

**MATURE STUDENTS IN THE PERSISTENCE PUZZLE:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS
THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ADULT LEARNERS' QUALITY OF
LIFE AND RETENTION IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION**

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Abstract

Mature Students in the Persistence Puzzle explored new theoretical directions and methodological approaches for studying adult learners' quality of life and retention in the first year of general arts and science programs in a university-college environment. The study was conducted to broaden and deepen our understanding of the multifaceted nature of mature students' lives and those factors exerting important influences on mature students' educational commitment and persistence. Because there are few studies that focus on adult learners' post-secondary experiences and fewer still that incorporate detailed student perspectives, results will provide valuable information for informing institutional student retention policies and practices.

An adult quality of life conceptual framework was used to explore the broad connections between health and learning, based on a synthesis of social ecology, health promotion, adult learning, and student development research. Mixed methods included a phenomenological hermeneutical-based approach for conducting in-depth interviews with first-year students aged 25-72 years. Phenomenological methods were also used to facilitate a faculty focus group that was added to the research design to identify the teaching and learning strategies that support mature students' educational commitment and persistence. The naturalistic inquiry findings were complemented by standard multiple regression analyses performed on the age-aggregated data of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study of College Students and First Year Outcomes.

In summary, eight main themes emerged from the qualitative data analysis focusing on: a) major life transitions; b) multifaceted educational goals; c) awareness of personal assets; d) relationships with professors; e) peer relationships; f) life-role conflicts; g) supportive institutional infrastructure; and h) experiential learning opportunities. Faculty members reinforced the importance of student-faculty relationships and experiential learning during the focus group. The multiple regression model contributed significantly to the prediction of intentions to persist or withdraw, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. Overall, study findings revealed that goal orientation, perceived relevance of studies, student-faculty relationships, and financial concerns were the most influential contributors to mature students' educational commitment and persistence. The implications for faculty, student-development staff, and educational leaders were discussed, along with practical strategies for creating and maintaining a health-promoting campus environment to optimize adult learners' quality of life and retention.

Keywords: mature students; quality of life; student retention; university-colleges/colleges; phenomenology; multiple regression

Subject Terms: adult students; quality of life; college dropouts – prevention; universities and colleges; education, higher; phenomenology; multiple regression analysis

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**we must reach for conceptions of the good
that will affect the direction of our lives
(Greene, 1995, p. 1)**

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

In their critical analysis of the state of research into student retention and non-completion, several researchers have positioned the empirical and theoretical deficits that exist, particularly in relation to non-traditional, or mature student retention (Andres & Carpenter, 1997; Braxton, 2002; Johnson, 1991; Yorke, 1999). Most of the research is reported to have concentrated on interactionist models of departure that deal with traditional-age, full-time students in residential post-secondary programs. For the most part, studies have concentrated on the impacts of academic and social integration and have not included subgroup analyses. There now appears to be a concerted effort to “reinvigorate” research to develop a better understanding of the factors that exert important influences on adult learners, who represent a growing segment of our post-secondary enrolments (Braxton, 2002, p.3).

McGivney (2004) summarizes recent data on the retention and non-completion rates of adult students and offers recommendations for increasing adult retention rates in conventional and open learning programs. She states that adults’ engagement with education tends to be non-linear, intermittent, and more varied, due to factors that are uniquely associated with their work and domestic and financial commitments; as a result,

adult learners are often studying part-time, attending institutions that are close to home (regardless of program choice and quality), and experiencing a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed after long lapses in formal learning (McGivney, 2004, pp. 33-34). Several researchers recommend adapting the campus environment to address adult students' needs and challenges. Kerka (1989) addresses the multiple roles and responsibilities of adult learners and suggests that effective institutional strategies for enhancing mature student retention would include: targeting interventions to relevant adult participation modes; helping adults to define their educational goals; and recognizing that students' objectives are more varied than degree attainment and use appropriate retention measures (p. 2). Conrad (1993) calls for institutions to address policy issues in areas of: curricula (active, goal-oriented and cooperative learning formats); faculty development programs (effective teaching techniques); administrative procedures (flexible offerings); and counselling and support services that meet the needs of adult learners (p. 5). And finally, McGivney (2004) points to the paucity of detailed data on mature student retention and advocates for in-depth data collection and greater age differentiation to obtain a "true picture of retention and non-completion among mature students" (pp. 34-36).

My study of mature students' persistence explores the complexity of adults' learning pathways in a university-college setting, using Malaspina University-College—a comprehensive, publicly-funded institution on Vancouver Island—as the research site. The study is based primarily on mature students' own perceptions of the factors that are of central importance to them in remaining committed to attaining their educational goals

and aspirations. The focus of my research is studying the broad connections between health-promoting environments and adult learners' educational commitment and persistence, placed within the conceptual framework of adult quality of life. This area remains largely unexamined, as there are few retention studies that explore the contextual experiences of mature students in post-secondary education and fewer still that place emphasis on quality of life influences. A multidimensional model of student persistence has informed my study, taking into consideration the multi-faceted nature of mature students' lives and those factors believed to exert the most important influences on students' decisions to persist or withdraw. A discussion of the significance of this study is contained in the first chapter, along with the definitions of relevant terms, stated purpose, and research questions. A review of the research literature has been included in Chapter 2 to provide the political and economic context for my study, as well as to summarize the relevant theoretical and empirical studies of student retention and attrition in higher education. The rationale for adopting an adult quality of life conceptual framework is also presented in the second chapter in order to explore the complex interactions between adult learners and their post-secondary environments, based on a synthesis of social ecology, health promotion, adult learning and student development research. A description of my research methodology for conducting the phenomenological inquiry, faculty focus group, and secondary data analysis of the Pan-Canadian Survey is included in Chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, report the qualitative and quantitative study results. And finally, the conclusions and practical implications for faculty, student development staff, and educational leaders are outlined in Chapter 6.

Significance of the Study

The demographic profile of students in post-secondary education is changing, given the declining pool of traditional-age students, and as members of the 'baby boom' generation move through their career and lifelong learning paths. We are witnessing increased participation of non-traditional learners in post-secondary education, with adult students representing a growing segment of post-secondary enrolments in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Andres (2004) reports that over the past two decades, full-time university undergraduate enrolment has increased by 20% in Canada, with a similar increase in the community college sector (25%) and much of that growth can be attributed to increased access for non-traditional students, including women, aboriginal people, disabled individuals, and older adults (p. 1). Enrolment rates for adult learners, typically defined as 25 years of age or older, comprise about half of current higher education enrolments in the United States (Conrad, 1993; Jacobs & Berkowitz King, 2002; Kerka, 1995). In the United Kingdom, James (1995) reports that mature students now outnumber school-leavers in higher education. In addition to these demographic trends, studies consistently show that non-traditional students experience higher rates of attrition and are reportedly less likely to obtain a degree than their traditional-age counterparts (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Chartrand, 1992; Farabaugh-Dorkins, 1991; Johnson, 1991). In a review of attrition research conducted by Canadian researchers, Grayson and Grayson (2003) report that: "nearly one half of attrition occurs between first- and second year" (p. 6). With adult learners constituting increasing proportions of the student population in post-secondary education, and given the

escalating demand for accountability in this sector, educational leaders are seeking information about those factors that precipitate mature students' decisions to persist or withdraw. University-college and college administrators have compelling reasons for developing more effective institutional responses that will have the greatest impact on improving adult learners' experiences. In this context, there is strong support for conducting a study of mature students' persistence, during students' first- and second semesters, to develop a better understanding of adult learners' unique educational needs and challenges.

The student retention literature is replete with studies examining the retention of typical high school entrants, with much less emphasis on the experiences of mature students. Researchers assert that additional studies are needed to identify those factors that have the greatest impact on maintaining and increasing adult learners' enrolment in post-secondary education and we are urged to modify our retention policies and practices to better accommodate this growing segment of our student population. Andres and Carpenter (1997) emphasize the significance of this research, in their overview of retention models for non-traditional students, suggesting that "mounting pressure for increased accountability by institutions of higher education, together with the changing demographic composition of the student body, have stimulated the development of more detailed and sophisticated retention models—models that reflect the lives of today's post-secondary students" (p. 37).

Research at the university-college level offers an excellent opportunity to determine the challenges that adult learners face and the associated need for campus

programs, services, and resources that will support mature students in attaining their educational goals and aspirations. Malaspina University-College is a comprehensive educational institution that was established in 1969 and given degree-granting status in 1995. It offers both university and college programs in the Central Vancouver Island Region and currently serves over 10,000 full-time students (additional background information is available at <http://www.mala.ca/about.asp>). The University-College has a vested interest in a study on mature students' retention, as a growing proportion of its student body can be categorized as mature students. The current age profile of students in undergraduate university programs¹ at Malaspina University-College reveals that 38.6% of students in the 2006-07 academic year were 25 years of age or older, with 80% of these mature students enrolled full-time and 20% part-time. This demographic profile appears to be a consistent trend across post-secondary institutions in British Columbia (Malaspina University-College, 2007).

Purpose

The purpose of my study is to explore the individual, institutional, and external factors that are associated with mature students' levels of educational commitment and persistence in post-secondary education, taking into consideration adult learners' unique life circumstances and educational experiences. Of particular interest are those quality of life dimensions and relevant contextual factors that contribute to mature students'

¹ An undergraduate program is a credit-based degree, diploma, or certificate program and excludes non-credit continuing education, career technical, vocational, and trades programs that do not ladder into, or receive credit towards, a degree (Office of Educational Planning, Malaspina University-College, September 27, 2007).

intentions to persist or withdraw in their first year of post-secondary education. A phenomenological-hermeneutical research approach was used to explore the lived experiences of mature students in a university-college setting, with a unique emphasis on adult quality of life dimensions. To complement the qualitative research findings, secondary analyses were conducted on the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study of College Students and First Year Outcomes dataset, using age-aggregated data (Dietsche, 2005). This multi-institutional dataset permitted an analysis of selected background characteristics and interaction and outcome variables that are associated with mature student retention within Canadian post-secondary institutions. Results from the qualitative and quantitative data analyses were used for recommending institutional strategies to enhance mature students' educational commitment and persistence and to create campus communities that are conducive to adult learners' quality of life and retention.

Definition of Terms

Persistence and Retention

In his recent edited work, Braxton (2002) examines the “departure puzzle,” the phenomenon whereby between 25-50% of students entering higher education depart at the end of their first year. He issues a call for reinvigorating research using new theoretical approaches “to learn about colleges and universities as organizations, the college experience of students, and the interpretations students make of these experiences” (p. 1). Building on this theme, I have used the term “persistence puzzle” to

better understand mature students' experiences and the meanings they attribute to their decisions to remain committed to their post-secondary studies. The term, 'persistence,' was also deliberately chosen for this study to place emphasis on the "perseverance and sustained involvement" of learners, and to distinguish it from the term, 'retention,' which focuses on the institution's role in influencing student behaviour (Johnson, 1991; Hagedorn, 2005a; Samuels, 2005). I have adopted a definition of persistence that is not limited to credential completion, but that is flexible enough to accommodate a diverse range of students' educational goals and aspirations. More refined measures of adult student retention that take into account part-time students, continuing students, transfer students, and non-degree seeking students are discussed in subsequent sections.

Non-traditional and Mature Students

According to Bean and Metzner (1985), a "nontraditional student is older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence (e.g., is a commuter), or is a part-time student, or some combination of these three factors; is not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution; and is chiefly concerned with the institution's academic offerings (especially courses, certification and degrees)" (p. 489). Chartrand (1992) defines non-traditional students as at least 24 years of age, living off-campus, and enrolled either part-time or full-time; her research focuses on degree-seeking students who are less than half way through their undergraduate programs when their risk of attrition is highest. While these definitions offer a convenient way of categorizing adult learners, they do not include other important characteristics that provide the "essence for

a more substantive definition”— one that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of mature students’ lives and that differentiates them from traditional-age students (Pennsylvania State University, 1990, pp. 11, 12). The Adult Education and Training Survey conducted by Statistics Canada uses 25 years as the cut-off point to distinguish individuals who are pursuing post-secondary education as part of their initial education, from individuals who are pursuing ‘second chance’ education later in life because they missed out on high-school completion or they did not enter post-secondary education in their youth (Myers & de Broucker, 2006, p. 33). For the purpose of this study, and consistent with extant research, mature students are broadly defined as individuals taking degree-level courses who are 25 years of age or older with life circumstances that include financial obligations, family responsibilities, work and community commitments, full- and part-time enrolment status, and varied educational goals and intentions.

Adult Quality of Life

According to Rapley (2003), defining quality of life is a complex task because there are imprecise and inconsistent terms used in ordinary language and in social scientific research. He maintains that one of the key problems in quality of life research is the huge variability of definitions and the interchangeable use of terms, such as happiness, life-satisfaction, and well-being. In addition, the literature includes a mix of objective and subjective estimations of life circumstances and assessments that occur at both population and individual levels. While there is generally broad agreement that

quality of life is a multidimensional construct, Rapley (2003) asserts that precise definitions are needed to clarify intended meanings and usages.

The Adult Quality of Life Profile, developed and tested by a multidisciplinary team of researchers at the Centre for Health Promotion (CHP), University of Toronto, offered a level of clarity and specificity that was useful as a guide for exploring the factors influencing mature students' quality of life and retention in a university-college setting. For the purpose of this study, I adopted the CHP's definition of quality of life, as:

...the degree to which a person enjoys the important possibilities of his/her life. *Possibilities* consist of both opportunities within a person's life and constraints on a person's life. These life possibilities depend upon the interaction between personal factors and environmental factors... (Rootman & Raeburn, 1998, pp. 119-120)

The application of quality of life constructs was expected to yield in-depth insights into mature students' persistence, by acknowledging and incorporating meaningful contextual factors for adult learners. A more detailed discussion of quality of life concepts, research models, and educational applications is included in relevant theoretical and methodology sections.

Personal Narrative

I have included a personal narrative to position my study in current organizational practice and to make explicit the key values underpinning my methodological direction. The phenomenological approach to research dictates that researchers uncover their personal presuppositions to "illuminate existential dimensions of their lives" in a

situation of trust with their subjects (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 69). According to Colaizzi (1978), researchers must pursue a line of questioning to uncover what personal inclinations and predispositions are influencing or prejudicing what is investigated and how it is investigated. These presuppositions must be subjected to careful scrutiny and analysis to discover what is personally invested and involved with the research.

In reflecting on my interest in the phenomenon of mature students' persistence, I have considered various aspects of my personal and professional background. I was inspired to define my research topic using what I care about to focus my attention. In my current role as Coordinator of Community and School Liaison at Malaspina University-College, and throughout my professional career in continuing education management, long-term care administration, and health promotion research, I have conducted, or collaborated on, many applied research projects in such areas as: women's retirement, seniors supportive living, women's employment and career development, and post-secondary transition support services for Aboriginal learners. A common theme in all these areas is the transformative nature of education, along with my interest in addressing the structural barriers to post-secondary access and successful integration into academic life. I decided to embark on a study involving mature students, as I believe that they are a neglected group (also predominantly female) who often face unique needs, issues and challenges when negotiating their post-secondary education. For example, Malaspina University-College has concentrated our recruitment and retention efforts exclusively on the traditional high-school entrant (students aged 17-24 years). I am frustrated by the dearth of information available about mature students, as well as my inability to establish

responsive student retention initiatives. It is also not lost on me that I am living the experience, and the experiment, of embarking on the EdD Educational Leadership Program, 20 years after acquiring my Masters, and amidst the general vicissitudes and richness of life as a university-college faculty member and a married mother of two school-aged children. I am very aware that my research questions, approaches, and data interpretations have been influenced by my professional background experiences, my specific life circumstances, and my personal belief system.

Research Questions

The intent of my study was to gain in-depth knowledge about mature students' educational commitment and persistence experiences in a university-college environment, with the ultimate aim of informing our student retention policies and practices. As mentioned previously, there are a limited number of studies focussing on mature students' post-secondary experiences, and fewer still that incorporate adult learners' perspectives. In addition, there are limited studies examining different types of educational institutions, such as the university-college setting, which offers a comprehensive range of career and technical, trades and applied technology, and degree-granting academic programs for meeting mature students' educational needs. A central research question was used as the foundation for my study, as it allowed for an open-ended exploration of mature students' persistence, namely: "What are the experiences of mature students that contribute to their levels of educational commitment and persistence in the first year of general arts/science programs in a university-college environment?"

Two additional and supplementary research questions were used to guide my study and data collection, as follows: “What conditions, processes, and quality of life factors do mature students perceive as facilitators or barriers?” and “What actions should educational leaders take to improve mature students’ retention?”

The research questions were used in the in-depth interviews to facilitate a discussion about students’ specific life circumstances, institutional occurrences, and external factors that have contributed to their educational progress and persistence (see Appendix A for the Individual Interview Guide). The intent, in every interview, was to pursue deeper levels of meaning through participants’ own experiences and perceptions. Participants were asked to consider quality of life issues, family and external life circumstances, academic and social interactions, classroom-based experiences, and institutional resource-use that had contributed to their educational commitment and persistence. Consistent with the nature and intent of my exploratory study, I did not develop specific hypotheses for predicting the interactions among the variables included in my age-aggregated analysis of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study. However, the major determinants of mature students’ persistence, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction were investigated to complement the results of my naturalistic inquiry and to provide a broader depiction of first-year college experiences across multiple university-college and college settings. As age and the impacts of selected institutional and external variables were the substantive interests of my study, I also did not focus on the full range of background, entry-level, and interaction variables included in the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study dataset.

Chapter 2.

Review of Related Literature

Political and Economic Climate

To set the context for my mature students' persistence study and before embarking on the literature review, attention will be given to the political and economic climate that has given rise to a renewed interest in mature students' retention and attrition. I have situated my research against a backdrop of political and economic changes within post-secondary education that have resulted in increased competition for students—a growing number of whom are adult learners. Current educational theories dealing with issues of modernity, authenticity, exclusion, and social inequity will be used to frame an analysis of the current role of universities and colleges and the corresponding implications for adult learners in modern society.

The development of our post-secondary institutions in British Columbia is rooted in traditions of geographic decentralization and equality of opportunity and access. In the landmark report outlining the plan for higher education in British Columbia, Macdonald (1962) called for the establishment of a new kind of institution—two-year colleges offering a variety of technical and semi-professional programs in accordance with local needs. The stated ideals outlined in the seminal report speak to suitable education for all

students who can benefit and equality of opportunity for all students throughout the province. Two decades later, after the mid-1980's recession, concerns about access gave rise to a new breed of institutions and degree-granting colleges like Malaspina University-College (Dennison, 1997). It was during this period that non-traditional students, including mature students, gained access to post-secondary education in unprecedented numbers. This trend has continued to the present day, accompanied by some additional challenges. Since the early 1990's, and following the introduction of a market-driven system within higher education in North America and the United Kingdom, we are now witnessing dramatic increases in student numbers, increased diversity of the student population with respect to age and race, and a system that is now pre-occupied with undergraduate non-completion (Ozga & Sukhnandan, 1998). As Yorke (1999) points out, widening participation has increased the risk of attrition to the point where non-completion has become politicized and construed as an inefficient use of public funds.

The market-like forces impacting on post-secondary education are well documented and include funding threats, rising tuition fees, labour market restructuring, privatisation, and workplace relevance (Andres, 2004; Levin, 2001; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). Post-secondary institutions are now paying increased attention to the quality and relevance of their students' experiences and to their educational outcomes (Andres, 2004). In fact, retention rates and overall assessments of student engagement and success have become the new benchmarks of institutional effectiveness and accountability for post-secondary institutes (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2007;

Hagedorn, 2005b; Kuh, 2003). However, there are inconsistencies in the reporting of retention rates in the post-secondary sector. Commonly reported retention measures do not separately identify types of nonreturning students and they are based on snapshot measures of second semester re-enrolment and one-year cohort comparisons, as well as degree completion rates within three- to seven-year time spans (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Dietsche, 1990; Hagedorn, 2005b; Hoell, 2006; Hoyt & Winn, 2004; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, and Associates, 2004; Sandler, 2001). As mentioned previously, this does not take into account the large number of adults engaged in “second chance” education who do not follow a traditional “age-graded life course with a fixed sequence of education completion” (Myers & de Broucker, 2006, p. 14). The problems associated with inconsistent and incomplete adult student retention measures have the effect of further marginalizing and misrepresenting adult students’ participation in post-secondary education. Quite apart from the importance of using more precise student retention measures for benchmarking and accountability purposes, there are implications for mounting effective adult retention programs based on accurate and inclusive institutional information.

Viewed from an institutional perspective, student attrition and non-completion are considered costly and a threat to the ‘bottom line.’ In response to this economic and fiscal management agenda, educational institutions are implementing various quality assurance and performance monitoring systems to address growing accountability pressures. These pressures have created a renewed interest in enrolment management strategies that will enhance student completion rates, as well as the development of campus programs and

services that are responsive to diverse students' needs. It is within this context that educational researchers and practitioners are posing questions and seeking answers about "what institutional structures facilitate or constrain successful participation and completion by certain groups?" (Andres, 2004, p. 4). This is now considered an important question to address, with adult learners representing a growing segment of our campus communities.

Market-driven forces have also raised questions about the current role of universities in modern society. Taylor (2004a) describes the features of contemporary culture and society that are exerting the strongest influences on institutions in Western society. Taylor's account of modernity and the forces that shape the social imaginary in contemporary contexts provides a very useful framework for examining the current role of the university and the relative position of mature learners within our post-secondary institutions. Of particular interest are Taylor's notions of authenticity and the dynamic of exclusion in our democratic institutions. In his inquiry into the sources of modern selfhood, Taylor (1989) describes how our moral and social life has been transformed by instrumentalist, bureaucratic, and industrial society to the point where "no goal stands out as being of higher significance" (p. 413). He further elaborates on the "ethic of authenticity," a new form of individualism and inwardness, that gives importance to being true to oneself; however, Taylor raises cautions about how this culture of authenticity can be self-defeating in contemporary society, unless it gives recognition to other issues of significance beyond self-fulfillment and self-choice (Taylor, 1991, p. 35). With a concerted emphasis on accountability, it would appear that our educational

institutions are giving authority to the forces of the market economy without due regard for contributing to greater societal ideals and goals—or, in fact, without honouring the stated ideals and goals enshrined in our educational missions.

Taylor (2004b) also refers to the “dynamic of exclusion in democracy,” whereby the strong need for cohesion, common identity, mutual trust, and participation in society often lead to unintentional by-products of exclusion (p. 17). He describes how there can be a “strong temptation to exclude those that can’t or won’t fit easily into the identity” as defined by the majority (Taylor, 2004b, p. 21). Schuetze and Slowey (2002) maintain that the recent expansion of higher education across all developed societies in the last decade has resulted in the increased participation of individuals who had been traditionally excluded from or under-represented in higher education. Hazel, Munro, and Wager (2005) expose an underlying by-product of widening access whereby non-traditional students are viewed as problematic and as needing to change to fit into university life. In their political analysis of the neglect of adult learners in higher education, Sissel, Hansman, and Kasworm (2001) claim that adult students are institutionally invisible, marginalized, without place and privilege, and considered of lesser importance than traditional-age groups. Their critique extends to a review of institutional policy, procedures, programming, and data collection that do not consider adult students.

In keeping with themes of exclusion and neglect, greater attention should be given to adult life complexities and the challenges adults face when fitting into educational systems that have been geared for more traditional-age students. For instance, in a recent report commissioned by the Canadian Policy Research Networks, Canada’s financial aid

system came under considerable criticism (Myers & de Broucker, 2006). Given the fact that this system was “designed for learners following a traditional path from secondary to post-secondary” (p. v), there are significant disincentives for older students engaging in continuous learning; mature students with dependents and married students with working spouses are reported to be at a “particular disadvantage” (Myers & de Broucker, 2006, p. 69). In our efforts to recruit and welcome increasing numbers of mature students, we must pay attention to the unique needs and issues that these students experience within our traditionally-oriented institutions. Moreover, in our response, we must guard against viewing mature students as problematic or forcing them into a single identity, and instead we should seek solutions that are “tailored to the particular situations of individuals” (Taylor, 2004b, p. 30).

Andres (2004), in her review of existing theoretical models and empirical analyses, suggests that researchers have not addressed the “dynamic relationship between students as agents within societal institutions and institutions as living structures that impact on the lives of students” (p. 3); she describes how students encounter people, policies and practices within post-secondary institutions that can “enable or constrain their ability to integrate socially and academically and to achieve their educational goals” (p.3). For instance, policies and practices permitting credit transfer among British Columbia’s highly diversified institutions have created a complex and frustrating process for students attempting to “progress through the system to complete their post-secondary studies” (Andres & Dawson, 1998, p. 15). Bourdieu maintains that educational institutions represent “fields or competitive arenas” where students can “protect or

enhance their existing resources” for “competitive advantage” (p. 99); his theory of social reproduction explains how colleges and universities can marginalize certain types of students, such as older students (p. 120), who do not share the same “amounts and types of capital” (p. 99) as the dominant class, and which in turn can “negatively affect their chances for educational success” (p. 121) (as cited in Braxton, 2002). Greene (1995), in her essays on education, discusses our need for “imagination to break with ordinary classifications and come in touch with actual [students] in their variously lived situations” (p. 10); she further states that to “see things large... one must see from the point of view of the participant in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face” (p. 14). In my research, I have endeavoured to ‘see things large’ when exploring the particular situations of mature students, giving attention to adult learners’ meaningful life-contexts. With this detailed analysis of mature students’ post-secondary experiences, I have attempted to expand our understanding of the relevant factors that help or hinder mature students’ successful educational commitment and persistence.

Theoretical and Empirical Studies of Student Retention

In this section, I will provide an overview of the major models of student retention and attrition spanning over three decades of research. To accomplish this task, I have relied on several researchers who have summarized the extensive body of research considered most influential in the study of student retention and attrition. I have not set out to provide a detailed account of the wide-ranging literature in student retention,

attrition, and non-completion. Rather, I have presented a cross-section of research to emphasize the need for new theoretical directions and methodological approaches to explore the complexity of adults' educational experiences and to address the identified gaps in current student retention and attrition research. The main claims and limitations of these models are positioned to advance the argument for using more holistic, social-ecological approaches for understanding mature students' persistence. The main contribution of this chapter is building the case for adopting an adult quality of life conceptual framework for the current persistence study that is attuned to the multifaceted nature of adults' lives. My aim is to provide a more accurate and complete portrayal of the contextual factors that influence mature students' commitment and persistence experiences in university-college and college environments.

In my overview of student retention and attrition models, I have attempted to show the evolution toward more holistic and contextualized approaches. I have summarized this progression by presenting relevant research articles under the headings of Student-Institution Integration Models, Multidimensional Models, and Quality of Student Life Models. I am indebted to several researchers who have summarized the major theoretical and empirical research findings from the voluminous body of student retention and attrition research (Andres, Andruske, & Hawkey, 1996; Andres & Carpenter, 1997; Braxton, 2002; Johnson, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Yorke, 1999). My synthesis of the research literature also conveys the analytic process I followed to delineate the conceptual framework for my study. Finally, to explore the implications for practice in adopting an adult quality of life conceptualization, mature

students' persistence has been placed within the broader theoretical context of social ecology and health promotion, adult learning, and student development.

Student-Institution Integration Models

The majority of retention models in higher education have been associated with traditional-age student attrition, and have focused on student-institution 'fit,' including student background characteristics and institutional experiences that affect their compatibility (Andres & Carpenter, 1997, p. 17). Most of this research is based on Tinto's (1975) interactionalist theory of student departure examining the influences of academic and social integration on student retention or withdrawal. Tinto hypothesized that several characteristics influenced students' goals and levels of institutional commitment and that the student-institution fit was predictive of students' decisions. Tinto's research has enjoyed near "paradigmatic stature" in the field of higher education since its original inception (Braxton, 2002, p. 2). In his overview of the stages of student departure, Tinto (1988) describes the longitudinal nature of the integration process as having three distinct stages—separation, transition, and incorporation—through which new students must pass for successful adjustment, along with the attendant challenges and difficulties that can arise for students at each stage. To test the validity of these stages, Tinto (1988) calls for studies to determine whether the process of student departure varies over time (p. 450); he also identifies the need for qualitative studies to "explore how students understand the temporal quality of their college careers" and he poses the question for future research, "do older students and/or foreign students

understand the temporal quality of persistence in the same way as do other students?”
(pp. 451).

In his later work, Tinto (1998) places emphasis on the institutional conditions that enhance student retention. He makes the case that much of the student retention research focuses on programs and student support services that are designed to enhance the likelihood of students persisting to degree completion, while largely ignoring the academic organization. He claims that the more academically and socially involved students are, through the frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff, and students, the more likely they are to persist; he also asserts that “involvement matters most during the first year of college,” when attrition is greatest (Tinto, 1998, p. 169). He recommends that colleges and universities use these findings to guide “educational and organizational reform,” such as: adopting a community model of academic organization to promote “shared, connected learning”; reorganizing the first year as a “distinct unit” with its own administrative and organizational structure; and reassigning faculty to allow them to instruct across “disciplinary and departmental borders” (Tinto, 1998, p. 170).

In their synthesis of studies conducted between 1989 and 2000, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) amassed an expansive amount of research assessing the environmental influences on student learning and cognitive development. In the period between their earlier publication and their most recent comprehensive review, the authors document a number of new trends and changes, including: “rapid increase in student diversity” and corresponding studies; inclusion of community college research; “new bodies of evidence on teaching, instruction, and learning;” new lines of policy research into the impacts of

costs, student diversity, and technological advances; and a broader range of “methodological approaches for estimating and understanding the impact of college on students” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 5). Of particular interest was the more prominent role assigned to student-faculty interactions and the innovative instructional approaches that were linked to student learning and development changes. As an example of this increased interest in how students learn, Kuh and Hu (2001) tested a “general causal model of environmental influences” (p. 314) to examine the “frequency and nature of student-faculty interaction” and its relationship to student learning and personal development outcomes (p. 310). Their results showed that interactions between students and faculty that are based on “substantive matters” (p. 328)—interactions with an intellectual, or course-related focus—encourage students to “devote greater effort to other educationally purposeful activities during college” which in turn have positive effects on learning outcomes and student satisfaction (Kuh & Hu, 2001, p. 329).

In a Canadian study examining the first-year experiences of students enrolled in science, arts, and extension programs at a commuter university, Grayson (1994) compared all three groups against desired student outcomes (retention, grades, and intellectual development). He collected three kinds of data hypothesized to influence these desired outcomes, including: out-of-class contact with faculty; academic and social links established; and positive classroom experiences. The study is limited to descriptive statistics comparing all three student groups, with no in-depth analyses. However, the recommended strategies for maximizing student-faculty contact, increasing academic and

social involvement, and enhancing classroom experiences are useful for helping students cope with the academic and social challenges of first year.

In an interesting comparative study, Strauss and Volkwein (2004) examined the predictors of institutional commitment of first-year students at 2-year and 4-year public institutions. The researchers defined student commitment as students' overall satisfaction, sense of belonging, perception of educational quality, and willingness to attend the institution again. The study attempted to address the gap in research by using an outcome model (combining concepts from other models) that includes organizational influences and which examined 2- and 4-year institutions in-depth. A cross-sectional research design was used with secondary analyses from a large multicampus database. Reported results showed that academic integration and growth (in particular classroom experiences) and social integration and growth (social activities and friendships) were especially strong predictors of student commitment. Differential impacts were noted for 2- and 4-year institutions, but they were not as great as expected. With respect to institutional comparisons, first-year students at 2-year institutions were reported to have slightly higher commitment scores, and classroom experiences were more influential predictors at 2-year institutions. In contrast, social integration was reported to have more impact at 4-year institutions. In a similar vein, Pascarella and Chapman (1983) used a multi-institutional, path test of the validity of Tinto's model for 4-year residential institutions and 2-year commuter institutions. Differences were reported with social integration showing a stronger influence at 4-year campuses and academic integration exerting more influence at 2- and 4-year commuter institutions. The implications for practice, with the

suggested focus on student's classroom experiences at smaller, 2-year commuter institutions, is particularly relevant given Malaspina's unique university-college status.

In attempts to enhance the application of Tinto's interactionist model to non-traditional student populations, Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a model that was consistent with Tinto's conceptualization of academic and social variables, with one major difference. Bean and Metzner (1985) gave prominence to environmental factors that are external to the post-secondary context, such as: finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities, and opportunities to transfer (p. 502). They posited that social integration variables would have only "minimal effects" on non-traditional students' attrition, and that environmental variables would have greater impacts (p. 530). Based on their extensive review of the research literature, Bean and Metzner (1985) concluded that further research is needed with non-traditional students that would emphasize "students' external environments" and that would use "multivariate research designs" and separate analyses for "subgroups of students, such as part-time or older commuter students" (p. 528). In more recent reviews of the interactionist literature, researchers have suggested that the best understanding of attrition is afforded by combining the student integration model with the student attrition model of Bean and Metzner (Grayson & Grayson, 2003, p.18). This conclusion is supported by Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) who recommend the use of a "broad repertoire of approaches" (p. 155) to accurately portray the impacts of college given the "demographic sea change" of student diversity evidenced in recent years (p. 154).

A sampling of the studies that build on Tinto's student-institution fit model were highlighted to show the interaction between students and their institutions. While these research studies integrate various perspectives of interest, they are limited by an almost exclusive focus on outcome models and the use of student and institution levels of analysis. It was the practical applications and the thoughtful discussions about how such practices could impact mature students' persistence that were the most useful for framing my current research.

Multidimensional Models

Models that are multidimensional depart from the traditional and almost exclusive emphasis on student-institution fit conceptualizations, and they appear to hold greater promise for application to non-traditional student populations. In their study of post-secondary student life across three post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, Andres, Andruske, and Hawkey (1996) conducted an action research project with small groups of students to examine their first-year post-secondary experiences. They drew attention to the fact that the predominant student retention models were designed to assess retention patterns of younger students and that "they disregard the demographic heterogeneity of today's student population" (p. 4). Their study offered interesting insights into the multiple realities and roles of mature students and their impacts on student success. Focus groups were conducted with small groups of students at three post-secondary institutions (one community college, one university-college, and one university) to share their experiences in negotiating their first academic semester. In

addition, interviews were conducted with faculty, administrators, and staff to obtain perceptions of student success and to explore the nature of institutional impact on student success. Results revealed that student success is a multidimensional concept when approached from the experiences of students, faculty, administrators, and staff and that “a dynamic relationship exists between students as agents within the institution and the institution (its people, policies and practices) itself” (p. 126). The authors argued that the variations of Tinto’s model, with a primary focus on academic and social integration, do not adequately address “the complexity of students’ lived lives” (p. 4). To address these limitations, Andres, et al. (1996) recommended use of Benjamin’s (1994) Quality of Student Life (QSL) model to capture the “complex and multileveled nature and multidetermined outcomes of students’ lives” (1996, p. 5). Benjamin (1994) provided a review of the four leading models of QSL and put forward an alternative ecological model that stressed the need to consider on- and off-campus contextual factors. Benjamin (1994) conducted a pilot study at the University of Guelph to create a taxonomy of student life domains and subdomains relevant to QSL and he later tested this model with typical third- and fourth-year students (Benjamin & Hollings, 1995). The over 300 variables in life domains/subdomains included both on-campus and off-campus environments in attempts to assess student satisfaction and happiness. The ecological model recognized the reciprocal relationship between the student and the institution and focused on personal meaning structures. Benjamin (1994) also emphasized the importance of “method triangulation” for “maximizing study validity,” drawing on the

strengths of qualitative student interviews, as well as quantitative retrospective surveys (p. 248).

McKeown, MacDonell, and Bowman (1993) provided strong support for developing a theoretical framework that takes into account the students' point of view. They advocated for research that attempts to "understand the actions of students in terms of the meanings things in their world have for them" (p. 65). The authors maintained that theoretical understandings of attrition should be grounded in students' experience, stating that a "good deal could be gained by starting with a much better sense of student life and the goals and priorities which prevail in that life" (McKeown et al., 1993, p. 76). They also recommended giving attention to the dynamics of student-faculty contact, suggesting that faculty perspectives are important in this context. The authors' recommendations for future research and their proposed research questions were helpful for situating the proposed research in relation to the goals, values, and priorities of mature students, and for supporting the inclusion of faculty perceptions.

It would appear that no variables in isolation can account for mature students' persistence and that it is the unique and complex interplay of various factors that will provide helpful insights into mature students' experiences. For instance, it may be that mature students' persistence will be best understood in relation to some combination of external circumstances, academic performance and expectations, and student integration experiences. For these reasons, I believe that qualitative, exploratory methods offer the best means to reveal interrelated themes for further exploration and analysis.

Quality of Student Life Models

There is a strong tradition of research into the quality of student life in elementary and secondary school settings that measures individual-level, subjective indicators of well-being, satisfaction, and happiness in relation to specific school domains and pragmatic areas of concern. Key concerns stemming from social inequalities that can be linked to educational outcomes for disadvantaged groups have been the motivating force behind this school-based, quality of student life research. The school reform movement in the United States was founded on the interdependent relationship between healthy school communities, students' healthy development, and academic success. Marx, Wooley, and Northrop (1998), in their overview of the concepts and steps for implementing coordinated school health programs, pointed to the "inextricable link" between students' health and their ability to learn (p. xv). The theme of school connectedness permeates the literature on school health and is broadly described as a student's relationship to school. Libbey (2004) provided a synthesis of the expanding literature on school engagement, school attachment, school bonding, school climate, school involvement, and school connectedness. Libbey (2004) outlined nine consistent themes for operationalizing student relationships with school, including academic engagement, belonging, discipline/fairness, extracurricular activities, school enjoyment, student voice, peer relations, safety, and teacher support (p. 278). She concluded that, irrespective of the constructs and measures used, students who feel connected to school fare better "functionally" and "affectively" (Libbey, 2004, p. 282).

In recent years, there has been increased interest in applying quality of student life concepts and measures to post-secondary settings. Much of the growing body of research has involved designing and statistically testing instruments for measuring global indicators of life satisfaction, happiness, and well-being in relation to various student life domains. Chow (2005) administered the Satisfaction with Life Scale to examine the general well-being, educational experiences, and academic performance of a sample of predominantly young, undergraduate students at a Canadian university. He conducted a regression analysis to identify the major determinants of students' life satisfaction. Results showed that those with a higher socio-economic status obtained a higher grade point average, and those who were more satisfied with their academic experience, self-esteem, relationship with significant other, and living conditions expressed a higher level of life satisfaction. Recommendations focused on using study findings to design "interventions and support services that might serve to enhance the quality of life for university students" (Chow, 2005, p. 146).

In a Canadian university context, Michalos and Orlando (2006) reported that Student Quality of Life Surveys are administered annually as an in-house monitoring and assessment tool. Data were recently aggregated from seven surveys from 1998 through to 2005, based on five overall satisfaction and happiness indices, six life domain variables (e.g., housing, family relations, friendships, recreation, financial security), and seven university-related items (e.g., instructors, course offerings, student services, library services). Regression results showed that the university domains have no impact on explanatory power when added to the life domains. However, among the university-

related variables, satisfaction with instructors was the most influential predictor of students' overall perceived well-being. In a similar vein, self-reported well-being was compared for university students in Canada and the United States to examine changes over the two separate sampling periods in 1984 and 1992 (Staats, Armstrong-Stassen & Partilo, 1995). The Satisfaction and Happiness Survey that was used measured global indicators of satisfaction and happiness, as well as self-perceptions in eleven life domains. The unique feature of this study was that it assessed "then and now" comparative discrepancies in areas of perceived change to capture student ratings of being better or worse off now than 10 years ago (Staats, et al., 1995, p. 97). Results for the change indicators showed that there were decreases in perceived student well-being over the two sample periods, and self-esteem and social support were significantly and strongly related to the perceived discrepancies. The connection between social support and happiness was discussed in relation to theories of student retention and attrition. Staats et al., 1995, cited the need for "new forms of student integration and social support groups" to improve student well-being at the university level (p. 109). It should be noted that the students' mean age ranged from 19.4 to 23.4 years, indicating a relatively young sample, and that the implications of social support and integration for older students was not specifically addressed.

