and similarities between the three groups.

Total Frequency of Critical Incidents

One interesting, if somewhat predictable, trend can be seen by comparing the total number of critical incidents reported by the students from the three groups (Table 32).

Table 32

Total Frequency of Critical Incidents Reported by Students

	University		CTV		ABE		Data Source		Totals
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F + H
Student Interviews	36	32	43	23	40	16	119	71	190
Student Questionnaires	<u>25</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>106</u>
Student Totals	61	45	69	28	73	20	203	93	296
Student Totals F + H	106		97		93		296		

Table 32 shows that the ratio of facilitating to hindering critical incidents is larger for the ABE students (73:20), somewhat smaller for the CTV students (69:28) and much smaller for the University students (61:45). This is perhaps an indication of a trend for the relationships between University students and tutors to be that of "peers working together," in comparison to the more formal "teacher/student" relationship that could be anticipated for ABE students and their tutors. The ratio of facilitating to hindering critical incidents also suggests that University students may be more critical in their thinking due, in part, to their more extensive educational experience, whereas many ABE students may, relatively speaking, be somewhat in awe of their tutors and more accepting of their circumstances, due to less previous educational experience and/or negative educational experiences. The tendency for University students to be more critical in their thinking is perhaps also reflected in the questionnaire in that, in virtually every case where students were asked to respond to questions such as "How thorough is your tutor's feedback on your assignments?" fewer University students--as compared with CTV and ABE students--responded in the "very thorough" category and more responded in the "somewhat thorough" category.

Student Questionnaires

There are also some interesting findings pertaining to the secondary research question reported in the students' responses to the questions contained in the questionnaire (Appendix 9). However, it is important to treat these results with extreme caution as they have been obtained from one data source only and, as such, are limited in their validity.

Initial Telephone Conversations

It would appear, from the responses to this questionnaire, that a greater number of initial telephone conversations took place between University students and tutors than between the ABE students and tutors. Responses to question 19 (Appendix 9) showed that initial telephone conversations took place between 74% of students and tutors in the University group, 70% in the CTV group and 60% in the ABE group. Of these, 51% of University tutors, 47% of CTV tutors and 40% of ABE tutors initiated the telephone call. This is surprisingly low in view of the fact that tutors are required to make an initial telephone call to students (OLA, 1988c, p. 8). However, this finding perhaps provides an excellent example of the importance of using a triangulation strategy. Durward and Durward's study (1983, p. 14) showed that 83% of University students, 81% of CTV students and 89% of ABE students did receive a call from their tutors. This finding refers to tutors initiating a call at some time during the course, rather than at the beginning of the course.

However, it is perhaps reasonable to assume that tutors who do not make an initial telephone call to a student are unlikely to initiate a call later on in the course.

Legibility of Feedback on Assignments

Question 3 suggests that more University students (32%) than ABE students (12%) experienced problems in deciphering their tutor's handwriting. No CTV students reported any difficulties in this respect.

Tutors' Responses to Notes Submitted by Students with Assignments

The responses to Questions 12 and 13 indicated that 46% of University students asked questions on the TMA, as compared to 23% of CTV students and 28% of ABE students. All of the CTV and ABE students "always" received a response from their tutor, whereas 12% of University students "never" received an answer.

Tutors' Availability during Out-of-Office Hours

Responses to Question 5 indicated that 68% of ABE tutors invited their students to telephone them during out-of-office hours, as compared to 53% of CTV tutors and 31% of University tutors.

Tutors' Telephone Manners and Communication Skills

Questions 23, 24, and 25 indicated that there is little difference between the three groups in this category. However, responses to Question 26 indicated that 29% of University students did not feel comfortable about telephoning their tutor as compared with 9% of CTV students and 12% of ABE students.

Follow-Up Telephone Calls

Responses to Question 18 show that a greater number of University students (89%) and CTV students (83%) had talked to their tutors on the telephone than ABE students (72%).

Responses to Question 17 show that a greater number of ABE students (36%) never tried to contact their tutor on the telephone, as compared with CTV students (27%) and University students (23%). Durward and Durward's study (1983, p. 14) showed similar results. They reported that 33% of ABE students, 21% of CTV students and 28% of University students did not call their tutor.

Telephone Conversations Concerning Examinations

Question 29 indicates that a greater number of University tutors (29%) and ABE tutors (25%) telephoned their students before the examination than their CTV counterparts (4%).

Other Findings

In several of the categories, critical incidents referred to the importance of tutors encouraging students to phone them. Question 4 of the questionnaire indicates that, in the feedback on assignments, more CTV tutors (97%) and ABE tutors (96%) encouraged their students to phone them than University tutors (63%).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into seven sections. The first section provides an overview of the study. In the second section a discussion of the facilitating and hindering factors in the relationships between students and tutors is presented, and possible reasons for the triangulation outcomes are suggested. The third section provides a brief discussion of the comparison made between the University, CTV and ABE groups. In the fourth section, the conclusion is presented. The fifth section makes recommendations concerning possible approaches that tutors and students could use to enhance their relationships. Limitations to the study are provided in the sixth section, and the seventh section concludes with some implications for further research.

Overview of the study

This exploratory qualitative study focussed on the relationships between students taking courses at the Open Learning Agency and their tutors. The main purpose of this study was to identify and describe the factors in the student/tutor relationship that students and tutors

perceived to be important for student success in open learning courses. Using the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954; Woolsey, 1986), data were collected from three data sources by means of student interviews, tutor interviews and student questionnaires. The 406 critical incidents obtained were classified into a categorization system containing 22 categories. Each category described a factor that was perceived by the data sources to be important for student success. The multiple triangulation strategy showed the extent to which each of the three data sources considered the identified factors to be important, and also enabled an explanation of the results to be made. The secondary purpose of this study was to compare the differences in the identified factors for students enrolled in (i) University courses, (ii) CTV courses, and (iii) ABE courses, and their tutors.

Whilst it is recognized that there are many factors external to the student/tutor relationship that have a great influence on the students' success, this study shows that there are many occasions when tutors do have a positive--or negative--impact on students. The ratio of 295 facilitating critical incidents to 111 hindering critical incidents reported by the three data sources suggests that relationships between students and tutors at OLA are generally--but by no means always--positive.

This study is a partial replication and extension of Brindley's (1987) research project conducted at Athabasca University. She found

that the effect of tutors on students' persistence can be negative as often as it is positive. Brindley's results are confirmed by this study as the ratio of facilitating to hindering critical incidents reported by University students who were interviewed was 36:32 (Appendix 10).

The critical incidents reported by students in Brindley's study under the category "Personalised instructional support" were similar in content to some of the critical incidents reported in this study. In addition, the critical incidents reported by Open University staff tutors concerning tutors' correspondence skills (Gibbs & Durbridge, 1976, pp. 11-13) are similar in nature to the critical incidents reported under the "Quality of feedback on assignments" category in this study. This supports Morgan's notion (1984) that qualitative research is generalizable, in a phenomenological sense.

Brindley's study was extended in two ways. Firstly, a multiple triangulation strategy was used in an endeavour to increase the validity of the findings. The strategy shows the relative importance of the identified factors to each of the three data sources. The three data sources were in agreement on the importance of 12 of the 22 categories. Plausible explanations of the reasons why the data were not convergent in the remaining 10 categories are presented in the next section of this chapter. Secondly, students' experiences at the college level, as well as the university level, were studied. Although it was not possible to make a comparison, as originally intended, of the identified factors for

students enrolled in (i) University (ii) CTV and (iii) ABE courses and their tutors, because of the low frequency of critical incidents reported in many of the categories, information is gleaned from the study that enables some suggestions to be made about possible differences and similarities in the student/tutor relationships between the three groups.

It was found that the critical incident technique was a very useful method of obtaining qualitative data, particularly by means of student interviews. It is believed that qualitative studies of this nature are essential in building a strong foundation of knowledge and understanding of the various components of open learning. For this reason, a strong emphasis has been placed in this thesis on providing in-depth information concerning the use of the critical incident technique in this research project.

The experience gained from using a multiple triangulation strategy confirms that triangulation is of paramount importance in increasing the validity of research findings. Mathison's (1988) conception of triangulation was found to be extremely valuable in making plausible explanations of the outcomes of the multiple triangulation strategy. A full description of the multiple triangulation strategy used in this study and the procedures followed in making the triangulation decisions has been provided in this thesis.

Facilitating and Hindering Factors in Student/Tutor Relationships

From the 406 critical incidents reported by the three data sources, 22 categories were formed. These categories identify the factors in the student/tutor relationship that students and tutors perceive to be important for student success in open learning courses.

Multiple Triangulation Strategy

The purpose of using a multiple triangulation strategy is to provide a plausible explanation of the data being studied (Mathison, 1988). In this study, there were four possible outcomes from the triangulation strategy: Convergent; Analogous; Divergent; and Inconclusive. Table 9 provides an overview of the triangulation decisions for each of the categories.

Convergent

The data were convergent in 12 out of a total of 22 categories. This means that all three data sources were in agreement that these 12 factors were--to a greater or lesser extent--perceived to be important for student success. These factors are listed, in order of importance as established by the three data sources, in Table 33.