In a large-scale European survey of student satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning, broader aspects of students' learning experiences were studied. Wiers-Jensen, Stensaker, and Groggaard (2002) expanded the traditional focus on perceptions of academic quality to include factors associated with teaching quality,

support facilities, physical infrastructure, social climate, and leisure activities. Results showed that satisfaction with the teaching and social climate were important determinants of students' overall satisfaction and well-being, which were both seen as factors that could be manipulated by higher education institutions. Recommendations were put forward for increasing the resources directed at "first-level service of the institution" that would reduce student-teacher ratios, provide extended individual guidance and academic feedback, and generally improve learning conditions for students; in addition, it was suggested that the model be used to stimulate and support the social features of students' learning experiences (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002, p. 192). The researchers concluded that broader-based student satisfaction surveys are important tools for improving students' learning experiences, as well as offering a market-oriented instrument for "adjusting and adapting higher education institutions to a changing and tougher economic reality" (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002, p. 194).

Several researchers have studied quality of university student life in relation to measures of affective and cognitive domains (Pilcher, 1998; Roberts & Clifton, 1992; Clifton, Etcheverry, Hasinoff, & Roberts, 1996; Cohen, Clifton, & Roberts, 2001). A group of researchers in a Canadian university context focussed on designing and validating scales to "create better instruments" for measuring the quality of students' intellectual lives in universities (Clifton, Etcheverry, Hasinoff, & Roberts, 1996, p. 49). Clifton, et al. (1996) used sophisticated statistical techniques to enhance the content and construct validity of their quality of life scale and advocated for its use to explore the correlates, causes, and consequences of quality of life in relation to student, department,

and faculty characteristics. Recent studies have expanded this focus on replicating and validating existing quality of life scales because of “deficiencies in conceptualization and/or the unsophisticated statistical techniques” used (Cohen et al., 2001, p. 63). However, there were two notable exceptions to this emphasis on re-analyzing existing instruments and increasing the power of statistical techniques. Pilcher (1998) used the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) to examine the extent to which affect and daily events can predict overall life satisfaction in college students. Her results showed that an increase in subjective life satisfaction was predicted by decreases in depression, negative affect, frequency of illness, and increases in vigour. This research was interesting in that it included self-reported measures of both psychological and physical health to investigate the relationship between health and life satisfaction. However, there were no theoretical or empirical links made between subjective life satisfaction and college students’ retention and attrition outcomes. In addition, as Pilcher (1998) herself points out, the research was carried out with young, healthy college students and further research would be needed to “better define the predictors of life satisfaction across the lifespan” (p. 303).

Another study focussed on incorporating concern and importance ratings into their prediction model. Disch, Harlow, Campbell, and Dougan (2000) included 10 high concern areas into their Student Quality of Life and Satisfaction (SQOLAS) instrument. The results of their regression analysis showed that positive attitudes toward one’s future direction in life could be predicted by higher levels of socio-personal satisfaction, cognitive processing, and lower levels of alcohol use and mental health concerns. In

addition, students' highest rated concerns were related to career and employment, use of time, and consumer and finance issues. Disch et al. (2000) concluded that their model established important links between concern and importance areas and functioning and performance variables. While this research was focused on improving the psychometric properties of existing instruments, it did incorporate self-rated importance and concern areas. However, I would argue that the student needs and concerns—especially those associated with high-risk behaviours—reflect the preoccupations of typical high school entrants and are less applicable to non-traditional student populations.

In an interesting departure from studies that measured overall quality of life adapted for use with college students, Sirgy, Grzeskowiak, and Rahtz (2007) developed and validated a well-being measure that was focussed specifically on the college life domain. This was the first survey-based research I encountered that measured students' satisfaction with specific aspects of college life using constructs that had been informed by focus group discussions with a class of undergraduate students. The convenience sample included primarily traditional-age students enrolled in undergraduate business-related courses in three diverse post-secondary settings. Sirgy et al. (2007) defined quality of college life as the “overall feelings of satisfaction a student experiences with life at the college” in relation to both the academic and social aspects of life on campus, and as influenced by college facilities and basic services (p. 346). Their hypotheses were that the greater the student's satisfaction with the academic and social aspects of college, the higher the student's quality of college life; and the greater the student's satisfaction with the facilities and services, the higher the student's satisfaction with the academic and

social aspects of the college. The intent of the research was to develop a quality of college life measure that could be used for identifying and addressing institutional problem areas. Specific mention was made of the diagnostic and administrative uses of quality of college life results to initiate improvements for attracting and retaining minority and at-risk students. Sirgy et al. (2007) also referred to the broader health-related implications, whereby college administrators could use quality of college life measures for “monitoring the social health of their institutions” (p. 358). The researchers emphasized the importance of focussing on college life domains representing specific academic, social, and institutional factors that were based on selective college student perspectives; however, the conceptualization and measurement of quality of college life, and the practical applications derived from the research, were not informed by theory-based research nor representative sampling methods.

Most of the quality of student life studies that were cited used scales that were based on global indicators of life satisfaction, happiness, or well-being. The concepts and their measures did not explore important links between health, relationships, school connectedness, and student retention in a post-secondary education context. I also did not locate studies that included naturalistic inquiry methods to explore the meaning and significance of the various concepts and domains investigated. The main emphasis was on designing and testing existing tools for their theoretical and empirical validity, with little attention to their ecological significance. In addition, the studies were focussed on traditional-age samples with interventions and conclusions that largely ignored mature students. Based on this overview, I believe that there is scope for learning lessons from

the school health movement, particularly with respect to making more explicit links between health and learning. In addition, I think that the use of qualitative methods for exploring the lived experiences of mature students will make an important contribution to the quality of student life research. To address this opportunity, I broadened the scope of my study by blending qualitative and quantitative methods and by adopting an adult quality of life conceptual framework that encompassed social ecology and health promotion perspectives.

Conceptual Framework

Quality of Life

The modern concept of 'quality of life' is attributed to the social indicators movement of Western societies that embodies notions of the good society and measures of national prosperity, population well-being, and social policy success (Rapley, 2003). In his historical overview of the development of quality of life concepts, Rapley (2003) highlighted the conceptual difficulties inherent in approaches that include both objective and subjective indicators of social well-being, along with different levels of analysis and abstraction, stating that "quality of life has become an *increasingly* slippery or complex concept over the course of its use" (p. 10). To address this problem, Rapley (2003) called for a reconceptualization of quality of life that clarifies the distinction between social indicators and individual-level indicators and that identifies meaningful constructs with specific and measurable domains. He claimed that it is vital to begin any quality of life study by "first understanding the meaning of the concept from the point of view of those

affected” and by appreciating that the relative importance of various aspects of life may change through the lifespan (Rapley, 2003, p. 60). He explained that one of the benefits of using qualitative approaches is having access to the “fine-grained detail” of how quality of life is lived and experienced by the individuals themselves (Rapley, 2003, p. 78). Rapley (2003) further described how quality of life could be used as a “sensitizing concept” for determining ways to enhance the “liveability” of specific environments (p. 212). It was from this critical review of quality of life research that I solidified my interest in conducting a fine-grained analysis of mature students’ lived experiences with an emphasis on enhancing the liveability of post-secondary settings for adult learners.

The concept of quality of life has received considerable attention in the health care and human service research and practice literature (Clark, 2000; Haas, 1999; Hendry & McVittie, 2004; Raphael, Renwick, Brown, & Rootman, 2002). Quality of life is now recognized as a desired health goal, with both health practitioners and educators becoming “interested in the same *new* outcome: quality of life” (Clark, 2000, p. 699). This focus was based on an integration of physical and psychological well-being concepts that cross social-behavioural and medically-oriented domains (Clark, 2000). A “robust definition” of quality of life was put forward by Clark (2000) to “account for the complex array of influences—physiological, psychological, social, cultural, and economic—that determine quality for a given person and community (p. 701),” with support given to theoretical perspectives that integrate individual and collective approaches for “enhancing individual and community capacity to achieve optimum quality of life” (p. 702). Haas (1999), who conducted a meta-analysis of theoretical and empirical research

in the 1990's, presented additional support for a clearly defined concept of quality of life. Her analysis identified the commonalities and distinctions among the various definitions and uses of quality of life across the disciplines of nursing, medicine, psychology, and social science. (p. 733). From her synthesis of the research literature, Haas (1999) offered the following definition of quality of life (QOL) as an attempt to clarify a very complicated concept:

QOL is a multidimensional evaluation of an individual's current life circumstances in the context of the culture in which they live and the values they hold. QOL is primarily a subjective sense of well-being encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions. In some circumstances, objective indicators may supplement or, in the case of individuals unable to subjectively perceive, serve as a proxy assessment of QOL. (p. 738)

In a critical review of the use of quality of life as an all-encompassing concept of well-being and as the basis for health interventions, Hendry and McVittie (2004) argued that there is little consensus on the definition of quality of life and that wider aspects of the concept have been neglected due to a focus on unilinear scale measurement. Their analysis of in-depth interview data suggested that these concerns are particularly relevant when studying the quality of life of older individuals, given that "older people's understandings of quality of life are not readily measurable and should be viewed in terms of phenomenological experience" (p. 961). Hendry and McVittie (2004) conducted semi-structured interviews with older day-centre clients using questions that focussed on the five main themes identified by the World Health Organization Quality of life Group, namely physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environment, as well as aspects of the individuals' perceived choice and control. From their results,

Hendry and McVittie (2004) concluded that quality of life among older people should be regarded as a “subjective whole,” not as fragmented component parts, and that further investigation is needed using multi-method approaches to develop more holistic and inclusive views of quality of life for older adults (p. 967).

In their overview of quality of life definitions, measurement issues, and research models, Raphael, Brown, Renwick, and Rootman (2002) outlined how quality of life considerations are influencing the planning, delivery, and evaluation of health and related services. Raphael et al. (2002) established the links among quality of life indicators, levels of analysis, and broad health-related implications. The Centre for Health Promotion’s adult quality of life model was presented as a holistic approach to conceptualizing and measuring quality of life while emphasizing the perspective of the individual; the model was endorsed as applicable to a range of populations and settings, directing attention to issues of personal development opportunities, immediate environments, and community resources (Raphael et al., 2002). In my estimation, the model has scope for identifying and addressing issues related to the health, well-being, and successful adjustment of adult learners in post-secondary educational settings.

Social Ecology and Health Promotion

One of the main goals of this study was to explore mature students’ quality of life and retention in post-secondary education using a conceptual framework and research methods that were grounded in adult learners’ lived experiences. Social ecology provided the major theoretical underpinning for my study as it allowed a more integrated and

complete conceptualization of adult learners' educational experiences than conventional student retention and attrition models. This study was also undertaken from a health promotion perspective, placing emphasis on the opportunities and constraints that exist in a university-college setting for enabling mature students to realize their educational goals and aspirations. My research direction was inspired by social ecological theories of the relations between people and their surroundings and research into the health-promotive capacity of human environments.

In charting the evolution of social ecological research, Stokols (2003) emphasized the importance of identifying “environmental conditions that either constrain individuals from realizing their full potential or, alternatively, enhance their capacity to achieve possible life goals and an enduring sense of well-being” (p. 332). From an ecological perspective, the environment is comprised of both physical and social features that can have positive or negative impacts on well-being. In his summary of the environmental features that can have positive influences on well-being, Stokols (2003) drew attention to the quality, clarity, and comfort of physical design features, as well as the social attributes that reinforce feelings of belonging, participation, and support. In his earlier research, Stokols (1996) described how social ecology provides a set of theoretical principles for “understanding the dynamic interplay among persons, groups, and their sociophysical milieu” (p. 283). He outlined how social ecological theory can be used for designing and evaluating health programs and environmental interventions to optimize individual wellness and collective well-being (Stokols, 1996). Three of the practical guidelines proposed seem particularly relevant for addressing the contextual factors

influencing mature students' persistence, and these include: the multifaceted nature of environmental influences on well-being; the compatibility or fit between individuals' needs and the environmental conditions; and the importance of identifying individual and organizational "leverage points" for targeting both personal and organizational changes to enhance well-being (Stokols, 1996, p. 288). I believe that these guidelines offer a useful tool for targeting individual and organizational approaches for enhancing mature students' educational commitment and persistence.

In his research into establishing and maintaining healthy environments, Stokols (1992) defined "healthfulness" as encompassing individual assessments of physical health and emotional well-being, as well as organizational and community-level analyses of social cohesion (p. 8). In a further elaboration of these concepts, Stokols (2000) proposed a new unit of analysis—the *health promotive (or wellness promotive) environment*—for examining the environmental features that influence personal and collective well-being (p. 135). He highlighted the importance of examining both physical and social dimensions of environments, while also determining which outcomes were the most desirable and important to community members. Drawing on work in the field of wellness promotion, Stokols, Grzywacz, McMahan, and Phillips (2003) developed a typology of environmental dimensions that can be used to analyze the health-supportive capacity of specific environments with the ultimate goal of "formulating strategies to enhance that capacity based on the unique health concerns, practices, and priorities found among the members of those settings" (p. 5). Using this typology, multiple environmental dimensions could be identified—including both material and human resources—to isolate

aspects of the university-college environment that are especially supportive of mature students' quality of life and well-being, with students identifying high-priority dimensions themselves. This approach may have utility for increasing the health-promotive capacity of university-college and college settings, in response to mature students' high-priority concerns.

The linkages between social ecology and health promotion offer a strong theoretical foundation for studying the specific life-contexts and the interplay of factors exerting important influences on mature students' quality of life and retention in post-secondary education. The foundational concepts of health promotion are summarized to show the key constructs and components I used in formulating a quality of life conceptual framework for exploring mature students' persistence. Health promotion is a multidisciplinary field of practice based on a broad view of health and its determinants. Rootman (1993), in his review of the development of health promotion in Canada, chronicled its emergence as an important field of endeavour beginning with the 1974 release of *A New Perspective on the Health of Canadians* by Marc Lalonde, then Minister of National Health and Welfare, followed by the 1984 *Charter for Health Promotion* (known as the Ottawa Charter). Both discussion papers were reported to have ushered in major changes in public policy and infrastructure development that ultimately led to the establishment of a National Framework for Health Promotion. The Framework addressed three main health challenges: a) reducing inequities in the determinants of health; b) increasing prevention; and c) enhancing coping skills through various health promotion mechanisms. Rootman (1993) described the development of the foundational concepts of

health and health promotion, resulting in the following definitions that are still widely accepted today:

Health is the extent to which an individual or group is able, on the one hand, to realize aspirations and satisfy needs, and, on the other hand, to change or cope with the environment. Health promotion is ...the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health....It is an approach to empowering both individuals and communities...in order to improve health...[and] it represents a mediating strategy between people and their environments, synthesizing personal choice and social responsibility in health to create a healthier future. (p. 4)

In describing the context for quality of life, Brown, Renwick, and Nagler (1996) stated that “quality of life is a construct that is at the heart of ... health promotion” and, as a social construct, its meanings vary among individuals and groups of people based on what people think constitutes quality in their lives (p. 4). Brown et al. (1996) examined the relationship between other related concepts, such as life satisfaction, happiness, morale, and well-being, recounting how these concepts are used interchangeably and inconsistently in the literature; the authors advocated for the use of quality of life, because it is a broader concept and as it is seen to subsume the others. The quality of life guiding principles proposed by Brown et al. (1996) that I have selected for application in an educational context include:

- Quality of life is a multidimensional construct.
- Because quality of life arises out of this complex person-environment interaction, a holistic approach is necessary for understanding it.
- The basic components of quality of life are those things that are common to all people and that constitute the human condition.
- Although the basic components of quality of life are the same for all people, the meaning attached to quality will differ to varying degrees from one person to another. This is because individuals attach

differing relative importance to the basic components of quality of life and have differing opportunities and constraints within their lives. (pp. 10-11)

I adopted the aforementioned quality of life guiding principles for my mature student persistence study, given the emphasis placed on the interaction between the student and the educational setting, the complex and multifaceted nature of mature students' lives, and the focus on personal meaning structures.

Raeburn and Rootman (1996) discussed the concept of quality of life and its relationship to health and health promotion, presenting an integrated model that showed the intersection of the quality of life conceptual framework with important health-related determinants and moderating conditions. Their integrated model offered a comprehensive framework for determining the role of health promotion in addressing the five action areas of the Ottawa Charter, namely: healthy public policy, health service delivery, personal skill development, community action, and the creation of supportive environments. The underlying principles and the conceptual synergy that guided the development of an integrated model offer compelling reasons for adopting a conceptual framework that is holistic, multidimensional, and steeped in the tradition of health promotion. My rationale for pursuing a quality of life conceptual framework is perhaps best summarized by Raeburn and Rootman's analysis (1996)—“it is comprehensive, it is designed for individuals but can be aggregated for groups, it includes elements of social [and ecological] indicators ... [and] it is contextual” (p. 17).

Adult Quality of Life

I adopted an adult quality of life conceptual framework for my study to address the limitations of existing student retention and attrition models and quality of student life approaches and to realize the potential for developing a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of mature students' persistence. The fundamental principles and core components of adult quality of life were used to emphasize the dynamic interplay of individual, institutional, and external factors and to recognize their joint influence on mature students' quality of life and retention.

Renwick and Brown (1996) outlined the conceptual approach to quality of life that was developed by the Quality of Life Research Unit at the Centre for Health Promotion (CHP) Research. The foundational definition of quality of life was based on fundamental health promotion concepts that consider "the degree to which the person enjoys the important possibilities of his or her life" and addresses the ongoing interaction between persons and their environments (p. 80). The CHP conceptual approach included three fundamental areas of life in which life possibilities occur and they are considered core components of quality of life, namely, *Being*, *Belonging*, and *Becoming*.

Being encompasses the most basic aspects of who people are as individuals. *Belonging* is concerned with the fit between individuals and their various environments. *Becoming* focuses on the purposeful activities in which individuals engage in an attempt to realize their goals, aspirations, and hopes. (p. 82)

In the CHP conceptual approach outlined by Brown, Raphael, and Renwick (2002), the extent of a person's quality of life in the areas of *Being*, *Belonging*, and

Becoming is determined by two factors: importance and enjoyment. Thus, quality of life consists of the relative importance or meaning attached to each particular dimension and the extent of the person's enjoyment with respect to each dimension. In the CHP Quality of Life Model, quality of life is adapted to the lives of all humans, at any time, and from their individual perspectives. The Model is also sensitive to the specific life situations of individuals and it addresses the quality of the environment in which the person lives (Brown et al., 2002). The Quality of Life Model is used to explain how a quality environment provides for basic needs to be met (food, shelter, safety, social contact); it also describes the range of opportunities that are within the individual's potential, and how control and choice operate within that environment (University of Toronto, Centre for Health Promotion, n.d.).

The CHP framework provided the theoretical base for several instruments to measure the quality of life for various population groups, including persons with disabilities, seniors living in the community, adolescents, and the general adult population (Renwick & Brown, 1996, p. 85). The instruments were developed as a guide for designing environments that promote quality of life, and as a tool for identifying areas that need improvement (Renwick & Brown, 1996, p. 86). Recent contact with the Quality of Life Research Unit confirmed that the adult-oriented instrument had not been tested with adult populations in post-secondary settings, and that this would make an important contribution to adult quality of life research. I obtained a copy the Quality of Life Profile: Adult Version from the Quality of Life Research Unit. While I did not administer the quality of life scale in my individual interviews, I used the three core components of the

Profile and their associated areas of life as a guide for designing my interview protocol. The core components of *Being*, *Belonging* and *Becoming* were also used to classify and interpret the emergent themes from my qualitative interviews. It is my contention that the subcomponents of *Belonging* and *Becoming*, as well as the concepts of control and possibilities, are particularly relevant to mature students in post-secondary settings.

In summary, I used an adult quality of life conceptual framework for my exploratory study that was multidimensional, ecologically-oriented, and attuned to adult learners' specific life contexts. I was particularly interested in assessing the health-promotive capacity of a specific university-college setting to identify targeted actions for improving mature students' quality of life and retention. The adult quality of life conceptual framework that I adopted had a firm theoretical grounding in social ecology and health promotion and was supported by the core principles and practices of adult learning and student development. Adult learning theory helped me to interpret and understand the high-priority dimensions of mature students' educational experiences from the perspective of adult learners themselves. In addition, the student development research literature enabled me to identify the individual and institutional leverage-points for optimizing mature students' educational commitment and retention.

Adult Learning

Four reviews of the foundations of adult education were particularly influential in setting the context for my study of adult learners' post-secondary experiences. From these overviews of adult learning theories and practices, I developed a deeper

appreciation of mature students' educational interests, motivations, and needs, and the contextual factors that influence their learning.

In their summary of learning in adulthood, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) described the five major theoretical orientations that have shaped the development of theory in adult learning. The humanist, social learning, and constructivist theories are particularly relevant to the current study. The humanist orientation, attributed to Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, emphasizes the function of motivation, choice, and responsibility and is manifested in concepts of andragogy and self-directed learning. The social learning orientation, highly influenced by Albert Bandura and Julian Rotter, focuses on the social context of learning and emphasizes the interactions of people and their environments, as evidenced through modelling and mentoring processes. Finally, the constructivist orientation, primarily influenced by Lev Vygotsky, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget, posits that learners construct knowledge from experience and is acknowledged as the basis of transformational and experiential learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, pp. 256-266). The distinctive features of the adult learning process were also highlighted by Merriam and Caffarella. Of particular interest were the life events and transitions that motivate adults to seek out learning. Merriam and Caffarella cited Aslanian and Brickell's original research into life changes, where 83 percent of adults were reported to be involved in learning to cope with a transition, primarily one that was career-related or family-oriented; the importance of this finding was punctuated by the original researchers' quote: "To know an adult's life schedule...is to know an adult's learning schedule" (p. 391). In addition, Merriam and Caffarella discussed the

implications of age-related factors that affect learning in adulthood, such as the greater incidence of health problems. The authors maintained that theory and practice must account for adult characteristics, life experiences, developmental concerns, and environmental contexts that are unique to adulthood (Merriam & Caffarella, p. 400). This overview impressed upon me the importance of addressing the relationship between adults' unique life circumstances and their patterns of learning participation.

In their edited work describing and interpreting the Canadian adult education experience, Selman, Selman, Cooke, and Dampier (1998) examined the concept of participation in adult education from various viewpoints. When advancing the viewpoint of adult learners themselves, Selman et al. (1998) stated that the “more that is known about adult learning needs and desires, and the factors which influence the decision to participate, the more that will be able to be done to meet these same needs and desires” (p. 119). The two approaches for understanding adult participation—enrolment and engagement—were described, with the former emphasizing quantitative measures to document activity, or the “turnstile” approach, and the latter capturing the notion that adults are free to exercise autonomy and discretion with respect to when and how they continue their learning (p. 121). Regardless of how participation in adult education is defined, the authors acknowledged that it is helpful to examine the motivations of participating adults. Selman et al. (1998) outlined the basic assumptions of andragogy—“the art and science of helping adults learn,” excerpted from the seminal work of Malcolm Knowles.

Adults are aware of specific learning needs generated by real life tasks or problems. Adult education programs, therefore should be organized around “life application” categories and sequenced according to learners’ readiness to learn. (p. 133)

Selman et al. (1998) described the relationship between readiness to learn and the developmental tasks and major social roles commonly experienced in the following life stages: early adulthood (18-30 years), middle age (30-55 years), and later maturity (55+ years). However, Selman et al. (1998) argued that the most lucid account of why adults participate is found in Cyril Houle’s description of the three types of adult learners and their basic motivational orientation, namely: a) the goal oriented—those who use education to accomplish fairly clear-cut objectives, such as to advance their work situation; b) the activity-oriented—those who participate for the activity itself and the social interaction and who may have no connection with the content or announced purposes of the activity; and c) the learning oriented—those who seek knowledge for its own sake (p. 135). Selman et al. (1998) summarized the following conclusions about adults’ motivational orientation that are particularly insightful for my study of mature students’ persistence: “the strongest motives for participating are ‘work’ and personal satisfaction; typically about one-third (of adults) give personal satisfaction as their main reason for participation; one powerful reason for participating is the desire to make practical use of the knowledge acquired; preparation for new jobs are mainly emphasized by persons under thirty and by women in the process of changing from child care to gainful employment; (and) interest in job-related goals begins to decline at age thirty and drops off sharply after age fifty” (p. 137). And finally, in their review of research into the

barriers to adult participation, Selman et al. (1998) outlined three categories of learning barriers—situational, dispositional, and institutional—with the institutional barriers considered most amenable to modifications for reducing their impact. The relevant institutional barriers identified by Selman et al. (1998) included: financial aid policies and practices that created disincentives or are inadequate; tuition fees and other associated costs; lack of support systems such as orientation, counselling, child care and tutoring; lack of information on available courses; institutional practices that are incompatible with learner needs; scheduling that is inappropriate; and reluctance to accredit an individual's life experiences as part of entrance requirements.

Adult learning theory pays particular attention to the need for supportive learning environments with educators playing a pivotal role in creating learning conditions that foster adults' personal growth and academic development. In his edited work exploring the core concepts and applications of Transformation Theory, Mezirow (2000) maintained that transformative learning is at the heart of significant adult learning. He defined transformative learning as the “process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and options that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (p. 8). Adulthood itself is described as a transformative process of meaning necessitating supportive relationships and learning environments that will enable adult learners to engage in “expanded awareness, critical reflection, validating discourse, and reflective action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 25). According to Mezirow (2000), it is the role of

the adult educator to help adults realize their potential for becoming “more liberated, socially responsible, and autonomous learners” and to create protected learning environments that foster this development; it is also the role of the adult educator to help learners assess and achieve their learning objectives which may be personal, social, or organizational (p. 30). In her chapter on fostering self-awareness, Taylor (2000) stated that by “explicitly teaching with developmental intentions,” educators are more likely to encourage transformational growth in adult learners (p. 167). To facilitate this growth, Taylor (2000) declared that adult educators are responsible for creating conditions of openness, inclusiveness, mutual support, and respect; she further maintained that the educational strategies that promote transformative learning are instructor-facilitated discussion and learner-centred activities that encourage participation and collaboration. In a similar vein, Saroyan and Amundsen (2001) referred to the theory of transformative learning to describe how adult learners engage in a change process wherein a “student-centred, learner oriented, facilitation process” is supportive of the transformative learning process (p. 345). The authors cited research describing a continuum of conceptions of teaching and practice, with teacher-centred/content-oriented conceptions and beliefs on one axis and student-centred/learning-oriented dimensions on the other. While an integrated view of teaching and learning was described as the highest competency, competent teachers were considered able to “place the student in a more prominent role in the teaching and learning process” and to “select teaching methods that engage students in various activities” (Saroyan & Amundsen, 2001, p. 345).

In summarizing the work of pioneering theorists that have created the foundation of adult learning theory, Holton and Swanson (1998) outlined the following five key assumptions about adult learners that have implications for teaching practice: “1) adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy; 2) adults’ orientation to learning is life-centred; 3) experience is the richest source for adults’ learning; 4) adults have a deep need to be self-directed; and 5) individual differences among people increase with age;” therefore, provision must be made for “differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning” (p. 40). Holton and Swanson (1998) described how the “experiential approach to learning has become firmly rooted in adult learning practice” with adults preferring a “problem solving orientation to learning,” with information presented “in real-life context” (p. 146). In a practical application of active learning, McInnis (2004) cited positive outcomes when students were acknowledged as active learners and when their previous knowledge and skills were recognized. As experiential and prior learning practices are cornerstones of effective adult teaching and learning, it makes sense that any attempts to make the classroom more relevant to mature students’ real-life situations would contribute to their positive experiences and outcomes.

Holton and Swanson (1998) provided an overview of developmental perspectives on adult learning and their influences on andragogical principles; adult and life-span-role development theories were seen as instrumental in explaining differences in “the way adults learn at different stages in their life” (p. 171). Recognition was also given to their contributions in clarifying “adult readiness to learn” in relation to “the predictable types

of changes that occur throughout an adult's life" and that often trigger a learning need (Holton & Swanson, 1998, p. 172). Several studies focussed on theories of life-span development that emphasize the developmental tasks and roles associated with specific life stages. In describing who participates in adult education and why, DeJoy (1997) depicted typical degree-seeking adults as being well educated, professionally employed, and goal-directed. The main reasons that adults participate in post-secondary education were reported to vary with age. DeJoy surveyed adult learners and found that those in their 20's sought degrees to qualify for employment, those in their 30's and 40's were primarily focused on advancing in their careers, and those in older age cohorts were enrolled to achieve personal goals and satisfaction. Puccio (1995) also positioned the importance of developmental needs for explaining the reasons why older adults engage in learning. Her findings showed that older learners (those aged 65 years and older) were more interested in being stimulated intellectually than in learning for professional or vocational reasons.

An adult life-span perspective was used by Kasworm (1982) to examine differences between the use and perceived need for student support services. Her results showed that older students reported needing a broader range of support services than their younger counterparts did (e.g., orientation, financial aid, housing, physical health, job placement, counselling, student activities, and study skills). In a later discussion about key differences between older and younger undergraduate students, Kasworm (2003) goes beyond the "status of age" (typically defined as 25 years or older) to include the "status of maturity and developmental complexity" that is acquired through life

responsibilities, perspectives, and financial independence; she also referred to the “status of responsible and often-competing sets of adult roles” that reflect “work, family, community, and college student commitments” (p. 3). Kasworm (2003) recommended that “adult life-context motivators” be considered in future research taking into account the influences of “internal life developmental changes, external planning to create a different future life in their adult world, or a mixture of the two life-context motivators” (p. 6).

Some theorists have refused to categorize adults based on chronological age and developmental stage and, instead, have used transition theory to capture the variability of adult learners. Neugarten makes the case that adults grow more diverse and heterogeneous as they age (as cited in Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989, p. 13). Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) used transition theory to explain why most adults return to school when triggered by either career or family transitions; they defined a transition as an “event” (re-entry to school) or a “nonevent” (staying in school over successive years) that “alters one’s roles, relationships, routines and assumptions” (p. 14). They elaborated that to understand the transition process, it must be viewed in relation to three distinct processes in the lives of adult learners, namely: “*moving into* the learning environment, *moving through* it, and preparing to leave or *moving on*” (p. 15). When applied to post-secondary education, adult learners’ needs and institutional responses were described as follows: *moving into*—adults need to “become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations” (p. 15) of their campus and this is typically addressed through new-student orientation and outreach events; *moving through*—

learners need to “balance their academic activities with other parts of their lives” (p. 16) and this is typically accomplished by seeking resources and supports to sustain their educational commitment; and *moving on*—because adults experience disequilibrium when leaving their familiar surroundings, they must find new “ways of functioning and interacting” with others to successfully “reinvest” their energies (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 16). According to Schlossberg et al. (1989), “the only certainty in the transition process is that people’s reactions...will change over time” (p. 16) as transitions are integrated into their life specific life situations.

Aslanian (2001) positioned the importance of life transitions by describing adulthood as a time of change, filled with the transitions that are inherent in family life, employment, community involvement, housing, personal health, and retirement. In referencing the national study examining adult students’ patterns of learning, she further concluded that “life transitions set the stage for adult learning” with adults taking advantage of various learning opportunities when moving, or planning to move from one life role to another; in this context, education is pursued to acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values to facilitate specific life-role movement (Aslanian, 2001, p. 15). Study findings showed that the typical (median) undergraduate adult student was 38 years old, female, white, married, employed in a full-time professional position, and residing in a community with a population base of 44,000 (statistics were remarkably similar for both two- and four-year colleges). Study results also showed that the majority of reasons given by adults for learning (85%) were related to career transitions, either for advancement or to remain current in their present jobs. In addition, when asked to explain the timing of

their return to education, specific life events were given as the reasons for triggering learning decisions. Once again, a common pattern emerged with the majority of the reported triggering events (71%) related to careers (Aslanian, 2001, p. 17). In a student retention context, Jacobs and Berkowitz King (2002) analyzed the impacts of age and adult life events on degree completion rates. They concluded that current age had no statistically significant effect on the odds of degree completion; however, they presented evidence in support of a “competing-role thesis,” whereby older women who were enrolled part-time, who delayed entry, and who had children were much less likely to complete their degrees than younger women (Jacobs & Berkowitz King, 2002, p. 222). Their results upheld the hypothesis that “competing demands make it more difficult for older students to complete their studies” (p. 225) and that “age per se does not inhibit college completion” (p. 226).

In an interesting study of the wellness of non-traditional-age university students, Hybertson, Hulme, Smith and Holton (1992) drew on adult development literature to incorporate relevant personal and environmental factors into their survey design and these included “job demands, financial obligations, [and] family responsibilities” (p. 50). They conducted a comparative analysis of non-traditional- and traditional-age students’ well-being and showed that non-traditional-age students more frequently cited factors such as “balancing my personal needs with the demands from others,” and “feeling overwhelmed or conflicted about fulfilling all my roles and responsibilities” (p. 52). In addition, non-traditional-age students were more likely than younger students to identify influential environmental factors and these factors “primarily involved social support

systems and social relationships” (p. 53). Hybertson et al. (1992) concluded that program administrators should provide wellness services that are “developmentally relevant” to older students and “consistent with their students’ level of integration into the campus community” (p. 50). Their analysis showed that older commuter students in university settings would benefit from the “active promotion of a humane campus environment with policies, processes, and personnel accommodating” adult learners’ life-context needs (p. 54). They argue that as the proportion of non-traditional-age students in the student body grows, student service practitioners should be advocating for “improved registration efficiency, affordable child care, adequate library service, responsive advising, available campus parking, and good computer laboratories” (Hybertson et al., pp. 54-55).

Developmental, life-span-role, competing-role, and life-transition perspectives have all reinforced the need to intentionally design institutional policies and programs to address the specific needs and challenges of adult learners. Research into adult learners’ motivations and needs at various life stages and their associated participation levels has informed this process. Building on these themes, relevant student development research is presented to identify the student support services and the teaching and learning strategies for creating more humane and accommodating campus environments for older students.

Student Development

The student development literature profiles a range of student support programs and flexible administrative structures for eliminating barriers and promoting student

retention in post-secondary education. Of particular interest are those approaches that are specifically attuned to adult learners' unique life circumstances. Several researchers have pointed to the need for targeted student support and career-oriented services that are sensitized to the needs and issues of mature students. In their review of programs and services for adult students, Schlossberg et al. (1989) recounted how student services have been organized traditionally along the functional lines of orientation, academic advising, counselling, housing, and student life activities. In their assessment, there is typically little communication and minimal integration among the various services resulting in fragmented and compartmentalized delivery. To redress these problems, Schlossberg et al. (1989) issued a call for "reallocating resources, disrupting current organizational patterns, undertaking significant professional development activities, and reorienting our personnel and professional postures toward our [adult] clients" (p. 226).

McGivney (1996) also commented on the need for infrastructure re-alignment to meet the learning needs of mature students. She reported that the "progress and well-being of mature and 'non-traditional' groups of students largely depend on the amount of support and understanding they receive in an institution" and that many institutions have not fully adjusted their procedures, practices, and support services to an adult clientele (p. 135). In a later paper, McGivney (2004) itemized the specific factors that contribute to adult retention, stating that "additional practical supports can make all the difference," such as flexible timetabling, high quality childcare, supportive learning groups and study circles, relevant personal and educational advice, financial support, and separate study and social facilities that are dedicated for adult students' use (p. 43). Brown (2002) also

outlined several strategies for enhancing adult student development and retention in academic degree programs. She put forward seven strategies for motivating and sustaining adult students, including: developing adult student cultural communities; establishing a range of student support services that are developed specifically for adult students; offering training to student services staff in the use of different client approaches based on “family systems theory,”...“adult development theory, and adult learning theory”; employing student services staff who have “strong motivational and advising skills”; developing special orientation and “first-year-experience workshops” to help adult students manage transitions; designing experiences that meet adult students’ career development and advancement needs (e.g., internships, service learning, and placement resources); and encouraging faculty members to “develop *inclusive* learning environments” with “course information [presented] in a contextual manner” (pp. 72-73).

In their overview of career development theory, Man-Nor Hoi and Hiebert (2005) provided a detailed analysis of the four constructs of Astin’s (1984) career development model that focus on “motivation, work expectations, socialization, and structure of opportunity” (p. 23). Man-Nor Hoi and Hiebert (2005) made the case that while career development models have made substantial contributions to the understanding of career decision-making and career development, “most theories are based on the experiences of white, middle-class males” (p. 22). The authors maintained that many of the underlying assumptions of career development theories are not relevant to non-traditional students. To test the career development constructs in Astin’s original model, Man-Nor Hoi and Hiebert (2005) surveyed first-year university students to examine the influences of

motivation and expectation on students' career decisions. Despite the limitations inherent in their homogeneous sample (88% were between 17-20 years of age and predominantly female), their findings suggested that "students who were more aware of their interests, strengths and goals were more motivated to achieve their goals" and the authors called for early intervention to increase students' awareness of educational and career-related opportunities (Man-Nor Hoi & Hiebert, 2005, p. 29).

Sandler (2000) incorporated the following constructs into their integrated model of student persistence: "career decision-making self-efficacy, perceived stress, and financial difficulty" (p. 540). His exploration of adult adjustment offered an innovative model for addressing non-traditional students' needs and can be examined within a student development context. In particular, his inclusion of factors that focus on the students' "key life roles" and stresses, and his exploration of students' confidence levels for educational and occupational goal planning merits closer examination (p. 541). In his discussion of research findings, Sandler (2000) stated that there are clear implications for student support services, "co-curricular programming," and curriculum to develop stronger linkages to the adult "world of work" and family (p. 564). He suggested that his elaborated model more appropriately addresses the needs of adult undergraduates and that academic and counselling professionals can use it to develop career-related enhancements. Unfortunately, the inclusion of "new constructs germane to nontraditional students" lose their utility and practical significance when embedded in a complex, path-analytic model within a large-scale, quantitative survey design (Sandler, 2001, p. 3). While career decision-making offers an interesting addition to existing student retention

and attrition models, there is a need for theory-based research that explores the actual lived experiences of mature students in undergraduate student contexts. The growing body of research into effective adult student retention strategies shows great promise for bridging theory and practice.

Adult Student Retention

Over the past decade, a burgeoning body of research has developed on effective adult student retention policies and programs. Tinto (1993) identified the following “principles of effective retention” (p. 145) from his comparative analysis of successful student retention programs: a) they are “committed to the students they serve,” putting “student welfare ahead of other institutional goals” (p. 146); b) they are “first and foremost committed to the education of all, not just some, of their students” (p. 146); and c) they are “committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members” (p. 147). Of these three, Tinto maintained that a commitment to education, to students’ social and intellectual growth, is the key to successful programs; he claimed that effective approaches focus on the settings and resources that “best promote student learning, especially during the crucial first year of college” (p. 147). The classroom was considered pivotal for monitoring student learning and for providing “frequent feedback to students,” with “active, rather than passive learning [as] the hallmark” (p. 147) of effective educational settings.

Several researchers have positioned the importance of active and cooperative learning as powerful teaching and learning tools (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998; Kuh, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In their review of research into effective teaching and learning practices, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated unequivocally that “innovative, active, collaborative, cooperative, and constructivist instructional approaches shape learning more powerfully, in some forms by substantial margins, than do conventional lecture-discussion and text-based approaches” (p. 646). The focus on students’ active engagement in learning and the associated impacts on academic success have been well documented. Over the last decade, Johnson et al. (1998) reported that there has been increased interest in cooperative learning at the college level, defined as “students [working] together in unstructured small groups...to accomplish shared learning goals” (p. 28). In their meta-analysis of research conducted on cooperative learning in college and adult settings, Johnson et al. (1998) documented empirical evidence that “cooperative learning promoted higher individual achievement” than competitive, “individualistic” learning approaches (p. 31). In addition to academic performance, studies also reported positive impacts on the “quality of the college experience,” the quality of faculty-student and student-student relationships, and “psychological adjustment to college life” (p. 31) with their associated linkages to social integration and educational commitment outcomes (Johnson et al., 1998).

Significant attention has been given to the impacts of active and collaborative learning and other program-level variables in a large-scale survey of undergraduate student participation. Since 2003, the National Survey of Student Engagement Project

(NSSE) has been collecting extensive information from first-year and senior students in the United States and Canada to measure the extent to which students engage in effective educational practices that are empirically linked with learning, personal development, student satisfaction, persistence, and graduation (Center for Post-Secondary Research, 2007). The NSSE Student Reports are used to compute benchmark scores of good practices in undergraduate education to permit intra- and inter-institutional comparisons of collegiate quality and improvement. The NSSE created five institutional indicators of effective educational practice for this purpose, namely: a) level of academic challenge; b) active and collaborative learning; c) student-faculty interaction; d) enriching educational experiences; and e) supportive campus environment (Center for Post-Secondary Research, 2007). According to Kuh (2003), the NSSE represented a new way to think about student engagement. He recommended that institutions use campus-specific profiles to identify students who are disengaged and attempt to involve them in relevant educational activities. Student engagement was described as the “time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and outside of the classroom, and the policies and practices that institutions use to induce students to take part in these activities” (Kuh, 2003, p. 25). Using two institutions as case examples, Kuh (2005) positioned the importance of using NSSE data for improving the quality of students’ educational experiences. Some of the identified targets for improvement included enhancing faculty and curriculum development, increasing research and internship opportunities, expanding employment opportunity contacts, making freshman experience courses mandatory for entering first-year students, and offering academic development

courses for selected sub-groups of students. In the examples cited, the aim was to better “orient [students] to the services and culture of the university, and to engage them” (p. 13) more deeply in their own learning (Kuh, 2005). McInnis (2004) placed NSSE findings in the broader context of student life experiences and their relationship to students’ learning outcomes. His synthesis of student engagement research identified “good practice” (p. 391) as involving the amount of time students spend on learning tasks, the extent to which they have meaningful contact with academic staff, and the supportive nature of the campus environment (McInnis, 2004).

In a Canadian example, the British Columbia College and Institute Student Outcomes Survey (CISO) data were used to explore the factors that contribute to student satisfaction and goal achievement—calculated as a student success measure—to help institutions improve their students’ educational experiences (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2007). Factors considered to be under an institution’s control, and the most amenable to change, were the facilities and services provided to students. Those factors that were positively correlated with student success included: learning support services; program, personal and career advising; and admissions and registration procedures. In addition, the program factors that contributed significantly to students’ success scores were curriculum, teaching, communication skills, and practical experience. Conclusions from the CISO research emphasized that institutions can improve their students’ educational experiences by maintaining “high teaching standards and (having) curricula that are relevant, up-to-date, and (including) practical experience” (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2007, p. 8).

Tinto (1993) stressed the importance of assessing student needs and “fine-tuning” (p. 180) institutional programs to address the specific needs of different students. He recommended that specialty programs be provided for segments of the student body that may be academically at-risk or marginalized from the mainstream of social and academic life. For instance, retention programs for returning adult students should be offered to reduce the barriers caused by family and work responsibilities and to increase the opportunities for academic involvement. Tinto (1993) outlined a wide-range of retention initiatives that should be implemented to create a supportive academic and social community for adult students, including: specifically designed orientation programs, advising and counselling services; early warning and intervention systems; study and learning skills enhancement; faculty and peer mentors; “flexible and extended schedules” (p. 188) for classes and support services; on-campus social and intellectual activities; communication outreach, interdisciplinary seminars; and “collaborative/cooperative learning settings...to engage the energies of adult students” (p. 189).

Adult students have been referred to as the “square pegs” (p.22) in the round holes of institutions that are geared for traditional-age students; Hagedorn (2005b) used this metaphor to illustrate the difficulties that mature students experience in post-secondary systems that treat them as “out of sequence” (p. 22) students with non-linear life paths (p. 24) and complex education and work realities. Using transcript data from a five-year longitudinal study, Hagedorn (2005b, p.24) conducted a cross-sectional analysis comparing the enrolment behaviour of “traditionally aged students” (17-21 years), with “young adults” (22-30 years), “prime timers” (31-45 years), and “last chancers” (46 years

and older). Hagedorn's (2005b) conclusions pertaining to retention and institutional accommodations were particularly relevant for profiling the unique needs and obstacles encountered by adult learners. With respect to retention measures, Hagedorn (2005b) advocated for the use of educational goals to rule out "legitimate reasons" for student withdrawal (p. 27). She also drew attention to "stop out" behaviours that are more reflective of family and work priorities than drop out intentions (Hagedorn, 2005b, p. 27). In a similar vein, Grayson and Grayson (2003) recommended that institutions monitor undergraduate degree program enrolment across any of four consecutive academic semesters, described as "any quarter within the past four quarters" (p. 19), so that attrition/retention rates for adult students can be more accurately portrayed. Their findings also confirmed that adult student attrition models must take into consideration the fact that many adults entering post-secondary programs have "no intention of completing a degree" (Grayson & Grayson, 2003, p.20). Finally, Hagedorn (2005b) recommended that post-secondary institutions provide "flexible learning opportunities" (p. 28) and teaching and learning practices that enhance student-faculty interactions to remain more responsive to adult students.

Increasingly, post-secondary institutions are updating their organizational policies and practices to address mature students' needs and expectations. Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002) maintained that "recruiting and retaining students is the responsibility of everyone in the college" and that an integrated set of institutional policies, programs, and services is needed to undergird all institutional efforts (p. 59). They identified 10 broad institutional retention strategies for responding to adult learners' needs in higher

education and these include: a) early systems of orientation, advisement and support by faculty and staff who are sensitized to and knowledgeable of adult transitions (p. 55); b) financial assistance resource people who can help adult students with various financial options that relate to their adult circumstances, including work study, loans, special adult scholarships, and emergency funds (p. 56); c) academic and basic skills development to enhance adults' readiness to meet academic demands (p. 56); d) "adult-oriented policies and procedures" that offer "convenient and accessible services" (p. 56) to recognize and support adults' life-context needs; e) information technology to "provide additional service and support" for students in connecting with faculty, their classmates, and college services without coming on campus (p. 57); f) "programs that incorporate families and spouses" through "special orientation sessions, open houses, and family recreation or cultural gatherings" (p. 57); g) personal interactions with faculty and staff that create an adult-friendly environment (p. 58); h) special needs services for "diverse segments of the adult population," including "housing, transportation, security, and childcare" (p. 58); i) support networks such as peer mentors and associations and societies for adult students "who value friendship and connectedness with others at college" (p. 58); and j) institutional and program efforts that make knowledge of each adult student their foundation (p. 58). In her later research, Kasworm (2003) placed more emphasis on flexible instructional delivery and more accessible student support services to reflect adults' "key life transitions and changes" (p. 6) with the associated need for institutional services and resources to "support learning situated within complex adult lives" (p. 9).

Brown (2002) conducted a thorough and insightful analysis of relevant research by going beyond broad institutional approaches to include specific instructional and student support strategies for effective adult student retention. She urged educational leaders to create the conditions that encourage adult students' development and persistence by establishing specialized support systems, offering high quality instruction, and providing flexible structures and processes to motivate and sustain adult students (Brown, 2002). Brown's (2002) recommended strategies included: a) establishing "nontraditional/adult communities on campus" (p. 72) that can shift perspectives toward more flexibility and willingness to change; b) developing a range of programs and services, including "one-stop enrolment, advising and registration opportunities, and financial aid and career counselling" services, along with "electronic methods of communicating" (p. 72); c) providing professional development for student services staff on topics specific to changing work conditions, family systems/adult development/adult learning theories, different client approaches, and relevant career assessment instruments (p. 73); d) retaining professional student services staff who have "strong motivational and advising skills" for helping adults "set realistic student expectations" (p. 73) and to instil a sense of community; e) developing "orientation and first-year experience workshops and courses" (p. 73) to prepare mature students for dealing with the institutional culture, common stresses, and academic requirements of returning to school; f) providing enrichment opportunities to address the "higher-ordered needs" (p. 73) of adults (e.g., internships, service learning, volunteer and career placement services); and g) encouraging faculty to "develop *inclusive* learning environments" to promote "sharing of

common life experiences” in relation to curricula, to “present course information in a contextual manner,” (p. 73) and to promote transformative learning by using creative teaching and learning practices (p. 74). Brown’s (2002) seven strategies for contributing to adult students’ development and persistence can be used as practical guidelines for making institutional accommodations in post-secondary education settings.

There are lessons to be learned from adult and continuing education programs with respect to developing responsive and innovative strategies for serving adult learners. Bash (2003) described the recent shift from “endgame” degree completion approaches to a focus on lifelong learning that has resulted in burgeoning numbers of adult learners enrolled in American higher education institutions—estimated to be as high as 47% of all registrants (p. 35). He maintained that these changes have ushered in “learner-centred approaches” to address the dynamic lifestyles and varied life experiences of adult students (Bash, 2003, p. 36). In a summary of successful models of adult-serving programs, Bash (2003) drew attention to the following best practices: more reliance on web-based learning resources; collaborative learning methods; accelerated course formats that place greater emphasis on self-directed study; and prior learning assessment using rigorous approaches to portfolio-based assessment (p. 37). In a qualitative study examining the social and academic experiences of successful non-traditional students, Samuels (2005) also identified best practices for improving persistence, such as: offering orientation and freshman seminars that are specific to the practical needs of non-traditional students and that promote confidence and academic self-efficacy(p. 127); providing individualized advising and program flexibility, particularly for transfer

students (p. 128); and sensitizing staff, across the campus, to the unique situation of older students giving recognition to their multiple life roles and their need for practical information and support (p. 131).

Educational leaders now recognize that the “total student experience” (p. 33) is the defining feature of a quality student learning experience (Sandeen, 2004). Because of changing demographics and more diverse student profiles in higher education, Sandeen maintained that an “expanded view of undergraduate education” (p. 33) is needed that includes a “wide variety of out-of-classroom supplements to classroom education” (p. 28). In her phenomenological study of college students who have encountered academic difficulty, suspension, and reinstatement, Hoell (2006) highlighted the complex issues involved in the study of academic success and failure. Her findings reaffirmed the importance of an overall institutional commitment to student success that includes coordinated efforts to address services for the whole student based on instruction, interventions, and co-curricular programs that are designed to address the needs of all types of students.

One area that shows particular promise for improving undergraduate student learning by addressing the needs of the whole student is collaboration between student development and academic staff. Many progressive institutions are dedicating resources to broadening students’ learning experiences through student involvement, leadership, student-faculty engagement, and community service programs. According to Sandeen (2004), the knowledge and understanding of student affairs staff should be used, not only for improving student recruitment and retention programs, but also for improving the

general education program. Professional student affairs staff should be recognized for their important contributions in getting students “more involved with faculty, creating student-learning communities, and encouraging students to participate in group projects” (Sandeen, 2004, p. 31). Through the joint efforts of faculty and student affairs staff, Sandeen (2004) recommended that programs be targeted for specific groups of students to improve their educational experiences. I firmly believe that there is scope for faculty and student services staff on university-college and college campuses to work collaboratively and intentionally to strengthen the total learning experiences of mature students.

The focus on the joint efforts of faculty and student services staff also has implications for developing comprehensive, fully integrated adult student retention programs that are aimed at addressing the total student experience. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) report that colleges and universities that offer comprehensive support and retention programs to “promote academic adjustment, persistence, and degree completion” for both the at-risk and general student population have longer-lasting effects on students’ persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 405). I expect that these same persistence effects could be achieved if educational leaders were to create the institutional incentives and conditions for academic and service staff to jointly plan and deliver a range of retention programs and services targeted to the specific needs and issues of mature students. In summary, current research on adult student retention suggests that effective institutional programs address the life-context needs of the

individual, focus on the whole student, and are implemented with a campus-wide orientation.

Synthesis of the Literature Findings

A selection of influential studies was sourced to summarize the major advances in student retention and attrition research spanning over three decades. It was shown that constructs used for investigating traditional-age students are inappropriate when applied to models of adult student retention. For the most part, the student retention and attrition research and the quality of student life literature have concentrated on academic and social integration, student involvement, and student satisfaction with narrowly defined aspects of the campus experience. Insights have been gleaned primarily from large-scale, institutional studies with traditional-age students, using conventional (albeit elaborated) models of student integration and attrition. As mentioned previously, there is a well-documented paucity of research into mature students' persistence, and even less that is based on qualitative approaches that include multidimensional constructs, holistic approaches, and contextual factors that matter to adult learners.

Instead of searching for stronger and more elaborated models for prediction, I believe that there is potential for broadening and deepening our understanding of the lived experiences of mature students. In this way, we will acquire the depth of information required for redesigning our institutional policies and practices to create post-secondary environments that can better support and sustain our adult learners. The results from my literature review confirmed the utility of using both qualitative and

quantitative methodologies to investigate the complex processes underlying mature students' persistence in post-secondary education. Based on this assessment, I conducted an age-aggregated analysis on the data collected from the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study as a complement to my qualitative study findings.

In deciding my research approach, I was particularly interested in discovering what aspects of mature students' first-year experiences had beneficial effects on their persistence. I wanted to examine the unique features of the university-college environment that facilitated and/or hindered mature students' persistence, as told through participants' own stories and experiences. I was drawn to social ecology and health promotion applied research for their holistic and contextualized approaches. On this basis, I selected an adult quality of life conceptual framework for studying mature students' persistence in a university-college setting. My argument for adopting an adult quality of life conceptual framework as an alternative approach, both conceptually and methodologically, was to permit a fine-grained analysis of the complex and multifaceted nature of mature students' lives. The focus on adult quality of life was attractive as it emphasized holistic levels of individual functioning and opportunities for enriching students' learning experiences, while also giving attention to the reciprocal and dynamic relationship between students and their campus communities. When quality of life is placed within the broader theoretical context of adult learning and student development, I believe that it offers a valid and useful framework for studying mature students' persistence that will lead to more effective adult student retention strategies. By pursuing this approach, I have endeavoured to contribute to the adult student retention literature, so

that mature students are no longer invisible, undervalued, and under-served in our post-secondary institutions.

Chapter 3.

Research Methodology

I used mixed methods for studying mature students' persistence, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative approaches into my research design. My primary emphasis was on conducting a phenomenological inquiry into those factors that contribute to adult learners' quality of life and retention in their first year of university-college life. I obtained a copy of the Adult Quality of Life Profile, developed by a multidisciplinary team of researchers at the Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto (Brown, Raphael, & Renwick, 2002). While it had been tested in a number of adult settings, the Adult Profile had not been applied to adult learners in post-secondary settings when I initiated my study. I did not administer the instrument directly; rather, I incorporated its key constructs and components into my data collection and interpretation protocols. The two dimensions of the Adult Profile, *Belonging* and *Becoming*, were considered particularly relevant to mature students in post-secondary settings. As outlined in the Adult Profile, it was also expected that a quality university-college environment would provide for a range of opportunities within the individual's potential, while also allowing for control and choice within that environment.

I also conducted secondary analyses on age-aggregated data from the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study of College Students and First Year Outcomes. The quantitative data

were intended to complement my phenomenological inquiry by outlining the broad dimensions and predictors of mature students' intent to persist/withdraw, as well as their educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. In this way, detailed findings from my in-depth interviews could be viewed in relation to the broad-based portrait resulting from the secondary analysis on the large college sample. Research methods and data analysis procedures are outlined separately for the qualitative and quantitative components of my research and are reported under the headings of Phenomenological Inquiry, Faculty Focus Group, and Pan-Canadian Survey.

Phenomenological Inquiry

The intent of my study was to create a detailed portrayal of mature students' educational experiences in their first year of university-college. Qualitative, naturalistic research methodologies were selected to explore those factors having important influences on mature students' quality of life and retention. I intentionally selected in-depth interviews to give voice to mature students' own insights and reflections to discern the meaning they attribute to their post-secondary studies. Phenomenological methods were a natural fit for revealing the complex realities and multifaceted nature of mature students' lives. This approach also gave me an opportunity to identify important connections between health and learning, as an integral component of my research was exploring how notions of quality of life offer a useful construct for deepening our understanding of mature students' educational experiences. I used an adult quality of life model to address the identified limitations in current student retention and attrition

research, and to formulate a conceptual framework that would provide a more complete portrayal of the contextual factors that influence mature students' educational commitment and persistence.

The theoretical grounding for conducting the current phenomenological study stemmed from my readings in philosophical phenomenology. From van Manen (1990), I developed an appreciation for the process that researchers of lived experience must undertake to understand and articulate the "epistemological or theoretical implications of doing phenomenology and hermeneutics" (p. 8). I accepted van Manen's (1990) claim that "a real understanding of phenomenology can only be accomplished by *actively doing it*" (p. 8) and that researchers must be attentive to the insights and "personal signature" (p. 76) that characterize the work of other researchers when developing a research approach that brings out their own strengths. This encouraged me to attend to the innovations of other researchers of lived experience, while also seeking an approach that would allow me to express my personal and professional insights, as well as my holistic, interdisciplinary perspective.

I pursued the philosophical aspects of the phenomenological approach to substantiate the relevance of phenomenology to my specific educational leadership research question and to decide which qualitative research methods to apply. According to Creswell (1998), in a phenomenological study, human experience is examined by obtaining detailed descriptions of the individuals being studied and by seeking to understand the experiences as they were lived; it is considered a philosophical paradigm as much as a research method (p. 54). In his review of the theory, practice, and evaluation

of the phenomenological method, Giorgi (1997) also asserts that phenomenology must be understood as a philosophical method “before its application to human scientific problems can be appreciated” (p. 238) giving attention to its distinctive features, precise terms, and methodological devices. He states that the phenomenological approach is “holistic” and “discovery-oriented” and that it offers a method for providing concrete and detailed descriptions that are “as faithful as possible” to the subject’s own experiences (p.244). Giorgi (1997) also emphasized that the method permits researchers to uncover “unexpected meanings” from the data, while also using their “special sensitivity” that stems from their unique disciplinary perspectives (245). This focus on extracting essences from the data, while also developing contextualized meaning based on disciplinary perspectives, resonated with me. However, it was Moustakas (1994), in his overview of the philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenological method, who convinced me that a phenomenological methodology was best suited for my mature students’ persistence study.

Moustakas (1994) positioned the importance of subjective experience by recounting Husserl’s beliefs about the “intentional nature of consciousness, the necessity of self-evidence,” and the “subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience” (p. 45). Husserl is acknowledged for being the originator of philosophical phenomenology, for establishing a “new way of looking at things [by returning] to things as they actually appear,” (p. 45) and for developing a rigorous science based on philosophy. He is also credited with introducing the concept of the “life-world,” or the realm of perceptual experience, whereby “essences are brought back into the world and enrich and clarify our

knowledge and experience of everyday situations, events, and relationships” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 48). Husserl’s phenomenology is described as transcendental by engaging a process of “reflective description,” with the inherent challenges of explicating the phenomenon for “its constituents and possible meanings” to arrive at an understanding of the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49).

In his summary of the core facets of phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) stated that phenomenology is concerned with “wholeness,” and “examining entities from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences of a phenomenon or experience is achieved” (p. 58). Moustakas (1994) clarified for me one of the basic tenets of phenomenology, whereby descriptions of experiences “keep a phenomenon alive, illuminate its presence, accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, and retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible” (p. 59). He further explained that to conduct a phenomenological study, the research question that guides the investigation must be constructed carefully and every method must be developed solely to illuminate the question, so that the phenomenon can be portrayed as “vital, rich, and layered in its textures and meanings” (p. 59). Moustakas provided me with the historical and philosophical foundation for pursuing a naturalistic inquiry, while also validating phenomenology as the best approach for exploring the holistic and multi-faceted nature of mature students’ lived experiences. Using a phenomenology methodology, I could adopt a holistic perspective toward creating a coherent vision of the phenomenon of mature students’ persistence.

Valle (1998), in his summary of the philosophical roots of phenomenology, introduced Husserl as the founder of phenomenology. He described how Husserl ushered in a new methodology by recognizing the “participation of the subject in the creation of meaning” (p. 8) and by explicating the meaning of phenomena based on intentional consciousness and reflection. According to Husserl, the phenomenological attitude begins with “*epoche*” (p. 5) and is defined as an attempt to put one’s past knowledge and assumptions aside or to “*bracket*” (p. 6) them, so that a phenomenon can be encountered precisely as it is intuited and experienced; in addition, “*phenomenological reduction*,” (p. 5) is described as the process of searching for meaning that involves reducing subjects’ expressions to “more precisely descriptive terms,” (p. 26) without violating their original formulations (Valle, 1998). Valle (1998) further delineated Husserl’s process of explicating the meaning of phenomena based on the assumption that “the data, that is, narrative descriptions, reveal their own thematic meaning-organization if we, as researchers, remain open to their guidance” (p. 29). Similarly, phenomenological methodology was described by van Manen (1990) as a systematic method for uncovering “internal meaning structures” using modes of questioning, reflecting, and focusing to grasp the essences of lived experiences and by using precise, descriptive language to show the “significance of the experience in a fuller or deeper manner” (p. 10). I selected a phenomenological methodology for my research study, given its potential for uncovering essential meaning structures from mature students’ narrative accounts and as a means to develop a deeper understanding of mature students’ educational experiences.

I reviewed the key features of empirical, heuristic, and hermeneutic phenomenological research to choose an appropriate methodology. Methodological distinctions centred on the role of the subject and the emphasis placed on description and interpretation. In empirical studies, general structural descriptions are constructed from the individual narratives and the subjects are said to “disappear in the process of interpretation and structural analysis” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19). Valle (1998) described how empirical phenomenology has a structural orientation that aims to disclose the essential meaning structure of a phenomenon. For qualitative phenomenological approaches, emphasis is placed on the “structure of meaning and how it is created” and explication is used to “bring out implicit meanings” in the life-text through systematic reflection (Valle, 1998, p. 22).

In contrast to empirical phenomenology, heuristic research focuses on the subjects as co-researchers and on the creation of composite depictions that use the individuals’ stories to achieve “layers of depth and meaning” through interactions between the primary researcher and the other research participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 19). According to Moustakas (1994), one of the defining features of a heuristic inquiry is that it begins with a question that holds “personal challenge and puzzlement” (p. 17) for the researcher and the question or problem posed is described as having both autobiographical and social significance. The heuristic researcher engages in an ongoing process of checking and judging the data to ensure that it is a valid depiction of the co-researchers’ experiences and the researcher verifies the meanings and essences distilled from the verbatim transcripts to validate the “comprehensiveness and accuracy” (p. 18) of

their assessments. In heuristic studies, the research participants are involved directly in the creation and examination of their individual narratives.

In their appraisal of heuristic research, de Witt and Ploeg (2006) described how the researcher is considered “inseparable from assumptions and preconceptions about the phenomenon of study” (p. 216). In addition, the “researcher’s preconceptions, biases and assumptions are clarified and become an integral part of the study findings” in interpretative phenomenology (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006, p. 222). Several aspects of the heuristic research process resonated with me during my initial reading. The origin of my research question stemmed from my personal knowledge as an adult learner, as well as my experiences as a reflective practitioner seeking to develop a better understanding of adult learners’ unique needs and challenges in a university-college environment. However, the driving force for my research was my puzzlement at the dearth of research available to capture the nature and meaning of mature students’ persistence from the perspective of the participants themselves.

The hermeneutic tradition of phenomenology departs from the purely descriptive nature of heuristic inquiry by interpreting participants’ narratives within broader historical and social contexts. Valle (1998) discussed how hermeneutical-phenomenology uses actual life-texts, such as interview transcripts, to engage a broader and more open-ended process for discerning meaning. He further explained how “questioning the meaning of an experience leads to the widening of the horizon of understanding, to a broadening of the context” (Valle, 1998, p. 56). Similarly, when examining the roots of interpretive phenomenology, van Manen (1990) described how hermeneutic

phenomenology is a “philosophy of the personal, the individual,” which we pursue against the background of an understanding of “the *whole*, the *communal*, or the *social*” (p. 7). Taylor (1977) extolled the benefits of hermeneutical science and its reliance on interpretation to “bring to light an underlying coherence or sense” (p. 3) in a text under study; he issued a call to go beyond the bounds of science based on verification to one which would study the meaning expressed by a subject as “constitutive of the social matrix in which the individuals find themselves and act” (p. 27). I was attracted to hermeneutics as an approach for exploring the individual and common meanings associated with mature students’ educational experiences that could be interpreted and understood within the broader context of their social reality.

In charting the history of interpretative phenomenology, Polkinghorne (1983) discussed how hermeneutics was principally informed by Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur and was based on their challenge of the basic assumptions underlying traditional, empiricist science. He cited Heidegger, when disputing Husserl’s notion of developing objective methods of understanding that were unaffected by “human desire and perspective,” stating that the task of hermeneutics is to explore how understanding has come about and that “true understanding is the result of human engagement” with the world (Polkinghorne, 1983, pp. 224). Gadamer is credited with extending the concepts of Heidegger by stating that “we cannot approach objects in a value-free, undistorted context,” (p. 225) and that the values, beliefs, and practices of the interpreter interact with the meaning of the text to create a “fusion of horizons” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 226). Polkinghorne (1983) identified Ricoeur as the most important contemporary writer who

maintained that hermeneutics was the appropriate methodology for the human sciences; Ricoeur proposed that the “researcher is like the reader of a text” (p. 234) seeking to understand its meaning. He cited Ricoeur’s belief that the text issues an appeal, or a “call,” to the observer and that the “call is answered by a reconstruction of the meaning, with the help of our categories of thought, and by fitting together the various pieces of evidence” to reconstruct intended meanings (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 229). Polkinghorne (1983) offered a convincing argument for using interpretive techniques to supplement the descriptive approaches when conducting a phenomenological inquiry. In Polkinghorne’s view, interpretive techniques penetrate the meaning of a text by allowing the researcher to decide among alternatives to attain a valid representation of human actions and expressions. Based on my review of phenomenological approaches, I have adopted a phenomenological-hermeneutical methodology for my study that is derivative of the interpretative phenomenology of Ricoeur. The interpretation of interview texts with the fitting together of evidence, like pieces in a puzzle, was considered the approach best suited for conducting an in-depth exploration of mature students’ educational commitment and persistence.

My phenomenological-hermeneutical research design was also informed by two phenomenological studies that integrated descriptive and interpretive approaches. Lindseth and Norberg (2004) used a phenomenological-hermeneutical method to investigate the ethical thinking of physicians and nurses in relation to regrettable conduct. They studied and revealed essential meaning through the interpretation of interview texts. However, they did not feel comfortable subscribing to “pure” phenomenology, based on

the intuitive discovery of essences, nor did they want to adopt “pure” hermeneutics, where interpretation does not transcend the text meaning to reveal essential traits of the life-world (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 147). For their interviews, participants were encouraged to tell their stories as freely as possible, with the interviewer interjecting only to encourage further narration or reflection. Context field notes were taken during the interview and the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Lindseth and Norberg (2004) applied three methodological steps for interpreting the texts, using Ricoeur’s interpretation theory to move through the hermeneutical circle, as follows: 1) *Naïve Reading* – the text was read several times in order to grasp its meaning (p. 149); 2) *Structural Analyses* – the whole text was divided into meaning units (sub-themes and main themes were condensed) and these were read and reflected upon against the naïve understanding; the process was repeated, until the naïve understanding was validated (p.150); 3) *Comprehensive Understanding* – the main themes and sub-themes were summarized and reflected upon in relation to the research question and the context of the study; critical reflection was used to “revise, widen and deepen our understanding of the text,” (p. 150) making associations with relevant literature, and the results were “formulated in everyday language,” (p. 151) rather than in abstract, scientific language.

The second study of interest, conducted by Samuels (2005), involved the social and academic experiences of adult undergraduates in a traditionally-oriented university. She used phenomenological research methods to examine the specific factors of family support, faculty support, institutional policies and services, and the classroom environment for their impact on supporting or impeding progress toward graduation.

Samuels (2005) reported the following emergent themes from her qualitative study: “participants exhibited a strong personal personal striving to achieve their aspirations; there were significant gender differences in the use of and expectations for faculty support; good advising and flexibility of the program were critical to attaining [a] bachelor’s degree; family support and sacrifice made the road easier to navigate, but for single parents with young children, this support was critical to persistence; social integration was not important for persistence and the classroom was the fulcrum of college activity for the older participants and; institutional support was not perceived to be crucial to persistence; however, there were identified barriers created by the institution that caused stress” (p. 59). Samuels (2005) used adult learning theory as the theoretical framework for her study, as well as applying a systems-level focus to study the influence of environmental factors in relation to life roles and supportive resources.

My theoretical grounding in the tradition of phenomenology evolved as I read original texts on philosophical phenomenology and naturalistic inquiry. In addition, I obtained several dissertations with similar phenomenological research approaches to benefit from the practical applications and insights of others. Through a process of review and reflection, I was able to develop a personal signature and integrate my own strengths into the phenomenological research methods. As a result, I used the phenomenological-hermeneutical interpretation methods, based on Ricoeur’s interpretation theory, and as applied by Lindseth and Norberg (2004). I adopted the three methodological steps for interpreting the text that were developed and tested by Lindseth and Norberg (2004), with the addition of phenomenological extraction-synthesis techniques designed to enhance

the process for discovering the structure and meaning of participants' lived experiences. Finally, to encourage free-flowing narration about mature students' educational experiences, I used broad-based, open-ended interview questions with a special sensitivity toward the perspectives of social ecology and health promotion.

While similar to Samuels' (2005) grounding in adult learning theory and systems thinking, my theoretical underpinning incorporated a more holistic conceptual framework that was founded on the core concepts and principles of social ecology and health promotion. I used the Adult Quality of Life Profile, developed by the Centre for Health Promotion (CHP), University of Toronto, as a heuristic for identifying issues related to the persistence of mature students in university-college environments. The CHP approach allowed me to expand the range of my inquiry by using an ecological perspective to explore adult quality of life issues that were pertinent to adults' perceived personal opportunities, immediate environmental impacts, and available community resources. In addition, my mixed-methods approach, with the inclusion of secondary analyses of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study data, provided me with a wide-angled lens for exploring individual, institutional, and external level variables considered relevant to mature students' educational commitment and persistence.

Procedures

Participant Selection

Purposive sampling techniques were used to identify participants who were 25 years or older and who were enrolled in their first year of general arts and science degree

programs at Malaspina University-College. Gender, age, and enrolment status criteria were used to obtain equal numbers of males and females, and to include representation from young (25-34 years), middle (35-44 years), and older age (45+ years) cohorts, as well as part-time and full-time students. My base for choosing an age-stratified sample was the student lists for entry-level, arts and science course clusters, as well as the current rosters of unclassified students. Course clusters are a supportive enrolment technique for creating a natural cohort of first year students. The clusters permit incoming students to register for three or more typical introductory courses that are conveniently timetabled together. Unclassified students are primarily those with undeclared programs of academic study. From Malaspina's enrolment management data, and as corroborated in the general retention literature, students in open programs with undeclared majors are considered more at-risk for attrition, or premature departure, than the general student population. While it was understood that results would not be generalizable, I was confident that the interviews would surface relevant themes and issues for informing our student retention policies and programs.

The total population of students aged 25 years and older, drawn from the course cluster and unclassified student lists, was 46. All students aged 25 years and older were emailed a notice of the intent of the study with an invitation to participate (see Appendix B). Letters of invitation were sent to these same individuals providing additional background details about the study (see Appendix C). Both letters and emails stated that follow-up telephone calls would be used to request their involvement. All participants were offered a \$25 bookstore voucher as an honorarium, with the added incentive of

having their names entered into a draw for a 1GB flash drive at the end of the study period. In addition to the sampling criteria used, the sole basis for inclusion in the study was that students were willing and able to share their in-depth stories of their first-year university-college experiences.

Of the 46 potential participants, I obtained a sample of 10 study participants within a 3-week period. Eight participants responded directly to my emails and letters of invitation. After receiving this main selection, I further refined my sample by calling selected participants from the combined lists to achieve a balance with respect to gender, and age cohort representation. In addition, I asked a colleague at our satellite campus to refer a First Nation student to the study. I also enlisted the help of another mature student to recruit a male science student in her introductory astronomy course. This snowballing technique successfully expanded and balanced the sample. In summary, there were eight students drawn from unclassified lists, two from the course cluster lists, and two from referrals. The age range of the 12 students comprising the study sample was 25-72 years, with six students in the 25- to 34-year cohort, one student in the 35- to 44-year cohort, and five students in the 45-year and older cohort. An even gender split was obtained (six males and six females) and there was one First Nation and one International student included in the study sample.

Interview Process

I developed an interview guide based on my literature review and generated from my own professional experiences working with mature students. One central research

question was created to obtain detailed descriptions of mature students' lived experiences in the words of the interview participants themselves. Two focus questions were also used for uncovering quality of life influences and to solicit suggestions for institutional improvements. Additional questions were included, as needed, for clarification, or to elicit concrete, specific situations or events. Pilot interviews were conducted with two first-year students, a 44-year-old male and a 65-year-old female, to practice the interview questions and to test approaches for creating an open, conversational climate. All participants were given the interview questions before their scheduled interviews to help them focus on the most meaningful aspects of their experiences and to facilitate reflection. I conducted semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with all individuals to record their personal narratives. Interviews averaged approximately two hours in duration. Students were encouraged to share their thoughts, perceptions, and feelings about being a mature student at Malaspina University-College. When quality of life factors were disclosed, additional questions were asked to place emphasis on *Belonging* and *Becoming* dimensions to describe students' connections with their university-college environment and their perceived range of possibilities, personal control, and choice. Throughout the interview, attempts were made to minimize the role of the interviewer and to facilitate the telling of participants' stories.

The University-College Ethics Review Committee approved my study in September 2006 and human ethics approval was received by the Office of Research Ethics, at Simon Fraser University. All study participants were interviewed during their first semester of studies from December 1 to December 19, 2006. At the beginning of

each interview, participants signed a consent form and were informed that their identity would remain confidential (Appendix D). Participants were also asked to create their own pseudonym for use during the recording and transcription phases of the research. This was an insightful and useful step, as it gave a distinctive quality to each interview and served as an effective warm-up exercise for engaging the storytelling process.

Participants met with me in a university-college meeting room on the main campus that was conducive to private discussions. Two participants elected to be interviewed at a satellite campus location for convenience. All agreed to have their individual discussions audiotaped and were willing to be contacted, after the initial meetings, to validate interview content and to share interpretive insights.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method I used for collecting and analyzing the narrative data. My personal experiences as a mature student and my previous education and professional background in health administration, health promotion, and student development prepared me for this role. Giorgi (1975) stated that one of the key aspects of phenomenology is a strict adherence to bracketing all past knowledge and assumptions before beginning the investigation. The actual meaning expressed by the subject is made more interpretable, if the researcher's biases and influences are more visible and where the researcher is "engaged and plays an active role in the constitution of the actual data" (Giorgi, 1975, pp. 95, 101). According to Giorgi (1997), one must "bracket past knowledge about a phenomenon, in order to encounter it

freshly and describe it precisely as it is intuited (or experienced) [by the subject]” (p. 237). When conducting personal interviews and facilitating the focus group, I was conscious of bracketing my own experiences to adopt the phenomenological attitude. This process enabled me to view mature students’ life stories in a more open, unbiased manner and from the viewpoint of adult learners themselves.

I personally recorded all interviews and the focus group discussion. The two research assistants I hired to create verbatim transcripts were mature students with social science and humanities backgrounds. For instrumentation, I used a portable *iAudio* recording device for creating Wav sound files for transcription. The Stop-Start transcribing system that I purchased, and had installed in the Faculty Computer Lab, was used by my two research assistants to transcribe all 12 interviews. The process of data collection and transcription was time-consuming; however, it enabled me to conduct my exploratory study without preconceived notions or a-priori hypotheses.

Data Analysis

The verbatim interview transcripts were used to explicate themes and to develop a structural text that included individual quotes and preliminary meaning units or ‘essences.’ When examining the transcripts, I remained attentive to the thematic elements and patterns that emerged. According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological themes are like “knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes” (p. 90). Using a similar analogy, I think of phenomenological themes as the interlocking pieces of the puzzle that provide

important connections among adults' various life experiences, and that facilitate a deeper understanding of the multi-dimensional, multi-textured, and multi-layered nature of mature students' lives. Thus, the essential themes that surfaced from the narrative descriptions were viewed as thematic junctures, or interlocking pieces, for discerning and portraying key aspects in the mature students' persistence puzzle.

I used a combination of interpretive techniques and procedural steps for analyzing the phenomenological data as outlined by Lindseth and Norberg (2004) and Samuels (2005). A series of data analysis steps were engaged to extract significant themes and sub-themes from the narrative texts. I created individual structural descriptions to capture the essence of mature students' experiences. As a final step, I developed a composite summary to combine essential meanings into one phenomenological account using the research questions to organize and report my findings. I conducted five rounds of qualitative data analysis and interpretation, as summarized in the following steps:

- Read through the individual, transcribed interview texts several times to gain a holistic sense of mature students' experiences;
- Isolate the pivotal experiences for each individual, from the narrative texts, using a concept map to capture clusters of meanings and broad themes;
- Create detailed structural descriptions to describe the nature and focus of each individual's experience, with particular attention to the themes, thoughts, and feelings expressed. An attempt was made to reflect on what participants were really saying about their specific experiences, and how these experiences were affecting their progress towards realizing their academic goals and aspirations;
- Review all structural descriptions to extract the significant themes and essences embedded in the personal accounts. Identify the most influential individual, institutional, and external factors impacting participants' quality of life and retention; and

- Create a composite summary as a synthesis of the main themes and “essential” meanings representing the entire group of participants. The summary of common and unique factors was used to depict the major influences on mature students’ perceived quality of life and retention in their first year of university-college life (selected quotes were included to portray the essential quality of these experiences). The composite summary represented the essential description, or the core of the persistence experience, and was the final stage of the qualitative analysis. The composite summary was also used as the basis for reviewing the qualitative study findings in the context of relevant themes and issues presented in the existing student retention and attrition literature.