Table 33

Categories Identified as Convergent By Three Data Sources

Category	Total Number of Critical Incidents
Quality of feedback on assignments	58
Tutors' telephone manners and communication skills	33
Tutors' responses to questions concerning course content during telephone conversations	29
Initial telephone conversations	23
Tutors' availability during out-of-office hours	23
Marks for assignments	20
Telephone conversations concerning examinations	17
Tutors offer encouragement to students to continue course	15
Depth of telephone discussions concerning course content	15
Tutors' persistence in ensuring students' understanding of course content during telephone conversations	14
Turnaround time for assignments	8
Telephone conversations concerning study skills	7

Analogous

In two of the categories the data were analogous. In Category 3, "Praising/critical comments on assignments," significantly fewer critical incidents were reported by tutors. The fact that only ABE tutors cited facilitating critical incidents indicates that ABE tutors, more than University and CTV tutors, perceive that praising comments are important to their students, perhaps because they are more likely to have had previous negative experiences with education. In Category 1, "Letters of Introduction," two data sources--the tutor interviews and the student questionnaires--reported significantly fewer critical

incidents than the student interview data source. As explained in Chapter 4, when tutors are hired by OLA, they are provided with a sample of an introductory letter and asked to write a personal letter of introduction which is then mailed to each of their students with the package of course materials. Unless tutors are specifically told by students that they appreciated receiving the letter of introduction (as was the case with the one critical incident reported by a tutor in this category), they would not be aware of whether this item was an important or unimportant factor to students. This may well account for the low frequency of critical incidents reported by tutors. The reason for the low frequency of critical incidents reported by the student questionnaire data source may be inherent in the questionnaire itself. There were no questions relating to the letters of introduction included in the questionnaire. It is possible, therefore, that the letters of introduction were not at the forefront of students' minds when they were completing questions 31 and 32 of the questionnaire.

Inconclusive

In each of the six categories where the triangulation decision was Inconclusive, the total number of critical incidents reported was very low (cf. Table 9 and Appendix 10). It is perhaps not surprising that tutors did not report any critical incidents in the category "Legibility of feedback on assignments," as tutors may not be aware of this problem unless they have been told about it by students, or they may have been reluctant to admit this problem during the interviews.

The reasons why the student questionnaire data source provided no critical incidents in the categories "Tutors give students the opportunity to resubmit assignments," "Tutors provide feedback on assignments by telephone," and "Telephone conversations concerning assignment schedules" may possibly be due to the fact that no questions relating to these items were asked in the questionnaire.

No critical incidents were reported by the tutor interview and student questionnaire data sources in the category "Tutors' responses to notes submitted by students with assignments." Responses to question 12 of the questionnaire indicate that 46% of University students, 23% of CTV students and 28% of ABE students did ask their tutors questions on the TMA. Of these, all of the CTV and ABE students who did ask questions, received an answer. In the University group, 71% of students received an answer "always", 11% received an answer "sometimes" and 11% "never" received an answer. It would appear, therefore, that, with the exception of a few cases in the University group, tutors do answer students' questions. However, the lack of critical incidents reported by tutors in this category would indicate that they may not be aware of the importance of this factor to their students. Indeed, the lack of critical incidents reported by the student questionnaire data source--despite three questions pertaining to this category being included in the questionnaire--suggests that this factor is of minor importance to students.

In the category "Tutor's availability during office hours," it is perhaps not surprising that only one tutor reported that students had difficulty in reaching her during office hours, as tutors would probably be unaware of the problem unless they had been advised of it by students. Although many comments were made in response to question 17 of the questionnaire that are similar in nature to the critical incidents reported by the student interview data source, this item was apparently not of sufficient importance to be reported by any students as a hindering factor in question 32. Responses to question 17 indicate that 26% of University students, 10% of CTV students and 8% of ABE students found it "not too easy" or "not at all easy" to contact their tutor. This is a higher percentage than that reported by Durward and Durward (1983) who showed that 10% of the total students in their study found some difficulty in contacting their tutors. It is apparent from the critical incidents reported by the student interview data source and from the comments in question 17 of the questionnaire that students did experience difficulty in contacting their tutors. However, this problem may have been mitigated somewhat by the fact that, according to students' responses to question 5 of the questionnaire, almost half of the tutors invited students to telephone during out-of-office hours. In addition it appears, from the critical incidents reported in category 12, that a number of tutors have telephone answering machines installed on their OLA telephones that enables students to leave messages at any time.

Divergent

Only two of the categories produced data that were Divergent. Tutors perceived that "Telephone conversations concerning non-course-related matters" was a significant factor to students, but the frequency of critical incidents reported by students suggested that this factor was not of significance to them. One student who reported a critical incident in this category expressed concern during the telephone interview that, as a result of her comments, the tutor would be criticized for having spent time discussing matters not concerned with the course. This may reflect students' apparent reluctance to report critical incidents concerning discussions about non-course-related matters.

The second category where the data were Divergent was "follow-up telephone calls." All students reporting critical incidents indicated a desire on their part for follow-up telephone calls. Tutors, however, indicated that they perceived that some students wanted telephone contact and others preferred not to have any. The amount of follow-up telephone calls that is reasonable for tutors to make, taking into account the part-time nature of the tutor's role, and the remuneration system that does not include payment based on the number of telephone calls made, is a difficult issue for tutors. Tutor-initiated follow-up telephone calls may be perceived by some tutors as a waste of time in many cases. Perhaps the satisfaction tutors experience by happening to

telephone a student just when they need help weighed against the frustration of telephoning students who are not available or do not appear to benefit significantly from the call, may account for the divergent nature of the critical incidents reported in this category.

Comparison of University, CTV and ABE Groups

At the outset of this study, it was suspected that there may be several differences in the relationships between OLA students enrolled in (i) University (ii) CTV and (iii) ABE courses and their tutors. It was, for instance, expected that ABE students would require a more supportive relationship from their tutors than their peers taking University and CTV courses.

Differences

The results of this study show that there are more similarities than differences between the three groups. There is some evidence to support the notion that ABE tutors--more than University and CTV tutors--find it important to write praising comments on their students' assignments, and to make sure that their students understand matters concerning the course content when they are talking to them on the phone. There is also some evidence to show that University students and tutors participate in more in-depth discussions than their CTV and ABE counterparts.

Similarities

The content of the critical incidents reported by the three groups were very similar in the majority of categories. Perhaps the most surprising category where the critical incidents reported were similar in nature was "Telephone conversations concerning non-course-related matters." It could perhaps have been anticipated that the ABE group would have participated in more telephone conversations concerning personal matters than the other two groups. Although very few students reported critical incidents in this category, tutors from all three groups reported both facilitating and hindering critical incidents. It appears that students from all three groups appreciated having someone to talk to and that some tutors from each of the three groups were willing to spend time chatting to their students whilst others were not.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the three most important factors in the student/tutor relationships are the quality of feedback on students' assignments, the tutors' telephone manners and communication skills, and the tutors' responses to questions concerning course content during telephone conversations.

Whilst the relationships between students and tutors are generally positive, there are occasions when tutors are unhelpful and discouraging to students. It is apparent, however, that the telephone tutor is one form of student support that is successful in facilitating the progress of many students.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Tutors to Enhance the Tutor/Student Relationships

Whilst this study does not attempt to recommend a model for effective tutoring, it does provide a rich description of the interactions that took place between students and tutors that may help administrators and tutors to form a better understanding of student/tutor relationships.

In the tutor interviews, the great majority of tutors emphasized that they believed that the student's own motivation, personality, and personal circumstances were the key factors in students achieving their personal course goals. One tutor suggested that if students are going to succeed because of the motivational, personality and circumstantial factors, they will do so regardless of the effectiveness--or ineffectiveness--of the tutor. On the other hand, if students are not motivated or their personal circumstances hinder them, they will be

unsuccessful, no matter how effective--or ineffective--the tutor is. However, this particular tutor felt that there is a group of students that fall in between these two extremes that can be helped by tutors. It is these students who can be motivated by a follow-up telephone call, and inspired by praising comments on their assignments. It is this group of students whose success may depend on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their tutors.

In describing the results of the categories in Chapter 4, it appears that one possible way of tutors enhancing the relationships with their students, particularly those who are in the middle of the continuum described above, is in the initial telephone conversation. A number of the factors identified in this study as being facilitating or hindering to students could be addressed during the initial telephone call. If the tutor is able to get to know the student at the beginning of the course and establishes a good rapport with him/her, this may have a significant bearing on their relationship throughout the rest of the course. For example, the initial telephone call would be an excellent time for the tutor to ascertain:

- the student's self-concept and thus be in a position to judge the amount of praising comments that the student is likely to appreciate receiving in the feedback on their assignments;

- the student's perceived needs relating to the amount of feedback provided by the tutor on assignments--whether the student would probably benefit from extensive comments, or whether it is unlikely that they will be read;
- the student's perceived needs with regard to the depth of relationship that the student would like to have with the tutor--whether the student would probably appreciate discussing the course content in great depth, or whether simple and straightforward answers to questions would be more appropriate;
- the student's perceptions on the amount of follow-up telephone calls he/she would like to receive from the tutor--whether a regular call from the tutor to see how the student is getting on would be appreciated, or whether he/she would prefer to work completely on his/her own;
- the student's study skills and habits--especially for students new to open learning;
- the student's understanding of the purpose of the assignment schedule;
- the student's confidence or apprehension in sitting examinations, so that tutors can ensure they make a pre-examination telephone call to those students who may be suffering from examination anxiety;

- the student's personal circumstances that may have an impact on his/her studies so that the tutor can be sensitive in providing appropriate support and encouragement to the student to continue his/her course.