Verification

Five criteria were adopted for assessing the rigour and goodness of my qualitative data, based on an integration of criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Richardson (2000). I used the following main strategies to establish these five criteria:

- *Credibility* – As a validity check, I emailed the structural texts to all participants and made follow-up telephone calls asking participants to validate the content and to share any additional interpretive insights and updates. Credibility was enhanced by returning to the participants, sharing the structural texts, and seeking their feedback on the comprehensiveness and accuracy of their individual accounts. All relevant feedback was incorporated.
- *Transferability* – To assist other researchers in making transferability judgments, I created a structural text for each participant that allowed me to reconstruct mature students’ stories in as holistic and lifelike a manner as possible. I also provided a detailed explanation of the context, so that someone interested in making a transfer judgment could reach a reasonable conclusion. In addition, I used purposive sampling to provide a wide range of information that could be used for deciding transferability.
- *Confirmability and Dependability* – To confirm if the study findings were grounded in the data, I established a research team to incorporate diverse perspectives. The research assistants I hired to transcribe the interviews were asked to share their insights and experiences, as mature students themselves. The recent graduate I hired to assist with secondary data screening and analyses, reviewed the preliminary

themes and issues arising from the in-depth interviews and contributed his assessment of their relationship to the quantitative data (secondary analyses also served as a form of methods triangulation). Finally, a faculty member in Malaspina's psychology department was enlisted to provide data analysis consultation and peer review in the initial stages of my research. I also maintained an audit trail as a dependability (reliability) check. I kept a research log for recording methodological, theoretical and personal notes. My methodological field notes focused on decisions related to data collection procedures and a critique of the interview process, whereas my theoretical field notes were used to record emerging concepts in the context of relevant research literature. I used my personal notes to capture reflexive insights, feelings, and concerns when documenting what happened.

- *Reflexivity* – I prepared a personal narrative to outline my personal and professional background as principal researcher and to put forward my own assumptions and biases toward adopting phenomenological-hermeneutical methods for researching mature students' persistence. I have attempted to disclose how my own experiences and biases were integrated into the research to clarify how they have influenced my research approaches and interpretations. In this way, I believe that I have provided sufficient information for enabling others to assess my point of view when reconstructing the accounts of my participants.
- *Impactfulness* – Throughout my writing process, I paid careful attention to expressing the narrative accounts of mature students' lived experiences using animated, evocative descriptions. My strategy was to use the language of the participants themselves to convey the significance of adult learners' experiences. I have also attempted to use creative, analytic practices for interpreting the interview texts.

Faculty Focus Group

To supplement the qualitative interview data, a small faculty focus group was held on June 20, 2007 to seek additional insights about creating a climate conducive to mature students' persistence. Four faculty members were drawn from introductory general arts and science cluster courses to participate in the focus group. The following questions were used to facilitate the focus group discussion: a) what aspects of our institution contribute to adult students' learning (and quality of life) and what aspects

hinder it? b) what are some examples of effective teaching and learning practices for mature students? and, c) how would you describe and evaluate the overall quality of the undergraduate experience at Malaspina for mature students? These were crafted as essential phenomenological questions and they were used to facilitate an open-ended discussion to surface salient faculty perceptions and experiences. Faculty signed a consent form informing them that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential (see Appendix E).

Pan-Canadian Survey

To complement the themes and issues that emerged from the in-depth interviews, I conducted secondary analyses on the data collected from the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study of College Students and First Year Outcomes. This large-scale study was conducted by the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, with funding from Human Resources and Social Development Canada, and represented over 150 institutional members. As a result of Malaspina's involvement in the Pan-Canadian Study, and through subsequent agreements with the Principal Researcher, Dr. Peter Dietsche, I gained access to this unique database (see Appendix F for the Letter of Permission).

The model for the quantitative study is based on an integration of student departure theories and interactionist concepts of academic and social integration originated by Tinto (1988, 1998), elaborated to include the concept of intention by Pascarella, & Chapman (1983), and with an emphasis on key external factors studied in the non-traditional student attrition research conducted by Bean and Metzner (1985). And

in keeping with repeated calls for further research using multidimensional concepts applied to subgroups of the non-traditional student population (Andres, 2004; Andres, Andruske & Hawkey, 1996; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Grayson & Grayson, 2003), I used a multivariate research design that placed emphasis on those institutional and external factors believed to influence mature students' persistence decisions. This research represents the first age-aggregated analysis of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study that will expand our understanding of mature students' persistence in university-college and community college settings.

Survey Instruments

All member colleges of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges were asked to encourage their first-year students to complete the two separate, web-based questionnaires administered between August 29, 2005 (Entry Survey—beginning of first term) and December 9, 2005 (Exit Survey—end of first term). In addition to student characteristics, the surveys collected information about students' experiences in terms of their attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, and college interactions and the possible interaction effects that promote learning and persistence in the first year (Dietsche, 2006). See Appendix G for the Entry and Exit Surveys of the Pan-Canadian Study of Canadian College Student Characteristics and Experiences.

Data Preparation and Analysis

Based on theories of non-traditional student retention and attrition, I identified important variables for inclusion in my study pertaining to students' intentions to persist

or withdraw, their educational goals, and their academic and social experiences. I generated a regression model that included selected background variables (educational goals and perceived relevance, advantages), institutional conditions (faculty and student interactions), and external circumstances (financial concerns). Attention was placed on students' academic and social interactions—the perceived quality of students' contact with faculty and other students—with expected effects on satisfaction ratings, educational commitment, and intent to leave or continue studies. Interactions with faculty were expected to have more substantive impacts than peer interactions, based on previous non-traditional student retention research. In addition, emphasis was placed on financial concerns, as the one external factor typically associated with adults' family and work-life commitments. This factor was anticipated to influence intent to leave or continue studies, educational commitment, and satisfaction with institutional support resources. I included the following list of selected dependent and independent variables in my analysis:

Selected Dependent Variables/Constructs

- Intent to Change/Transfer Program (DV 1)
- Intent to Leave/Continue Studies (DV 2)
- Educational Commitment (DV 3)
- Confidence (DV 4)
- Satisfaction with Faculty Relationships (DV 5)
- Satisfaction with Student Participation (DV 6)
- Satisfaction with Institutional Support Resources (DV 7)

Selected Independent Variables/Constructs

- Financial Concerns/Financing College (IV 1)
- Peer Interaction/Friendships (IV 2)

- Faculty Interaction/Relationships (IV 3)
- Goal-Orientation (IV 4)
- Perceived Relevance of Studies (IV 5)
- Perceived Advantages of College Education (IV 6)

Using SPSS software, version 14, I generated simple descriptive summaries and a correlation matrix for the selected dependent and independent variables. All relevant questionnaire items from the Pan-Canadian Study pertaining to the seven dependent and six independent variables of interest were entered into the correlation matrix (ranging from three to 15 items). The output of the correlation matrix was used to determine if there were substantial correlations within each variable list to permit the use of data simplification and reduction techniques. See Appendix H for a sample correlation matrix for items comprising the independent variable, Faculty Interaction/Relationships (IV 3).

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was selected as the data reduction technique to simplify the data subset, as a preliminary step for conducting multiple regression analyses. The rationale for use of the PCA method is to reduce the complexity of the data by decreasing the number of variables that are considered; the first few derived variables—the principal components—account for the largest proportion of the total variance to provide a convenient summary of the data and to simplify subsequent analyses (Landau & Everitt, 2004). The central idea of PCA is to transform the data to a new set of ordered variables, so that the first few retain most of the variation present in all of the original variables (Jolliffe, 2002). The statistical texts that I consulted suggested that the criteria for deciding how many principal components to be retained are relative

and pragmatic, with percentage cut-offs chosen that are large enough (typically correlations of .30 and above) to give an adequate representation of the data (Joliffe, 2002; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The most common method of variable rotation—varimax—is recommended for use after variable extraction to maximize high correlations and minimize low ones for ease of interpretation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

I performed my principal component analysis for the selected subset of dependent and independent variables using SPSS software, version 14 and varimax rotation to compute the percentages of total variance explained. I adopted the criterion of selecting the one principal component for each variable that explained the greatest proportion of the total variance (between 50-70%) and that appeared to have construct validity. Using this criterion, the extracted factors were chosen that were considered useful and meaningful for further analysis. The selected factors were each labelled, based on relevant concepts in the student retention research. An example of the PCA component extraction method used for data reduction is included for one independent variable. See Appendix I for a sample principal component extraction with the component loadings, communalities (h^2), and percent of variance related to Faculty Interaction/Relationships (IV 3). In this example, one component (labelled *Faculty Interaction*) emerged from the analysis and accounted for 52.1 percent of the total variance. Principal component analysis was performed on the data to reduce the number of interrelated variables down to a smaller number of components for analysis. The new set of transformed variables was used to conduct my comparative analysis and to run standard multiple regression analyses on the age-aggregated dataset.

For the purposes of my quantitative analyses, I used only matched data files for students who completed both the Entry and Exit questionnaires. This provided a consistent dataset with the most comprehensive range of variables available for analysis. It also ensured the inclusion of the college experiences and attitudinal variables of interest that were incorporated in the second survey. In preparation for multivariate procedures, the data were cleaned to reduce skewness and outliers, as well as to remove those cases where a substantial portion of the item responses were missing and were considered critical for the analysis. Cases were removed if over two thirds of the Exit questionnaire items were missing. The main intent of the study was to disaggregate the data by age; therefore, a review of the deleted cases was conducted to rule out age-related patterns in the missing values. While this method of deleting cases represented a substantial loss of data, it was considered the most prudent method for ensuring that there was a complete set of variables available for performing the multivariate procedures, while retaining a large sample. As a result, data cleaning reduced the total dataset to 6009 merged student files from the 65 participating institutions. The age cohort breakdown for this merged dataset was: 4818 (80%) under 25 years; 834 (14%) 25-34 years; and 357 (6%) 35 years and older. When conducting the secondary data analysis for my study, I focused exclusively on the age-aggregated, merged dataset for mature students, that is, the 1191 students aged 25 years and older who completed both Entry and Exit surveys of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study.

I computed descriptive statistics for the age-aggregated dataset to describe the nature of first-year experiences for mature students, using the subset of selected

dependent and independent variables. I ran χ^2 statistical tests to compare traditional and mature students against selected dependent variables, including measures of: persistence (intent to change programs, and quit studies before completion); educational commitment (rating of determination to finish education); confidence (rating of ability to succeed); and satisfaction (in relation to faculty relationships, teaching methods, and institutional support resources). The specific experiences of mature students were compared against younger age groups (under 25 years) to identify statistically significant differences.

As a final step, I ran standard multiple regression analyses on the age-aggregated data of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study dataset to examine the relationships among individual, institutional, and external variables on levels of mature students' intent to persist or withdraw, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. The fundamental assumptions were met for using multiple standard regression, with no adjustments made to the data. Variables were measured on an interval scale and were based on independent observations. The relationship between the independent and dependent variables was presumed linear based on previous research. Concerns about the normal distribution of variables were addressed by data cleaning and data reduction procedures and the central limit theorem, which protects against failures of normality with large sample sizes (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The regression model used was confirmed with the Principal Researcher for the Pan-Canadian Study, Dr. Peter Dietsche. Combined results from the qualitative and quantitative data analyses were used to develop practical guidelines for enhancing student retention policies and practices in

university-college and college settings, with the aim of improving the quality of our institutional environments for mature students.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study, including those that emerged as the research progressed, are products of the sampling and variable selection techniques employed. The aim of the data collection for the phenomenological inquiry was to broaden and deepen our understanding of mature students' post-secondary experiences from the perspective of the students themselves. While the results were never intended to be generalizable, I gave careful attention to the verification of my qualitative data by applying the five criteria outlined for assessing rigour and goodness. I used purposive sampling techniques and provided detailed explanations of background information to address transferability concerns. There is always the danger that I did not describe contextual factors in enough detail to permit other researchers to make informed transfer judgments. In addition, transfer may be affected by my representation of important aspects of the mature student demographic at Malaspina University-College. Two thirds of my sample was unclassified students reflecting our institutional concern that students with undecided majors or non-specific educational goals are more at risk for early departure. In addition to the equal gender split, half of my interview sample was in the younger cohort (25-34 years), with the remainder shared between middle and oldest cohorts. One First Nation participant and one international student were interviewed reflecting their 10% representation in our overall study body. While covering a broad range of mature students at our University-

College, my sample may create an atypical profile that will limit the transfer of data collection techniques and practical applications to other institutions.

With respect to reflexivity, the disclosure of my institutional role as Student Services Coordinator may not have been sufficient to assess any possible influences on participant responses. In addition, the disclosure of my own experiences and biases as principal researcher may not have been sufficient to describe how they influenced my research approaches and interpretations. I was determined to remain as open and objective as possible during the interview process and when extracting significant themes and sub-themes from the narrative texts. However, at one point in the individual interviews, I realized that I was so intent on defining quality of life for theoretical and consistency reasons that I may have led the participants in directions that were more reflective of my research concerns and less responsive to their actual experiences. After the first two interviews, I relaxed my stance and focused on eliciting salient aspects of students' quality of life. This shift in emphasis encouraged additional personal reflection and yielded more valuable information.

The first year of post-secondary studies is a crucial timeframe for student attrition and hence for targeting intervention efforts. Thus, I intentionally conducted my interviews during the twelfth week of term to document students' first-semester experiences at University-College. Likewise, the first and second waves of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study data were collected before the end of the students' first semester. In both instances, this may have been too early to obtain accurate information about students' decisions to complete their programs of study. Students may not have had an

opportunity to access institutional resources nor to approach faculty members for assistance and support. While it was clear during my follow-up calls that all students had re-enrolled in their second semester, a study that tracked these same students over time would provide a more valid portrayal of mature students' persistence. The limitations of predicting end-of-course outcomes from early indicators of students' intentions and behaviours would be avoided in a longitudinal study.

The nature of the sampling and data collection for the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study raised several concerns. The web-based survey format may have discouraged from participating those mature students who prefer filling out paper copies. In addition, the reward effect might have enticed otherwise indifferent students to participate and may have encouraged some participants to misrepresent their answers or to submit incomplete responses simply to qualify for the incentive prize. There were large amounts of missing data from the Exit Survey—the questionnaire that housed the most relevant response variables for the regressions—that may be attributable to this reward effect for participation. While there appeared to be no age-related pattern to the missing data and it still permitted a large sample for secondary data analysis, the missing data may have excised valuable information from the merged dataset. Because final grade point averages were not uniformly available, nor consistently measured, I dropped this dependent variable from my analysis. Consequently, pertinent outcome information was lost. And finally, I was prepared to use the age-aggregated dataset to conduct a comparative analysis of institutions within Western Canada; however, only 20% of the sample were drawn from Western provinces and territories (British Columbia/Yukon, Alberta,

Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northwest Territories/Nunavut), with 60% of the respondents from colleges in Central Canada (Ontario and Quebec) and 20% from the Atlantic provinces. Given the reduced number of mature students in the geographic region of interest, there were not enough cases in each cell for meaningful analysis.

Due to the large number of items comprising both dependent and independent variables of interest, it was necessary to adopt a strategy for reducing and simplifying the data in preparation for multivariate analysis. I decided not to create composite variables by pooling responses to several different items, to avoid artificially inflating the correlations. However, I did elect to isolate those dependent and independent variables that were strongly intercorrelated to create a subscale of variables for conducting Principal Component Analysis (PCA). I used this technique to reduce the large number of variables to a smaller number of factors for conducting multiple regression analysis. The first factor, or principal component, that accounted for the greatest proportion of the variation in the original data was used for subsequent multiple regression analysis. The one risk to this procedure is that some low-variance components may have had predictive value with the result that some valuable information may have been discarded. However, I used practical knowledge to select principal components that had clear meaning and PCA percentages that were large enough to give an adequate representation of the data. In addition, results from the survey sample were also used to complement the qualitative data, not for making inferences about the underlying population.

Chapter 4.

Qualitative Results

As the intent of my study was to broaden and deepen our understanding of mature students' educational commitment and persistence, I conducted a phenomenological inquiry with 12, first-year undergraduate students aged 25-72 years at Malaspina University-College. Purposive sampling techniques resulted in a participant sample that was reflective of the diverse range of adult learners on campus. The original data were collected during a 3-week period in the students' first semester (Fall 2006), using a semi-structured individual interview protocol. Follow-up emails and telephone conversations were completed over a 4-week period in the students' second semester (Spring 2007) to validate the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the individual written narratives, and to elicit additional information about students' academic progress (see Appendix J for the participant follow-up questions).

Participants

The demographic profile of the interview sample is shown in Appendix K. The sample included equal numbers of women and men with six, one, and five participants falling into the 25-34, 35-44, and 45+ age ranges, respectively. Two thirds of the sample were enrolled in full-time studies, and most students were pursuing a Bachelor of Arts or

Education Degree Program. Equal numbers of students reported that their highest education achieved was at the high school/equivalent, certificate/diploma, and undergraduate degree levels, with the time elapsed since their last formal education averaging 15 years. A descriptive profile of the interview participants follows. Self-ascribed pseudonyms were used to protect their confidentiality.

Antonio

Antonio is 47-years-old, married with two school-aged children, and has over 25 years experience as a faller in the forestry industry. Twelve years ago, he sustained serious shoulder and neck injuries from a tree fall. Since his accident, he has been battling the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) to obtain retraining support for alternative work that will accommodate his physical restrictions and replace his earning power. While awaiting his WCB claim, he is currently completing a mix of Grade 12 upgrading courses and academic science classes at Malaspina to acquire the necessary pre-requisites for acceptance into BCIT's Nuclear Medicine Technology Diploma Program. Antonio is pursuing these courses independently, because he is determined to realize his long-term goal of becoming an MRI technician. He is committed to using his "brain instead of his brawn" to support his family and make a meaningful contribution to society. He has faced a series of bureaucratic obstacles, financial challenges, and family health concerns that have threatened to deter him from his education and career path. While it has been disheartening, and at times devastating for him to experience these setbacks, Antonio is firmly resolved to persevere with his plan.

Bunny

Bunny is 70-years-old and describes herself as having a “Bachelors Degree in the World” from her years of travel and work experience abroad. She has reached a stage in her life, with a supportive second husband, where she can devote time to her academic language courses. She is currently taking a 2nd-year Spanish class and plans to continue pursuing upper level courses, pending their availability. Throughout her life, Bunny experienced an arduous and deferred education path, that included: involuntary grammar school dismissal in England, with no encouragement from her family; a history of working as a laboratory assistant and manager to provide for herself and her husband in Canada, while receiving employer support to acquire university credits; graduating from McGill University with a Bachelor of Science Degree, as a divorced, 39-year-old; building a career as a chemist in the nuclear and waste management industries, prior to teaching chemistry at a community college; retiring and moving to Ladysmith, and finally being able to take university-level courses of interest for a nominal cost and at a relaxed pace.

Cara

Cara is a 43-year-old, single parent with a 16-year-old son who is currently taking Malaspina courses at North Island College. This semester, she is taking four courses with a mix of classroom-based and correspondence classes. She has also recently completed a supplementary course to become certified as a holistic nutritionist. It will be necessary for her to take third and fourth year electives at Malaspina’s Nanaimo campus in September,

2008, to complete her Degree. Cara has also worked as a lunch hour supervisor for the past six years in her son's old elementary school. Cara is passionate about securing a health and wellness position in the Comox School District to teach elementary school teachers how to incorporate health and nutrition content into their curriculum. She is working towards her Bachelor of Education Degree to prepare her for a School District Resource position. Cara demonstrates a high level of motivation, determination, and clarity in the pursuit of her career goal.

Chloe

Chloe is a 25-year-old, recently married "Prairie Girl" who moved from Calgary to attend Malaspina University-College in August 2006. Her previous post-secondary and teaching experiences were helpful to her as a student returning to post-secondary education. Chloe completed a year of Business at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) and then transferred to the University of Saskatchewan to embark on a year of arts and science study. This transfer year was a negative experience, resulting in Chloe discontinuing her studies and taking a year off to teach English in Japan. She eventually returned to SIAST to complete her Paramedics Certificate. Her work experience includes a one-year paramedic assignment and a series of progressive positions with a large insurance company based in Calgary.

Elmar

Elmar is a 72-year-old writer who is enjoying having a "first opportunity" to focus on his writing process in a structured academic setting. He has written fiction and

journalistic pieces for most of his adult life. With the support of his second wife, Elmar made a spontaneous decision to enrol in university-college courses to earn a second Bachelor of Arts Degree in Creative Writing. It has been 32 years since he completed his first undergraduate degree in political science from the University of Waterloo. Elmar retired after working for 27 years with a varied employment history, including flight instructor, municipal property tax assessor, word processing operator, and taxi and bus driver. Currently, he is a volunteer tutor with a student at the Cowichan campus, and he helps another senior citizen with her computer. This semester, he is taking one creative writing course at the Cowichan campus and is enjoying the discipline of having to produce a writing project every two weeks for class critique. Elmar is making the most of his tuition-free courses, as a senior, and is looking forward to continuing his studies on a part-time basis, as close to his Mill Bay home as possible.

Krystahl

Krystahl is a 34-year-old, recently separated, single parent of two young children. After her marital break-up, she moved from the Mainland to live with her parents in Nanaimo. Her parents' support made it possible for her to enrol in the pre-requisite courses she needs to apply for the Dental Hygiene Program at Malaspina University-College. This is the first opportunity she has had to take university-college level courses, since graduating from high school 16 years ago. She has worked both full- and part-time in entry-level accounting jobs, while raising her family and supporting her husband

through university. Krystahl is highly motivated to obtain an education that will enhance her career-prospects, thus enabling her to support herself and her young family.

Louis

Louis is a 31-year-old, married marine biology consultant who is completing the credits he needs to transfer into the UBC Engineering Program. He has significant post-secondary experience, having obtained two degrees (Bachelor and Master of Science) by completing courses at three universities and one community college. He is focused on acquiring the education and industry experience he needs to eventually take over his father's electrical contracting company in Vancouver. Louis made a conscious career and lifestyle choice to exchange his successful consulting practice for work in a more sustainable industry. He has ambitions to "make or break it" in the engineering field before starting a family and buying a house on the Mainland. He chose Malaspina with the intent of boosting his GPA, while also allowing him to consult part-time and live in an affordable community.

Lucy

Lucy is 30 years old and has recently moved from Edmonton with her husband to enrol in courses that will strengthen her graduate school application. She completed her Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of Alberta in 2000, and worked as a landscape surveyor before teaching English in Taiwan for five years. She chose Malaspina because it was a small university-college close to home and she was offered early acceptance. She had also heard about the strong reputation of the Geography Program, with professors

who are well connected to the field. She is highly motivated to do well this semester to improve her chances of gaining entrance into graduate school. When she returned from Taiwan and witnessed Edmonton's "urban sprawl," she made a pivotal decision to pursue a career in urban planning and design. Lucy is thoroughly enjoying her courses and finds that she is getting more out of her studies than she did from her first undergraduate degree.

Randy

Randy, a 56-year-old First Nation student, is divorced and has sole custody of his nine-year-old granddaughter. He quit school when he was 13-years-old to pursue work as a logger, commercial fisher, and pipeline worker. Throughout his many years of physical labour, he suffered several back injuries until he was placed on Workers' Compensation in 2002. He was denied long-term disability and was mandated to complete a series of training courses to maintain his benefits. Randy credits his drug and alcohol counselling training for giving him insight into the root causes of his own anger problems, for helping him deal with the tragic deaths of his daughter and siblings, and for providing him with the confidence to realize his education goal. He is completing pre-requisite courses to gain entrance into the Social Services Diploma Program in September, 2007. Randy is highly motivated to complete his Diploma Program to give his granddaughter a stable upbringing and to serve as a positive role model.

Ross

Ross is a 26-year-old, single international student from China, who is completing the required ESL courses to gain entrance into Malaspina's MBA Program. He selected the University-College based on its good reputation, its relaxed entrance requirements, and the chance to practice his language skills in a small, predominantly English-speaking community. The fact that he can obtain two concurrent graduate degrees in business administration and management science was also attractive to him. He is taking three ESL classes, as well as an introductory anthropology course. His previous education includes an advanced diploma from China and one-year of study at a private college in Vancouver. Ross is focused on completing the MBA Program and learning about North American culture, with the ultimate goal of starting his own international trading company.

Wayne

Wayne is 28 years old, single, working full-time in sales for a training company, while also teaching music part-time. He completed a Diploma in Music, straight out of high school, with course credits obtained from the University of Victoria and a university in Amsterdam. He is focused on obtaining the "piece of paper" that a Bachelor Degree offers to enhance his employment prospects. His experiences at Malaspina University-College have been mixed with respect to course delivery and quality instruction. He is taking three classroom-based courses and one online offering this semester, and is dissatisfied with two of these choices. Wayne feels strongly that his academic

performance is dependent on quality teaching, specifically described as interactive and challenging, and consisting of enjoyable classes taught by knowledgeable and passionate professors.

Zoe

Zoe is a 53-year-old fiction writer, who is currently taking a creative writing course at Malaspina's Cowichan Campus. Although acquiring an Arts Degree is not her primary focus, she plans to continue taking writing courses that may eventually "build into a degree bundle." At present, her main goal is to focus on the craft of writing toward the ultimate aim of becoming a published novelist. When the Port Alice Mill closed, Zoe moved with her husband to Duncan. Zoe's gradual re-entry into post-secondary studies has been dependent on both location and timing. She has taken upgrading courses in Port Alice, non-credit courses at Camosun College, ongoing writing workshops in the community, and credit-based writing courses at Malaspina's Cowichan campus. As Zoe's family commitments are her first priority, she enrolls in courses only when she has a "block of time at home." She frequently travels to provide support for her 80-year-old mother, childcare relief for her daughter and son, and summer vacation care for her grandchildren.

Emergent Themes and Essential Meanings

Phenomenological hermeneutical-based approaches were used for interpreting and explicating the data from the in-depth interviews. Using the verbatim interview

transcripts, I applied the analytic process, outlined in the previous section, to develop structural descriptions for each participant. The detailed structural descriptions depicting the experiences, aspirations, issues, and challenges for all 12 participants are included in Appendix L.

A second round of data reduction enabled me to use the analytic cycle of the hermeneutic process to extract the significant themes and essences embedded in the structural descriptions. A summary of the major individual factors influencing participants' quality of life and retention in the university-college setting is reported in Appendix M. In total, 46 significant emergent themes were extracted from the 12 structural descriptions. These were itemized as 11 Individual Factors, 14 Quality of Life Indicators, 12 Facilitators/Opportunities, and nine Barriers/Obstacles. Listed first are the individual factors that contributed to participants' educational experiences. Using the core components of the Adult Quality of Life Profile to organize and present the data, the individual factors are reported under the sub-headings, *Being*, *Belonging*, and *Becoming*, with an emphasis on participants' ability to enjoy important life possibilities, exercise a range of choices, and exert control over their environment. Finally, a summary is included of the institutional and external factors that were perceived as facilitators/opportunities, and barriers/obstacles to mature students' persistence (see Appendix N).

Composite Description

As a final round of data analysis, a composite summary was developed to provide an additional descriptive dimension to the qualitative inquiry. This level of analysis provided a synthesis of the main themes and essential meanings representing the group of participants as a whole. The composite method enabled me to identify the common and unique factors across all participants' stories that contributed to mature students' persistence, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. It was a challenge for me to express how powerful and evocative the interviews were in their entirety; however, I have included only those quotes that best exemplify the themes disclosed. In this way, I have attempted to convey a vivid sense of what is important to mature students and to highlight the impact of individual, institutional, and external factors on students' self-assessed quality of life and retention in a university-college setting.

Eight main themes were identified from the final data analysis process to complete the composite summary. These themes included: a) major life transitions; b) multifaceted educational goals; c) awareness of personal assets; d) relationships with professors; e) peer relationships; f) life-role conflicts; g) supportive institutional infrastructure; and h) experiential learning opportunities. Sub-themes were subsumed under the eight thematic elements and were illuminated by selected accounts of the 12 participants' stories. I used the three core components of the Adult Quality of Life Profile—*Being*, *Belonging*, and *Becoming*—to form the basic framework for synthesizing and presenting the eight main themes and their essential meanings. The core components provided a valuable guide for delineating the most influential individual factors that

define the basic aspects of who students are (*Being*), the institutional factors that describe students' connections with their environment (*Belonging*), and the institutional and external factors that contribute to students' ability to realize their goals and aspirations (*Becoming*).

Being

Theme 1. Re-entry Decisions Were Triggered by Major Life Transitions and a Life-Centred Approach to Education

If I had to choose one descriptive phrase to capture participants' reactions to events leading up to their decisions to enrol in university-college, it would be 'firm resolve and focus through significant life changes.' This thematic aspect emerged naturally in the beginning stages of the interview process when participants were describing how they had applied to Malaspina University-College. Many participants related stories of critical junctures in their lives that 'triggered' the educational decision-making process. In most instances, these decisions were due to unanticipated and involuntary personal situations that ushered in other life changes. Personal reflection, careful pre-planning, and pursuit of clear educational goals characterized the decision-making process for most participants.

For example, Krystal, a 34-year-old single parent, moved to Nanaimo from the Mainland with her two young children to live with her parents after her marital break-up. She described how this was her first opportunity to take university-level courses since graduating from high school 16 years prior. Without her parents' instrumental support with childcare, housing, and tuition assistance, Krystahl believed that she would not have

been able to enter university-college to upgrade her entry-level job skills and to prepare herself for more meaningful and secure employment. For Krystahl, the decision to return to school came with the stark realization that she would otherwise not be able to support herself and her children. She described how her recent separation forced her hand and compelled her to enrol in university-college.

Well, I recently got separated from my husband. So, I didn't have the skills to have a decent job to support myself and my children. And I put my husband through university and I just never went after high school. I never took any post-secondary education, or anything. And I realized if I was going to be able to support us - because I didn't think I would get child support from my husband - that I would need to be able to get a better job and I wanted to go back to school, but I didn't really see how I could afford to, or how it would be possible. And my parents offered that I could come and stay with them, with the kids as well, and they would help me pay for everything, so I could go to school.

Krystahl was highly motivated to obtain an education to enhance her career-prospects, thus enabling her to support herself and her young family. In her first semester, she enrolled in three courses as a strategy to manage her workload and to give her time to help her children integrate into their new school and community. Krystahl's adjustment process was facilitated by family support, careful planning, and judicious use of university-college support resources. Krystahl is completing the pre-requisite courses she needs to fulfill her career goal of becoming a dental hygienist. In addition to providing for her family, she knows that her children will benefit from her educational role-modeling. Krystahl believes that having a "real goal" is not only a compelling reason for returning to school, but also a major motivator for persisting.

Randy offered a different example of how multiple losses and occupational setbacks compelled him to return to school to complete his education. Randy is a 56-year-old, divorced First Nation student who secured sole custody of his nine-year-old granddaughter after the tragic death of his daughter. He also suffered severe back injuries from his long years of physical labour as a logger, commercial fisher, and pipeline worker. When he was required to complete a series of retraining courses to maintain his disability benefits, he made a life-changing decision to embrace education. He poignantly described what motivated him to attend university-college.

Well, when I lost my daughter—it killed me, and that little girl was there for me. So, my marriage broke up and the little girl and I started to lean on each other, and this is part of the counselling. I was there for her and she was there for me. And that's the way we still are today. And for a little nine year old girl, it killed me to see what she had to go through and she didn't even know - and she's the one that made me stronger. And then a lot of days, I looked and I thought, if this little girl can do this, then I can move on, and do things too. And, I remember, for three months, I held her in my arms while she cried herself to sleep looking for her Mom. And then my Ex, we split up shortly after that—then, she cried for her Gramma and her Gramma wasn't there. So, I had to hold her again. And when it was over, we were both stronger and we both moved on...I think this stability that we gave each other, started me on this process. All I wanted was the Drug Alcohol Certificate to start with, and then I seen diplomas and degrees. And then I thought, well, I've gone so many months - what's the big deal of going another two or three yards. And then the financial deal was, sort of like, I'll be getting paid to go to school and through Cowichan Tribes, so between those two, my granddaughter and I can survive comfortably—and that was the final piece of the puzzle. And I'm going for my Social Service Diploma, which is a four-year course. And the Drug Alcohol (Certificate) gets one year taken off, so I have to put in three.

Randy's main motivation for completing his education was to secure a more promising future for his 9-year-old granddaughter. When he was entrusted with his granddaughter's upbringing, he made a positive decision to go back to school. He is

completing his upgrading and pre-requisite courses to gain entrance into the Social Services Diploma Program to prepare him for a career helping other First Nation children and youth. He was aware that his educational goal was also an important role modeling opportunity for his grandchild. Randy holds his granddaughter responsible for starting him on his learning pathway and for helping him to remain focused on his long-term goal, when faced with the daily stresses of negotiating the education “system.”

Antonio decided to enrol in university-college after sustaining a serious shoulder and neck injury from a logging accident, and while he was awaiting his retraining decision from the Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB). He is 47 years old and married with two school-aged children. He described how he has been battling WCB for the past 12 years to obtain retraining support for pursuing alternative work that will accommodate his physical restrictions and replace his earning power. Antonio’s story is one of dogged determination, supportive family backing, and ongoing self-advocacy.

Well, being injured in 1995, and here it is now, what, just about 12 years later...you know, and I’m not getting any younger. Uhm, getting back into school I have the support of my family—particularly, my mother-in-law. She, you know, back in March of this year I came out of camp and I was crippled. I . . .it was all I could do to walk, and they did an intervention on me. They said you can no longer go back to work doing what you’re doing. You have to get on your program of going back to school. If it’s a matter of finances, we’ll help you out whenever we can (she said)...(Going back to school),. . .it was a decision that wasn’t made overnight. It was something that I worked on...I mean, I was injured in a logging accident in 1995, and in 2002 WCB was to come up with a plan to retrain me into a job that met my physical restrictions due to my injury, and plus the income had to be there. And I had an MRI done in January 2002, and I was talking to the MRI technician about the big demand (for technicians) so I looked into it. So, with that in mind, I came up with the plan to become an MRI technician and I was supported by WCB at the time, and I began upgrading at North Island College in April of 2002...The only thing I need

out of Malaspina is my grade 12 courses. Even though I've had the background of University, BCIT, or SAIT, or any post-secondary education requires that my academic records have to be within the last five years. So, I have to come back and redo my grade 12.

Antonio was highly motivated to re-train himself as a medical diagnostic technician. He enrolled at Malaspina to acquire his Grade 12 upgrading courses and the academic science classes he needs for acceptance into BCIT's Nuclear Medicine Technology Diploma Program. He planned to pursue his education plan independently until WCB settled his claim and came up with a reasonable alternative for retraining. Antonio talked about putting his "blood, sweat, and tears" into his upgrading program and academic courses, because he is committed to his education goal. He referred to the fact that he applied himself to his studies because he was ready for the challenge and he was "prepared to make a change at this stage of his life." Antonio also spoke, with emotion, about his education enabling him to provide for his family and safeguard their financial security.

I have to provide for my family. It's part of me, and I'm trying my best to become a productive member of society again, and you know, I mean, I'm clawing my way out of the hole I'm in...

While most of the stories revolved around pursuing education in response to stressful life events and unfortunate circumstances, this was not the case for all participants. Chloe's decision to return to school stemmed from her abrupt realization that it was "now or never." Chloe is a 25-year-old recently married student who had completed a number of post-secondary courses in arts, science, and business areas. She was fully engaged in her work as an insurance agent, with the prospect of accepting the

“golden handcuffs” from her employer, when she decided to return to school. Chloe decided to act on her long-standing interest in the teaching profession, fuelled by her recent positive experiences teaching English in Japan, to complete a combined Bachelor of Arts/Education Degree at Malaspina. She was convinced that she could manage the transition from full-time work to full-time school, having changed jobs, gotten married, bought and sold a house, and moved to Nanaimo from Calgary, all within a 2-year period. She related the series of events leading up to her decision to return to school with her clear goal of becoming a teacher.

I moved to Japan and taught English in Japan for a year. And then I came back, about a year later, and that's when I moved to Calgary and got back together with my old boyfriend and I was working for a multibillion dollar insurance company for two years. And about every six months, I would move up as I was doing extremely well there, but it just wasn't something that I wanted to do. So, that's when I decided that, because I knew teaching English in Japan was something that I needed to do, because for almost ten years of my life, I taught swimming lessons and I was a lifeguard and teaching was just a thing that I excelled at—but, I just didn't know that it was something I should be doing, until I actually went to Japan and experienced it firsthand. So, then it was just kind of a reinforcer—so, approximately two years after (when I was) moving up so quickly in a company that I...liking what I was doing, but not loving what I was doing, and, like I said, the golden handcuffs was hard to walk away from, but I knew that it was something that I couldn't see myself doing forever. And, I knew if I didn't turn around, I was going to be making some really good money, and that would be really, really hard to leave from, and I'd be even older and it would be even harder to leave. So, I knew if I didn't do it now—I never would...So, I applied to a bunch of schools, and this was the first one I got into. I mean, thank you God, it was a great school and it has been a really great experience, so far.

All participants in the study had clearly-defined educational goals that were contextualized by their personal or occupational life events. Education was pursued primarily as the basis for changing career direction, enhancing employment prospects,

preparing for program or graduate school entrance, seeking a more meaningful contribution to society, or merely for enjoying the challenge and stimulus of learning. In all instances, decision-making was linked to careful planning and preparatory activities, such as weighing different educational options, considering the impacts on family, pursuing financial resources and assistance, and using institutional resources for education planning. Because of their goal-directed approach to education, mature students were highly motivated to make the necessary life-adjustments to manage their transition to post-secondary education. For all, this involved establishing new school-life routines, acquiring the self-discipline required for focused study, and learning how to use university-college resources efficiently.

Theme 2. Mature Students' Goals Were More Multifaceted and Growth-Oriented than Degree Attainment

Participants eagerly shared their personal reflections on the multifaceted nature of their learning goals and aspirations. While all individuals were highly goal-directed in their educational pursuits, mature students' goals were more varied and expansive than degree completion, and included personal growth and development aspects. In many instances, education was viewed as a life-changing event, as well as an empowering personal experience. The descriptive phrase that comes to mind for this thematic aspect is 'valuing education for its life enhancing qualities.'

Cara described how she was free to focus her time and energy on her education, after she left a bad marriage. She is a 43-year old single parent with a teenage son and is currently taking Malaspina courses at the North Island College campus. She plans to

transfer to Malaspina's Nanaimo campus for 3rd- and 4th-year level courses. Cara is intent on obtaining her Education Degree, as she is passionate about securing a health and wellness position in the Comox School District.

I left a bad marriage and just went from there and the doors have opened and things have really clicked into place. Getting accepted into this Liberal Studies Program that I began in the Fall this year, it was waitlisted, and I got in! I don't know how I got in, but I got in, and it's been...it's really been a great program....And we sit around and discuss everything from Aristotle to Plato to women in history. We argue about whether Jesus actually existed. We...it's, it's a fabulous program...Six years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer. If I could say I sailed through it, I sailed through it, even though it was, it was, ah, chemotherapy, radiation, the whole nine yards, but I've always been, uhm, a very, very strong believer in health and nutrition and exercise...I went back to school, corresponded, after I was diagnosed with cancer, and got certified as a holistic nutritionist, and I started doing lunch hour supervision. I was extremely fortunate that I was able to take a year off when I was diagnosed. It hurt the budget, don't get me wrong, we were, we were very, you know, had to be very, very frugal with our expenses, but I was able to start... I am following a path that now, if I wanted to jump off it, I couldn't. The train would drag me along saying, "get back on board, you fool!"

Cara's clarity of purpose and vision to make a meaningful contribution to children's health and well-being stemmed from the many positive life changes that she made as a cancer survivor. Cara spoke, with emotion, about going back to school after 15 years, and how it was a life changing and empowering decision to enrol in university courses. She has also taken advantage of opportunities to enrich her educational experience. At the end of her first term, she traveled to Italy with the Liberal Studies Abroad Program describing it as a wonderful adventure that "expanded her horizons immensely."

Education was viewed by several study participants as enabling them to make a more meaningful contribution to society by realizing career and job enhancement goals. Randy, Cara, and Lucy shared compelling stories of their desire to make a difference in society. Randy is obtaining his Social Services Diploma to work toward improvements in the lives of First Nation children and youth. Cara is committed to her health and wellness education goal to make a positive contribution to children's health and well-being in the school system. And Lucy is preparing to gain acceptance into a Master of Arts Program in urban planning to make a meaningful contribution to the field of urban growth and development.

Lucy is 30 years old and moved from Edmonton with her husband to enrol in geography courses at Malaspina. She is focused on "beefing up" her graduate school application by obtaining high grades and securing positive recommendations. She also talked about how she was deriving so much more from her studies than when she completed her first undergraduate degree as a traditional high-school entrant.

Yeah, (when) I decided I was actually going to (come here)...I was teaching English for a long time, and so I had come back to Canada to apply to do a Masters in Linguistics and follow through with that. Then, when I got back to Canada, I changed my mind, like, abruptly. I had been away, and I had to work as a surveyor before I left, in Canada, and when I came back I just noticed that the landscape had changed so much, and I, sort of, became preoccupied with the idea of working in some urban planning, and maybe, I don't know, doing things differently...When you're away five years, and you come back, it's just like, wow, yeah! . . .(You) notice it flying over most Canadian cities; it's just this, you know, huge sprawl...So, I changed my mind and I just right away decided that...once I got over culture shock, and I was like, well, this is clearly where I want to be working...And so, that's why I decided to come here...So, I basically had to find a school that offered the program, with decent enough faculty, close enough, and that I could get into and do it...I also kinda felt like I

didn't really get as much out of my first degree as I could have, and it, you know, it's...the first three weeks of school, I was like ,wow, learning is so fun!...it's just like, ah, this is great to be a student and really...I don't know...probably, I don't know if everybody is the same as me, but I didn't do as much in my undergrad as I could have.

There was also a strong theme, with the oldest participants, of engaging in education for its life-enhancing qualities. Elmar and Bunny related stories about reaching a stage in their lives when they felt justified in pursuing courses of interest for primarily personal development reasons. Elmar described having his “first opportunity” to focus on courses that would refine his writing skills at age 72. He reported that it had been 32 years since he completed his first undergraduate degree in political science. He talked about making a spontaneous decision to enrol in creative writing courses to take advantage of his tuition-free status as a senior.

Well, I'm a writer. I consider myself a writer anyway, and I've written a lot of things from when I was a teen. And I hadn't been consistent. I hadn't sat down every day at a certain time. I can't write that way. I can't force myself. I have to wait until the muse moves me, and, ah, when it does, then I can sit down and I can write. And, the last time I did that was during the course that I just finished taking. It's goal orientated. That worked for me. It was goal orientated and I needed the structure...That was a major factor in making the decision to come back to University. Well, how did I make the decision? I just decided suddenly, like a bolt out of the blue, that I was going to look up and find out what courses were available at Malaspina for me in creative writing. And, lo and behold, I found a few and I just made a decision and when my wife came home that night...I said to her, "I'm going to go to school."

During his follow-up interview, Elmar summed up his view of education by eloquently saying:

Learning is very important. It can extend your life. Lifelong learning enhances the quality of your life.

Bunny offered another example of how older students pursue learning for its own sake. She thoroughly enjoyed being able to take university-level courses of interest at a nominal cost. At 70 years of age, she stated that she would continue to take courses, as she always wanted to be enriching her life with learning. Education was a prized possession for Bunny, as her parents did not encourage her academically and life circumstances made it difficult for her to pursue post-secondary education until later in life. Her delight in being immersed in the “wonderful energy” on campus and having access to a wide range of introductory courses of interest was evident.

It's actually a lot of fun. I'm the only mature student, well, that's not quite true. In my Spanish class, there's one girl who is 28, okay, and the others are all in their early 20's, and it's just fun being around young people. And, I do Tai Chi and I find the energy on the campus is wonderful. I walk into the place sometimes, and just walking along from the roadway or over to the library here, I just see it all bubbling around me—it's just wonderful. It's really enjoyable, from that perspective. I don't think they realize themselves, the atmosphere they're creating—so wonderful! . . . Once you're over 65, a lot of those expenses for school are paid. Oh, it's amazing. Oh, my God, yeah, there are many things I could think of, that I would be interested in—I mean, introductory level of anything—anthropology... I haven't looked at the calendar to see, but I guarantee that there are things that would interest me—history, literature, writing.

Two students experienced the unique themes of language and cultural barriers intensely. The influence of family expectations and first generation status was a major contributor to participants' stated educational goals and motivations. The narratives of the international student and the First Nation participant are included to depict the diverse and expansive nature of students' educational goals.

Ross, a 26-year-old international student from China shared a graphic account of how his family have pinned all their hopes on him to excel in his studies and to integrate into Canadian culture and society. He is completing the required ESL courses to gain entrance into Malaspina's Master of Business Administration Program. He talked about being under "extreme stress" in attempting to fulfil his parents' wishes and goals for his future success and how he would not be able to face his family if he did not complete an advanced degree. Ross experienced a cultural divide in all of his classes, as he was unable to understand the underlying historical, political, and cultural context of many lectures and casual conversations. He used a vivid image for describing how this situation was affecting his studies.

Sometimes the most important, the hardest thing is the language...ah, the pronunciation, yeah, the accent, uh huh, I have to explain more, or they have to explain more in detail. Hmm, I think there are several things about the block to enter the local culture, local community. A block, it's like, ah, it's a stone in the way. In the road...if it's a big stone, we have to go round, walk around. So, it means I have to use more energy, more time, to get a goal.

Randy, the First Nation participant, shared his story of completing his education to provide a solid foundation for his granddaughter. He talked about the oppression that First Nation people experience, because of residential school abuses and the devastating removal of aboriginal children from their families and their communities. His insight into the causes of the pervasive drug and alcohol problems in his family, and in his community, spurred him on to pursue his Social Services Diploma and to work with First Nation children and youth. In addition to his educational goal, Randy was carrying the

burden of being a first generation student with a personal goal of serving as a positive role model for his granddaughter, family, and community.

Theme 3. An Asset-Based Approach to Learning Contributed to Students' Expectations of Success

This thematic aspect can perhaps best be summarized as 'relying on personal drive and resilience to succeed.' Virtually all participants had insight into how their strong achievement orientation and personal drive to succeed were major motivating influences for completing their studies. Their inventory of personal assets also included a strong work ethic and work-related skills, previous post-secondary experiences, and an optimistic and resilient attitude.

Most participants related stories showing that high levels of motivation and determination were needed to manage the transition to school in the context of other significant life commitments. Often, this was seen as distinguishing them from their younger classmates. Louis, Cara, and Chloe offered convincing accounts of their comparative edge. Louis, a 31-year-old married marine biology consultant, was changing his career direction so that he could assume a senior position in his father's electrical contracting company. Although he already has a Master of Science Degree, he was completing pre-engineering courses at Malaspina to gain entrance into the second year of the Engineering Program at the University of British Columbia. He was aware that his previous academic performance had given him the study skills and confidence to succeed. He was prepared to complete four more years of post-secondary education,

while also continuing his consulting practice, as he is determined to take on the operation of his father's company one day.

I came in with a clear goal in mind. So, I wouldn't have made the decision, if I wasn't, like, really focused on a goal, because what I'm doing right now (working as a marine biology consultant)—it's not exactly broken, you know—I've been fairly successful at it. I'm just...I'm thinking farther down the road, you know, farther afield.

Cara attributed her high level of motivation and determination to being a mature student with well-developed life skills and work experience. She mentioned that mature students have a higher “value system” and work ethic than their younger counterparts. To succeed, Cara believed that older students must be more committed to their education goals, because they are typically juggling school along with other work and family responsibilities.

In a similar vein, Chloe believed that being a mature student has actually helped her to stay focused on her educational goal. She described how she successfully transferred her time management, organizational, and multi-tasking skills from her employment to her academic situation. Chloe is convinced that her strong work ethic and work-related skills are academic advantages.

Since just getting into a habit of dedicating your whole life to school, I mean, weekends are dedicated to school. I'm also in a position now, where the company I worked for has helped me tremendously to develop good work habits, which is why I think I'm doing so well in my classes now, too, because I've just developed some really good work habits.

Almost every participant showed evidence of having an optimistic and resilient attitude in the face of adversity. The stories of Cara, Antonio, and Randy are remarkable

examples of how these personal attributes have helped them to overcome difficult life circumstances while moving toward their stated life goals and educational aspirations. At age 43, Cara's optimism enabled her to overcome her own health setbacks to work towards making a positive impact in the school system. At age 47, Antonio bounced back from a series of bureaucratic struggles, financial setbacks, and family health concerns to pursue his own retraining plan. And at age 56, Randy rebounded from a difficult childhood, the deaths of his siblings and daughter, and an injury that prevented him from returning to work to accept the challenge of continuing his education. Study participants had generally reached positive conclusions about how their personal strengths and work-related assets were contributing to their successful academic adjustment and performance. For the majority of participants, this awareness had also enabled them to defer gratification and make the sacrifices that were needed to endure the obstacles and hardships they had encountered in their first semesters of study.

Belonging

Theme 4. Relationships with Professors Were Pivotal in Encouraging and Supporting Academic Performance and Persistence

Apart from academic performance, mature students' interactions with faculty members had the most impact on their educational experiences. The thematic element that figured most prominently in all of the participants' narratives was the nature and quality of their relationships with professors. In fact, if I had to select one thematic element as the most influential contributor to mature students' successful integration into their academic milieu, it would be relationships with professors. And the descriptive

phrase that I would use to capture participants' perceptions of its importance is 'being sustained by encouraging, accommodating and inspiring professors.'

The majority of participants described situations where their professors were instrumental in instilling confidence, clarifying academic expectations, and offering tangible support and assistance. In most instances, these situations were encountered early in the semester when students were under stress and struggling to complete assignments. An understanding and accommodating response from professors was seen as validating students' decisions to return to school, as well as providing positive feedback on their academic potential. Krystahl, Chloe, and Cara explained how closer ties with their professors helped them to successfully negotiate first-semester logistics. For example, Krystal mentioned that the biggest boost to her confidence was realizing that her professors were willing to explain what was expected of her academically. She talked about the importance of being introduced to the "process of learning" by professors who gave detailed instructions and who provided many opportunities for her to ask questions and seek clarification both inside and outside the classroom. Krystahl held her professors responsible for her continued progress by supporting her during the first few weeks of her semester.

Well, it was just getting to know people, getting to know the profs and what they expected of me, understanding just how the process works, of how, you know, the process of learning and taking notes and studying and doing the test, and all that kind of stuff. It...it, then is very easy to understand how it all works and...There was lots of notes (and) instructions given. They laid out the term and what you're, you know, what's expected of you. I just expected there to be much less help from the professors, and it was...it's been better, obviously, better than high school. I get more help here than I ever got in high school...There's been a lot of

the professors and teachers (that) I would say, I feel like I can talk with them and they're very supportive. Even if it's...whether it's about schoolwork, or just chatting about life, or whatever, I've really, yeah, I really feel like people care about me.

Similarly, when asked about specific experiences at Malaspina that have allowed her to pursue her educational goal, Chloe stated emphatically that it was the encouragement from professors that made it possible for her to move forward.

Encouragement from within, but also encouragement from the professors. Like, I've never received such a wonderful support system from all the professors—everyone seems to really share. If you want to put the effort in, they're going to want to give the effort to you, to help you do good. It's really encouraging, and I've just never experienced anything like that before—so, encouragement is, I guess, the biggest word that I can think of.

Academic performance was a key factor in validating students' decisions to return to school. In addition, the positive feedback that mature students received from their professors helped them to feel more confident in continuing their studies.

As a final example, Cara felt comfortable approaching her professors for needed assignment extensions, because of the rapport she had established with them. She talked about how she found it very reassuring that the majority of her professors understood that “life happens” for mature students. She recounted a few examples of how her professors offered her research report extensions, such as when her son underwent surgery. She said that the positive relationships she had with her professors, and their flexibility with respect to deadlines, enabled her to complete her assignments, while also maintaining her high academic standards.

Theme 5. Peer Relationships and a Strong Social Circle Were Important Motivating Influences

An important aspect of students' successful adjustment to post-secondary education was the sense of belonging that students derived from their social support system. Being able to establish and maintain supportive relationships while at school was a critical factor for the majority of participants. Students made specific reference to benefiting from the support of partners/spouses, children, parents, friends, and professors who cared about their academic progress. It was interesting to note that the majority of participants mentioned the importance of having a social circle at school, as opposed to making friends outside of university-college. Krystahl's comments were particularly illustrative, as she did not seek socializing opportunities outside of class because classroom connections were sufficient for meeting her social needs.

I've talked to a lot of people, their goal is to pass and my goal is to get an "A." And I don't have other distractions, other than my children...for me, I went into it with the goal of... I'm not going to have a life outside school. I'm not going to have any other kind of life. I'll meet people and make some friends, but I'm not going to be out partying, or anything like that. I'm going to school and I'm studying and I'm putting all my effort into that, because I want to get it done—do as well as I can in that time allotted...I've heard a lot of people say, you know, take advantage of all the things that are offered and it really enriches your experience. I haven't taken advantage of...I haven't chosen to get involved in a lot of the extracurricular stuff, because for me, that would have distracted me from the school work. I think if you're, I don't know, you know, young—early 20's and that—I think that would help someone that age. I don't think it would help me. I don't, I guess, you know...it helps introduce you to people, but I...I'm meeting people in my classes and that's enough for me.

Several students indicated a preference for socializing with peers, or like-minded students who had similar life experiences. For example, Lucy, Chloe, and Wayne

expressed the wish to meet students in their own age group. Lucy, age 30, made the comment that, because of her compressed schedule, she was missing important social opportunities. She talked about being reluctant to speak up in class, for fear of being perceived as having an advantage based on her age and previous degree. Lucy was disappointed that Malaspina did not have a designated space on campus for mature students to meet others with similar interests and motivations. Chloe, age 25, talked about being intimidated by the fact that she was taking classes with students who were the same age as her younger brother and sister. She was concerned about being able to form relationships with students who were 5 to 10 years her junior. Wayne, age 28, mentioned that one of the main obstacles he faced in his first semester was not having time to socialize with his classmates after class. He described feeling disconnected socially from other students his own age.

I like being able to meet and see people my own age, that's a big thing... and after my first semester, I still feel quite remote in terms of the rest of the student body. You know, I'm quite outside of it, and I think it's probably a very similar experience for people like me.

Two students, facing unique circumstances, accentuated the fact that they felt isolated and segregated by taking classes with younger students. Ross, the international student, talked about having motivation problems that stemmed from taking classes with younger students who did not share his interests or life experiences. He also reported having a home stay arrangement that was isolating and boring, and that he was missing opportunities to share significant cultural events with other people on campus. Randy, the First Nation student, spoke of experiencing ageism and cultural exclusion in the

classroom. He also talked about the importance of being surrounded by healthy people on campus and how he appreciated being with other people who were on a “healing path.”

In contrast with stated preferences for socializing with peers, four participants indicated that they actually benefited from the mix of ages and the diverse interaction opportunities available in the classroom. Despite her fears about being surrounded by younger students, Cara (age 43) and Zoe (age 53) were pleasantly surprised to find that they were able to establish rapport with students regardless of their age and background. Zoe was anxious about contributing to class discussions and forming relationships with younger students. In her first weeks, she was afraid that she would “stick out like a sore thumb” in her courses, and that she would have nothing in common with the majority of her younger classmates. The two oldest participants indicated that the presence of younger students actually enriched their educational experience. Elmar, age 72, claimed that he looked forward to receiving writing critiques from the younger students, as he enjoyed their varied perspectives. Bunny, age 70, found it motivating and fun to be studying with her energetic and youthful classmates.

In summary, having connections with other students on campus, especially within the classroom, was associated with students’ sense of belonging and their feelings of having successfully integrated into the university-college environment. It would appear that participants in the youngest cohort (25-34 years) were seeking opportunities to learn and socialize with their peers, whereas those in the oldest group (55+ years) were contented to be surrounded by students representing a mix of ages and life stages.

Becoming

Theme 6. Students' Life-Role Conflicts Contributed to Levels of Stress and Decisions to Continue

The final category, *Becoming*, captures those institutional and external factors that have the potential for making a critical difference to mature students' persistence.

Participants revealed that their educational progress was dependent on the following three thematic elements: a) life-role conflicts; b) institutional infrastructure; and c) classroom experiences. The descriptive phrase that I would use to position the importance of the themes that emerged from the interviews is 'benefiting from a flexible and engaging learning environment.' I believe that the success of our educational efforts in supporting mature students' persistence is directly related to the amount of institutional attention we give to addressing the general and unique themes that are reported in this section.

Study participants all encountered the tensions created by balancing school with other life commitments. Female students, in particular, reported that significant family obligations competed for their time, energy, and resources and presented a threat to their continued studies during their first semester. Single parents, main wage earners, and students with eldercare responsibilities were especially affected by these issues. Zoe, for example, is a 53-year-old fiction writer who enrolls in creative writing courses, only when she can anticipate having a "block of time" that is not dedicated to childcare or eldercare. She is taking credit courses, one at a time, as opposed to pursuing a Bachelor of Arts Degree, primarily because family commitments take priority and continue to place

parameters around when she can participate in classes. She gave a clear indication of the challenge she faces in committing to a 13-week semester.

I see my personal life getting in the way, which it frequently does, because of the family element. I see that...Yeah, your life belongs to other people, your life belongs to everybody else. There are times when I go and I assist my Mum—she's 80. She lives on Salt Spring. She's extremely active and that, but sometimes she needs a hand. So, I go help her. I go help my daughter frequently—she has a young one, and another one on the way. The new one is coming up in January. And then I have a son who has a daughter and stepson, and they've just split up—they've got a big family thing happening there, and I have them, the kids, over the summertime, for two weeks—just about does me in. But, I mean, I can't write in the summer, anyway. I've got too much outside work, and the grandkids and everything happens in the summer. I tried for a while, to do it, but I just gave it up. Yeah, and the trouble is...is that if the summer course came up, I have to make the decision on...if it was just one month, that would be alright. I'd still have the kids down. Six weeks would be doable, because I have to work around their school and summer schedules, as well.

During her second interview, Zoe informed me that she was checking into summer semester courses to see if she could “squeeze one in.” She was also surprised to learn, upon reading her interview transcript, just how far she was “bending for my family” and has resolved to make her family more aware of the importance she attaches to her writing and to the courses that allow her to maintain her writing momentum.

As another example, Cara is working as a lunch hour supervisor at her local elementary school and is taking a mix of classroom-based and correspondence courses, while supporting her teenaged son. She is committed to finishing her degree as quickly as possible to pursue her goal of becoming a health and wellness educator. Cara talked about feeling physically tired and depleted most of the time because she does not have any discretionary time or money. She had to juggle tuition installments, along with

mortgage and car payments, and home maintenance and child-rearing costs. The toll that this was taking on her health and peace of mind was apparent in the description of her first semester.

Now, being that the Liberal Studies Program is in the evening, that frees up my day for electives. I took four courses this term plus a supplement to my holistic nutritionist certification through correspondence. I was taking five classes this term and it wasn't wise. It was too much, so this term has been very overwhelming.

Cara referred to the health implications of returning to school as an older student. As a cancer survivor, she was conscious of her stress levels and made an effort to integrate personal health and wellness activities into her daily routines.

In many instances, family obligations created financial stresses for students, as it was often the case that Student Loans were either unavailable or inadequate for financial assistance. Antonio described the financial setback he faced when his 11-year-old son was diagnosed with diabetes in the middle of term. He was relying on his accumulated RRSP's and Student Loans to cover the costs of his education and living expenses. He described how his family was stretched to the breaking point when he incurred the unexpected costs for treatment supplies and travel that were required to manage his son's chronic condition. As an injured worker, he was faced with the decision of withdrawing from school to return to logging for a brief period to provide for his family.

As a final comment related to managing life-role conflicts, all participants highlighted the importance of receiving support from their partners/spouses, family members, and friends to help solve practical problems when returning to school. In

particular, family members contributed essential childcare, tuition support, and shared housing and household tasks. Only one participant mentioned that an employer had offered flexible work arrangements making it possible to work while going to school.

Theme 7. A Supportive Institutional Infrastructure Was Critical to Continuous Course Enrolment and Timely Degree Completion

Throughout the interviews, participants emphasized specific institutional practices that supported them before, during, and after their enrolment. In fact, references to the institutional infrastructure constituted the main category of themes that emerged from the study. Several participants mentioned aspects of the admission process that enticed them to enrol in the University-College and that helped them to cope with their immediate entrance requirements.

All participants acknowledged the fact that supportive institutional practices helped ease their re-entry adjustment. Some of the most effective techniques that students mentioned were issuing early acceptance letters, granting advanced credits for previous post-secondary education, and providing an orientation to campus facilities and resources. Chloe, the youngest study participant, made a spontaneous decision to enrol in first semester courses when she received an acceptance letter shortly after submitting her online application. Early acceptance enabled Chloe to take advantage of a number of key institutional resources, including orientation tours to locate her classrooms and meetings with educational advisors to map out her courses. She credits these resources with helping her deal with the “rocky first couple of days” in an unfamiliar setting. In addition, Chloe received credit for previous courses that she had taken at the University of

Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, and it was a major motivating factor for her to find out that she had significantly reduced the timeline for completing her BA/BEd Degree.

It was a huge encouragement knowing that I don't have to retake everything or redo everything because all my credits transferred, which was a huge, huge bonus. So, just knowing that there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Similarly, Elmar was delighted to learn that he had been granted 60 credits from his previous university experience and that was a deciding factor for him in pursuing a second Bachelor's Degree at Malaspina. The fact that his tuition was free, as a senior, was an added incentive to continue his studies.

Orientation tours and easy access to educational advisors were frequently cited as resources that helped students manage their critical first weeks on campus. However, not all participants were introduced to these resources as they struggled to cope with logistics on their own. The only obstacle that Bunny mentioned during her first few weeks of classes was not receiving an orientation to campus facilities and resources. As it had been over 30 years since she had taken university courses, Bunny was apprehensive about finding her classes and generally being able to access university-college resources. She had difficulty negotiating the physical layout of the campus and did not realize that there were amenities, like fitness facilities, that she could use. Bunny was also unaware that she could meet with an Education Advisor to address her questions about accessing upper level Spanish courses. As another example, Wayne did not receive a formal introduction to amenity spaces on campus, which would have encouraged him to spend more time

socializing with other students. He learned later in the semester that departments had lounges and study spaces that could be used as meeting places for students and faculty.

A strong pattern of academic, financial, and emotional stresses was noted, clustering around the themes of limited course availability and inflexible course scheduling. The majority of mature students spoke at length about the importance of course location and timing that accommodated their work routines, children's school schedules, and their ability to use facilities for studying on weekends and in the evenings. For Krystahl, the main barrier she faced in pursuing her dental hygiene goal was not being able to access the biology course she needed as the program pre-requisite. She was having to wait a full year to enter the program, because both classroom and online classes were full and maintaining "huge" waitlists. The unanticipated delay was financially and emotionally draining. She clearly described the financial and emotional toll this was taking.

(It) delays me for a whole year, because otherwise I'd be able to get into Dental Hygiene this next September. And I've got to wait an entire year--because Dental Hygiene only starts every September--to do one course. So, being...being 34, having two kids, wanting to get out into the work force (to) support myself, (not) being a leech on my family--that's, you know, that's...that's kind of been the one thing that's really bummed me out.

There was a general feeling that science courses were particularly challenging for working students, as there are few evening and weekend offerings, limited access to online core courses, and few opportunities for students to compress their schedules to maximize their time on campus. Louis provided additional insights into how course timing and scheduling could have distinct financial disadvantages. Because his pre-

engineering courses were structured exclusively around daytime lab access, Louis was required to be on campus everyday leaving little remaining time or energy to devote to his consulting work.

I'm only doing three courses, but yet, I go to school Monday through Friday. If I could have at least a day off during the week, that would give me a day to work and make money, or even, like, having evening classes would be nice.

Course location and timing also limited students' access and their ability to remain continuously enrolled in their chosen areas of study. Two students mentioned that they were experiencing delays, because advanced courses were not offered locally, or sequentially, at the satellite campus. Both Zoe and Elmar were anticipating that they would take longer to acquire advanced creative writing credits to "build into a degree bundle" and that they would need to travel to the main campus to remain continuously enrolled. In Zoe's case, she would revert to taking non-credit courses of interest to maintain her momentum. And Elmar had accepted the fact that it would take him longer to complete his second degree, because he preferred taking all of his classes close to his home to avoid long distance and night driving. For both students, problems with local course access were seriously hampering their abilities to "keep learning."

Several students registered for a reduced course load in their first semester as a strategy for managing multiple life-roles, making tuition affordable, and developing effective study routines. For Krystahl and Antonio, gradual re-entry was also associated with achieving higher grade-point averages, and thus increasing their chances of being accepted into competitive programs. It was more important for Krystahl to take fewer

courses and focus on her academic performance than it was to progress too quickly. She talked about needing to prove to herself that she had the self-discipline and study skills for handling the full-time course load in the Dental Hygiene Program. Antonio withdrew from two of his courses, in the middle of his mid-terms, when his son became ill. He was determined not to jeopardize his grades and, ultimately, his chances of transferring into the Nuclear Medicine Technology Diploma Program. Both students came to a similar realization that by carrying a reduced course load, they would be in a much stronger academic position.

Study participants also benefited from infrastructure supports that were more general in nature. Affordable tuition and small class sizes were frequently reported as reasons for selecting the University-College and for choosing to stay. Maintaining a comfortable lifestyle while going to school was also an important decision factor for many mature students. Participants talked about the advantages of securing affordable housing close to campus, reducing fuel costs by walking or taking the bus, and returning home for lunch between classes.

Theme 8. Experiential Learning Opportunities Intensified Mature Students' Educational Commitment, Confidence, and Satisfaction

Experiential and active learning are considered effective student learning strategies in university-college and college settings. Interview findings showed that a positive group atmosphere and a greater emphasis on experiential learning enriched the learning experience for all study participants. In particular, students mentioned that group discussions and collaborative assignments increased their satisfaction levels and

improved their learning outcomes. In addition, several participants referred to the importance of having vibrant professors that stimulated and challenged students' thinking.

Wayne and Louis gave a clear indication of how group-learning situations generated more creative ideas and discussions, and ultimately resulted in higher quality assignments. For Wayne, "high quality teaching" was essential to his academic performance. He talked about having good and bad classes and how these experiences affected his motivation and effort. He recounted specific instances where his professors encouraged active participation in class and conveyed a sense of passion for their field. He shared an example where the instructor created an environment where all students were engrossed in the discussion and everyone was included.

An excited prof is a big plus...it affects the students...when (students) do participate they get so much more out of the class...So, you know, my professor has really pushed us to do that, and yeah, the class is very productive. In that sense, everybody is quite satisfied with it and nobody is sort of...is being left out.

Conversely, two of his courses were decidedly negative experiences. In one class, the professor did not encourage collaborative discussion and in the second, the professor displayed a "lackadaisical attitude" by conveying disinterest in the course content and repeatedly dismissing the class early. Wayne indicated that he would not have returned for his second semester if all of his classes had been bad experiences. He emphasized that teaching quality had a direct impact on his willingness to continue with his studies.

Louis referred to wasting precious time and energy figuring out his assignments on his own. For one class in particular, he wished that he could have had additional group work to learn from other students.

And I'm just thinking of this one course, in particular...where it seems like the class—we're all individuals—nobody ever talks to each other the whole time, and it seems like everybody's constantly re-inventing the wheel. And I don't know why, maybe it's ego or something like that, but it seems to me, if we all sat down as a group and brainstormed how to solve a certain problem, you know, your time spent working on the actual assignment would be far less. I mean, there was one assignment—I think I spent over 30 hours on it over a 2-week period...Yeah, that to me was totally counter-productive, you know...It's something that needs to be changed. Even if you forced, maybe, even group assignments, where...force people to work in groups and they would have to interact with other people...I'm sure the quality of the work handed in would be higher.

Participants also linked their professors' ability to create inclusive, stimulating, and enjoyable classes to their satisfaction and commitment levels. Antonio emphasized that "top quality instructors" made a huge difference for returning students. He gave examples, in two of his courses, where his instructors encouraged all students to participate in lively discussions and to sign up for group assignments. When faced with course withdrawals, Antonio decided *not* to drop the course where he was involved in a group project, as he felt allegiance to his fellow classmates.

Part of the reason why I stayed in the (course) was because I was involved in a term paper with two other people and I, you know, I didn't think that I should just drop and say "see you later, and you guys have to do my part now." So, uhm...again, so I completed that and, uh, you know, things are working out...

Expectations of value for money and effort expended resulted in critical assessments of teaching quality. Participants assumed that they were deserving of knowledgeable, skilled, and well-organized professors. Wayne pointed out that mature students expect value for their money and that they have a right to good learning experiences. He gave several examples of what professors should be doing to address mature students' needs and expectations, including spelling out course requirements clearly, using technology effectively (e.g., web-based learning systems), and encouraging more classroom participation and opportunities to engage inside and outside of class. Bunny described how dissatisfied she was with an instructor who was disorganized and who scheduled a mid-term study group outside of class at an inconvenient time for commuting students. Elmar shared similar concerns, stating that he dropped a course in his Spring semester because of changing course requirements.

I didn't care for the quality of instruction. The instructor didn't seem to be well-organized and that was upsetting to me. She would change her mind about assignments, or the requirements. I felt jerked from point to point.

Experiential learning also involves tapping into students' experiences in the classroom. Zoe highlighted how the institution could do a better job of reassuring mature students that their considerable life experience would be viewed as an asset in the classroom. Zoe was afraid that her older mind would not be flexible enough to "bend" to course expectations. She was also concerned about being able to sustain the pace required for her studies.

I did have a great fear, when I first started classes, that as you get older your mind is not as flexible as it was at one time. And I thought, how am I

going to, sort of, keep up, because I've done various workshops and things that were extremely fast paced and I find that difficult.

Zoe was pleasantly surprised to learn that her professors created a casual, comfortable environment in the classroom and this encouraged her to “jump right in.” To allay fears and boost confidence levels, Zoe recommended that professors take time at the beginning of semester to remind mature students of their “incredible life skills.”

As discussed previously, extracurricular activities and socializing outside of class were not sought by the majority of participants, due to time constraints and compressed schedules. For instance, students taking three-hour courses one night a week while fulfilling busy work and family responsibilities were not predisposed to spend additional time on campus. However, most participants mentioned that they appreciated having active learning opportunities that were integrated directly into course designs (e.g., field trips, theatre reviews, and library orientation sessions). And in a similar vein, several students took advantage of opportunities to expand and enrich their educational experiences. Cara, for example, mentioned how joining the Liberal Studies Abroad Program and traveling to Italy expanded her horizons. Chloe talked about the transformative experience she had when conducting an on-campus interview with a boy soldier and author from Sierra Leone. As a result, she was highly motivated to obtain her degree and pursue United Nations work after graduation.

Summary

The eight main themes that emerged during the final level of qualitative data analysis form a richly-textured composite of all participants' stories. Selected aspects of the narratives were used to elaborate and animate those individual, institutional, and external factors that were exerting major influences on mature students' educational commitment and persistence. For the three themes included under the *Being* category, a life-centred, goal directed approach to education was the defining characteristic. All participants exhibited a strong commitment and desire to achieve their educational goals that were often broader and more varied than conventional degree attainment.

Relationships with professors and peers were the two thematic elements comprising the *Belonging* category. However, the most influential contributor to students' successful integration into university-college life was their relationship with professors. The majority of participants recounted instances when they relied on the caring and instrumental support of their instructors to boost their confidence and to support their continued academic progress. For the most part, participants' social connections at school were centred in the classroom and contributed to students' sense of belonging. Many students indicated a preference for socializing with peers and conveyed feelings of being disconnected and segregated from their age group. However, there appeared to be age-related differences, with younger participants seeking opportunities to connect with peers and older participants expressing an interest in studying in mixed age groups.

The impacts of life-role conflicts, institutional infrastructure, and experiential learning opportunities were the key themes explored under the *Becoming* category. Participants devoted considerable energy and attention to the institutional factors that facilitated, or hindered, their ability to realize their educational goals and aspirations. The importance of having a supportive institutional infrastructure was the strongest finding to emerge from the interviews. Limited course availability, inflexible schedules, and inaccessible facilities during hours that accommodate work and other life commitments were the main factors perceived to threaten continuous course enrolment and timely degree completion. Finally, positive classroom experiences that incorporated experiential learning opportunities were seen to have a direct impact on students' educational commitment and satisfaction levels. This was a unique study finding and suggests that teaching and learning practices should be a focal point for adult student retention. In subsequent sections, the main themes that were extracted from the in-depth interviews are discussed in relation to the results from the quantitative data analyses.

Focus Group Results

I included a focus group in my research design, because the interplay between students and faculty was considered an important aspect of students' academic attainment and retention. It was also adopted as a data triangulation method for enhancing the relevance of study findings. As in the individual student interviews, I used a phenomenological approach to gather faculty perspectives in an open, unbiased manner. Three broad, open-ended questions were used to facilitate a focus group discussion to

surface salient faculty perceptions and experiences, as listed in the Research Methodology section (Chapter 3).

Once the individual student interviews were completed, I facilitated a focus group with selected faculty members to elicit their views on mature students' first-year experiences. The purpose of the focus group was to examine the perceptions of student success and persistence from the perspective of faculty members who have responsibilities for teaching introductory arts and science classes. As a 4-year comprehensive regional University-College, Malaspina's stated mission focuses on teaching, service, and research excellence, with the fostering of student success listed as one of its strategic priorities. With this emphasis on teaching excellence and student success, faculty members were approached and agreed to participate because they were concerned about students' first-year experiences and they were interested in sharing their insights about creating institutional conditions that are more conducive to mature students' academic success and persistence.

Participants

Four faculty members, three males and one female, were interviewed at the end of the Spring term in June, 2007. The group consisted of two arts and two science faculty drawn from the departments of English, Geography, Biology, and Physics/Astronomy. With respect to faculty profiles, their teaching experience at Malaspina ranged from three to 17 years, with two participants obtaining their doctoral degrees as mature students, and two following more traditional academic pathways to complete their doctoral studies.

Two of the participants had completed undergraduate courses at Malaspina University-College before transferring to other universities in British Columbia.

Descriptive Summary

A phenomenological analysis was performed on the data generated from the focus group to explore, understand, and describe the essence of mature students' persistence. I audiotaped and summarized the themes that emerged from the focus group discussion after a careful review of the data. A descriptive summary was created and sent electronically to all participants requesting any changes or refinements to the documented summary. Data analysis was completed when these final insights were incorporated into the descriptive summary.

The salient themes that emerged from the focus group were categorized into three main areas: a) aspects of the institutional environment that facilitate, or hinder, mature students' learning and quality of life; b) effective teaching and learning practices for mature students; and c) assessment of the overall quality of the undergraduate experience for mature students at Malaspina University-College. These thematic elements were further refined and presented under the headings: faculty perspectives on mature students' Teaching and Learning Experiences; faculty experiences, with respect to Teaching and Learning Practices; and faculty Suggestions for Improvements. The following descriptive summary captures the essential meanings that were derived from the faculty focus group.

Teaching and Learning Experiences: Faculty Perspectives

- Generally, adult students are perceived to be focused, goal- and achievement-oriented, motivated to learn, able to readily engage in class discussions, and interested in their fields of study.
- Mature students value their education and have a good understanding of how education will contribute to their future opportunities. They engage in their studies at a higher level than their younger counterparts do, based on perceived educational value.
- Because they have competing life commitments and are concerned about their available time, adult learners apply themselves diligently and efficiently to their studies. This is recognized and appreciated by instructors.
- Mature students add a very positive dynamic to classes and provide a focal point for certain teaching and learning techniques. They also serve as role models for younger students by sharing examples of how their learning is applied in real-life situations.
- Adult learners are very diverse, and faculty need to be aware of individual and cohort-related differences to address individual needs and interests (within the broad 25+ adult age range, there are several cohorts). Instructors face different challenges when teaching adults who are primarily motivated by personal interests, versus more conventional academic goals.
- Faculty must be careful not to generalize and recognize that some students have very unique needs and challenges. For instance, some First Nation students may need additional support to acquire study skills and to meet academic requirements. Faculty must be alert to significant barriers that some students face and respond with care and flexibility. While older students may have much to contribute in discussions, they may need to be supported in class so that their contributions are appreciated and not resented by other classmates.
- Mature students have organizational and leadership skills that they readily apply to collaborative projects and group work in class.
- Adults take advantage of opportunities to meet with professors outside of class to discuss ideas and their assignments; thus, it is easy to make a personal connection with them. They are generally receptive to, and act on, instructors' suggestions and advice.
- Older students often have a sense of entitlement when pursuing certain marks and this can place added demands on professors. In addition, their personal relationships with professors can lead to ethical dilemmas when students are advocating for higher grades.

Teaching and Learning Practices: Faculty Experiences

- It is recognized that students often have huge anxieties about writing based on negative school experiences. They may be taking certain courses only because it is a requirement for their degree program. The “hook,” in this instance, is to convince students that their humanities courses are relevant. Instructors draw on and validate students’ life experiences to instill confidence. Flexibility is also important (not relaxing standards) to help students complete their courses without fixating on grades.
- Specific examples are used in class that students can relate to (tailored to relevant eras, or cohort experiences). Faculty make efforts to draw students into discussions in ways that recognize previous life experiences and unique backgrounds. As an example, one faculty member has students introduce themselves at the beginning of the semester and shows an interest in students’ backgrounds by bringing this information into class discussions. Another faculty member makes a point of sharing personal background information to acknowledge and recognize previous volunteer work and life experiences. Faculty members also talked about the importance of sharing relevant information about their personal and professional lives to reduce the distance between faculty and students (dispelling the ivory tower myth) and to make a genuine connection with students. It is also used to demonstrate the relevance of the humanities (i.e., viewing our lives as narratives).
- Faculty focus on creating a safe atmosphere for students to ask questions in class, and make a concerted effort to be approachable after class. They let students know that instructors are there to support them and that they are willing to help students achieve their potential.
- Email is used as a vehicle for connecting with students after hours (one faculty member invites students to ask course-related questions and/or send draft assignments for feedback). It is recognized that adult students may not be able to arrange meetings with faculty during regular office hours and that email is an efficient way to make a connection and provide reassurance. The key is to be flexible and offer alternatives.
- Faculty use group work and provide opportunities for in-class collaboration, but are mindful of the problematic aspects of these techniques. Mature students will often complain that some students are not pulling their weight in a group context, and others complain that mature students are not available after class for group meetings. One

strategy used is to encourage collaboration in class, without ascribing marks.