Obviously, it may not be appropriate to have an in-depth conversation at the time the tutor makes the initial telephone call. Tutors may need to arrange with the student to call again at an appropriate time in order to be able to take the time necessary to have a fairly lengthy telephone conversation. In addition, it can be anticipated that students who wish to work on their own may not appreciate a lengthy conversation with the tutor. The tutor's sensitivity in ascertaining this fact near the beginning of the conversation, could enable the tutor to judge the suitable length of the initial telephone call and the appropriate depth of conversation with individual students.

Recommendations for Students to Enhance the Student/Tutor Relationship

Students taking courses at OLA are adults and may have enjoyed a wider variety of life experiences than their tutors. For example, they may have more effective telephone communication skills, may have equal or higher educational qualifications, and may have wider occupational or professional experiences. It would appear to be appropriate, therefore, that students should share the responsibility of establishing and

maintaining effective relationships with their tutors. Perhaps a list of helpful hints on "how to get the most out of your tutor" could be prepared and included with the student's package of course materials.

At the present time, OLA students have the opportunity to complete a voluntary questionnaire that they can forward to their tutor at the beginning of the course. The questionnaire covers information concerning the student's course work at OLA and his/her educational goal and occupation, as well as personal data relating to family, health and outside activities. Although no critical incidents were reported concerning the student questionnaire, it was alluded to several times during the tutor interviews as being very helpful in allowing tutors to become acquainted with their students. Perhaps greater emphasis should be placed on this questionnaire by making it mandatory and expanding the scope of it to cover some of the factors suggested in the recommendations in this study by seeking information on, for example, the student's personal course goals and the student's perceived needs for follow-up calls.

Limitations

The critical incident technique proved to be an excellent research methodology for obtaining qualitative data by means of telephone interviews with students. The technique was not quite so successful in

obtaining data from tutors, mainly because of the nature of the subject being studied. It was difficult for many tutors to be able to state categorically how they had facilitated or hindered students in achieving their course goals. The problem of recall was also a problem for the tutors who participated in this study because they had been tutoring for many years and could not always remember specific details of their relationships with students who had taken courses a number of years ago. It was also found that the written questionnaires did not provide as rich a source of data as the telephone interviews.

Although a multiple triangulation strategy was used in an attempt to increase the validity of the findings in this study, the strategy does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of bias. The interviewer attempted to overcome possible biases by audio-taping the interviews and thus avoided the possibility of unconsciously being biased in the selection of data (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 445). The standard formats of the telephone interviews would suggest that there were no procedural biases during the telephone interviews.

Implications for Further Research

The results of this study provide some indication that many of the factors inherent in the relationships between open learning students and their tutors could be addressed during the initial telephone call, or

during subsequent telephone conversations at the beginning of the course. A research study could be conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of in-depth initial telephone conversations. This study could involve an experimental group and a control group and the tutors and students of the experimental group could participate in in-depth initial telephone calls, along the lines suggested in Chapter 5.

Several other experiments could be carried out to ascertain whether, for example, follow-up calls are helpful and encouraging to students, students who participate in in-depth discussions with their tutors on the telephone are more likely to complete their courses, and receiving high marks is motivating to students.

It is apparent from this study that the tutors' functions are multifarious, and that tutors provide a considerable amount of counselling and advising support to students. A similar study could be conducted with OLA advisors to ascertain in what way they facilitate or hinder students. A study of this nature would enable decisions to be made about student support requirements and the feasibility of combining or continuing to separate the roles of tutors and advisors, as well as the provision of other student support services.

APPENDIX 1

Letter of Introduction
and Explanation to Students

565 ST. ANDREWS ROAD
WEST VANCOUVER, B.C.
V7S 1V3

Telephone: 922-2267

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, and am conducting a study to find out how tutors can be of more assistance to students taking courses through the Open University and Open College. Your name has been chosen at random from students who registered for a course in March, 1988. I am very interested in what you can tell me about your experiences with your course regardless of how far along in the course you are, or how well you are doing.

I will be telephoning you within the next week to find out if you are willing to participate in this study. Appointments for a telephone interview (approximately 20 minutes in length) will be required of each participant. Should you decide to take part in the study, you will have the right to withdraw at any time. Any information obtained during the interviews will be held in confidence. Results of the study will be reported in group format only, with no names attached to it. At the completion of the study all data files will be destroyed.

If you have further questions about the project, please feel free to discuss them when I call you. If you decide you would like to be involved with the study, an appointment for an interview at a time convenient to you will be set.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Andrews

APPENDIX 2

Format of Initial Telephone Conversation

Setting Up Interviews With Students

Hallo, this is Barbara Andrews. I am a graduate student at Simon Fraser University, and I wrote to you last (this) week about a research study that I am conducting. Have you received the letter yet?

Have I called at a convenient time?

No - arrange to phone back at appropriate time

Yes - (see below)

As you know, I am conducting a study to find out how tutors can be of more assistance to students who are taking courses through the Open University and Open College. In order to do this I am trying to find out what tutors have said or done that has either been significantly helpful and encouraging to students or significantly unhelpful and discouraging to students in achieving what they wanted to in their course.

I would like to hear about your experiences as a student. In particular, I am interested in finding out what your tutor has said or done that has either been significantly helpful and encouraging to you or significantly unhelpful and discouraging to you in achieving what you wanted to in your course.

Would you be interested in participating in this study?

No - That's fine. I quite understand. Just for my own interest - would you be willing to tell me why you don't want to participate? . . . Well, thank you for your time. Good bye.

Yes - I really appreciate your help with this study. What I'd like to do is to explain a little bit about the study, and tell you the questions I'm going to be asking you so that you have time to think about your responses. We can then set a date and time which is convenient for you to be interviewed.

I'd like you to think about the two questions I will be asking you. You may want to jot down a few notes and have them handy when I interview you.

I would like you to focus on your relationship with your tutor. If you have taken more than one course, I would like you to think back over all of them and focus on the different relationships you have had with your tutors. The relationships were probably established by:

1. the initial letter you received from your tutor
2. the telephone conversations you had with your tutor
3. the comments that your tutor made about your assignments
4. any notes or letters that you sent to your tutor with your assignment.

I'd like you think about what your tutor has said or done that has been either significantly helpful and encouraging to you or significantly unhelpful and discouraging to you in achieving what you wanted to in your course(s).

Do you have any questions?

I would like to set up a time that is convenient to you so that we can spend some time talking about your experiences. When is the most convenient time for you?

Well, thank you for your time. I will telephone you on (date) at (time). Good bye.

APPENDIX 3

Interview Format - Students

Hello, this is Barbara Andrews. We arranged this time for an interview. Is this still alright with you? (Couple of minutes of informal conversation, e.g. "What's the weather like up there in Prince Rupert?" etc.)

Do you have any questions or comments before we begin?

I would like to tape record our telephone conversation so that if I don't understand my handwritten notes I can check the tape. As soon as I've finished my research study, I will destroy the tapes, so no-one else will ever hear them.

I would like you to focus on your relationship with your tutors. Can you think of something that a tutor has said or done that has been significantly helpful and encouraging to you in achieving what you wanted to from the course?

Pause. Take all examples

Paraphrase each incident for clarification.

Can you think of something that a tutor has said or done that has been significantly unhelpful and discouraging to you in achieving what you wanted to from the course?

Pause. Take all examples

Paraphrase each incident for clarification

Conclusion: I'd just like to ask you a few questions so that I can compare your responses with those of other students.

(If information not already obtained)

1. In which course did you enrol in the March 1988 session?
2. What is your main reason for taking this course?
3. How many courses, past and present, have you taken at O.L.A?
4. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
6. What is your occupation?
7. As I read the following age categories would you tell me in which one you fall?

Less than 25 26 - 35 36 - 45 46 - 55 56 - 65
Over 65

Well thank you for taking the time to answer these questions. Your responses have been very helpful. Do you have any questions or comments? If you happen to think of any other items over the next few days which you think I might be interested in, I would be very grateful if you could telephone me. You can call me collect at 922-2267. Thank you.

APPENDIX 4**Letter of Introduction**
and Explanation to Tutors

565 ST. ANDREWS ROAD
WEST VANCOUVER, B.C.
V7S 1V3

Telephone: 922-2267

July 28, 1988

Dear

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, and am conducting a study about student/tutor relationships at the Open Learning Agency. I am endeavouring to find out what motivates or hinders students in their distance education courses. Your name has been chosen at random from tutors who have been employed by the Open Learning Agency (previously the Open Learning Institute) for four or more years.

I will be telephoning you within the next week to find out if you are willing to participate in this study. Appointments for a telephone interview (approximately 20 minutes in length) will be required of each participant. Should you decide to take part in the study, you will have the right to withdraw at any time. Any information obtained during the interviews will be held in confidence. Results of the study will be reported in group format only, with no names attached to it. At the completion of the study all data files will be destroyed.

If you have further questions about the project, please feel free to discuss them when I call you. If you decide you would like to be involved with the study, an appointment for an interview at a time convenient to you will be set.

Your input is essential to the success of this research project, and it is hoped that the results will be of interest to tutors. Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Andrews

APPENDIX 5

Format of Initial Telephone Conversation

Setting up Interviews with Tutors

Hallo, this is Barbara Andrews. I am a graduate student at Simon Fraser University, and I wrote to you last week about a research study that I am conducting. I wondered if you had received the letter yet?

Have I called at a convenient time?

No - arrange to phone back at appropriate time

Yes - (see below)

As you know, I am conducting a study about student/tutor relationships at the Open University and Open College. I am endeavouring to find out what motivates or hinders students in their distance education courses.

Would you be interested in participating in this study?

No - That's fine. I quite understand. Just for my own interest, would you be willing to tell me why you don't want to participate? Well, thank you for your time. Good bye.

Yes - What I'd like to do is to explain a little bit about the study, and tell you the questions I'm going to be asking you so that you have time to think about your responses. We can then set a date and time which is convenient for you to be interviewed.

In my research study, I'm collecting data from three sources:

1. Telephone interviews with students.
2. Student questionnaires
3. Telephone interviews with tutors.

What I am asking tutors to do is to think back over all the students you have tutored. I would like you to focus on your relationships with those students, and think of any occasions when you said or did something that you perceived was significantly helpful and encouraging to students in achieving what they wanted to in their courses. Then I would like you to think of any occasions when you did or said something that you perceived was significantly unhelpful and discouraging to students in achieving what they wanted to in their courses.

Do you have any questions?

I would like to set up a time that is convenient to you so that we can spend some time talking about your experiences as a tutor. When is the most convenient time for you? Thank you. I'll call you on (date and time).

APPENDIX 6

Interview Format - Tutors

Hello, this is Barbara Andrews. We arranged this time for an interview. Is this still alright with you? (Couple of minutes of informal conversation)

Do you have any questions or comments before we begin?

I would like to tape record our telephone conversation so that if I don't understand my handwritten notes I can check the tape. As soon as I've finished my research study, I will destroy the tapes, so no-one else will ever hear them.

I would like you to focus on your relationships with your students. Can you think of any occasions when you said or did something that you perceived was significantly helpful and encouraging to a student in achieving what they wanted to in their course?

Pause. Take all examples

Paraphrase each incident for clarification.

Can you think of any occasions when you said or did something that you perceived was significantly unhelpful and discouraging to a student in achieving what they wanted to in their courses?

Pause. Take all examples

Paraphrase each incident for clarification

Conclusion: I'd just like to ask you a few questions so that I can compare your responses with those of other students. (If information not already obtained)

1. Which courses do you tutor?
2. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
6. What is your occupation other than being a tutor with OLA?
7. As I read the following age categories would you tell me in which one you fall?

Less than 25	26 - 35	36 - 45	46 - 55	56 - 65
Over 65				

Well thank you for taking the time to talk to me. You have been very helpful. Do you have any questions or comments?

If you happen to think of any other items over the next few days which you think I might be interested in, I would be very grateful if you could telephone me. You can call me collect at 922-2267. Thank you.

APPENDIX 7**Questionnaire to students**
and Covering Letter

565 ST. ANDREWS ROAD
WEST VANCOUVER, B.C.
V7S 1V3

Telephone: 922-2267

June 17, 1988

Dear

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University and am conducting a study to find out how tutors can be of more assistance to students taking courses through the Open University and Open College.

Your name has been selected at random from all Open University and Open College students who enrolled in a course in March 1988 and who have completed at least two assignments. As questionnaires are only being mailed to a small number of randomly selected students, it is very important, for the success of this study, that you complete this questionnaire.

It is estimated that you will need 10 - 15 minutes to answer the questions. The information obtained from the questionnaires will be held in confidence. The data will be reported in group format and you will not be identified personally. The questionnaire has an identification number for mailing purposes only. This is so that I may check your name off the mailing list when your questionnaire is returned. Your name will never be placed on the questionnaire. At the completion of the study all data files will be destroyed.

I am very interested in what you can tell me about your experiences with your course regardless of how far along in the course you are, how well you are doing, and whether or not you intend to complete the course.

To assist with this project, would you please complete the attached questionnaire and put it in the mail in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by Friday, July 8, 1988. I, like you, am a student with limited discretionary time, and I value the time and effort you are contributing to my research study. Your input is essential to the success of this study, which hopefully will have some future benefit to students studying "at a distance." If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me collect at 922-2267. Thank you for your help.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Andrews

SURVEY OF OPEN UNIVERSITY AND OPEN COLLEGE STUDENTS

Purpose of research study

- The purpose of this study is to find out how tutors can be of more assistance to Open University and Open College students. To do this, I am asking students to identify what tutors have said or done which has either been significantly helpful and encouraging to them, or been significantly unhelpful and discouraging to them in achieving what they wanted to in their courses. I would really like to hear about your experiences as a student taking courses "at a distance." Thank you for assisting me with this research project by completing the questionnaire.

Instructions for completing questionnaire

- Please relate your answers to the course in which you enrolled in the **March, 1988** session.

If you enrolled in more than one course in the March, 1988 session, please choose one of the courses and relate your answers to that course and tutor only.

- If you wish to add any comments or additional information, please do so in the space provided. Please feel free to use the back of the page or an extra sheet if you need more space. Thank you.

Instructions for returning questionnaire

- Please place the questionnaire in the stamped, addressed, envelope provided and put it in the mail by:

Friday, July 8, 1988

Please return it to:

Barbara Andrews
565 St. Andrews Road
West Vancouver, B.C.
V7S 1V3

Comments, concerns and questions

- If you have any comments, concerns and questions please don't hesitate to call me **collect** at
922-2267

1. In which course did you enrol in the March 1988 session? (If you enrolled in more than one course in the March 1988 session, which course are you relating this questionnaire to?)

Please give complete course title or course code.

2. How many courses, past and present, have you taken at OLA?

Enter number please. _____ courses.

3. Is your tutor's handwriting easy to read on your marked assignments?

Very easy

Somewhat easy

Not too easy.

Not at all easy

Tutor uses a typewriter or
word processor

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

4. In the feedback on your assignments, has your tutor encouraged you to telephone him/her if you have any questions, concerns, or problems?

Yes.

No

5. Has your tutor invited you to telephone in "out-of-office" hours if you need immediate help?

Yes

No.

6. Does your tutor include in the feedback on your assignments phrases such as: "Good work," "Excellent," "Good effort," "You are doing well," etc?

Always
 Often.
 Sometimes.
 Never.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

If you checked "Never" please go to question 8.

7. Are these phrases (such as: "Good work," "Excellent," "Good effort," "You are doing well," etc.) encouraging to you?

Very encouraging.
 Somewhat encouraging.
 Not too encouraging
 Not at all encouraging.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

8. Does your tutor include in the feedback on your assignments phrases such as: "Poor work," "You are not making satisfactory progress," "You are not putting enough effort into your work," etc?

Always
 Often.
 Sometimes.
 Never.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

If you checked "Never" please go to question 10.

9. Are these phrases (such as: "Poor work," "You are not making satisfactory progress," "You are not putting enough effort into your work," etc.) discouraging to you?

Very discouraging.
 Somewhat discouraging.
 Not too discouraging
 Not at all discouraging.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

10. How thorough is your tutor's feedback on your assignments?

Very thorough
 Somewhat thorough
 Not too thorough.
 Not at all thorough

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

11. How helpful is your tutor's feedback on your assignments?

Very helpful.
 Somewhat helpful.
 Not too helpful
 Not at all helpful.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

12. Have you asked your tutor a question by writing the question in the box provided on the T.M.A. or by writing it on a separate sheet of paper which you have included with your assignment?

Yes.
 No

If you checked "No" please go to question 15.

13. Does your tutor answer the question(s) you have asked?

- Always
- Often.
- Sometimes.
- Never

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

If you checked "Never" please go to question 15.

14. How thorough is your tutor's answer(s) to your question(s)?

- Very thorough
- Somewhat thorough
- Not too thorough.
- Not at all thorough

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

15. Are you satisfied with the marks that your tutor gives for your assignments?

- Always
- Often.
- Sometimes.
- Never

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

16. Are you encouraged by the marks that your tutor gives for your assignments?

Very encouraged.
 Somewhat encouraged.
 Not too encouraged
 Not at all encouraged.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

17. How easy is it to contact your tutor on the telephone?

Very easy.
 Somewhat easy.
 Not too easy
 Not at all easy.
 Never tried to contact tutor . . .

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

18. Have you talked to your tutor on the telephone?

Yes.
 No

If you checked "No" please go to question 31.

19. At the beginning of the course did you speak to your tutor on the telephone?

Yes, tutor called me
 Yes, I called tutor.
 No
 Cannot remember.

If you checked "No" or "Cannot Remember" please go to question 21.

20. As a result of your telephone conversation with your tutor at the beginning of the course, were you eager to work on your course?

Very eager
 Somewhat eager
 Not too eager.
 Not at all eager

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

21. During the course, how many times have you talked to your tutor on the telephone? (Give your best estimate.)

0 times.
 1 time
 2 times.
 3 times.
 4 times.
 5 times or more.

If you checked "0" times, please go to question 31.

22. Who usually places the telephone calls?

I usually call my tutor.
 My tutor usually calls me. . . .
 I sometimes call my tutor and
 he/she sometimes calls me. . .