- Lab activities offer students a chance to socialize and to assume responsibility for each other in a group setting that mirrors work and real-life contexts. It also offers a means to forge bonds between younger and older students and to promote classroom integration. Lab settings also benefit instructors by offering opportunities to learn more about students' backgrounds and to recognize prior learning. One faculty member used the example of incorporating students' map reading skills and travel experiences into lab sessions.
- In some instances, field studies are offered within course designs to bring all students together as a more cohesive unit and to allow sharing of life experiences; all students and faculty were seen to benefit.

Suggestions for Improvement

- Reinforce the fact that Malaspina's small campus affords many opportunities for faculty and students to interact and get to know one another. Profile the open, adaptive, engaging, dynamic, and comprehensive aspects of our institution.
- Use discretion and flexibility when administering courses (e.g., offer assignment extensions when warranted, for mature students).
- Address course availability problems (e.g., monitor course reserves on pre-requisites courses) and make sure that there is sufficient flexibility in course scheduling when timetabling courses.
- Create socializing areas for students and faculty to meet informally and establish rapport; faculty considered socialization to be a critical component of students' education. Create social spaces in departments (one faculty member talked about how they converted a storage room into a sitting area to create a lounge). Find ways to fund and use new square footage creatively (e.g., put the coffee machine in the middle of open areas to promote interaction).
- Address parking problems for students who arrive after 8:30am (e.g., after dropping their children off at school). Find safe ways for commuter students to share transportation.
- Ensure that there is good administrative support in all departments, where warm, welcoming support staff greet students. Faculty feel strongly that we are moving away from more personalized service and creating a less inviting environment (i.e., establishing un-staffed computer kiosks across campus). Faculty are concerned that our

automated telephone access and computer kiosks are not sending the right message to incoming students.

- Pay attention to our aging physical plant (e.g., address the fact that our bathroom ratios and cleaning schedules are not appropriate in some buildings). Improve general amenities on campus, especially for our more discriminating, mature students.
- Improve signage on campus and ameliorate the challenges that our “vertical” campus creates for older students. Encourage students to plan their courses in relation to any limitations presented by building access.
- Recognize that if we focus on recruiting older students, to make up our enrolment shortfalls, we may need to offer more remedial resources (e.g., it may be necessary to extend library orientation times for database searches, etc.).

Summary

The results from the Faculty Focus Group corroborate the main findings from the individual student interviews. In particular, the faculty members interviewed acknowledged that mature students have multifaceted lives and are more diverse, discriminating, determined, and goal-directed than their younger counterparts. Mature students were also seen to have a broader range of life skills to draw on, similar to the personal and work-related assets that student interviewees disclosed.

One of the more interesting findings is that faculty placed a similar emphasis on the importance of student-faculty relationships as a means to instil confidence and to support students’ academic progress. Specific reference was also made to the anxieties and fears that re-entry students often face in classes with younger students. Faculty members mentioned that they make conscious efforts to facilitate class discussions in ways that encourage participation from older students and that minimize any resentment by other classmates. Similar to the concerns and issues raised by the students

interviewed, faculty highlighted the importance of flexibility in handling students' assignment deadlines and in scheduling courses to address adults' work and life commitments. In addition, faculty made similar recommendations that social areas should be created that are integrated into departmental areas to increase opportunities for student-faculty interactions. As a final note, it was evident that faculty members give serious attention to incorporating experiential learning opportunities into their classroom activity and course designs. There was recognition that these teaching practices validate mature students' life experiences and prior learning, and have a positive impact on mature students' learning outcomes.

Chapter 5.

Quantitative Results

Discussion in the literature points to the merits of using mixed-methods research when the complexity of a phenomenon requires data from a number of sources; however, it has been argued by some authors that combining qualitative and quantitative methods to study the same phenomena is problematic. Sale, Lohfield and Brazil (2002) raise the caution that the two methods represent incommensurate positivist-interpretivist paradigms and may result in the misrepresentation of data due to the selective search for similarities. They espouse the belief that “mixing research methods across paradigms, as it is currently practiced, often diminishes the value of both methods” (Sale et al., 2002, p. 50). The authors propose a solution for addressing these issues by using multiple methods in a single study for complementary reasons. Sale et al. (2002) advocate for the careful distinction of the purposes of the research, the methods used, and the phenomena under study in each method. Taking into consideration the proposed solution and the cautions raised when using mixed-methods, I incorporated both qualitative and quantitative approaches into my research for complementary purposes, not cross-validation or phenomenon enrichment reasons.

A mixed-methods approach was carried out in sequence for studying mature students' persistence. In the present study, the phenomenological inquiry findings provided in-depth insights into mature students' educational commitment and persistence in a university-college setting. The results from the secondary analyses on data from the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study of College Students and First Year Outcomes were used to complement the qualitative study findings. In this way, the broader trends of the large-scale survey were viewed in relation to the main themes and essential meanings that emerged from the naturalistic inquiry.

The data for the secondary analysis were extracted from the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study of College Students and First Year Outcomes. The study was designed to examine the key determinants of students' academic success and persistence during their first year of college. The focus was on those students who completed both Entry and Exit questionnaires. This represented a total of 67 member institutions and 6190 student files, with approximately 70% of these drawn from the Ontario college system. My survey sample was comprised of the 1191 students aged 25 years and older who completed both Entry and Exit survey questionnaires.

In this section, I have included a detailed profile of the mature students' sample drawn from the Pan-Canadian Study, along with descriptive statistics to describe the nature of their first-year experiences. In addition, the results of the standard multiple regression analyses performed on the age-aggregated data are presented to examine the relationships among individual, institutional, and external variables on levels of mature students' intent to persist or withdraw, educational commitment, confidence, and

satisfaction. Results from the secondary data analysis and the in-depth interviews were integrated to develop overall study conclusions and practical applications.

Survey Sample

The subgroup of interest for the present study represented 1191 (20%) students aged 25 years and older from the total, merged dataset. There were 181 student files removed from the merged dataset due to missing data. A demographic profile of the study sample is included in Table 1.

The survey sample represented a predominantly younger group of students (70% were 25-34 years old), with 63% females, and roughly equal percentages who were single (43%) and married/living common law (40%). Almost all mature students were enrolled in full-time studies (95%) and approximately half of the sample (49%) was returning to school with a 10-or-more-year time lapse in their formal education. Over one-third of the sample (37%) had one to three dependent children and 10% were supporting one to three dependent adults. The greatest number of students had some university-college credits or an undergraduate degree (36%) with equal numbers of students reporting that their highest education achieved was at the high school/equivalent or certificate/diploma levels (24% respectively). In addition, given the comprehensive range of programs available in university-college and college settings, the majority of students were enrolled in career or technical programs (67%) followed by post-graduate diplomas (13%) and Bachelor Degree Programs (9%).

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Age-Aggregated 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study Sample

Age Category (Cohort)		Elapsed Time/Gap in Formal Education	
25-34	834 (70%)	< 5 years	86 (7%)
35-44	266 (22%)	5-10 years	469 (40%)
45+	91 (8%)	10+ years	580 (49%)
Total	1191 (100%)	Missing	56 (5%)
Gender		Enrolment Status	
Female	755 (63%)	Full time	1127 (95%)
Male	401 (34%)	Part time	38 (3%)
Missing	35 (3%)	Missing	26 (2%)
Marital Status		Dependent Children	
Single/Never Married	512 (43%)	None	671 (56%)
Married/Common Law	475 (40%)	1-3	432 (37%)
Separated/Divorced	164 (14%)	3+	16 (1%)
Missing	40 (3%)	Missing	72 (6%)
		Dependent Adults	
		None	374 (31%)
		1-3	116 (10%)
		Missing	701 (59%)
Highest Education Level		Type of Program/Enrolment	
Less than High School	67 (6%)	Post-Graduate Diploma	154 (13%)
Grade 12/Equivalent	289 (24%)	Bachelor Degree Program	109 (9%)
Apprenticeship Training	31 (3%)	University Prep/Transfer	57 (5%)
Some Univ/College	231 (19%)	Career/Technical Program	796 (67%)
Certificate/Diploma	290 (24%)	Access/Upgrading Program	40 (3%)
Undergraduate Degree	202 (17%)	Missing	35 (3%)
Post-Graduate Diploma	33 (3%)		
Missing	48 (4%)		

Descriptive Statistics

I conducted chi-square analysis generated from SPSS cross tabulations to compare traditional and mature students using the reduced subset of dependent variables resulting from the Principal Component Analysis. For each variable, the component that accounted for the greatest percentage of the variation was selected for use in the comparative analysis. The high-variance component was also checked to make sure that

it gave a relevant and valid interpretation of the original data and that it was a meaningful construct in relation to the study variables. The summary list of components used for the comparative analysis included measures of persistence (intent to change programs, and quit studies before completion), educational commitment (rating of determination to finish education), confidence (rating of ability to succeed), and satisfaction (in relation to faculty relationships, teaching methods, and institutional support resources).

I was prepared to compare students under age 25 with those over 35 years (using an age 35+ cut point), because I believed that the greater age differential would give a truer picture of mature students' educational experiences. However, preliminary analysis showed that the observed differences were noted across all older age cohorts with no further distinctions gained by using the 35+ cut point. For my comparison of traditional versus mature students, I proceeded with my original plan of comparing students under 25 with those 25 years and older. I compared the two groups using χ^2 to see if there were statistically significant differences between the observed frequencies in each group. The results are reported in Tables 2 and 3.

A comparison of the self-reported persistence, commitment, confidence, and satisfaction ratings for traditional and mature students revealed some interesting variations. Turning to persistence measures in Table 2, it would appear that mature students are less likely to report an intention to change, or rate their program as not what they want, than their younger counterparts; there were statistically significant differences between the two groups ($\chi^2 = 70.79, p < .001$). Although perceptions were polled early in

the semester and represent intentions only, it is interesting to note that the likelihood of quitting was not greater for mature students.

Table 2. Comparison between Traditional and Mature Students for Selected Persistence, Educational Commitment, and Confidence Measures

Measure	Age	Agreement Ratings			Significance χ^2
		Strongly Disagree/Disagree N (%)	Undecided N (%)	Strongly Agree/Agree N (%)	
Persistence Intent to Change Program	< 25yrs	3338 (72.6)	731 (15.9)	527 (11.5)	70.79*
	≥ 25yrs	949 (82.4)	112 (9.7)	91 (7.9)	
Persistence Intent to Quit Program	< 25yrs	3644 (81.5)	532 (11.9)	294 (6.5)	7.69
	≥ 25yrs	963 (84.8)	107 (9.4)	65 (5.7)	
Commitment Determination	< 25yrs	65 (1.5)	347 (7.8)	4063 (90.8)	10.83**
	≥ 25yrs	8 (0.8)	76 (6.7)	1048 (92.6)	
Confidence Ability to Succeed	< 25yrs	85 (1.8)	324 (7.2)	4078 (90.9)	37.56*
	≥ 25yrs	12 (1.1)	51 (4.5)	1072 (94.5)	

* Significant at the 0.001 level, ** Significant at the 0.05 level.

Note. PCA–Variable with Highest Variance/Influence:

Persistence = Rating of Need to Change Program
 Persistence = Rating of Intent to Quit Studies Before Completion
 Educational Commitment = Rating of Determination to Finish Education
 Confidence = Rating of Ability to Succeed

Total Merged Dataset (Entry & End Survey) N= 6009
 Traditional Students (< 25 yrs.) n= 4818
 Mature Students (≥ 25yrs.) n= 1191.

With respect to educational commitment (Table 2), mature students expressed more determination to finish their college education than traditional-age students ($\chi^2 = 10.83, p < .05$). Similarly, mature students showed more confidence in their ability to succeed in college ($\chi^2 = 37.56, p < .001$). These results are consistent with the findings from the in-depth interviews where participants' determination was expressed as a strong goal-orientation and achievement motivation, and where confidence was discussed in

relation to acknowledged personal assets derived from extensive life and learning experiences. When viewed in relation to the interview findings, age-related differences may be associated with the fact that mature students have established clear goals, have weighed educational options carefully, and have decided to make the necessary sacrifices for longer-term benefits.

Table 3. Comparison between Traditional and Mature Students for Selected Satisfaction Measures

Measure	Age	Extent Ratings				Significance χ^2
		None N (%)	Very Few/Some N (%)	Most/All N (%)	Don't Know N (%)	
Satisfaction Faculty Relationships	< 25yrs	31 (0.6)	1346 (28.2)	3345 (69.9)	63 (1.3)	41.66*
	≥ 25yrs	6 (0.5)	248 (21.0)	915 (77.6)	11 (0.9)	
Satisfaction Student Participation	< 25yrs	37 (0.8)	1173 (24.6)	3520 (73.7)	43 (0.9)	122.39*
	≥ 25yrs	8 (0.7)	175 (14.8)	989 (83.8)	9 (0.8)	
Satisfaction Support Resources	< 25yrs	39 (0.8)	1069 (23.0)	3434 (73.7)	115 (2.5)	7.01
	≥ 25yrs	7 (0.6)	280 (24.1)	837 (71.9)	40 (3.4)	

* Significant at the 0.001 level.

Note. *PCA-Variable with Highest Variance/Influence:*

Satisfaction with Faculty Relationships = Extent of Good Faculty-Student Relationships
 Satisfaction with Teaching Methods = Extent that Student Participation Encouraged
 Satisfaction with Institutional Resources = Rating of Resources to Support Learning

Total Merged Dataset (Entry & End Survey) N= 6009
 Traditional Students (< 25 yrs.) n= 4818
 Mature Students (≥ 25yrs.) n= 1191.

For satisfaction indicators, I computed cross-tabulations tested with chi-square to show significant differences between the two groups (Table 3). Mature students reported having good faculty-student relationships to a greater extent than traditional-age students ($\chi^2 = 41.66$, $p < .001$). In addition, they indicated that they were more satisfied with teaching methods, specifically in relation to the extent of student participation and

involvement in the classroom ($\chi^2 = 122.39, p < .001$). These results are aligned with two major themes that emerged from the qualitative study and lend support to the claims that positive faculty-student relationships and experiential learning opportunities have a direct impact on students' satisfaction levels. No statistically significant differences emerged between the groups for satisfaction ratings of institutional resources to support student learning. It was, perhaps, too early for students to have accessed the range of available institutional resources.

In summary, mature students appear to be less inclined to change their programs and are more determined, confident, and satisfied with their faculty relationships and classroom experiences than their younger counterparts. When viewed in relation to the detailed accounts of students' personal assets and their positive post-secondary experiences, there is evidence to suggest that faculty and staff have a strong role to play in reinforcing the advantages of mature students' greater life experience and academic strengths. In addition, mature students could definitely benefit by taking introductory courses that promote active student participation and group interaction, especially during the crucial first semesters.

Multiple Regression Analyses

To complete the quantitative component of the study, standard multiple regression analyses were performed on the age-aggregated data of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study to explore the determinants of mature students' intent to persist or withdraw (persistence measure), educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. As outlined in the

Methodology Section (Chapter 3), the final multiple regression model contained seven dependent and six independent variables pertaining to the sample of mature students drawn from the Pan-Canadian Study merged dataset (see Appendix O for the Variable List and the Model for Regression Analyses). Principal component analysis was the statistical technique applied to this set of variables to simplify and prepare the data before performing multiple linear regression. I used SPSS (version 14) multiple regression procedures allowing prediction of mature students' persistence, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction from the six independent variables of interest. A separate regression analysis was conducted for each dependent variable, using the subset of predictor variables. In total, seven multiple regression analyses were performed on the data to test the model.

Intent to Change/Transfer

As indicated in Table 4, the six-variable model significantly contributed to the prediction of Intent to Change/Transfer Program ($F = 122.624, p < .001$). All six independent variables contributed significantly to the regression with t -statistics at .05, .01, and .001 levels. The regression model indicates that all variables in combination accounted for 44% (44% adjusted) of the Intent to Change/Transfer Program variance. The standardized coefficients reflect the unique contribution of each independent variable and show that financial concerns ($\beta = .094$), goal orientation ($\beta = -.364$), and perceived relevance of studies ($\beta = .229$) were important determining variables in the prediction of Intent to Change/Transfer Program.

Table 4. Standard Multiple Regression of College Academic Experience and Attitude Variables on Intent to Change/Transfer

Variable	Coefficients		Model		
	β	t	Adjusted R^2	F	df
Financial Concerns	.094	3.777***	.443	122.624***	6
Peer Interaction	-.072	-2.411*			
Faculty Interaction	-.074	-2.256*			
Goal Orientation	-.364	-12.550***			
Perceived Relevance	.229	10.653***			
Perceived Advantages	-.068	-2.290*			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Intent to Leave/Continue Studies

The regression model contributed significantly to the prediction of Intent to Leave/Continue Studies ($F = 61.572$, $p < .001$), as depicted in Table 5. Five independent variables contributed significantly to the regression with t -statistics at .01 and .001 levels. All variables together accounted for 28% (28% adjusted) of the variance in Intent to Leave/Continue Studies. Results showed that four variables, in particular, were important determinants of students' intent to leave/continue in their program of study, and these were financial concerns ($\beta = .103$), goal orientation ($\beta = -.239$), perceived relevance of studies ($\beta = .174$), and perceived advantages of a college education ($\beta = -.161$).

Table 5. Standard Multiple Regression of College Academic Experience and Attitude Variables on Intent to Leave/Continue

Variable	β	Coefficients t	Model		
			Adjusted R^2	F	df
Financial Concerns	.103	3.674***	.283	61.572***	6
Peer Interaction	-.088	-2.582**			
Faculty Interaction	-.059	-1.591			
Goal Orientation	-.239	-7.241***			
Perceived Relevance	.174	5.459***			
Perceived Advantages	-.161	-4.809***			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Educational Commitment

With respect to determinants of Educational Commitment, Table 6 shows that the regression model contributed significantly to prediction ($F = 121.711$, $p < .001$). Four of the independent variables contributed significantly to the regression with t -statistics at .01 and .001 levels. All variables taken together accounted for 44% (44% adjusted) of the Educational Commitment variance. Three variables, in particular, showed a strong relationship to the response variable. Faculty interaction/relationships ($\beta = .136$), goal orientation ($\beta = 11.191$), and perceived advantages of a college education ($\beta = 10.719$) were important predictors of students' educational commitment to complete their college education.

Table 6. Standard Multiple Regression of College Academic Experience and Attitude Variables on Educational Commitment

Variable	β	Coefficients t	Model		
			Adjusted R^2	F	df
Financial Concerns	.027	1.090	.441	121.711***	6
Peer Interaction	.005	.155			
Faculty Interaction	.136	4.145***			
Goal Orientation	.327	11.191***			
Perceived Relevance	-.074	-2.636**			
Perceived Advantages	.317	10.719***			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Confidence

As shown in Table 7, the regression model contributed significantly to the prediction of Confidence ($F = 87.976, p < .001$) with four of the independent variables statistically significant at .01 and .001 levels. All variables in combination accounted for 36% (36% adjusted) of the variance in Confidence. Three variables showed an especially strong relationship to the response variable, such that faculty interaction/relationships ($\beta = .196$), goal orientation ($\beta = .312$), and perceived advantages of a college education ($\beta = .163$) were important determinants of students' confidence in their ability to succeed in their studies.

Table 7. Standard Multiple Regression of College Academic Experience and Attitude Variables on Confidence

Variable	β	Coefficients t	Model		
			Adjusted R^2	F	df
Financial Concerns	-.030	-1.142	.361	87.976***	6
Peer Interaction	.092	2.877**			
Faculty Interaction	.196	5.587***			
Goal Orientation	.312	10.094***			
Perceived Relevance	-.037	-1.229			
Perceived Advantages	.163	5.157***			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Satisfaction with Faculty Relationships

For Satisfaction with Faculty Relationships, Table 8 shows that the regression model contributed significantly to prediction ($F = 73.775$, $p < .001$). Four of the independent variables contributed significantly to the prediction of Satisfaction with Faculty Relationships with t -statistics at .01 and .001 levels. All variables in combination accounted for 32% (32% adjusted) of the variance in Satisfaction with Faculty Relationships. Two variables, in particular, showed a strong relationship to the response variable. Faculty interaction/relationships ($\beta = .482$) and perceived program relevance ($\beta = -.120$) were important determinants of students' satisfaction, as measured by their assessment of the number of faculty who have good relationships with their students.

Table 8. Standard Multiple Regression of College Academic Experience and Attitude Variables on Satisfaction with Faculty Relationships

Variable	β	Coefficients t	Model		
			Adjusted R^2	F	df
Financial Concerns	-.071	-2.594**	.322	73.775***	6
Peer Interaction	-.025	-.762			
Faculty Interaction	.482	13.242***			
Goal Orientation	.088	2.755**			
Perceived Relevance	-.120	-3.844***			
Perceived Advantages	-.014	-.428			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Satisfaction with Student Participation

As shown in Table 9, the regression model contributed significantly to the prediction of Satisfaction with Student Participation ($F = 50.147$, $p < .001$) with two of the independent variables statistically significant at .01 and .001 levels. All variables together accounted for 24% (24% adjusted) of the variance in satisfaction with student participation. One variable, in particular, showed a strong relationship to the response variable. Faculty interaction/relationships ($\beta = .399$) was the strongest predictor of students' satisfaction, as measured by their assessment of the number of faculty who encourage student participation and involvement in class.

Table 9. Standard Multiple Regression of College Academic Experience and Attitude Variables on Satisfaction with Student Participation

Variable	β	Coefficients t	Model		
			Adjusted R^2	F	df
Financial Concerns	-.046	-1.582	.243	50.147***	6
Peer Interaction	.019	.550			
Faculty Interaction	.399	10.427***			
Goal Orientation	.036	1.065			
Perceived Relevance	-.104	-3.150**			
Perceived Advantages	.031	.889			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Satisfaction with Institutional Support Resources

Lastly, the regression model contributed significantly to the prediction of Satisfaction with Institutional Support Resources ($F = 49.240$, $p < .001$) with three of the independent variables statistically significant at .05, .01, and .001 levels (Table 10). All variables in combination accounted for 24% (24% adjusted) of the variance in satisfaction with institutional support resources. Two variables, in particular, showed a strong relationship to the response variable. Faculty interaction/relationships ($\beta = .388$) and perceived program relevance ($\beta = -.125$) were important predictors of students' satisfaction, as measured by their assessment of the extent to which the institution provides students with the resources they need to learn.

Table 10. Standard Multiple Regression of College Academic Experience and Attitude Variables on Satisfaction with Institutional Support Resources

Variable	β	Coefficients t	Model		
			Adjusted R^2	F	df
Financial Concerns	-.064	-2.220*	.240	49.240***	6
Peer Interaction	.023	.670			
Faculty Interaction	.388	10.059***			
Goal Orientation	-.006	-.181			
Perceived Relevance	-.125	-3.792***			
Perceived Advantages	.055	1.589			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Summary

Overall, the results support the effectiveness of the regression model in identifying several factors that are important predictors of mature students' persistence (intent to persist or withdraw), educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. The model appears to have the best fit with Intent to Change/Transfer and Educational Commitment Variables (explaining 44% of the variance, respectively).

For both Intent to Change/Transfer and Intent to Leave/Continue Studies variables, financial concerns, goal orientation, and perceived relevance of studies were the most important determinants. It would appear that these factors are important predictors of students' intentions to continue their studies, with the potential for affecting mature students' actual retention outcomes. For both Educational Commitment and Confidence variables, faculty interaction/relationships, goal orientation, and perceived advantages of a college education were the most significant predictors. Similarities in the results suggest that the constructs of educational commitment and confidence may be

closely related. Further study would be needed to refine construct measurement, in order to improve the predictive model. Finally, for the Satisfaction variables, faculty interaction/relationships and perceived program relevance were the strongest predictors. Not surprisingly, students' positive assessment of faculty-student relationships was predictive of their satisfaction ratings. It also makes sense that the likelihood of students finding their program relevant contributes positively and significantly to their satisfaction levels. It would appear that students' satisfaction with their college experiences, in general, is dependent on their perceived positive relationships with faculty and their belief that they are engaged in relevant learning experiences.

A consistent pattern of individual, institutional, and external factors is revealed, when results from the secondary data analysis are considered alongside the emergent themes from the in-depth interviews. The multiple regression analysis confirmed the importance of goal orientation and perceived relevance of studies as predictors of Intent to Change/Transfer and Intent to Leave/Continue Studies. During their interviews, mature students also stressed the significance of having clearly defined goals, as well as the importance of having high-levels of determination and motivation to realize their educational goals and aspirations. Participants shared vivid examples of how their individual characteristics—expressed as personal assets—were contributing to their educational focus and persistence. Mature students continually situated their educational pursuits in the context of relevant personal, educational, and career-related goals.

Student-faculty relationships were a pivotal factor in promoting mature students' persistence in the current study. Students' ratings of faculty interactions/relationships had

predictive significance in the regressions on Educational Commitment, Confidence, and Satisfaction variables. Likewise, the perceived quality of students' relationships with their professors was the most influential institutional factor raised during the individual interviews. Most participants attributed their positive academic experiences to the encouragement and support they received from their professors. The nature and extent of mature students' relationships with their professors were particularly important for instilling confidence, clarifying academic expectations, and providing course-related accommodations when needed.

Financial concerns were raised as prominent issues for mature students in both the large-scale survey and the qualitative interviews. This factor was a significant predictor of Intent to Change/Transfer and Intent to Leave/Continue in the multiple regression analyses. This is not surprising, given the fact that over one-third of the survey sample had between one to three dependent children and 10% were supporting between one to three dependent adults. Similarly, finances was the one external factor reported most often as exacerbating students' levels of stress and life-role conflicts in the individual interviews. Several students gave detailed accounts of how family obligations had compounded their financial stresses, and how their Student Loans were either unavailable or inadequate to relieve their financial burdens.

In summary, goal orientation, perceived relevance of studies, student-faculty relationships, and financial concerns emerged as the most influential contributors to mature students' persistence. The importance of these factors was revealed in the major findings for both secondary and primary data analyses. Although I conducted a

comparison of selected persistence, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction measures for traditional and mature students, I did not examine variations among the different cohorts. It was not the focus of this study to examine the differential impacts within and between the various cohorts of mature students. However, it must be noted that Peer Interaction was a significant determinant of Intent to Change/Transfer, Intent to Leave/Continue, and Confidence, and this may be related to the fact that 70% of the age-aggregated survey sample were between the ages of 25-34 years. Turning to similar findings for the individual interviews, the youngest participants reported feeling disconnected and segregated from their peers when opportunities for socializing were missing. In contrast, the older participants were more contented to be studying with mixed age groups. Thus, the possibility exists that peer interaction is a more important contributor to students' social integration and persistence for younger cohorts of mature students.

Chapter 6.

Conclusions and Implications for Educational Leadership

The current study was designed to broaden and deepen our understanding of the unique life circumstances and challenges that mature students experience in post-secondary education. Using a mixed-methods design involving phenomenological-hermeneutical methods of inquiry and multivariate analysis of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Study data, I was able to identify a complex array of individual, institutional, and external factors that have significant impacts on maintaining and increasing adult learners' levels of persistence, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction in their first year of university-college life. The core components of the Adult Quality of Life Profile provided the guiding framework for explicating and reporting the eight main themes and essential meanings from the qualitative inquiry. Results from the secondary data analysis were used to complement and further elaborate the findings from the individual narratives. The blending of qualitative and quantitative study findings created a more holistic and comprehensive portrait of the factors influencing mature students' quality of life and retention, thus confirming the utility of adopting an adult quality of life conceptual framework for this study.

The main conclusions drawn from the qualitative and quantitative results are reflective of the multi-textured and multi-layered patterns of mature students' lived experiences. The study conclusions are reported in relation to the two main research questions, and are discussed in the context of relevant themes and issues in the existing student retention and attrition literature. To address the third research question, I have developed a list of practical applications aimed at improving the quality of university-college and college environments for mature students. A key piece in the persistence puzzle is ensuring that existing student retention policies and practices are flexible, holistic, and responsive to adults' unique needs and challenges. This section culminates with a discussion of the need for future research to further our understanding of mature students' persistence and the institutional responses that will attract, support, and sustain this growing segment of our study body.

Individual Contributors to Student Success

Research Question 1: What are the experiences of mature students that contribute to their levels of educational commitment and persistence in the first year of general arts/science programs in a university-college environment?

The strong themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews were used to create a composite of mature students' common and unique experiences during their crucial first semesters. The eight identified thematic categories were summarized as: a) major life transitions; b) multifaceted educational goals; c) awareness of personal assets; d) relationships with professors; e) peer relationships; f) life-role conflicts; g) supportive

institutional infrastructure; and h) experiential learning opportunities. Of these, three themes were raised by the majority of interview participants and formed the basis for my conclusions about individual factors influencing mature students' educational commitment and persistence.

The first conclusion relates to the multifaceted nature of mature students' educational goals and aspirations. All participants interviewed were highly goal-directed, although the driving force behind their educational pursuits was more varied and complex than conventional degree attainment. The majority of participants had clearly defined educational goals that were placed in specific career or advanced education contexts. However, about a third of the sample was engaging in post-secondary education for personal growth reasons, or to make a more meaningful contribution to society that may or may not involve a terminal degree or diploma. This finding can be understood in the context of adult and life-span-role development theories explaining enrolment and academic engagement in relation to adult learning needs and desires and the typical life changes and transitions that trigger adults' educational participation (DeJoy, 1997; Holton & Swanson, 1998; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Selman et al., 1998).

For accurate retention and attrition predictions, more importance should be assigned to adults' varied life circumstances and the meaning they attach to their educational pursuits. The finding that mature students have more complex life-context motivators, as well as more diverse educational goals and intentions is well supported in studies of adult student retention and attrition (Braxton, 2002; Grayson & Grayson, 2003; Hagedorn, 2005b; Hoell, 2006; Hoyt & Winn, 2004; Kasworm, 2003). Rather than

measuring persistence using conventional program completion or graduation rates, mature students' progress should be assessed against their specific educational goals, using institutional tracking systems that can account for stop-out, transfer-out, and opt-out behaviours. A longitudinal study of adults' learning pathways would provide valuable information for designing effective adult student retention policies and programs. A more accurate portrayal of mature students' persistence would also free up institutional resources for identifying and monitoring those students who are truly at risk for early departure and avoidable attrition.

A second conclusion pertains to the evidence that mature students attribute their post-secondary successes to personal assets that were derived from extensive life, learning, and work experiences. Their self-identified skills, attitudes, and knowledge are important contributors to mature students' educational experiences. The majority of participants made positive associations between their ability to succeed and their personal ethics, values, and work-related skills. Results from the focus group highlighted the fact that faculty recognize and capitalize on the organizational and leadership skills that mature students contribute in class. Faculty members also drew attention to the high value that mature students place on their education. These results are aligned with several studies that highlight the importance of teaching practices that acknowledge adults' previous knowledge and skills and their career-related self-efficacy (Bash, 2003; Man-Nor Hoi & Hiebert, 2005; McInnis, 2004; Sandler, 2000).

Results from the comparative analysis between traditional and mature students revealed that adult learners were less likely to report an intention to change, or rate their

programs unfavourably, than their younger classmates. They were also no more likely to convey intentions to quit before finishing their programs than their younger counterparts, as there were no statistically significant differences found. While representing intentions only and not actual persistence behaviours, study findings are inconsistent with previous research suggesting that non-traditional students have higher rates of attrition (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Chartrand, 1992; Farabaugh-Dorkins, 1991; Johnson, 1991). However, it does lend further support to Metzner and Beans' (1987) later claim that older students were less likely to express an intention to leave than younger students were, and that their higher educational goals had stronger negative effects on intent to leave than expected. Institutional efforts to acknowledge and reinforce mature students' strengths and their extensive life and learning experiences may be very effective in helping mature students manage the transition to university-college. This may be especially helpful for 'second chance' students and those who lack confidence in their academic abilities. For others, this may be the catalyst for converting positive intentions into demonstrated learning outcomes.

A third conclusion is that mature students who were experiencing heightened levels of life-role conflicts persisted with their studies if they were able to draw on practical assistance and support at critical junctures. Students' ability to balance school with other life commitments appeared to be directly related to the nature and extent of support they were receiving from external sources. In their individual interviews, all students mentioned how family members were providing essential childcare, tuition support, housing, and help with activities of daily living. In spite of their family

obligations and work commitments, instrumental support from external sources was an important contributor to mature students' continued enrolment. This finding was supportive of previous research indicating that environmental support and outside encouragement have important direct and mediating effects on non-traditional student retention (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Samuels, 2005; Sandler, 2001; Farabaugh-Dorkins, 1991; Johnson, 1991).

Students also talked about the financial hardships they were experiencing by returning to school while juggling multiple life roles and family obligations. In several instances, students anticipated having to stop-out for one or more semesters to manage their finances. Contrasted with Tinto's (1993) assertion that financial reasons often mask more important academic and/or social reasons for withdrawal, financial stresses appeared to be a direct threat to students' continuous enrolment. Results from the regression analysis also showed that financial concerns were a significant predictor of mature students' intent to change/transfer their program and intent to leave/continue their studies. Several researchers profiled the importance of financial aid and financial planning assistance for supporting mature students' persistence (McGivney, 2004; Brown, 2002; Samuels, 2005). Given the significance of this factor, mature students should have ongoing access to education planning resources to help them realistically assess and plan for the impacts on family and financial resources. Comprehensive student retention programs that include financial counselling and special scholarships and bursaries are promising best practices for promoting mature students' persistence and timely degree completion.

Institutional Facilitators and Barriers

Research Question 2: What conditions, processes, and quality of life factors do mature students perceive as facilitators or barriers?

An important aspect of the study was examining mature students' perceptions of the institutional conditions, processes, and quality of life factors that act as facilitators and barriers to their academic progress and persistence. Combined results from the qualitative inquiry and the secondary data analysis revealed that four main institutional and external factors were responsible for facilitating or hindering mature students' ability to continue their studies. The most influential contributors were: a) student-faculty relationships; b) peer relationships; c) institutional infrastructure; and d) experiential learning opportunities. Four additional conclusions can be drawn from these findings involving classroom experiences, teaching and learning resources, institutional structures and facilities, and health-promotive environmental aspects that support mature students' progress toward attaining their educational goals and aspirations.

Classroom Experiences

Apart from the evidence that mature students are highly goal-directed, student-faculty relationships were of paramount importance. The fourth conclusion of the study is that having supportive and helpful relationships with professors has a positive impact on students' satisfaction levels and their feelings of academic competence. This claim is substantiated by numerous studies indicating that academic engagement and meaningful student-faculty interactions, both inside and outside the classroom, are powerful

predictors of adult learners' academic performance, satisfaction, and persistence (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2007; Center for Postsecondary Research, 2007; Kuh, 2003; Kuh, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; McInnis, 2004; Sandeen, 2004). The majority of students interviewed in the current study benefited from the encouragement and course-related support they received from their professors.

Reassurance from professors and flexible assignment deadlines made it possible for students to meet course expectations while dealing with competing family and work priorities. Regression results also showed that faculty interaction/relationships were a significant determinant of students' educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. Given the importance attributed to this factor, professors should make special efforts to remain accessible and approachable in the first few weeks of classes. Introductory, first-year courses should be used as the vehicle for linking students' academic engagement with their educational attainment and retention rates. As pointed out during the faculty focus group, there are creative ways to engage mature students by integrating their extensive life and learning experiences into classroom activity.

Results from the interviews and secondary data analysis also reinforced the importance of creating classroom conditions that facilitate peer interactions for mature students who are seeking in-class socializing opportunities. This is in marked contrast to several non-traditional student retention studies that showed that academic reasons, not social factors, were responsible for shaping students' intentions to leave or continue their studies. In their study of non-traditional, part-time commuter students, Metzner and Bean (1987) reported that non-traditional student attrition was due to poor academic

integration, whereas social integration variables did not have significant effects on students' intentions to leave or stay. In an earlier study, Pascarella and Chapman (1983) reported that social integration showed a stronger influence on students' educational intentions at four-year campuses, and academic integration exerted more influence at two- and four-year commuter institutions.

When documenting institutional conditions that promote student development, satisfaction, and persistence, Kuh et al. (2004) highlighted the importance of meaningful interactions between students and their teachers as “essential to their high-quality learning experiences” with peers assuming the secondary role of providing instrumental support for helping students deal with academic and social challenges (p. 207). Toward this end, many institutions create “socially catalytic spaces” that are integrated into departmental areas to increase accessibility to faculty and to promote student-faculty interaction (Kuh et al., 2004, p. 209). My study findings were consistent with Samuels' (2005) conclusions wherein “the classroom was the fulcrum of college activity for older participants” at a traditionally-oriented university campus (p. 109). In contrast with Samuels' findings, social integration *did* contribute to mature students' feelings of belonging and connectedness in the current study. However, there may be differential effects based on age, with results showing that younger study participants (those aged 25-34 years) were less satisfied with their studies, and experienced feelings of isolation and segregation, when opportunities to socialize with peers were lacking. While not the strongest determinant, regression results showed that peer interaction was found to be a significant predictor of Intent to Change/Transfer, Intent to Leave/Continue, and

Confidence. Combined qualitative and quantitative results for the current study point to the importance of peer interaction as a vital component of mature students' sense of belonging and satisfaction. It may also be the case that student-student interaction is having important effects in mediating high-quality learning experiences in the classroom.

Teaching and Learning Resources

Fifth, it may be concluded from this study that experiential learning opportunities have a positive impact on mature students' educational commitment and satisfaction levels. This unique finding was confirmed in both the individual interviews and the faculty focus group and gives credence to the importance of integrating mature students' prior life and learning experiences into classroom activity. In addition, results from the comparative analysis showed that mature students were more satisfied than traditional-age students with teaching methods that encouraged student participation and classroom involvement. The current study marks a departure from conventional student retention and attrition research by including adult learning principles and practices as theory-based variables for exploring mature students' educational commitment and persistence. It builds on previous research showing how teaching and learning that is firmly and intentionally rooted in adult learning practice can enhance student engagement and educational attainment when prior learning and experience, active learning, and collaborations among faculty and students are integrated into classroom-based activity (Clifton, Perry, Stubbs, & Roberts, 2004; Conrad, 1993; Holton & Swanson, 1998; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998; Kuh et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terinzini, 2005; Tinto,

2002). Study findings are also supportive of empirical research showing that faculty teaching skills—specifically teaching organization, preparedness, and clarity—have direct positive effects on students' social integration and their subsequent institutional commitment and intentions to re-enrol (Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000). The current study offers compelling reasons for promoting specific teaching and learning practices that are positively associated with mature students' educational commitment and persistence.

An advantage of this model is that it places emphasis on teaching and learning practices that are responsive to adult learners' needs and that can be readily applied in institutions whose mission and mandate is founded on teaching excellence. It also has implications for the way that institutions allocate their teaching and learning resources, organize their instructional activities, and monitor teaching and learning outcomes when promoting student success.

Institutional Structures and Facilities

A sixth conclusion of the study is that a supportive institutional infrastructure is linked to mature students' ability to realize their educational goals and aspirations, which in turn is associated with positive persistence and satisfaction outcomes. A range of supportive institutional practices emerged from the interviews that were either lacking or were specifically geared to meeting mature students' unique needs and challenges. Participants drew attention to the importance of financial affordability, small class sizes, responsive admission processes, and the extent of course availability and scheduling

flexibility. Regression results provided additional evidence that financial concerns were a determining factor in mature students' re-enrolment decisions. Financial concerns were a significant predictor of mature students' Intent to Change/Transfer and Intent to Leave/Continue. These combined study results are corroborated by previous research into supportive campus environments and institutional practices that help mature students succeed academically, as well as cope with their non-academic, life-role conflicts and responsibilities (Brown, 2002; Hybertson et al., 1992; Kuh et al., 2004; McGivney, 2004; Samuels, 2005; Sandler, 2001). Findings from the current study provide a detailed account of mature students' educational experiences that could be used for redesigning financial assistance programs, enhancing prior learning and early warning systems, as well as improving course availability and scheduling flexibility.