23. When you talk to your tutor on the telephone, do you feel that you have to rush?

Always
 Often.
 Sometimes.
 Never

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

24. Is your tutor's manner on the telephone friendly?

- Very friendly
Somewhat friendly
Not too friendly.
Not at all friendly

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

25. Is it difficult to understand your tutor on the telephone (because of accent, tone of voice, speed of talking, etc)?

- Very difficult.
Somewhat difficult.
Not too difficult
Not at all difficult.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

26. Do you feel comfortable about telephoning your tutor?

- Very comfortable.
Somewhat comfortable.
Not too comfortable
Not at all comfortable.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

27. How thorough is your tutor when giving you information over the telephone?

- Very thorough
- Somewhat thorough
- Not too thorough.
- Not at all thorough ,

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

28. How helpful are telephone conversations with your tutor?

- Very helpful.
- Somewhat helpful.
- Not too helpful
- Not at all helpful.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

29. Did your tutor telephone you just before the exam?

- Yes.
- No
- Have not taken exam.

If you checked "No" or "Have not taken exam" please go to question 31.

30. How helpful was the telephone conversation you had with your tutor just before the exam?

- Very helpful.
- Somewhat helpful.
- Not too helpful
- Not at all helpful.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

31. Do you feel that your tutor cares about how well you are doing in the course?

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, a little.
- Not much.
- No, not at all.
- I don't know.

If you wish to add comments, please do so here:

Now that you have had a chance to respond to general questions about your relationship with your tutor, please take a few minutes to write down a few specific comments by answering the following questions:

32. What has your tutor said or done that has been significantly helpful and encouraging to you in achieving what you wanted to in your course?

33. What has your tutor said or done that has been significantly unhelpful and discouraging to you in achieving what you wanted to in your course?

Lastly, a few questions so that I can compare your answers with those of other students.

34. What is your main reason for taking the course that you enrolled in during the March 1988 session?

35. What is your present occupation?

36. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

37. In what age category do you fall?

25 or less
 26-35.
 36-45.
 46-55.
 56-65.
 Over 65.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please place the questionnaire in the stamped, addressed, envelope provided and put it in the mail by:

Friday, July 8, 1988

Please return it to:

Barbara Andrews
 565 St. Andrews Road
 West Vancouver, B.C.
 V7S 1V3

APPENDIX 8

Follow-up Letter--Student Questionnaires

565 ST. ANDREWS ROAD
WEST VANCOUVER, B.C.
V7S 1V3

Telephone: 922-2267

July 23, 1988

Dear

I trust that you received my letter dated June 17, 1988 enclosing a questionnaire relating to the course in which you enrolled in March, 1988. I have had a very good response to this questionnaire, which leads me to believe that the research study I am conducting is not only valid, but also has the potential of being very valuable to future students who are taking courses "at a distance." Although many students have responded to my request, I am very anxious to hear from the few students who have not yet returned their questionnaire. As I mentioned in my letter dated June 17, only a small number of students have been randomly selected to participate in this study. Your personal input is therefore of great importance to this research.

I am well aware that most adult learners have many responsibilities and demands on their time in addition to their studies. However, if you could take the time to contribute your input into this important project, I would be extremely grateful. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call me **collect** at 922-2267.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Andrews

APPENDIX 9

Responses To Questionnaires

1. In which course did you enrol in the March 1988 session?

University		CTV		ABE	
Courses	No. of Students	Courses	No. of Students	Courses	No. of Students
ADMIN 411	1	BOTR 101	2	BISC 023	2
ADMIN 450	1	BOTR 125	1	BISC 030	6
COMPT 101	1	BUSM 101	2	ENGL 010	1
ECON 200	1	BUSM 111	1	ENGL 020	2
ECON 201	1	BUSM 121	1	ENGL 030	3
ECON 401	1	BUSM 131	6	ENGL 034	1
ENGL 100	3	BUSM 132	3	FREN 020	1
ENGL 101	2	ELEC 110	3	MATH 003	3
ENGL 201	1	ELEC 120	1	MATH 010	1
ENGL 221	1	ELEC 140	1	MATH 024	3
ENGL 442	1	ENGL 106	2	MATH 033	1
GEOG 231	1	MATH 106	1	SCI 020	1
GEOG 270	1	TRAV 100	2		
HIST 210	1	TRAV 110	1		
MATH 100	1	TRAV 120	1		
MATH 101	1	TRAV 130	2		
MATH 102	2				
MATH 110	3				
MATH 411	1				
PSYC 102	5				
PSYC 440	1				
PSYC 445	1				
PSYC 446	2				
SOCIO 450	1				

2. How many courses, past and present, have you taken at OLA?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
One course	11	31	14	47	12	48
Two courses	11	31	6	20	9	36
Three courses	7	20	8	27	3	12
Four courses	2	6	1	3	-	-
Five courses	1	3	-	-	-	-
Six courses	-	-	-	-	1	4
Seven courses	1	3	-	-	-	-
Eight courses	1	3	-	-	-	-
Nine courses	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ten courses	-	-	1	3	-	-
Eleven courses	1	3	-	-	-	-

3. Is your tutor's handwriting easy to read on your marked assignments?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very easy	14 ^a	40	19 ^e	63	17 ^g	68
Somewhat easy	9 ^b	26	10 ^f	33	5	20
Not too easy	8 ^c	23	-	-	1	4
Not at all easy	3 ^d	9	-	-	2	8
Tutor uses a typewriter or word processor	1	3	1	3	-	-
No response	-	-	-	-	-	-

Comments from University students

- a "Sometimes uses a typewriter or word processor"
"Tutor uses both type and handwriting"
"I have found that it has been a problem in past classes I have taken."
"Tutor also uses a typewriter or word processor. "My first tutor's handwriting was difficult to read but the content was very good."
- b "Tutor also uses a typewriter or word processor. On essay a little hard, but I appreciated the comments because they were helpful."
- c "Would prefer if the tutor printed."
"Only odd words, that are not easy to read"
"Tutor uses typewriter sometimes"
- d "It was so bad, for the most part I didn't even try to decipher it."

Comments from CTV students

- e "Clear and precise, lets me know what she's thinking."
"She made brief comments on cover sheets. On assignments she indicated changes where numbers needed correcting."
- f "An ink pen seemed clearer than felt."

Comments from ABE students

- g "Tutor also uses a typewriter or word processor. She printed out her main comments on a word processor but also made notes throughout my work."
"She uses red pen."
"My tutor marks and returns my assignments quickly and her writing is clear and to the point."

4. In the feedback on your assignments, has your tutor encouraged you to telephone him/her if you have any questions, concerns, or problems?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	22	63	29	97	24	96
No	12	34	1	3	1	4
No response	1	3	-	-	-	-

5. Has your tutor invited you to telephone in "out-of-office" hours if you need immediate help?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	11 ^a	31	16	53	17 ^d	68
No	24 ^b	69	13 ^c	43	8	32
No Response	-	-	1	3	-	-

Comments from University students

- a "Tutor invited to call in introduction letter. However, was not home (or no answer) twice when I called (out of office hours). My tutor's "office hours" were not convenient for me i.e. Monday/Tuesday."
- b "I find there are enough regular hours for contact that I do not need "out-of-office" hours."

Comments from CTV students

- c "I receive generally good marks, so I feel that there is not a need for him to phone me, or to phone in off-hours."

Comments from ABE students

- d "She has said I can telephone any day, any time, because I study during the day."

6. Does your tutor include in the feedback on your assignments phrases such as: "Good work," "Excellent," "Good effort," "You are doing well," etc.?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always	21 ^a	60	23 ^c	77	19 ^e	76
Often	11	31	4 ^d	13	3 ^f	12
Sometimes	2	6	2	7	3 ^f	12
Never	1 ^b	3	1	3	-	-

Comments from University students

^a "Other than my first assignment, most of my assignments have been Good or Very Good."

^b "This is in relation to March session only."

Comments from CTV students

^c "Comments were always positive but brief."

^d "He didn't explain what I was doing wrong, and how to correct it."
"When they are done well."

Comments from ABE students

^e "It's very encouraging when you get comments on your work."

^f "He was impressed that I finished my assignments in (a) few weeks."
"Not so much as the above statements. More like 'bad effort.'"

7. Are these phrases (such as "Good work," "Excellent," "Good effort," "You are doing well," etc.) encouraging to you?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very encouraging	19 ^a	54	20 ^c	67	18 ^e	72
Somewhat encouraging	13 ^b	37	9 ^d	30	6 ^f	24
Not too encouraging	2 ^b	6	-	-	-	-
Not at all encouraging	-	-	-	-	-	-
Skipped	1	3	1	3	-	-
No response	-	-	-	-	1	4

Comments from University students

- a "I find personally that it makes me feel confident in my abilities to do the assignments well."
"This was particularly important on the first assignment to ensure that I was on the right track."
- b "I find these comments cliché, i.e. 80% earns 'Good work,' 90% earns 'Excellent'"

Comments from CTV students

- c "The feedback comments on the returned assignments were very encouraging -- especially to someone like myself taking an OLI course for the first time."
"I find them very encouraging. After not being in the habits of studying, it makes you feel good when you are doing good."
- d "Yes, he is very encouraging."
"My encouragement comes from the mark itself."
"They are more encouraging if the mark is high."

Comments from ABE students

- e "These phrases are very encouraging because I have been out of school for many years."
"Until I have more problems."
"It's nice to hear encouragement, especially when you're struggling through some assignments."
"I liked this encouragement because it made me feel that although I didn't know 100% of the work, it gave me some indication on my performance . . . in my tutor's opinion."
"I always find positive comments very inspiring, although constructive criticism is also helpful. My tutor, although little phone communications were used due to an error at OLI with my phone no., wrote encouraging comments in the returned assignments. I appreciated his use of my proper first name in doing so."
- f "She will often ask me a question and this is usually helpful in my work."

8. Does your tutor include in the feedback on your assignments phrases such as "Poor work, "You are not making satisfactory progress," "You are not putting enough effort into your work," etc?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always	-	-	-	-	2	8
Often	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sometimes	5 ^a	14	1 ^c	3	1 ^e	4
Never	29 ^b	83	29 ^d	97	21 ^f	84
No response	1	3	-	-	1	4

Comments from University students

- a "He was specific when my essay content was not clear. He did not use the terms that you have used."
 "Not exactly as vague as those examples; usually more specific."
 "More often I don't grasp the exact direction they wanted me to go with my assignment, e.g. 'Good grammar and punctuation, but use more examples from the story . . .' or an indication that something more or different was expected."
- b "Other than my first assignment where my tutor pointed out weak areas that needed revision, negative comments haven't been used."
 "On this particular course I am doing well, but I hope if in some other area I need these comments that they will be given to me."
 "That's because I am such a great student. Ho Ho."

Comments from CTV students

- c "Only when it was."
- d "Yes, in fact, I've been behind a lot and he encourages you to hang in there."
 "There hasn't been any need for such comments."
 "She might have on other people's work, but I never received any such comments."
 "I've always done well."
 "Marks were good overall."

Comments from ABE students

- e "e.g. if I cancel the right answer."
- f "My lowest mark was 92%. I have completed the course."

9. Are these phrases (such as: "Poor work," "You are not making satisfactory progress," "You are not putting enough effort into your work," etc.) discouraging to you?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very discouraging	-	-	-	-	1	4
Somewhat discouraging	1 ^a	3	-	-	1	4
Not too discouraging	1	3	-	-	-	-
Not at all discouraging	3 ^b	9	-	-	1 ^e	4
Skipped	29	83	29 ^c	97	21	84
No response	1	3	1 ^d	3	1	4

Comments from University students

- a "As indicated in question 8 ('More often I don't grasp the exact direction they wanted me to go with my assignment') sometimes it's hard when you've done your best but were a bit off track. An example from my course would be my second assignment. The assignment was to do an essay on our feelings about one of our readings, or how it affected us. I found it difficult because we didn't spend much time working on how to write an essay itself. It would have helped to have seen an example of the type of work expected."
- b "If they were as vague as the example it would be very discouraging." "This was taken as positive constructive criticism."

Comments from CTV students

- c "Yes, they do discourage you because fitting in these courses into a busy schedule is hard and I'm very aware of the deadlines."
- d "Why would it be any of the above? Comments like that should be taken as advice."

Comments from ABE students

- e "Because we learn by mistakes."

10. How thorough is your tutor's feedback on your assignments?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very thorough	13 ^a	37	14	47	17 ^d	68
Somewhat thorough	19	54	13 ^c	43	8 ^e	32
Not too thorough	3 ^b	9	3	10	-	-
Not at all thorough	-	-	-	-	-	-

Comments from University students

- a "Weaknesses are pointed out and corrections or further material (answers) revisions are added to the assignments I have handed in." [sic]
- b "Usually short comment"
"Tends to !!x, so I asked under "student comments" if a question is wrong to include the correction (i.e. I had nowhere to look it up). On one assignment she wrote "Why do this!" but never told me why it was wrong. I found this disquieting."

Comments from CTV students

- c "She made corrections and brief comments."
"I find that when I make an error, I don't get enough feedback on what my error was."

Comments from ABE students

- d "Tells me to call her if I have any questions after my assignment is marked. Will write reference page numbers for questions that are not completely or thoroughly answered by me."
"Although I do well on my assignments, my tutor always points out my problem areas and asks me to call."
"On the questions I ask her, she was very thorough."
"My tutor explains questions I've done wrong very well."
- e "I'd prefer if my tutor would comment on my content rather than my structure of essays."

11. How helpful is your tutor's feedback on your assignments?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very helpful	14 ^a	40	16 ^d	53	13 ^f	52
Somewhat helpful	18 ^b	51	13 ^e	43	11 ^g	44
Not too helpful	3 ^c	9	1	3	1	4
Not at all helpful	-	-	-	-	-	-

Comments from University students

- a "Problems could be corrected in future assignments."
"Found comments very helpful -- valuable."
- b "Helpful when legible."
"It would be more helpful if they would point out your weak areas so students could concentrate more on these areas of study."
"When I don't take the time to decipher his writing, it can't be too helpful. My fault, not his. He puts lots of comments on my papers."
- c "Too short"

Comments from CTV students

- d "Helps correct the little mistakes, thus fine tuning my assignments."
- e "The frequency of telephone contact was not adequate." (sic)

Comments from ABE students

- f "I find, by giving me page number out of the text book, I remember better than if she was to tell me the answer."
"She supplies page numbers in my text, so that I may go over a problem area in my marked assignment."
"It's nice when I don't understand a question and my tutor explains the question."
- g "It would be easier to sit with the tutor in person and discuss errors."
"Tells me which page to find it on."
"I noticed a lot of confusion between the courses use of, my tutor's use of, and my texts actual page numbers specification. I assumed a different text was referred to."

12. Have you asked your tutor a question by writing the question in the box provided on the TMA or by writing it on a separate sheet of paper which you have included with your assignment?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	16	46	7	23	7	28
No	18	51	23 ^a	77	18 ^b	72
No response	1	3	-	-	-	-

Comments from CTV students

- ^a "I phone him if I need to ask about something."

Comments from ABE students

- ^b "More or less just comments."

13. Does your tutor answer the question(s) you have asked?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always	12	71	7 ^b	100	7	100
Often	2	11	-	-	-	-
Sometimes	-	-	-	-	-	-
Never	2 ^a	11	-	-	-	-
Skipped	18	-	23	-	18	-
No response	1	6	-	-	-	-

Comments from University students

- ^a "Once I suggested that an assignment question was very vague, there was no response."
"Have only asked one question - received no reply."

Comments from CTV students

- ^b "I had asked for extra assigned work on a topic. There wasn't any available."
"She phoned me back immediately with answer -- as soon as she received it."

14. How thorough is your tutor's answer(s) to your question(s)?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very thorough	7 ^a	41	6 ^b	86	5	71
Somewhat thorough	7	41	1	14	1	14
Not too thorough	-	-	-	-	-	-
Not at all thorough	-	-	-	-	-	-
Skipped	18	-	23	-	18	-
No response	3	18	-	-	1	14

Comments from University students

- ^a "However, I found in the past they sometimes use terms which are hard to understand."

Comments from CTV students

- ^b "On telephone, I had to refer to page number in text only. Her response was immediate and helpful." (sic).

15. Are you satisfied with the marks that your tutor gives for your assignments?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always	20 ^a	57	21 ^d	70	20 ^f	80
Often	10 ^b	29	8	27	2	8
Sometimes	5 ^c	14	1 ^e	3	1	4
Never	-	-	-	-	1	4
No response	-	-	-	-	1	4

Comments from University students

- a "Very fair marking"
"A breakdown of marks received for conceptual, tutor-posed and essay questions would be helpful."
- b "Three out of four assignments I was very pleased. The grade on the 1st assignment is questionable."
"There was an error (3 marks) on one assignment that I still have to re-submit."
"I found many multiple choice type questions were really ambiguous and of little or no value in specific terms of preparation towards the final exam. Please note I do not mean that the questions themselves had to appear on the final exam."
- c "I thought I would score better, but I'm sure he is accurate."
"It's not the tutor's marking I have a problem with, but my scores."
"This particular course was a repeat for me. The first time I had an average of 78%, the second time 82%. For the most part I merely rewrote the assignment questions. On quite a number of the assignments the answers were identical (with a little more thorough answer the second time) however, the second mark was less than the first. This didn't seem reasonable to me because the content was the same."

Comments from CTV students

- d "They wouldn't have the job if they didn't know what they were doing."
- e "Tutor's marks seem very strict for an intro course with no prerequisites and some interpretation is encouraged in course."

Comments from ABE students

- f "My tutor is always fair, she gives some marks for each problem even if the answer isn't right."

16. Are you encouraged by the marks that your tutor gives for your assignments?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very encouraged	16	46	19 ^d	63	16 ^f	64
Somewhat encouraged	14 ^a	40	8	27	7	28
Not too encouraged	4 ^b	11	1	3	-	-
Not at all encouraged	-	-	1	3	1	4
No response	1 ^c	3	1 ^e	3	1	4

Comments from University students

- a "To me marks do not count as much as what I got out of the assignment."
- b "The last one I was pleased with."
- c "Did not view the marks as encouraging or non-encouraging."

Comments from CTV students

- d "This was often the only encouraging part of a very dull and often frustrating course."
- e "The marks do not give me encouragement, but they give me satisfaction, or desire to do better on the next assignment."

Comments from ABE students

- f "Except the last one -- 68% -- I bombed that one."