Health-Promotive Environmental Aspects

Quality of life was not pursued as a correlate of persistence per se; rather, it provided the framework for broadening the scope of inquiry to explore the multi-dimensional and multi-layered nature of mature students' lives. As a seventh and final conclusion, I propose that an adult quality of life model has conceptual validity for exploring the complexity of mature students' educational commitment and persistence.

I used an adult quality of life conceptual framework, encompassing social-ecology and health promotion perspectives, to yield a broader understanding of mature students' university-college experiences. Six of the study conclusions addressed factors that institutions can positively influence with respect to enhancing mature students'

persistence, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. The most influential factors included: a) varied life-contexts and educational goals; b) positive beliefs and attitudes toward background experiences; c) practical support and assistance from external sources; d) encouraging and helpful relationships with professors; e) opportunities for student participation and classroom involvement; and f) supportive and flexible institutional practices. In summary, study results showed that mature students' persistence is a multifaceted phenomenon and that a social-ecological approach has utility for exploring the "dynamic transaction" between people and their environments (Stokols, 1992, p. 8). I believe that efforts to enhance mature students' quality of life and retention must take into account the health-promotive aspects of university-college and college settings, as well as the joint influence of individual, institutional, and environmental factors on personal and collective well-being.

By explicitly considering the health-promotive aspects of the university-college environment, I was able to suggest practical strategies for creating and maintaining improved levels of mature students' persistence, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. If student departure can be viewed as a "barometer of the social and intellectual health of institutional life," then mature students' persistence should serve as an important indicator of the actions needed to promote more healthful institutional conditions (Tinto, 1993, p. 5). The practical applications outlined in the following section highlight the role of educational leaders, faculty, and staff in establishing student retention policies and practices that optimize mature students' quality of life and retention in university-college and college settings.

Practical Applications

Research Question 3: What actions should educational leaders take to improve mature students' retention?

To address the third and final research question, I have included suggestions for creating and maintaining supportive institutional environments that could lead to improved levels of mature students' quality of life and retention. I obtained many of my improvement strategies from the 12 narrative accounts of mature students' university-college experiences, as well as from the faculty members' insights. In addition, I used the main conclusions derived from the study results to identify targeted interventions and resources for enhancing mature students' persistence, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction. In accordance with the various levels and accountability structures within university-colleges and colleges, I have presented the practical applications under the headings: Implications for Faculty, Implications for Student Development Staff, and Implications for Educational Leaders.

Implications for Faculty

Faculty members play a pivotal role in welcoming, encouraging, and mentoring mature students who may be entering university-college or college for the first time, or re-entering after long lapses in their post-secondary education. In either case, frequent faculty contact has a powerful influence on mature students' educational experiences. Recent research studying the impact of college on students confirmed the critical role that student-faculty interaction plays in promoting educational attainment and persistence. It

has been shown that “supportive interaction with professors, both in and out of the classroom, is instrumental to college students’ academic achievement” (Clifton et al., 2004, p. 803). Particular emphasis was placed on faculty’s role in introducing students to the social and scholarly norms of the institution, and in solidifying the bonds between students and the institution (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). In addition, faculty teaching and active learning have been linked to student learning and persistence (Tinto, 2002). There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that the “most effective teaching and learning require opportunities for active student involvement and participation,” and that “curricula and courses that address topics in an interdisciplinary fashion are more likely to provide effective educational experiences” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, pp. 646-647).

The important role of faculty in contributing to non-traditional student retention has been well-documented (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Hoell, 2006; Samuels, 2005). Faculty are in the ideal position to: provide ongoing academic advice and performance feedback; clarify specific course or program expectations; build confidence and rapport by acknowledging students’ previous life and learning experiences; create active learning opportunities to engage students in classroom activity; and orient students to the general requirements and specific culture of the university-college. Findings from the current study reinforce the important role of faculty, as substantiated in previous research. However, the current study places more emphasis on teaching and learning practices that address adults’ stated learning requirements and expectations. It also places faculty at the forefront in promoting an engaging and responsive university-college environment, using

a more holistic, adult quality of life perspective. The following list of practical suggestions was generated from the participant interviews:

- Create an institutional dialogue among faculty to discuss effective teaching and learning approaches that will enhance student-learning outcomes. Discussion could focus not only on teaching and learning practices that encourage student participation, but also on ways to stimulate interdepartmental connections to promote enrichment opportunities for students;
- Explicitly acknowledge the links between mature students' persistence and active student involvement in classroom activity. At the start of each semester, reinforce the importance of professors using active learning strategies for acclimatizing students to the learning culture, facilitating in-class socializing, and providing a means for efficient assignment completion. Professional development workshops could be offered during Spring and Summer institutes that are specifically geared for new teaching faculty;
- Encourage professors to place more emphasis on self-directed study to recognize adults' previous life and learning experiences. Endorse the pacing of course material to avoid the "crunch" at the end of each semester, and as a way to minimize the effects of life-role conflicts;
- Integrate attendance at relevant on-and-off campus events into the course syllabus (e.g., theatre performances, art shows, research presentations, concerts) to provide enrichment opportunities and to facilitate student-professor and student-student relationships; and
- Encourage departments to host their own open houses or welcoming events, at the beginning of each semester, to introduce incoming students to faculty and other students, and to orient mature students to discipline-specific common areas.

Implications for Student Development Staff

Research suggests that the use of academic advising and student support services is positively associated with student persistence and graduation rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Barriers to student retention are well documented and include uncertainty about educational goals and major fields of study, inadequate academic

preparation, academic difficulty, inability to access support services, inadequate finances, transitional stress, and personal problems (Grayson & Grayson, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Moreover, these barriers are shown to have differential effects for non-traditional students who are generally considered more “at-risk” for experiencing academic difficulty and non-completion (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Farabaugh-Dorkins, 1991; Kasworm, 2003; Samuels, 2005; Sandler, 2001).

The construct of intention to persist is an important component of theoretical models of non-traditional student attrition, as intentions are considered a strong predictor of actual persistence and re-enrolment behaviour (Metzner & Bean, 1987; Sandler, 2000). In addition, factors linked to mature students’ intentions may have the most potential for affecting students’ success early in the semester, with implications for longer-term persistence. Regression results showed that goal orientation and perceived relevance of studies were important determinants of mature students’ persistence. These factors may be particularly amenable to early educational planning interventions that include academic advice, financial assistance, and personal support. When viewed in the context of current study findings, student support services that address the particular life-context challenges faced by mature students are fundamental to their ability to continue their studies. The following suggestions address the major concerns and issues that were summarized from the current study and build on the documented evidence in support of targeted student support services:

- Provide separate pre-admission and orientation sessions for mature students that include focused campus tours, study skills for re-entry

students, hands-on demonstrations for accessing relevant resources, and an overview of 'typical day' scenarios;

- Institute a schedule of ongoing education planning sessions that will facilitate face-to-face meetings between mature students and education advisors. Offer a minimum of three points of contact for mature students that are scheduled before classes begin, during the first three weeks of semester, and at the end of the first academic term;
- Conduct student assessments of current and anticipated financial circumstances in relation to ongoing family and work commitments, during scheduled education planning sessions. A variety of sources for financial aid should be pursued including grants, scholarships, loans, family support, and employment income;
- Document and promote typical post-secondary entry points for mature students that include flexible admission, adult basic education, and prior learning assessment and recognition. Give particular attention to laddering programs and opportunities for mature students to apply their college credits to university-level studies; and
- Schedule brown bag luncheons throughout the first semester and invite all mature students to attend for an informal exchange of practical information and peer support. Also, encourage mature students to join academic associations and clubs on campus to increase program relevance and academic engagement.

Implications for Educational Leaders

In the preceding sections, the interrelated influences of individual, institutional, and external factors on mature students' persistence, educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction were highlighted. Study findings revealed a number of factors that enhance or impede mature students' successful educational progress and credential completion. Interview findings revealed that despite the many programs and services available at our University-College, adult learners' experienced feelings of isolation, dissatisfaction, confusion, and uncertainty at various times during their first two semesters. The current research endorses the conclusion that university-colleges and colleges need to adapt their institutional structures and processes to better accommodate

the multiple roles and responsibilities faced by adult learners. This is consistent with the evidence in the non-traditional student retention and attrition research that mature students are “persisting against difficult odds in an institutional system that is not well calibrated for the multiple roles of adults” (Sandler, 2000, p. 569).

In exploring the links between health and learning, I came across one innovative study that examined the direct relevance of student health to student success outcomes. Floyd (2003) made the case that “a true learning college, a college committed to student success, is one that is committed to a healthy climate for students and to student health” (p. 25). It was further argued that educational leaders are charged with the responsibility of creating and sustaining healthy campuses, and for implementing broadly-based student health programs and services. Community colleges were encouraged to determine the demographics of their student population and to assess their specific health needs. Family-based health services were recommended in instances where the surrounding community had limited access to medical and health services (Floyd, 2003). When health-related issues are examined in relation to the current study findings, the mature students I interviewed did not have access to on-campus health and wellness resources to help them cope with their family-based health needs. In addition, students who were new arrivals to the community-at-large, faced significant obstacles when trying to find a family physician who would accept new patients. When considered in light of the 2005/06 Pan-Canadian Survey data, the demographics of the mature student sample showed that a high proportion (37%) were caring for dependent children and 10% were supporting dependent adults. Study results point to the need for university-college and

college administrators to address the significant student health challenges that adult learners face, and in the context of adult student wellness, quality of life, and retention.

My primary interest in conducting this study was to gain in-depth knowledge about mature students' educational experiences that would shed light on the specific institutional actions needed to improve mature students' quality of life and retention in a university-college environment. Both the interview findings and the multiple regression results reinforce the need for a comprehensive, coordinated institutional effort to address mature students' educational needs and challenges. In fact, the data imply institutional obligations for developing effective adult student retention policies and programs that are within the scope of institutional responsibility. I did not set out to create an inventory of institution-specific student retention initiatives, or to catalogue the broad range of institutional best practices that have been associated with successful student outcomes. It *was* my intention to use the findings and conclusions of this study, together with my synthesis of the relevant research, to identify specific organizational improvements for enhancing mature students' educational commitment and persistence within university-college and college settings. The practical applications that pertain to educational leaders are presented under the headings of environmental features, organizational policies and systems, and enrichment and health-promotive practices.

Environmental Features

- Create “socially catalytic spaces” within departmental areas for adult students to congregate and to promote student-faculty interaction. Focus on functional and attractive design issues, such as natural light/atriums, energy efficient lighting, comfortable chairs, wireless

study carrels, and local community art. Incorporate these public zone spaces as part of the ongoing renovation work on campus.

- Provide lockers, and storage areas for commuting students to unload heavy books between classes. Lockers should be available in all departmental areas and proximate to student-faculty lounges and common areas.
- Develop a physical facilities plan for upgrading all classrooms to become adult-friendly (e.g., install non-glare lighting for better visibility, replace finishings with more sound absorbent material).
- Institute a Ride Program or Commuter Van for safe and cost-effective transportation, especially for students commuting from outlying communities and satellite campuses. This would reduce congestion around campus parking, while creating incentives for students to pursue environmentally-friendly transportation.

Organizational Policies and Systems

- Improve course access by experimenting with course models that are shorter in duration and delivered in evenings and on weekends. Summer Session courses could be promoted to help mature students expedite their degree and as a way to lighten course loads during the regular semester.
- Offer a mix of course formats and schedules for core BA/BSc degree courses to minimize waitlists and to permit timely degree completion. High-demand courses could be offered online across all semesters to supplement classroom-based delivery.
- Offer bursaries for returning students and merit-based scholarships for 'second chance' students to offset financial burdens.
- Provide extended hours of library service on weekends and throughout all semesters to accommodate working students.
- Schedule refresher sessions for all front-line staff to reinforce the importance of handling students in an individualized, supportive way. Review and revise procedures for handling course complaints that include follow-up communications.
- Develop a tracking and monitoring system for mature students that will report actual enrolment behaviour across four academic quarters. The system could be designed to reflect mature students' diverse educational goals and their less traditional education pathways (e.g., acknowledging stop-out or inactivity because of work and family obligations). Institutional retention models, and their corresponding methods for recording and reporting statistics, should be adjusted to

capture the most common continuous learning patterns for adult learners.

Enrichment and Health-Promotive Practices

- Increase opportunities for students to pursue work-related apprenticeships and co-op experiences as a strategy to enrich learning, increase program relevance, and enhance job prospects. This gives recognition to the fact that adults are life-centred in their educational orientation.
- Offer campus-based activities and special interest programs that are geared to a more mature audience. The Student Union Executive could be approached to allocate a portion of student fees to reflect the changing student demographic and the need to supplement the predominant traditional-age student focus.
- Dedicate peer helping and mentorship resources to promote student-student interactions and a sense of belonging on campus for mature students. Resources could be used to provide specific academic and social support in attempts to strengthen mature students' academic and social engagement. A peer mentorship initiative could be implemented, as part of a coordinated student retention plan, to promote student leadership skills.
- Develop a systematic and comprehensive approach to health and wellness, as a campus-wide student retention strategy. Provision of on-campus health education, promotion, and family-based services would be a major step forward in creating and maintaining a "health-promotive" university-college environment. This would be especially supportive of mature students who have age-related personal health concerns and family-related health and caregiving responsibilities.

Need for Future Research

This study was unique in applying mixed-methods for exploring mature students' quality of life and retention in university-college and college settings. Multiple regression results were used to complement the emergent themes and issues from the naturalistic inquiry to develop a more comprehensive understanding of mature students' persistence. I have attempted to draw meaningful conclusions from the combined results to identify

practical applications that are within the control of institutional faculty, student development staff, and educational leaders. Using the analogy of the jigsaw puzzle, my intent was to construct a holistic and coherent image of mature students' persistence from the integration of qualitative and quantitative data. I am hopeful that other researchers will be encouraged to use mixed-methods for complementary purposes. With additional research, it will be possible to assess the philosophical and methodological validity of using mixed-methods research for studying mature students' quality of life and retention in post-secondary education.

Despite a number of quality of life studies using quantitative methods, there is a dearth of research using phenomenological methods in post-secondary educational environments. The current study applied phenomenological methods for exploring adults' quality of life and persistence in an effort to remain student centred and ecologically valid. This represented a departure from numerous studies that tested quality of student life instruments using broad life domains and a complex array of variables. Further qualitative studies are needed to test an adult quality of life model that is based on relevant life domains and contextual factors that adult learners themselves believe have important influences on their educational progress. Perhaps the current study has offered some useful constructs for deepening our understanding of mature students' educational commitment and persistence in post-secondary education. The individual, institutional, and external variables that were grounded in mature students' experiences could form the basis for developing an adult quality of life model specifically designed for conducting qualitative studies in post-secondary settings. The adult quality of life domains and

subdomains could also be used as an organizational checklist for the planning, delivery, and evaluation of targeted adult student retention initiatives in university-college and college settings.

Because undergraduate faculties and programs can vary with respect to levels of academic and social support, it would be interesting to explore the mix of conditions, processes, and services that are the most conducive to mature students' quality of life and retention. The current study showed that there were cohort differences in relation to educational goals and peer interactions that would call for different educational planning and social support strategies. A closer examination of cohort differences drawing on life-span theories of adult development would produce useful information for designing targeted student development approaches and interventions. As well, it would be helpful to have access to longitudinal research that would determine more accurately the influence of institutional and external factors on mature students' persistence experiences over time. Longitudinal studies could track and monitor students to identify the coping strategies and resources they draw on when dealing with the increased demands of advanced courses. A larger population of mature students, followed over an extended period, would also permit a detailed analysis of the educational experiences of those students who did not continue their studies as originally intended.

Study results showed that experiential and active learning approaches in the classroom fostered more positive levels of educational commitment, confidence, and satisfaction for mature students. This is consistent with previous research showing that high-quality learning environments build in opportunities for interaction and

collaboration with faculty and fellow students (Clifton et al., 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2002). Additional research is needed to identify the teaching and learning practices that strengthen students' academic performance and social connectedness at different points in their learning trajectory. It would be interesting to know if teaching methods and faculty support have differential effects when students are first acclimatizing to the culture, when they are coping with mid-term and second-semester academic expectations, and when they are declaring their major fields of study. Research into academic and student support practices that can be demonstrably linked to student learning outcomes would also be helpful for educational planning and resource allocation purposes.

Further research is required to develop a model of student retention/attrition that is more attuned to adult learners' continuous learning pathways in university-college and college environments. Grayson and Grayson (2003) recommend a revision to current retention and attrition models by capturing four quarters of enrolment activity to accommodate the less-traditional academic paths of adult learners. Hoell (2006) points to the limitations of conventional snapshot retention data that do not allow an assessment of the multiple, often legitimate reasons, why students leave or transfer from their original institutions. Hoyt and Winn (2004) offer a compelling argument for institutions to identify subpopulations of nonreturning students for institutional planning purposes. They call for more refined definitions that distinguish between the following groups of students: transfer-outs, those who re-enrol in another institution; stop-outs, students who skip a term or more and do not complete their studies within normal time schedules; and

opt-outs, nondegree-seeking students who leave when they have accomplished their educational goals. These findings suggest that modifications to traditional student retention and attrition models are warranted to develop a more accurate representation of adult student retention. Further site-specific research is needed to develop accurate retention models that take into account adults' complex life circumstances, their more diverse educational goals and intentions, and their need for more accommodating institutional responses.

This study has provided evidence that a social-ecological approach has utility for interpreting and addressing the multiple dimensions of mature students' quality of life and retention in university-college and college settings. A conceptualization of health-promotive environments that emphasizes the joint influence of individual, institutional, and external factors has potential for developing a broader and more integrated approach to the study of adult student retention. The practical strategies put forward are aimed at establishing and maintaining an adult-friendly institutional environment that gives attention to adults' multiple life roles and responsibilities. Further investigation is needed to determine the merits of adopting an adult quality of life model for conducting a more complete assessment of adult learners' educational needs and challenges in post-secondary settings. Mixed methods could inform this model by using phenomenological approaches to identify and verify adult quality of life domains, which in turn could be used to create a diagnostic and administrative survey instrument to assess and monitor the health-promotive aspects of post-secondary environments.

I believe that if educational leaders are truly committed to student success, then they can demonstrate that commitment by creating and sustaining a healthy campus environment for *all* students—mature students’ persistence offers an excellent barometer of the state of our institutional health. I would like to conclude with a thought that was stimulated by Maxine Greene’s reflections on the larger domains of education. She describes how learning happens with a “breaking free, a leap, and then a question” (Greene, 1995, p. 6). This captures, in evocative language, the essential meaning I hope that I have conveyed in sharing the findings from my *Mature Students in the Persistence Puzzle* Study. I envision us breaking free of conventional ideas about student retention and attrition to take a leap of faith in conceptualizing and addressing mature students’ persistence using holistic, multidimensional, and inclusive theories and practices. As educational leaders, we could then turn our attention to the pressing question of how we can create health-promotive environments to support and sustain our mature students.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Individual Interview Guide

Note: Thank student and refer to our brief telephone conversation. Begin the interview with a social conversation as a warm-up. Use a brief reflective activity—ask for any immediate ideas/insights/concerns, or ask participant to recall a specific situation, event, thought/feeling, or person connected with her/his first day on campus.

Introduction: Recap study purpose. The purpose of my study is to gain in-depth insights into mature students' university-college experiences, and to identify those factors that contribute to their quality of life and retention. By participating, you will be helping us to identify the specific needs and challenges that adult learners face and the associated need for campus programs, services, and resources that will support mature students in attaining their educational goals and aspirations.

Interview Question:

Tell me about your experiences as a mature student?

Note: Participants will be asked to describe their experiences, as fully as possible, using one open-ended question: Additional (focus) questions will be used, as needed, to evoke vivid and comprehensive accounts of each person's experience, to seek clarification, and/or to obtain specific examples. Focus questions will be varied, changed, or ignored altogether to allow for spontaneous accounts of participants' lived experiences.

Additional (Focus) Questions:

1. What is it about your university-college experience that allows you to achieve your life goals, hopes and aspirations as a mature student? (Probe for examples of what has helped, gauging importance/positive impact).
2. Are there aspects of your university-college experience that have presented barriers in your efforts? (Probe for examples of what has hindered, gauging importance/negative impact).
3. What are the key elements of the university-college setting that influence your quality of life, that is, your ability to exercise your individual needs, choices and control as a mature student? (Probe for specifics, such as classroom experiences).
4. What are some of the issues you face in managing your multiple life roles as a mature student? (Probe for specifics, such as family responsibilities).
5. Are there specific things that the university-college could do to improve mature students' educational experiences? (Probe for specifics, such as course-availability).
6. Do you have anything else to add? Any surprises? Any advice for others?

Note. Ask for a pseudonym and confirm email and telephone number for follow-up.

Appendix B.

Invitation to Participate: Email Format

Re: Invitation to Share your Unique Insights and Experiences as a Mature Student

I am writing to ask for your voluntary participation in an exciting research study on the experiences of first-year, mature students at Malaspina University-College. My *Mature Students' Persistence Study* will explore aspects of mature students' lives and life events that are important to their well-being, and that contribute to their decisions to complete their studies. By participating in this study, you will be making a unique contribution to this under-researched area. You will also be helping Malaspina to identify the specific campus programs, services, and resources that will support mature students in attaining their educational goals and aspirations.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete two, one-hour interviews held on campus during your first and second semesters. During the interviews, I will be asking open-ended questions that may touch on your classroom-based experiences, institutional resource-use, family circumstances, support networks and educational goals and intentions. All interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed, and results will be presented as summarized information only (your personal information will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential).

To recognize your contribution of time, energy, and effort, I will be offering you a \$25 Bookstore Gift Certificate, and at the end of the interviews, your name will be entered into a draw for a 1GB, USB Flash Drive/Memory Stick (your chances of winning are 1 in 12!).

I will follow-up this email with a formal letter of invitation, and I will be phoning you in the near future, to answer any questions you may have and to ask you for your participation. I can be reached at tel: (250) 740-6548, and by email: macfadgen1@mala.bc.ca to discuss your interest in joining the study. I am looking forward to the possibility of your participation and I thank you, in advance, for making a significant contribution to our understanding of mature students' unique needs and issues.

Sincerely,

Lynne MacFadgen, Research Principal
Mature Students' Persistence Study
Malaspina University-College
Building 305/Room 512g
Tel: (250) 740-6548
Fax: (250) 740-6256
Email: macfadgen1@mala.bc.ca

Appendix C.

Participant Letter of Invitation: Follow-Up

Re: *Invitation to Share your Unique Insights and Experiences as a Mature Student*

Dear _____

I am writing to ask for your voluntary participation in an exciting research study on the experiences of first-year, mature students at Malaspina University-College. My *Mature Students' Persistence Study* will explore aspects of mature students' lives and life events that are important to their well-being, and that contribute to their decisions to complete their studies. By participating in this study, you will be making a unique contribution to this under-researched area. You will also be helping Malaspina to identify the specific campus programs, services, and resources that will support mature students in attaining their educational goals and aspirations.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to complete two, one-hour interviews held on campus during your first and second semesters. During the interviews, I will be asking open-ended questions that may touch on your classroom-based experiences, institutional resource-use, family circumstances, support networks and educational goals and intentions. All interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed, and results will be presented as summarized information only (your personal information will be kept strictly anonymous and confidential).

To recognize your contribution of time, energy, and effort, I will be offering you a \$25 Bookstore Gift Certificate, and at the end of the interviews, your name will be entered into a draw for a 1GB, USB Flash Drive/Memory Stick (your chances of winning are 1 in 12!).

I will follow-up this Letter of Invitation with a phone call in the near future, to answer any questions you may have and to ask you for your participation. I can be reached at tel: (250) 740-6548, and by email: macfadgen1@mala.bc.ca to discuss your interest in joining the study. I am looking forward to the possibility of your participation and I thank you, in advance, for making a significant contribution to our understanding of mature students' unique needs and issues.

Sincerely,

Lynne MacFadgen, Principal Researcher
Mature Students' Persistence Study
Canadian Council on Learning Research Grant Recipient
and Doctoral Candidate in Education, Simon Fraser University

Appendix D.

Research Consent Form: Participant

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM - STUDENT

"Mature Students' Persistence Study"

May, 2006

<p>Lynne MacFadgen, Principal Researcher, Malaspina University-College, Faculty of Student Services Tel: (250) 740-6414; Fax: (250) 740-6464 Email: macfadgenl1@mala.bc.ca</p>	<p><i>Additional Contact:</i> Dr. Patrick Ross, Vice-President Student Services Faculty of Student Services Tel: (250) 740-6411; Fax: (250) 6484 Email: rossp@mala.bc.ca</p>
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You are invited to participate in the Mature Students' Persistence Study which is being conducted to explore the factors that are associated with mature students' levels of commitment and persistence in their first year of post-secondary education. Of particular interest are those factors that contribute to your quality of life, and your decisions to complete your studies at Malaspina University-College.

You will be asked to participate in two, one-hour interviews during your first and second semesters, along with other students aged 25 years and older who are currently enrolled in first-year courses in general arts and science degree programs at Malaspina University-College. During the interviews, you will be asked open-ended questions about your quality of life issues, family circumstances, external activities, support networks, academic performance, classroom-based experiences, institutional resource-use, and educational goals and intentions.

All interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed by senior students to capture central themes and issues. Results will be presented as summarized information (papers presented at ACCC and CSSE National Conferences in May, 2007), and a Final Written Report of Findings will be submitted to the Canadian Council on Learning (project funder) and to Simon Fraser University (to fulfill requirements of the researcher's EdD Educational Leadership Degree). Personal narratives and case studies will have no individual identifiers attached when reported, to ensure strict confidentiality and complete anonymity. Only the principal researcher, the hired transcribers, and the senior supervisor will have access to personal records, all of whom are committed to keeping your personal information confidential.

Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your involvement, at any time and for any reason, without consequence. You also have the right to ask questions throughout the study, and to decline to answer any questions in the interview process. You will be asked to review your personal profiles and case studies to determine how closely these descriptions match your actual experiences. The possible risks associated with participation in the research are considered minimal, and no greater than those encountered when negotiating daily life, while the potential benefits are expected to be significant in contributing to our understanding of adult learners' needs and challenges.

I have read and understand the above information and I voluntarily agree to participate in the Study. I have been offered to keep a copy of this signed consent form.

Participant's signature

Principal Investigator's signature

Date

Appendix E.

Research Consent Form: Faculty

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM - FACULTY

"Mature Students' Persistence Study"

May, 2006

<p>Lynne MacFadgen, Principal Researcher, Malaspina University-College, Faculty of Student Services Tel: (250) 740-6414; Fax: (250) 740-6464 Email: macfadgenl1@mala.bc.ca</p>	<p><i>Additional Contact:</i> Dr. Patrick Ross, Vice-President Student Services Faculty of Student Services Tel: (250) 740-6411; Fax: (250) 6484 Email: rossp@mala.bc.ca</p>
--	--

You are invited to participate in the Mature Students' Persistence Study which is being conducted to explore the factors that are associated with mature students' levels of commitment and persistence in their first year of post-secondary education. Of particular interest are those factors that contribute to adult learners' quality of life, and their decisions to complete their course of study at Malaspina University-College.

You will be asked to participate in a one-hour focus group, along with other Faculty members who are instructing in introductory science and general arts courses at Malaspina University-College. During the focus group, you will be asked to share your perceptions and insights about what contributes to students' decisions to persist in their studies or to withdraw.

The focus group discussion will be audiotaped and transcribed to capture central themes and issues. Results will be presented as summarized information (papers presented at ACCC and CSSE National Conferences in May, 2007), and a Final Written Report of Findings will be submitted to the Canadian Council on Learning (project funder) and to Simon Fraser University (to fulfill requirements of the researcher's EdD Educational Leadership Degree). No individual identifiers will be used when reporting project findings, to ensure strict confidentiality and complete anonymity. Only the principal researcher, and the senior supervisor will have access to focus group records, all of whom are committed to keeping the information confidential.

Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw your involvement, at any time and for any reason, without consequence. You also have the right to ask questions and to decline to answer any questions during the focus group. You will be asked to review a summary of the focus group transcript to validate the information provided. The possible risks associated with participation in the research are considered minimal, and no greater than those encountered when negotiating daily life, while the potential benefits are expected to be significant in contributing to our understanding of adult learners' needs and challenges.

I have read and understand the above information and I voluntarily agree to participate in the Study. I have been offered to keep a copy of this signed consent form.

Participant's signature

Principal Investigator's signature

Date

Appendix F.

Letter of Permission: Pan-Canadian Study

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of
The University of Toronto
252 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

September 24, 2007

Ms. Lynne MacFadgen
9 Embarcadero Place
Nanaimo, B.C.
V9S 3C4

Lynne,

This letter is to confirm that I have provided you with an anonymized data set of the Pan Canadian Survey of College Students as data in support of your doctoral dissertation. As we agreed, the data set must be destroyed following the completion of your dissertation work.

In addition, you are free to publish the results of your research in the usual scholarly journals.

Should you have additional requirements, please advise at your earliest convenience.

Regards,



Peter Dietsche Ph.D.
William G. Davis Chair in Community College Leadership
Assistant Professor of Higher Education
Department of Theory and Policy Studies
OISE/UT
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto M5S 1V6
Tel: 416.978.1217
Fax: 416.926.4741

Q9 Which of the following best describes the field of study your program is in.

1. Business
2. Health Sciences
3. Applied Arts/Media
4. Liberal Arts and Sciences
5. Social and Community Services
6. Hospitality, Recreation and Tourism
7. Applied/Engineering Technologies
8. Information Technology
9. Trades
10. Other (specify)

Q10 How many years of full-time study are normally required to complete your program/studies? (Including the summer months when you may/may not have classes)

1. Less than one year
2. One year
3. 2 years
4. 3 years
5. 4 years
6. More than 4 years
7. Other _____

Q11 Does your program include an on-the-job component where you spend time in a work place with or without pay?

1. No, my program does not include on-the-job experience
2. Yes, my program is a Co-op program (alternating periods of study and paid work terms)
3. Yes, it is a Trade/vocational training program
4. Yes, it is another program with a work placement component (e.g. practicum, internship, clinical)
5. Don't know

Q12 Did you receive any academic credits for experience gained prior to attending this institution?

1. I did not know I could apply for academic credits based on prior experience
2. I knew about, but did not apply for any academic credit when I began my studies here
3. Yes, I applied for credits but did not receive any
4. Yes, I did receive academic credit for previous experience..... If you answered #4 go to Q13

Q13. If so, what type of experience did you get credit for? (check all that apply)

1. Courses taken in high school
2. Courses taken in another college
3. Courses taken in university
4. Experience gained in the workplace
5. Experience gained doing volunteer work
6. Other (specify)

MODULE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC AND FAMILY BACKGROUND VARIABLES

Q14 Your age in years _____

Q15 Your sex.

1. Female
2. Male

Q16 Which language did you learn first?

1. English
2. French
4. Other language

Q17 What is your marital status? Are you ...

1. Single, that is never married
2. Married, living common-law or with a partner
3. Separated (still legally married)
4. Divorced

Q What is the HIGHEST level of education attained by your parents/guardian?

	Q18Father	Q19Mother
- Less than high school completion	01	01
- Completed high school or equivalent (GED)	02	02
- Some apprenticeship training	03	03
- Completed apprenticeship training	04	04
- Journey-person Certification	05	05
- Some college/university credits completed	06	06
- College certificate/diploma	07	07
- Undergraduate university degree (e.g. B.A., B.Sc.)	08	08
- Post-graduate/advanced diploma (college/university)	09	09
- Graduate degree (Master's or PhD)	10	10
- Don't know	11	11

Q20 How important was/is it to your parent(s) or guardian(s) that you get more education after high school?

1. Not important at all
2. Somewhat important
3. Quite important
4. Very important

Q21 Do you consider yourself to be a person of Aboriginal or Native ancestry? (e.g. First Nations, North American Indian, Inuit, Métis, etc.)

1. No
2. Yes

Q22 Do you consider yourself to be a member of a visible minority group? (Visible minorities are those, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are because of their race or colour, a visible minority in Canada)

1. No
2. Yes..... If you answered #2, go to Q23

Q23 If yes, please select one group below.

1. South Asian (e.g. East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)
2. South East Asian (e.g. Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)
3. Arab/ West Asian (e.g. Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)
4. Black (e.g. African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali)
5. Chinese
6. Japanese
7. Korean
8. Filipino
9. Other

Q24 Do you consider yourself to have a disability (mental, physical, or learning)?

1. No
2. Yes If you answered #2, go to Q25

Q25 If yes, please select one group below.

1. Learning
2. Mobility
3. Sensory
4. Other

Q26 How would you describe yourself?

1. Born in Canada and both parents born in Canada
2. Born in Canada and only one parent born in Canada
3. Born in Canada and neither parent born in Canada
4. Not born in Canada and now a Canadian citizen
5. Landed immigrant/permanent resident| If you answered #4, 5, 6 or 7 go to Q27
6. Visa student
7. Refugee.....|

Q27 In what year did you first come to Canada to live?

_____ year
- Don't know?

Q28 Which of the following BEST describes your main activity during the 12 month period prior to attending this college?

1. Attending high school full time
2. Attending college full time
3. Attending university full time
4. Working full time (30 hours or more per week)
5. Working part time only (less than 30 hours)
6. Both working part time and studying part-time
7. A full time homemaker
8. Unemployed and seeking work
9. Unemployed and not seeking work
10. Other (specify) _____

Q How many children and/or adults living with you are financially dependent on you?

<u>Q29 Children (less than 18 years)</u>	<u>Q30 Adults (18 years or older)</u>
- None	0
- One	1
- Two	2
- Three	3
- Over three	4

Q31 In a typical 7-day week, approximately how many hours do you spend on child care or other activities with your children? _____ hours

Q32 Which of the following BEST describes who you are living with while at this college?

1. Parent(s), guardian(s) or relatives (e.g. brother, aunt, grandparent)
2. Girlfriend/boyfriend/partner
3. Partner/spouse and children
4. Your children only
5. Students or friends (off campus)
6. Other students in an on-campus residence
7. Boarding house with strangers
8. On your own (with nobody else)
9. Other - Specify

MODULE 3: ACADEMIC BACKGROUND AND PREPARATION VARIABLES

Q33 What is the HIGHEST level of education you have completed so far?

01. Less than high school completion
02. Completed high school or equivalent (GED)
03. Some apprenticeship training
04. Completed apprenticeship training
05. Journey-person Certification
06. Some college/university credits completed
07. College certificate/diploma completed
08. Undergraduate university degree (e.g. B.A., B.Sc., B.Ed., Applied degree)
09. Post-graduate/advanced diploma (college/university)
10. Graduate degree (Master's or PhD)

Q34 After leaving high school, how many hours did you spend taking part in a workshop, program or course designed to help you adjust to first-year college studies?

1. none
2. one hour or less
3. 2-5 hours
4. 6-10 hours
5. more than 10 hours
6. Don't know

Q. The next few questions ask you to evaluate your various skills. Using the scale below, how would you rate your:

1. Poor
2. Fair
3. Good
4. Very good.

- Q35- Ability to comprehend the language of instruction in your program (language spoken by faculty/instructors and used in textbooks)
- Q36- Writing abilities? (e.g. writing to get across information or ideas to others, or editing writing to improve it).
- Q37- Reading abilities? (e.g. understanding what you read and identifying the most important issues, or using written material to find information).
- Q38- Mathematical abilities? (e.g. using formulas to solve problems, interpreting graphs or tables, or using math to figure out practical things in everyday life).
- Q39- Ability to manage your time? (e.g. planning and organizing multiple tasks so that you are able to complete each one on time).
- Q40- Ability to take notes in class and take tests? (e.g. listening to a lecture and writing key concepts and points or managing how you answer test questions so that you finish in time).
- Q41- Study skills? (e.g. extracting main points from textbook materials, organizing and condensing course materials to help you study for tests, and creating memory aids).

MODULE 4: SECONDARY SCHOOL VARIABLES

- Q42 How many years has it been since you last attended high school?
1. Less than 5 years
 2. Between 5 and 10 years
 3. 10 or more yearsIf you answered #3, go to Q62
- Q43 What was your approximate overall average (%) in your final year of high school? _____ %
 _____ letter grade
- Q44 About how many hours in a typical 7-day week did you spend preparing for class (studying, reading, doing homework) while in high school?
1. 3 hours or less
 2. 4 – 7 hours
 3. 8 – 14 hours
 4. 15 - 20 hours
 5. more than 20 hours
- Q45 How often did you skip classes in high school?
1. Once a week or more
 2. Two or three times a month
 3. Approximately once a month
 4. Almost never
 5. Never
- Q46 How often did you complete homework assignments on time while in high school?
1. Never
 2. Rarely
 3. Sometimes
 4. Usually
 5. Always
- Q During your last year of high school, how often were the following statements true for you?
1. Never
 2. Rarely
 3. Sometimes
 4. Often
 5. Always
- Q47- I did as little work as possible; I just wanted to get by.
- Q48- I was interested in what I was learning in class.
- Q49- Got along well with teachers
- Q50- Thought that school was a waste of time
- Q51- Felt like an outsider or that I was left out of things at school
- Q52- If I needed extra help, I received it from my teachers.

Q53 During your last year of high school, about how many hours each week did you usually spend participating in any school clubs, teams, or other extracurricular activities?

1. Zero
2. Less than one hour per week
3. 1 to 3 hours
4. 4 to 7 hours
5. 8 to 14 hours
6. 15 hours or more

MODULE 5: CAREER PREPARATION, SELECTION AND CERTAINTY

Q During high school, how often did:

1. Never
2. 1 to 4 times
3. 5 to 10 times
4. 11 to 15 times
5. 16 to 20 times
6. more than 20 times

Q54- someone teach you about jobs/careers you may be interested in when you finish all your schooling?

Q55- you meet with a school counsellor about your future education or work?

Q56- you complete a questionnaire (paper or on-line / electronic) to find out about your job interests or abilities?

Q57- you visit an internet site or use a computer program to help you decide what college or university program or courses to take?

Q58- you take any CLASSES in career planning, how to search for a job, write a résumé, or prepare for an interview?

Q59- you take any special courses to gain work experience or job skills, where you actually spent time with an employer. For example, through Co-op Education or a Youth Internship Program?

Q60- your parent/guardian talked to you about your future education or career options?

MODULE 6: EXPECTATIONS OF COLLEGE

Q61 Before enrolling in your program, about how much time did you spend exploring what you would actually be doing in the job you feel your program would lead to?

1. 1 hour or less
2. More than 1 but less than 4 hours
3. 4 or more, but less than 8
4. Between 8 and 10 hours
5. More than 10 hours
6. Not applicable – my program doesn't lead directly to a job

Q62 On average, how many hours per week do you expect to be working for pay while studying this semester?
_____ hours

Q63 Please indicate which of the following statements best describes your situation.