17. How easy is it to contact your tutor on the telephone?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very easy	8 ^a	23	14 ^f	47	6 ⁱ	24
Somewhat easy	9 ^b	26	5 ^g	17	7 ^j	28
Not too easy	8 ^c	23	2 ^h	7	2 ^k	8
Not at all easy	1 ^d	3	1 ^h	3	-	-
Never tried to contact tutor	8 ^e	23	8	27	9	36
No response	1 ^e	3	-	-	1	4

Comments from University students

- a "Very helpful when I did contact her."
"I only phoned him once. We hung up. He called back, and spent $\frac{1}{2}$ hour plus explaining something to me."
- b "He has given only two days out of a week (Monday and Tuesday, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.) to contact him."
"Although she has convenient office hours, I tend to do my homework at odd hours. Tried to reach her once, but didn't want to wait the 5 days until her next day with office hours. (Found answer to question on my own)."
- c "Limited - $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours set aside - evening 2 hours once a week and morning $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours once a week."
"Explained earlier, office hours were not convenient for me."
"His phone wasn't working for a week without him knowing."
"Her schedule and mine are on different time zones."
"It would be easier if one had more immediate access to a tutor than waiting 3 or 4 days until their scheduled time. It can be frustrating if you have a problem which can hold up your work for a couple of days."
"Get busy (signal) very often."
"Even during his designated "tutor hours" sometimes there would be no answer."
- d "I live in isolated logging camp with one phone line. I don't have my own phone and can only use the office phone. It is usually turned off in the evenings."

/Continued

- e "The office times were not convenient for me as I was at school days (9:30 - 11:00 a.m.) and 5:30 - 7:00 p.m. is busy with children."

Comments from CTV students

- f "Was able to help at all times, or able to comment on any given situation."
 "Only had to contact once. No problems."
 "She was always available at assigned times."
- g "Has answering machine for any time phoning. 'Specified Time' phoning is tough getting through -- line busy."
 "It would be nice to be able to talk to your tutor more than twice a week."
- h "I have found it difficult to get a hold of some tutors."

Comments from ABE students

- i "I only contacted the tutor once and I found her very helpful and encouraging."
 "Although I haven't tried - I know she has an answering machine and will get back to me."
 "As already stated, there was little contact (by my choice) yet when I phoned, he was available."
- j "Only tried once."
- k "Because of my shiftwork."

18. Have you talked to your tutor on the telephone?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	31	89	25	83	18	72
No	4	11	5	17	7	28

19. At the beginning of the course did you speak to your tutor on the telephone?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes, tutor called me	18 ^a	51	14	47	10 ^c	40
Yes, I called tutor	8 ^b	23	7	23	5	20
No	5 ^b	14	4	13	2	8
Cannot remember	-	-	-	-	1	4
Skipped	4	11	5	17	7	28

Comments from University students

a "He phoned when I was out so I returned call."
"He phoned when I was out so I called him."

b "The tutor had called me at the beginning of the course but I was not home."

Comments from ABE students

c "He called while I was at work. I did call back."

20. As a result of your telephone conversation with your tutor at the beginning of the course, were you eager to work on your course?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very eager	10 ^a	37	16 ^e	76	10 ^g	67
Somewhat eager	12 ^b	44	4	19	4	27
Not too eager	2	7	- ^f	-	-	-
Not at all eager	1 ^c	4	1 ^f	5	-	-
Skipped	8 ^d		9		10 ^h	
No response	2 ^d	7	-	-	1 ^h	7

/Continued

Comments from University students

- a "Couldn't say eagerness is a result of talking to tutor as opposed to personal motivation."
- b "Her calling me had very little influence on my working on the course - over-all."
"I am sure you can understand that Economics is not one of the most exciting courses one can take."
"Course was of a personal interest."
- c "Phone call had no affect on my eagerness to start on the course."
- d "I received a lengthy letter detailing how to contact my tutor, and expectations."
"Call did not make any difference to my enthusiasm."

Comments from CTV students

- e "The phone conversation would not be the prime reason for the eagerness to get the course under way."
"The introductory telephone conversation made me feel much more comfortable and anxious to begin working on the course."
- f "The eagerness was in the fact of wanting to learn in that field of study."

Comments from ABE students

- g "My tutor was very positive about what I'd learn. So needless to say I became very eager to start."
"My tutor was very pleasant to talk to. She said to make sure I call her if I have any problems at all."
- h "I had started the course as soon as I received the text and info so I was already in assignment no. 2 when she called."

21. During the course how many times have you talked to your tutor on the telephone? (Give your best estimate.)

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
0 times	7	23	2	8	2	11
1 time	8	26	6	24	3	17
2 times	9	29	6	24	4	22
3 times	4	13	2	8	-	-
4 times	1	3	6	24	2	11
5 or more times	2	6	3	12	7	39
Skipped	4		5		7	

22. Who usually places the telephone calls?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
I usually call my tutor	17	71	17	74	9	56
My tutor usually calls me	3	13	3	13	2	13
I sometimes call my tutor and he/she sometimes calls me	4	17	3	13	5	31
Skipped	11		7		9	

23. When you talk to your tutor on the telephone, do you feel that you have to rush?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Always	-	-	-	-	1 ^d	6
Often	4 ^a	17	-	-	1	6
Sometimes	4	17	4	17	1 ^e	6
Never	15	63	18	78	12 ^f	75
Skipped	11 ^b		7		9	
No response	1	4	1 ^c	4	1	6

Comments from University students

- a "I called about the error on my assignment. It was a holiday (Monday morning) and she just happened to be there."
- b "To be honest - I was nervous calling - and was conscious of taking up too much of her time."

Comments from CTV students

- c "I feel that there are others who may be anxious to get through, so I keep it fairly short."

Comments from ABE students

- d "Only once - somewhat rushed."
- e "Once or twice she has been in the middle of doing something, but she always offers to call me back."
- f "The only rush I feel is that knowing its long distance. The tutor did not make me feel rushed."
 "She has a great deal of patience, willing to explain things over and over again."
 "My tutor phoned me and then asked if I had any questions. I wasn't rushed at all."
 "My tutor first phoned me to say that he had been given the wrong number. He asked about my courses and asked if I needed assistance or was I having any difficulties."

24. Is your tutor's manner on the telephone friendly?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very friendly	15	63	19	83	13 ^a	81
Somewhat friendly	9	38	4	17	1	6
Not too friendly	-	-	-	-	1	6
Not at all friendly	-	-	-	-	-	-
Skipped	11	-	7	-	9	-
No response	-	-	-	-	1	6

Comments from ABE students

- a "My tutor is a very pleasant person to talk to."
 "One occasion, I fell asleep late while studying, therefore missing my exam. I contacted my tutor and he was very helpful to direct me on the proper procedures and also calmed me down a lot."

25. Is it difficult to understand your tutor on the telephone (because of accent, tone of voice, speed of talking, etc.)?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very difficult	-	-	-	-	-	-
Somewhat difficult	1	4	-	-	-	-
Not too difficult	1	4	1 ^a	4	2 ^c	12
Not at all difficult	22	92	22 ^b	96	13	81
Skipped	11	-	7	-	9	-
No response	-	-	-	-	1	6

Comments from CTV students

- a "He speaks quickly and decisively; sometimes will not understand (or acknowledge) my approach to problem."
 b "Was able to go through assignment step-by-step to find and correct errors."

Comments from ABE students

- c "She had a little accent but it wasn't too hard to understand."

26. Do you feel comfortable about telephoning your tutor?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very comfortable	7	29	14	61	9 ^e	56
Somewhat comfortable	10 ^a	42	7 ^c	30	4 ^f	25
Not too comfortable	7 ^b	29	2 ^d	9	1 ^g	6
Not at all comfortable	-	-	-	-	1	6
Skipped	11		7		9	
No response	-	-	-	-	1	6

Comments from University students

- a "I'm shy . . . so I call when I really need help."
- b "Feel like I'm interfering."
 "I never really understood how I was supposed to call him (e.g. collect all the time or what?)"
 "I grew up and have lived in a remote area and did not have a telephone until I was thirty years old. I'm still 'scared' of it."

Comments from CTV students

- c "The fact that he is a stranger, bothers me a bit. Living in a small town where you know everyone, has a lot to do with my feelings on this, I think."
 "I didn't like to call too often, but on three occasions, my progress was obstructed because of printing errors in text."
- d "My questions seem too vague to mention."

Comments from ABE students

- e "My tutor is always pleasant and seems glad to answer any questions I may have."
- f "I don't like to bother her too much. I try to do the work myself and call only as a last resort."
- g "The tutor before in Introductory in Dental Assistance was very thorough and phoned always and talked with no rushes at all. Made me feel at ease."

27. How thorough is your tutor when giving you information over the telephone?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very thorough	15	62	20	87	13 ^c	81
Somewhat thorough	4	17	2	9	3	19
Not too thorough	2 ^a	8	1	4	-	-
Not at all thorough	-	-	-	-	-	-
Skipped	11		7		9	
No response	3 ^b	13	-	-	-	-

Comments from University students

a "Haven't discussed problems over phone -- I can manage myself."

b "He rambled"

c "Really were no instructions communicated -- cannot comment."

Comments from ABE students

c "Very helpful and encouraging."

"Its hard to understand some math exercises without seeing it done step by step in front of you."

"My tutor will go over a problem area with me until she is sure that I understand."

28. How helpful are telephone conversations with your tutor?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very helpful	11 ^a	46	19	83	13	81
Somewhat helpful	9 ^b	38	3	13	1	6
Not too helpful	1 ^c	4	1	4	1	6
Not at all helpful	-	-	-	-	-	-
Skipped	11		7		9	
No response	3 ^d	13	-	-	1 ^e	6

Comments from University students

- a "Helped to clarify some points I was having difficulty with."
- b "As in question 14, I sometimes have difficulty in understanding the terms they use."
- c "Once I called the tutor because I didn't understand what an assignment question was asking for. Her answer "It is straightforward." This didn't help me. But I "guessed" right.
- d "Cannot comment -- it was not a conversation about the course per se."
"Again, can't answer because of the above reason." (I haven't discussed problems over phone -- I can manage myself.)

Comments from ABE students

- e "I haven't really talked to her about my course."

29. Did your tutor telephone you just before the exam?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	7 ^a	29	1 ^b	4	4 ^c	25
No	9	38	14	61	4 ^d	25
Have not taken exam	8	33	8	35	8	50
Skipped	11		7		9	

Comments from University students

- a "I phoned the tutor just before the exam and found it helpful."
"I called her."

Comments from CTV students

- b "I phoned her."

Comments from ABE students

- c "Although I have not written the exam as yet, she has told me what to study."
d "But she did write encouraging comments on the assignment sheet, that I should have no problem with the exam, and what to concentrate my studying on."

30. How helpful was the telephone conversation you had with your tutor just before the exam?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very helpful	3	43	1 ^a	50	2	50
Somewhat helpful	3	43	1	50	1	25
Not too helpful	1	14	-	-	-	-
Not at all helpful	-	-	-	-	-	-
Skipped	28		28		21	
No response	-	-	-	-	1	25

Comments from CTV students

- a "She gave me hints for exam."

31. Do you feel that your tutor cares about how well you are doing in the course?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes, a lot	6 ^a	17	17 ^d	57	15 ^e	60
Yes, a little	17 ^b	49	7	23	7 ^f	28
Not much	6 ^c	17	1	3	-	-
No, not at all	-	-	-	-	1	4
I don't know	5	14	5	17	1	4
No response	1	3	-	-	1	4

Comments from University students

- a "I have no idea, but she seems to put a lot of effort into marking the assignments, so she must care."
- b "I typed a letter to my tutor before the exams to ask him if I was pushing myself too hard in order to be able to write the exam early due to my job workload and other courses I am presently taking. He responded favourably."
- c "I have stopped taking the course, and no-one has called to find out why."
"However, I can say I had few difficulties with this course."
"The few times I did converse with him he did not seem overly interested."

Comments from CTV students

- d "He was kind enough to let me know when he'd be out of town and unavailable."
"I feel that he does, he would not be doing the job of tutoring if he didn't, I would think."

Comments from ABE students

- e "Because he always tells me where to study hard, e.g. I had a problem with my assignment 6 in genetic supplement."
"Yes, by the comments written on the covering assignment sheet."
"But as I have put the assignments aside for the time being, I feel that I need a lower level course first."
"She has phoned me and said she hadn't had an assignment from me in a while. She was concerned that I would get behind."
- f "She comments on how well I do."
"I think she must care because she is very encouraging, although I don't think it's her whole life."

37. In what age category do you fall?

	University (N = 35)		CTV (N = 30)		ABE (N = 25)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
25 or less	10	29	7	23	12	48
26-35	17	49	13	43	8	32
36-45	7	20	8	27	4	16
46-55	-	-	1	3	-	-
56-65	-	-	-	-	1	4
Over 65	-	-	-	-	-	-
No response	1	3	1	3	-	-

General Comments

General Comments from University students

- "A more consistent Likert Scale on this survey would have been helpful. I didn't like the difference between very ... and somewhat ... 'Usually' would have felt easier."
- "I think it would be helpful for correspondence students to have a group review while taking the course. In a previous course taken, we had two reviews during the course. They helped 'tie up the loose ends.'"

General Comments from CTV students

- "I have found it very difficult to get Advisors when I need it. I found the Math 181 course (taken previously) was difficult to understand even though the test was easier. Also I found the format of the Elec 120 course jumped around a lot. I also thought the Elec 110 did not go into enough detail about things. In fact both Electronics courses are somewhat simplistic (110 and 120). More effort should be made to explain things in greater detail and more self tests should be given. On the other hand, the Math 181 went into too much detail. In general I am not sure I am getting my money's worth."
- "I think this math course has nothing to do with what I am doing, a lot of the questions -- if not just about all the questions -- have nothing to do with what I need to know. A consumer Math course would be just what I need (basic Math skills)."

- "As an additional comment, I would like to say that I think the tutor should make the initial contact at the beginning of the course. Although I am not a shy person I do not like to approach people over the phone. If my tutor had phoned me first, I would have felt much more comfortable about calling him later."
- "I feel, however, that the course itself needs lots of improvement starting with a new text."

General comments from ABE students

- "My son married a French Canadian girl and I wanted to be able to converse a little with her French speaking parents. I started the course and worked very hard at it for six weeks and then we got very busy and involved with the wedding which was on May 21st and I really just had about 6 weeks oin the course. I sent in my mini tests and one major test which I got, I think, 83 or 84%. Since then its fruit season in the Okanagan and other chores but I intend to pick up the course in the fall. I was very excited at the wedding time because even with my 6 weeks study which really is nothing, I found I was picking up a few phrases of French from the in-laws. The tapes are absolutely excellent and my tutor, was very helpful and encouraging. She would speak French to me on the phone and if I got her to repeat it, usually I could pick it up. As I told her in a note, I could read it reasonably well, also pronounce it because of the cassettes, and spelling wasn't too bad, but the ear is so slow to pick up the spoken word. She is an enthusiastic teacher and I hope to do well when I get at the course again."
- "In my other course, no contact was made with my tutor whatsoever and several assignments have yet to be returned. (I have written the exam). Her comments were vague and useless. She would refer to concepts I obviously had not grasped, although I didn't know so at the time."

APPENDIX 10**Frequency of Critical Incidents**
by Data Source and by Group

	Student Interviews				Tutor Interviews				Student Questionnaires				Group Totals									
	CTV		ABE		CTV		ABE		CTV		ABE		F	H								
	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H	F	H								
A. INITIAL CONTACT																						
1. Letters of introduction	5	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	1	11						
2. Initial telephone conversations	2	1	3	2	2	1	4	0	2	0	1	0	1	17	6	23						
B. FEEDBACK ON ASSIGNMENTS																						
3. Praising/critical comments on assignments	4	1	7	2	7	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	9	1	10	1	43	7	50			
4. Quality of feedback on assignments	8	4	5	0	7	2	2	1	4	1	2	0	11	3	3	2	2	1	44	14	58	
5. Turnaround time for assignments	0	2	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	4	8		
6. Marks for assignments	0	3	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	3	2	2	0	1	0	11	9	20	
7. Legibility of feedback on assignments	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	3		
8. Tutors give students the opportunity to resubmit assignments	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	4		
9. Tutors' responses to notes submitted by students with assignments	1	4	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6	9		
10. Tutors provide feedback on assignments by telephone	0	1	3	0	2	0	3	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	1	13			
C. TELEPHONE INTERACTION																						
11. Tutor's availability during office hours	0	3	0	2	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10			
12. Tutor's availability during out-of-office hours	2	2	2	5	1	0	3	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	16	7	23		
13. Tutors' telephone manners and communications skills	3	3	4	2	3	3	3	0	1	0	2	1	0	2	1	1	4	0	21	12	33	
14. Follow up telephone calls	1	2	0	2	1	2	2	1	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	1	1	3	1	12	11	23
15. Tutors' responses to questions concerning course content during telephone conversations	1	1	2	1	6	3	2	1	2	1	1	0	2	1	4	0	1	0	21	8	29	
16. Depth of telephone discussions concerning course content	4	1	1	0	0	0	4	0	1	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	14	1	15		
17. Tutors' persistence in ensuring students' understanding of course content during telephone conversations	1	1	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	13	1	14	
18. Telephone conversations concerning study skills	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	7	0	7	
19. Telephone conversations concerning assignment schedules	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	5		
20. Telephone conversations concerning examinations	1	1	3	0	1	0	2	0	4	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	14	3	17	
21. Tutors offer encouragement to students to continue course	2	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	3	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	15	0	15	
22. Telephone conversations concerning non-course-related matters	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	1	2	2	5	1	0	0	0	1	0	12	4	16		
TOTALS	36	32	43	23	40	16	33	6	30	6	29	6	25	13	26	5	33	4	295	111	406	

DATA SOURCE TOTALS		F + H	
F	119	H	71
F	92	H	18
F	84	H	22
F + H	190	F + H	110
F + H	295	F + H	106
F + H	406	F + H	406

APPENDIX 11**Tutor Marked Assignment Form (TMA)**

**OPEN UNIVERSITY
OPEN COLLEGE**

Registry, Box 94000, Richmond, B.C. V6Y 2A2

**TUTOR MARKED
ASSIGNMENT FORM**

SECTION 1 — STUDENT TO COMPLETE — USE SEPARATE FORM FOR EACH ASSIGNMENT

STUDENT'S NAME

INITIALS

TELEPHONE NUMBER
—

STUDENT NUMBER

STUDENT COMMENTS ON ASSIGNMENT

COURSE NUMBER

ASSIGNMENT NUMBER

DATE SENT TO TUTOR DAY MO. YR.

SECTION 2 — TUTOR TO COMPLETE

DATE FROM STUDENT DAY MO YR.

DATE TO REGISTRY DAY MO YR.

SESSION COURSE STARTED

TUTOR'S NUMBER

TUTOR'S SIGNATURE

STUDENT:—PRINT YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS IN THE SPACE PROVIDED ON THE BACK OF THIS SHEET.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	

OVERALL MARK %

QUESTION GRADES / SCORES

TUTOR'S COMMENTS AND ADVICE TO STUDENT.

STUDENT

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