1. I have increased the time I spend studying and doing homework in preparation for college.
2. I intend to increase the time I spend studying and doing homework within the next 4 weeks.
3. I intend to increase the time I spend studying and doing homework sometime this semester.
4. I may increase the time I spend studying and doing homework sometime this academic year.
5. I do not intend to change my study habits.

Q To what degree do you believe you could benefit from extra support in the areas below to be successful in your program of studies?

1. Would be of no benefit
2. Would be of very little benefit
3. I could benefit somewhat
4. I could benefit greatly

- Q64- Expressing ideas in writing
- Q65- Improving reading skills
- Q66- Improving math skills
- Q67- Developing better study habits
- Q68- Improving test-taking skills
- Q69- Choosing/changing course/program
- Q70- Selecting an appropriate career
- Q71- Securing financial aid for my studies
- Q72- Coping with a disability (learning, physical, mental)
- Q73- Coping with childcare issues
- Q74- Improving English/French as a second language
- Q75- Improving my skills in the language of instruction
- Q76- Planning for my future studies

Q How likely would you be to accept support in the areas below to be successful in your program of studies?

1. Very unlikely
2. Unlikely
3. Quite likely
4. Highly likely

- Q77- Expressing ideas in writing
- Q78- Improving reading skills
- Q79- Improving math skills
- Q80- Developing better study habits
- Q81- Improving test-taking skills
- Q82- Choosing/changing course/program
- Q83- Selecting an appropriate career
- Q84- Securing financial aid for my studies
- Q85- Coping with a disability (learning, physical, mental)
- Q86- Coping with childcare issues
- Q87- Improving English/French as a second language
- Q88- Improving my skills in the language of instruction
- Q89- Planning for my future studies

Q90 About how many hours in a typical 7-day week do you think you will have to spend preparing for class (studying, reading, doing homework) to be successful in your program of studies?

1. 3 hours or less
2. 4 – 7 hours
3. 8 – 14 hours
4. 15 - 20 hours
5. more than 20 hours

Q How important is each of the following to you as a reason for attending this institution.

1. Not A Reason
2. Minor Reason
3. Major Reason

- Q91- To acquire the knowledge and skills for my future occupation
- Q92- To prepare for university/future studies
- Q93- To obtain a student loan or other form of financial assistance
- Q94- To be able to make more money
- Q95- Because I couldn't get into university
- Q96- To help decide on a career
- Q97- To help plan my future educational path
- Q98- To be with my friends
- Q99- Obtain a college diploma then continue on to university and obtain a degree
- Q100- Could not find a job I wanted
- Q101- To improve my chances for career advancement
- Q102- For personal development: help develop a sense of self or discover who I am

Q103- To broaden my knowledge about the world around me

Q104- To retrain for a new career

Q105- To get away from home

Q106- My family wanted me to go

MODULE 7: FINANCING COLLEGE

Q The next questions are about paying for your education. Please indicate which of the following are sources of money you plan to use to fund your current program of study?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

Q107- money from your parents, that you DON'T have to pay back?

Q108- money from your spouse or partner, that you DON'T have to pay back?

Q109- money from other people that you DON'T have to pay back?

Q110- money from LOANS to fund your education, including those from government, family, or directly from a bank?

Q111- money from your personal savings? (e.g. money earned from jobs, co-op, summer work)

Q112- money from scholarships, awards or prizes?

Q113- money from grants and contributions?

Q114- money from another source? (specify _____)

Q115 From which of the following sources are you receiving the most money? (Choose ONE only)

1. Parents
2. Spouse or partner
3. Other people
4. Loans
5. Personal savings from working
6. Scholarships, awards or prizes
7. Grants or bursaries
8. Other sources (specify _____)
9. Don't know

Q116 If you are receiving money from loans to fund your education, what type(s) of loan? (Choose all that apply).

1. I am NOT receiving money from loans to finance my current studies
2. A government sponsored student loan? (provincial or federal)
3. A bank loan (other than a student loan) or line of credit
4. A loan from your parents or family

Q Please rate your level of concern with the following issues. (Choose only ONE response for each question).

1. Not at all concerned
2. Mildly concerned
3. Moderately concerned
4. Very concerned
5. Don't know

Q117. Having enough money to pay your college studies and living expenses this year?

Q118. The amount of debt you think you will have by the time you complete your post-secondary education?

Q119. Your ability to repay any student debt you accumulate within a reasonable timeframe?

MODULE 8: ATTITUDES

The following statements describe certain attitudes that students may have regarding their college education. Please indicate whether you agree, disagree or are neutral/have no opinion about each statement according to the following scale:

Strongly disagree	= You totally disagree with the statement
Disagree	= You disagree more than you agree with the statement
Undecided	= You neither agree nor disagree; you are undecided
Agree	= You agree more than disagree with the statement
Strongly agree	= You totally agree with the statement

Q120 I think I am well prepared to be a successful student in college

Q121 A college education enhances a student's understanding of him/herself

- Q122 College staff I have had contact with care about helping students with problems
Q123 I would rather be working full-time than studying right now
Q124 I feel my program is directly related to the type of work I want after I graduate
Q125 Attending college creates a good foundation for future learning
Q126 I have the ability to succeed in college-level studies
Q127 I am determined to finish my college education
Q128 I may quit my studies at this college before I finish my program
Q129 This college is concerned with helping students succeed in their studies
Q130 It is important that I complete my program and obtain a diploma/certificate/degree
Q131 If I had a chance to have a full-time job I would take it and leave college
Q132 I consider this to be an excellent college
Q133 I could benefit from special help in securing financial aid for my education
Q134 I may NOT continue with my studies here next semester
Q135 I am capable of getting a B+ average (78%) or better in my courses
Q136 Difficulty with finances may mean that I will have to quit my studies
Q137 A student's writing skills can be improved as a result of a college education
Q138 So far, college staff have been friendly and welcoming
Q139 College grads have a better chance of getting a good job than those who do not graduate
Q140 I feel undecided about what my career will be after I finish college
Q141 I have chosen the program I am in because I have a particular career/job in mind
Q142 A college education develops a person's ability to think critically
Q143 I would decide to remain in college even if offered a full-time job
Q144 Paying for my education is NOT going to be a problem for me this semester

To help other students make a successful transition to college and achieve their personal goals, please comment on the following questions:

- Q145 What one thing could your college have done better to make beginning your studies here easier?

Text box

- Q146 What one thing did your college do that made beginning your studies here easier?

Text box

Exit Questionnaire

SURVEY OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN CANADIAN COLLEGES AND INSTITUTES

MODULE 1: COLLEGE AND RESPONDENT IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC STATUS

When you complete this questionnaire, you will immediately receive a report that will suggest what might help you easily make the transition and be successful in college. The report will be based on YOUR answers to this questionnaire and will be customized according to what you say about YOURSELF. This report will be presented to you on-screen when you click the "submit" button at the end of the questionnaire and will be addressed to you personally. To accomplish this please, provide us with your first and last name below.

First name _____ Last name _____

Q1 Did you complete the first student questionnaire for this research project in September called the *SURVEY OF CANADIAN COLLEGE STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS*?

1. Yes..... If you answered #1, skip to Q24
2. No
3. Don't know

Q2 Is this the first time you are attending this college either full- or part-time?

1. Yes
2. No

Q3 Are you currently attending this college as a: (choose ONE response only)

1. Full time student
2. Part time student

Q4 What type of program are you enrolled in?

1. Access or upgrading program..... If you answered #1, go to Q6
2. Career or technical program (certificate or diploma)
3. University preparation or transfer program
4. Post diploma or advanced diploma program
5. Degree program

Q5 Which of the following best describes the field of study your program is in.

1. Business
2. Health Sciences
3. Applied Arts/Media
4. Liberal Arts and Sciences
5. Social and Community Services
6. Hospitality, Recreation and Tourism
7. Applied/Engineering Technologies
8. Information Technology
9. Trades

Q6 How many years of full-time study are normally required to complete your program/studies? (including the summer months when you may/may not have classes)

1. Less than one year
2. One year
3. 2 years
4. 3 years
5. 4 years
6. More than 4 years
7. Other _____

Q7 Does your program include an on-the-job component where you spend time in a work place with or without pay?

1. No, my program does not include on-the-job experience
2. Yes, my program is a Co-op program (alternating periods of study and paid work terms)
3. Yes, it is a Trade/vocational training program
4. Yes, it is another program with a work placement component (e.g. practicum, internship, clinical)
5. Don't know

MODULE 2: DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Q8 Your age in years _____

Q9 Your sex.

1. Female
2. Male

Q10 Which language did you learn first?

1. English
2. French
3. Other language

Q11 What is your marital status? Are you ...

1. Single, that is never married
2. Married, living common-law or with a partner
3. Separated (still legally married)
4. Divorced

Q What is the HIGHEST level of education attained by your parents/guardian?

		Q12Father	Q13Mother
- Less than high school completion	01	01	
- Completed high school or equivalent (GED)	02	02	
- Some apprenticeship training	03	03	
- Completed apprenticeship training	04	04	
- Journey-person Certification	05	05	
- Some college/university credits completed	06	06	
- College certificate/diploma	07	07	
- Undergraduate university degree (e.g. B.A., B.Sc.)		0808	
- Post-graduate/advanced diploma (college/university)		0909	
- Graduate degree (Master's or PhD)	10	10	
- Don't know	11	11	

Q14 Do you consider yourself to be a person of Aboriginal or Native ancestry? (e.g. First Nations, North American Indian, Inuit, Métis, etc.)

1. No
2. Yes

Q15 Do you consider yourself to be a member of a visible minority group? (Visible minorities are those, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are because of their race or colour, a visible minority in Canada)

1. No
2. Yes..... If you answered #2, go to Q16

Q16 If yes, please select one group below.

1. South Asian (e.g. East Indian, Pakistani, Punjabi, Sri Lankan)
2. South East Asian (e.g. Cambodian, Indonesian, Laotian, Vietnamese)
3. Arab/ West Asian (e.g. Armenian, Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese, Moroccan)
4. Black (e.g. African, Haitian, Jamaican, Somali)
5. Chinese
6. Japanese
7. Korean
8. Filipino
9. Other

Q17 Do you consider yourself to have a disability (mental, physical, or learning)?

1. No
2. Yes If you answered #2, go to Q18

Q18 If yes, please select one group below.

1. Learning
2. Mobility
3. Sensory
4. Other

Q19 How would you describe yourself?

1. Born in Canada and both parents born in Canada
2. Born in Canada and only 1 parent born in Canada
3. Born in Canada and neither parent born in Canada
4. Not born in Canada and now a Canadian citizen
5. Landed immigrant/permanent resident
6. Visa student
7. Refugee.....

Q20 Which of the following BEST describes your main activity during the 12 month period prior to attending this college?

1. Attending high school full time
2. Attending college full time
3. Attending university full time
4. Working full time (over 29 hrs. per week)
5. Working part time (less than 30 hours)
6. Both working part time and studying part-time
7. A full time homemaker
8. Unemployed and seeking work
9. Other (specify) _____

Q How many children and/or adults living with you are financially dependent on you?

Q21 Children (less than 18 years)	Q22 Adults (18 years or older)
- None	0
- One	1
- Two	2
- Three	3
- Over three	4

Q23 In a typical 7-day week, approximately how many hours do you spend on child care or other activities with your children? _____ hours

MODULE 3: COLLEGE FINANCES

Q Please rate your level of concern with the following issues. (Choose only ONE response for each question).

1. Don't know
2. Not at all concerned
3. Mildly concerned
4. Moderately concerned
5. Very concerned

Q24. Having enough money to pay your college studies and living expenses this year?

Q25. The amount of debt you think you will have by the time you complete your post-secondary education?

Q26. Your ability to repay any student debt you accumulate within a reasonable timeframe?

Q27 On average, how many hours per week have you been working for pay during your studies this semester?

_____ hours

MODULE 4: SKILLS SELF-ASSESSMENT AND ACADEMIC BEHAVIOUR

Q28 Please indicate which of the following statements best describes your situation.

1. I have increased the time I spend studying and doing homework in college.
2. I have made definite plans to increase the time I spend studying and doing homework this semester.
3. I intend to increase the time I spend studying and doing homework sometime this academic year.
4. I may increase the time I spend studying and doing homework sometime this academic year.
5. I do not intend to change my study habits

Q The next few questions ask you to evaluate your various skills. Using the scale below, how would you rate your:

1. Poor
2. Fair
3. Good
4. Very good

Q29- Ability to comprehend the language of instruction in your program (language spoken by faculty/instructors and used in textbooks)

Q30- Writing abilities? (e.g. writing to get across information or ideas to others, or editing writing to improve it).

Q41 How often did you complete homework assignments on time this semester?

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Usually
5. Always

Q42 Since starting college, how many hours did you spend taking part in a workshop, program or course designed to help you adjust to first-year studies?

1. none
2. one hour or less
3. 2-5 hours
4. 6-10 hours
5. more than 10 hours
6. Don't know

Q Since beginning your studies here, how often were the following statements true for you?

1. Never
2. Rarely
3. Sometimes
4. Often
5. Always

Q43- I did as little work as possible; I just wanted to get by.

Q44- I was interested in what I was learning in class.

Q45- I got along well with faculty/instructors

Q46- I felt like an outsider or that I was left out of things

MODULE 5: COLLEGE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES

Q To what degree do you believe you could benefit from extra support in the areas below to be successful in your program of studies?

1. Would be of no benefit
2. Would be of very little benefit
3. I could benefit somewhat
4. I could benefit greatly

Q47- Expressing ideas in writing

Q48- Improving reading skills

Q49- Improving math skills

Q50- Developing better study habits

Q51- Improving test-taking skills

Q52- Choosing/changing course/program

Q53- Selecting an appropriate career

Q54- Securing financial aid for my studies

Q55- Coping with a disability (learning, physical, mental)

Q56- Coping with childcare issues

Q57- Improving English/French as a second language

Q58- Improving my skills in the language of instruction

Q59- Planning for my future studies

Q How likely would you be to accept support in the areas below to be successful in your program of studies?

1. Very unlikely
2. Unlikely
3. Quite likely
4. Highly likely

Q60- Expressing ideas in writing

Q61- Improving reading skills

Q62- Improving math skills

Q63- Developing better study habits

Q64- Improving test-taking skills

Q65- Choosing/changing course/program

Q66- Selecting an appropriate career

Q67- Securing financial aid for my studies

Q68- Coping with a disability (learning, physical, mental)

Q69- Coping with childcare issues

Q70- Improving English/French as a second language

Q71- Improving my skills in the language of instruction

Q72- Planning for my future studies

Q How difficult have each of the following been for you during your studies so far?

0. Has not been difficult at all
1. Has been a little difficult
2. Has been quite difficult
3. Has been very difficult

Q73- Dealing with the program workload (number of assignments, course load, class time)

Q74- Finding time to both work and study

Q75- Balancing the demands of school and family

Q76- The content of college courses

Q77- Knowing how to improve my grades in courses I'm having trouble with

Q78- Meeting with faculty outside class hours

Q79- Identifying a clear career direction/path

Q80- Knowing who to talk to when I have a problem

Q81- Knowing how well I'm doing in my courses

Q82- The methods used by faculty/instructors to teach

Q83 On average, how many times per week do you study with one or more students? # times _____

Q Using the scale below, how many of your faculty/instructors would you say;

1. None of them
2. Very few
3. Some
4. Most
5. All
6. Don't know

Q84- showed an interest in helping students succeed

Q85- Provided exam/test results within two weeks of writing them

Q86- encouraged student participation/involvement in class

Q87- used the lecture method to teach classes

Q88- incorporated student presentations into their method for evaluating students

Q89- incorporated group work or group discussions as a part of their classes

Q90- used mostly multiple-choice tests to determine course grades

Q91- made themselves available to meet with students outside of class

Q92- were very good teachers

Q93- provided opportunities to practice and apply new learning

Q94- asked for student feedback

Q95- had a good relationship with their students

Q96- provided regular feedback on my progress in courses

Q97- measured my performance in courses using practical demonstrations or projects

Q98- provided feedback on my progress in courses using written assignments

Q99 How many times have you interacted with program faculty outside classroom for ten minutes or more?

of times _____

Q Using the scale below, would you say your institution;

1. Not at all
2. Very little
3. Some
4. Quite a bit
5. Very much
6. Don't know

Q100- tries to help students and faculty interact regularly

Q101- is interested in helping students succeed

Q102- treats students like numbers in a book

Q103- provides sufficient space for students to study in groups

Q104- considers student views when making policy

Q105- has specific programs or strategies to help students adjust to college studies

Q106- has a highly selective admissions process

Q107- makes sure students have the resources they need to learn

Q108- has the necessary services to support student learning

Q109- provides services to students so that using them is easy

MODULE 6: ATTITUDES RE: CONFIDENCE, COMMITMENT AND CERTAINTY

The following statements describe certain attitudes that students may have regarding their college studies and experiences. Please indicate whether you agree, disagree or are undecided/have no opinion about each statement according to the following scale:

- (SD) Strongly Disagree = You totally disagree with the statement
 (D) Disagree = You disagree more than you agree with the statement
 (U) Undecided = You neither agree nor disagree; you are undecided
 (A) Agree = You agree more than disagree with the statement
 (SA) Strongly Agree = You totally agree with the statement

- Q110 I could benefit greatly from special help in securing financial aid for my education
 Q111 I find most of the information being discussed in my program a waste of time
 Q112 I feel my program is directly related to the type of work I will have after I graduate
 Q113 Difficulty financing my studies may mean that I will have to leave college
 Q114 This semester, I often thought what I was doing was a waste of time
 Q115 It is important that I complete my program and obtain a diploma/certificate/degree
 Q116 I am capable of getting a B+ average (78%) or better in my courses
 Q117 I have chosen the program I am in because I have a particular career/job in mind
 Q118 I may try to transfer into another program at the end of this semester
 Q119 I would decide to remain in college even if offered a full-time job
 Q120 I find it hard to pay attention in most of my classes
 Q121 I feel undecided about what my career will be after I finish college
 Q122 I always try to do the best I can in whatever I do
 Q123 I may quit my studies before I finish my program
 Q124 A student's writing skills can be improved with a college education
 Q125 I feel that I'm making progress toward achieving my college goals
 Q126 I would rather be working full-time than studying right now
 Q127 Attending college creates a good foundation for future learning
 Q128 I'm beginning to think the program I'm taking is not what I want
 Q129 I will continue my studies at this college next semester
 Q130 The topics being covered in my courses are important for my future success
 Q131 My studies are one of the most important things in my life
 Q132 College graduates have a better chance of getting a good job than those who do not graduate
 Q133 I would recommend this program to other students with the same educational goals
 Q134 I think I am well prepared to be a successful student in college
 Q135 I will continue in my present program next semester
 Q136 I may quit my studies before I finish my program
 Q137 I think that many of the things I'm learning in class are useless

- Q138 I have the ability to succeed in college-level studies
- Q139 I think my program is delivered in a well organized way
- Q140 I'm beginning to think the program I'm taking is not what I want
- Q141 I find my program interesting
- Q142 Paying for my education is NOT going to be a problem for me this semester
- Q143 A college education enhances a student's understanding of him/herself
- Q144 My program is providing me with the skills and knowledge I will need to succeed
- Q145 If I had a chance to have a full-time job I would take it and leave college
- Q146 I may not continue with my studies next semester
- Q147 I considered dropping out of my program at least once this semester
- Q148 I am very certain that I will obtain a college diploma/certificate/degree
- Q149 A college education develops a person's ability to think critically
- Q150 I am determined to finish my college education
- Q151 I find most of what I am learning in my program irrelevant

The following statements describe certain attitudes that you may have regarding your college studies and experiences with faculty and other students. Based on your experience so far, please indicate whether you agree, disagree or are neutral/have no opinion about each statement according to the scale below. If you feel you have not yet had enough experience to make a judgement, respond with "U" or undecided.

- (SD) Strongly Disagree = You totally disagree with the statement
- (D) Disagree = You disagree more than you agree with the statement
- (U) Undecided = You neither agree nor disagree; you are undecided
- (A) Agree = You agree more than disagree with the statement
- (SA) Strongly Agree = You totally agree with the statement

- Q152 I have developed a good relationship with at least one faculty member
- Q153 It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students
- Q154 My interactions with faculty have helped me better understand my future job
- Q155 So far, college staff have been friendly and welcoming
- Q156 Student friendships in college have helped me cope with stress of college life
- Q157 Faculty in my program have been willing to help with course-related problems
- Q158 The friendships I have developed at this college are enjoyable
- Q159 I consider this to be an excellent college
- Q160 Outside of class discussions with faculty have influenced my interest in ideas
- Q161 College staff I have had contact with care about helping students with problems
- Q162 At this time I feel like I "fit in" at this college
- Q163 Faculty have referred me to other staff on campus
- Q164 I would recommend this institution to other students
- Q165 Since coming to this college I have become close friends with several students

- Q166 This college is concerned with helping students succeed in their studies
 Q167 Students I know in my program are willing to help each other with problems
 Q168 If I needed extra help, I received it from my teachers
 Q169 I find it easy to make friends in new situations

MODULE 7: TIME USE, EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT & SERVICE USE

Q During an average 7-day week this term, about how many hours do you spend on the following campus and non-campus activities? (Choose only ONE response for each item).

1. zero hours
2. 1 – 5 hours
3. 6 – 10 hours
4. 11 – 15 hours
5. 16 - 20 hours
6. more than 20 hours

- Q170 Participating in unpaid community service or volunteer activities.
 Q171 Attending scheduled classes and/or laboratories.
 Q172 Participating in campus in activities other than going to classes, labs or in residence
 Q173 Dealing with family responsibilities. (i.e., house, spouse, children, elder care)
 Q174 Recreational/Leisure Activities (i.e., TV, movies, personal e-mail/web surfing, sporting events, clubbing etc.)
 Q175 Commuting both ways between campus and you're your current residence.

Please indicate the **number of times** you participated in college groups, activities or used college services listed below since beginning your studies this year. Enter your estimate of the number of times in the box to the left of each group, activity or service. For example, enter "0" if you have never participated in an activity, a "5" if you participated 5 times etc..

Type of Group, Activity or Service

- Q176 Religious group
 Q177 Ethnic/cultural group
 Q178 Intramural or varsity sports
 Q179 Informal athletics (e.g. basketball with friends)
 Q180 Special interest clubs (e.g. photo, electronics, computer)
 Q181 Political group (e.g. Young Liberals, P.C.s etc.)
 Q182 Student pub, games room, lounge etc.
 Q183 Hanging out in cafeteria/food service areas with friends
 Q184 Interacting with a peer mentor
 Q185 Involved in Student Association activities or events
 Q186 Academic advising/counselling (e.g. course choice, load, etc.)
 Q187 Personal counselling (e.g. stress, personal problems)
 Q188 Career counselling/planning (e.g. identify interests, aptitudes)
 Q189 Information on college and/or university courses/programs
 Q190 Language/Writing service (e.g. help with writing, reading)
 Q191 Learning skills service (e.g. help in study skills etc.)
 Q192 Math skills service (help with math problems, skills, etc.)
 Q193 Peer-Tutoring Service (students help students in courses)
 Q194 Library facilities and services (studying, borrowing books)
 Q195 Cultural events (theatre, movies, public lectures, etc.)
 Q196 Career resource centre (info on careers, job postings etc.)

Q197 Services for students with disabilities

To help Canadian colleges ensure students achieve their personal postsecondary goals, please comment on the following:

Q198 Looking back to when you began your studies, what, if anything, do you wish you had known or better understood when you started your program?

Text box.....

What has been:

Q199. the biggest challenge for you at college this semester?

Text box.....

Q200. Something that went better for you this semester than your had expected?

Text box.....

Q201. A particular source of pride or pleasure for you this semester?

Text box.....

Appendix H.

Correlation Matrix for All Items Comprising Faculty Interaction/Relationships (IV 3)

Items	Items							
	EQ152	EQ154	EQ155	EQ157	EQ160	EQ161	EQ163	EQ168
EQ 152 Agreement Rating: I have developed a good relationship with at least one faculty member		.451**	.379*	.413**	.448**	.396**	.269**	.390**
EQ 154 Agreement Rating: My interactions with faculty have helped me better understand my future job			.428*	.436**	.525**	.402**	.314**	.395**
EQ 155 Agreement Rating: So far, college staff have been friendly and welcoming				.589**	.373**	.552**	.200**	.457**
EQ 157 Agreement Rating: Faculty in my program have been willing to help with course-related problems					.437**	.569**	.236**	.543**
EQ 160 Agreement Rating: Outside of class discussions with faculty have influenced my interest in ideas						.450**	.376**	.438**
EQ 161 Agreement Rating: College staff I have had contact with care about helping students with problems							.279**	.478**
EQ 163: Agreement Rating: Faculty have referred me to other staff on campus								.256**
EQ 168: Agreement Rating: If I needed extra help, I received it from my teachers								

N ≤ 5832, Pearson Correlation **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Appendix I.

Principal Component Extraction: Component Loadings, Communalities (h²), and Percent of Variance Related to Faculty Interaction/ Relationships (IV 3)

Items	Extracted Component	
	C ₁	h ²
EQ 152 Agreement Rating: I have developed a good relationship with at least one faculty member	.682	.466
EQ 154 Agreement Rating: My interactions with faculty have helped me better understand my future job	.719	.517
EQ 155 Agreement Rating: So far, college staff have been friendly and welcoming	.758	.574
EQ 157 Agreement Rating: Faculty in my program have been willing to help with course-related problems	.793	.629
EQ 160 Agreement Rating: Outside of class discussions with faculty have influenced my interest in ideas	.718	.515
EQ 161 Agreement Rating: College staff I have had contact with care about helping students with problems	.794	.631
EQ 163 Agreement Rating: Faculty have referred me to other staff on campus	.509	.259
EQ 168 Agreement Rating: If I needed extra help, I received it from my teachers	.761	.580
Eigenvalue		4.171
Percent of Total Variance		52.100

Appendix J.

Participant Follow-up Questions

Individual Interview Follow-Up Questions–Email/Telephone Call

Name: _____

Tel: _____

Date: _____

Questions: _____

1. Are there any changes and/or additions that you would like to make to your interview summary (e.g., is there anything missed, misrepresented, or needing clarification)?
2. What is it like for you now? Are there any changes, challenges, or transitions that you would like to mention?
3. Do you have any additional insights into what makes it possible for you to continue in your studies/pursue your educational goal?
4. Do you have any further suggestions for meaningful ways that Malaspina could support your persistence or quality of life, as a mature student?

Appendix K.

Demographic Profile of Interview Sample

Age Category (Cohort)	
25-34	6 (50%)
35-44	1 (8%)
45+	5 (42%)

Elapsed Time/Gap in Formal Education	
1-5 years	3 (25%)
6-20 years	3 (25%)
21+ years	6 (50%)

Gender	
Female	6 (50%)
Male	6 (50%)

Enrolment Status	
Full time	8 (67%)
Part time	4 (33%)

Highest Education Level	
Grade 12/Equivalent	3 (25%)
Certificate/Diploma	3 (25%)
Undergraduate Degree	3 (25%)
Post-Graduate Diploma	1 (8%)
Other	2 (17%)

Educational Goal	
BA/BEd Degree	5 (42%)
BSc Degree	1 (8%)
General/University Prep	2 (17%)
ABE Upgrading/ESL	3 (25%)
Other	1 (8%)

Appendix L.

Structural Descriptions: Individual Interviews

Antonio:

Sustained by Self-Advocacy, Family Support, Retraining Goal

Influential Experiences

Antonio is highly motivated to re-train himself as a medical diagnostic technician, after his logging injury. During the Fall semester, he was registered for three academic courses and a Math 12 upgrading course to obtain the pre-requisites he needs to apply to the 24-month Nuclear Medicine Technology Diploma Program at BCIT. With this training and related work experience, he could then enrol in the MRI Distance Program for certification. He has a longstanding interest in the sciences and is currently volunteering in the hospitals' emergency department, with Canadian Blood Services, and for the Lifeline Medical Alert Program. When describing his education background, Antonio expressed a wish to "turn back the clock" about 20 years, while retaining the same focus and determination he now feels. His son's recent diagnosis of diabetes has rekindled his interest in biology and clinical research. With more parental guidance during his formative years, and less preoccupation with competitive skiing, Antonio believes that he might have pursued a science career straight out of high school.

For the past 12 years, Antonio has been battling with WCB to use his approved training funds for his upgrading and academic course expenses. He has been repeatedly denied this access, in favour of heavy equipment operator or truck driver retraining. The occupational research he has conducted for these jobs reveals that he would not be able to compete with younger, uninjured workers. In contrast, his health care research strongly suggests that he would be in demand as an MRI technician, due to labour shortages. Antonio has independently pursued his science education to prepare him for his chosen career as an MRI technician. He has committed his time, energy, and personal resources to focus "100% on what I need, not what I need to do to get financing." He has also applied himself academically, devoting long hours to his studies, and he is proud of his high grades. He believes that "it's important to anybody that's getting an education to get good grades, but more so at an older age, because the demand is higher on me." Antonio is determined to succeed, based on his strong desire to provide for his family and to serve as an example for his children. He is also committed to "clawing his way out of the hole" to become a better contributing member of society. He has worked in a variety of jobs to fund his school expenses, including working as a trainer at the Husky Restaurant, delivering fish, and processing Albacore Tuna. He is also prepared to return to falling from January to April, if WCB does not release his training funds for his intended program. Antonio demonstrates a resilient attitude and a willingness to persist amidst adversity, as he subscribes to the belief that "it could be worse...it is the hand you are dealt, so get on with it."

Essential Themes and Issues

Antonio attributes his ability to persist, when "the odds are stacked against me horrendously," to the strong support he receives from his family. His mother-in-law offered to pay for his schooling, when she saw him return from the logging camp in a disabled state. His wife is very supportive and has recently completed her MBA Program and is working as a fundraiser to help support the family. Antonio has used RRSP's to help pay for his education and is currently relying on Student Loans to cover the tuition and associated costs for his Fall courses.

When asked about specific experiences that help him progress with his studies at Malaspina, Antonio made reference to the positive learning environment in his upgrading courses, where small class sizes, skilled instructors, and the camaraderie of students are conducive to him meeting with success. He also emphasized that “top quality instructors” make a huge difference for returning students. In particular, he mentioned that his Biology and first-year Astronomy professors made learning exciting, enjoyable, and inclusive—both instructors encouraged participation from everyone in the class. When faced with course withdrawals, Antonio did not consider dropping his Astronomy course, because he was involved in a group project and did not want to disappoint or disadvantage his fellow classmates.

Antonio’s own health, and the health of his 11-year-old son, is the foremost factor influencing his quality of life. When he first heard about his son’s diagnosis with diabetes, he described how his “whole world came crashing down.” In time, it was apparent that his son was managing well with his condition. Antonio talked about putting things in perspective and about appreciating the fact that his son can still live a normal, healthy life. He also highlighted the importance of financial security and how his quality of life is being affected by his current financial difficulties; he is not able to afford the extras, such as going to the movies, going skiing, or going out to dinner. He recognizes that this is a temporary situation, stating that “I’ve got to look at things over the long term—I’m sacrificing now, for the benefit down the road.” The ability to provide for his family and make a meaningful contribution to society is also a key element influencing his quality of life. He talked about his family’s trip to Guatemala and Honduras where they saw people living simply and happily with few material resources. He hopes that his own children will value having enjoyable, meaningful work someday.

The biggest obstacle that Antonio has faced in negotiating his education as a mature student is the lack of finances. He is receiving a disability pension from WCB as a living allowance, but no settlement has been reached about his training fund. His son became ill in the middle of his mid-terms and he was forced to drop two of his courses—physics and psychology. Because of his late withdrawal, he was worried that he would have to pay back a portion of his Student Loan and that he would not receive funding for his January semester. However, his two professors were very supportive of his decision to withdraw and they talked to their Dean to ask that he not be penalized for dropping the courses, due to his extenuating circumstances. As a result, he was not charged for the courses and they were removed from his transcript. He also appealed to Canada Student Loans and asked that this be taken into consideration for his next semester financing.

Antonio also talked about the added difficulty of having to take three university-level science courses to be eligible for a Student Loan. This created a stressful workload for him, as he was also taking upgrading courses. In addition, the expensive blood testing supplies and special dietary requirements for treating his son’s diabetes were an unanticipated and difficult expense for him to absorb on a limited budget. Antonio talked about feeling like an “outsider” in his first-year university courses, and how he was “shunned” by the younger students—“those jerks will not go out of their way to help me” with physics. While he knew that he could access the Learning Centre to help him with his Math 12 assignments, he found that there were too many students, with too few instructors available for assistance. He described being “left out on my own” for the majority of the semester.

Antonio recommended that Malaspina advocate for the Canada Loans Program to cover adult basic upgrading, in addition to academic courses. He also suggested that the University-College offer bursaries for mature students in need. Antonio asked that all Malaspina staff be reminded that many returning students are experiencing financial hardships. He recounted an interaction in Student Services where the staff member was unsupportive when handling his course withdrawals. She did not explore other options with him, nor did she simply acknowledge his unfortunate life circumstances. He asked that “instead of being treated as a number, I’d like to be treated as an individual.” As a final comment, Antonio said that if he is unable to continue his studies in the Spring semester, it will be just “a bit of a detour” until his financial situation

improves—"the thing with school is, as much as I'd just love to continue with it—it'll always be there."

During his follow-up interview, Antonio mentioned that he completed two courses in the Fall (Biology 12 and Astronomy) and that he took a full course load in the Spring with a mix of upgrading and science electives. He is currently taking CHEM 12 in the Summer Session and will be finished in July, 2007. He proudly reported receiving straight "A's" in his academic courses thus far, while earning a 9.4 GPA for his upgrading courses. He attributes his high grades to his strong organizational skills, and to the fact that his son's condition has stabilized. Antonio also mentioned that he developed a specific interest in becoming a Nuclear Medicine technician after learning more about where elements came from in his Astronomy course.

In January 2007, Antonio applied for the BCIT Nuclear Medicine Technology Diploma Program, showing proof that he was completing his last pre-requisite course. He received an email from the Admissions Department at BCIT that he did not meet all the criteria. He was upset that Admissions did not consider other aspects of his application, including his university courses and the glowing letters from faculty on his file. He set up an appointment with the Department Head for Nuclear Medicine to review his application and to convince her that "he was equal, if not better, than other applicants." Antonio described how he was very persistent in the interview, emphasizing his academic record, and the fact that he had done extensive occupational research to reach his decision. He also told the Department Head about his considerable First Aid and health-related volunteer experiences and he gave a personal account of why he was interested in becoming an MRI technician (based on his father's delayed diagnostic tests and premature death). His commitment and his level of preparation impressed the Department Head, giving him hope that his application might meet with success (he heard that he was accepted into the Program on June 3, 2007).

With respect to his WCB status, he has been asked to report for an assessment in June, 2007, to be considered for a truck driving retraining program. He says that he remains open to any "suitable plan" that WCB will offer. However, he will continue pursuing his own education plan with BCIT, unless WCB comes up with a reasonable alternative. He intends to negotiate with WCB in attempts to apply the approved funds against his BCIT Diploma. Antonio talked about putting his "blood sweat and tears" into his upgrading program and his academic courses, because he is committed to his education plan. He attributes his persistence to his personal drive, and because he is willing to fight for his rights based on his strong morals and ethics. He admits that "lots of times I felt like giving up, but I would just contemplate things and get back on track." Antonio also referred to the importance of focusing on the "grand picture," stating that he applied himself to his studies, because he was ready for the challenge and he was prepared to make a change at this stage of his life. He offered the following advice for mature students who are thinking about returning to school—"don't do it unless you really want to do it." He also suggested that Malaspina handle course complaints more seriously. After approaching one of his ABE instructors about course problems last semester, and not receiving a satisfactory response, he reported his concerns about poor quality teaching to the Head of ABE. He is disappointed that no action has been taken to date, and that there has been no attempt to follow-up with him.

Bunny:

Sustained by Relaxed Pace, Supportive Husband, Academic Language Goal

Influential Experiences

Bunny thoroughly enjoys her senior's status at Malaspina, which gives her the opportunity to take low-cost, academic Spanish courses. She describes knowing, since her youth, that "all I really ever wanted to do was to go to university." However, several obstacles prevented her from pursuing a post-secondary education, until later in life. Bunny was forced to leave grammar

school in England to enter the workforce at 16 years of age, as a result of the headmistress' harsh discipline and because she received no encouragement or support from home. She visited the Labour Exchange in London, England, and was disheartened to learn that there were only four jobs available for young women: bank teller, shop clerk, nurse, or teacher. As she was not interested in any of these options—and she had a grammar school background with a “scientific bent”—it was recommended that she become a laboratory assistant. She qualified to receive sponsorship as a sandwich student and was able to take night school classes, while gaining full-time lab work experience. Unfortunately, she failed her university-prep courses, because, as she describes, “I didn't know how to study.” This was the catalyst for her to travel around the world to get “an education of a different sort.” She worked as a lab assistant in several countries, including, New Zealand, Australia, England, and Canada. When she moved to Vancouver, at age 26, she landed a job in the Wood Chemistry Lab at the University of British Columbia and was funded to take university-level courses toward her eventual science degree. She deferred entering university full-time, until after her ex-husband had completed his PhD and when she had saved enough money. It was years later, as a divorced 39-year-old, when she completed her Bachelors of Science Degree from McGill University. While she has no regrets about the years she spent working and travelling, she feels that it was a trade-off, and that “you can't have everything in one life.” She recognizes that these were her prime years for pursuing formal education and that she might have gone as far as a PhD. Bunny's degree was acquired in a work-related context and was very helpful to her, when she was supervising and training lab assistants for the majority of her working career.

Bunny is committed to her current goal of taking as many academic Spanish courses as she can at Malaspina, and she has warned her new husband, “don't imagine I'm quitting.” She is also motivated to continue her literacy tutoring work in the community, on the days that she attends classes in Nanaimo. She and her husband plan to use their conversational Spanish, when they sail to Mexico in the months ahead.

Essential Themes and Issues

Bunny claims that one of the most important factors enabling her to fulfil her education goal is having a supportive husband with compatible interests. In fact, her husband is taking an introductory Spanish course in their local high school, so that they can learn and practice the language together for their shared travels. She also enjoys being immersed in the “wonderful energy” on campus from the younger students, describing how it is motivating and fun to have it “bubbling around me.” At first, as a senior, she was apprehensive about speaking up in class mostly in relation to the learning levels of the younger students. Over the term, she has become much more comfortable asking questions and interacting with the professor in class. If upper-level Spanish courses are not available at Malaspina, she talks about the possibility of pursuing other courses of interests, such as anthropology, history, literature, or writing. She says that she will continue taking courses, as she always want to be learning. At this stage of her life, she enjoys the challenge of university-college studies.

With respect to quality of life, Bunny appreciates having a supportive husband, and being in the position now to “make life fit around school.” In the past, she has spent her winters living on their sailboat in warmer climates. She described how this is the first winter, in nine years, where she has had a whole semester available to take university-college courses. She is also enjoying taking courses of interest at a relaxed pace, where she has time to study without feeling pressured. She commutes from Ladysmith two mornings a week to take her Spanish class, and she goes to the Library when she arrives to prepare for class. She has a spot in the Library that overlooks a lake and she finds that it is a quiet and beautiful place for studying. She takes pleasure in watching the young people trying to expand their minds and says that “they don't realize what a great time in their lives this is!” Bunny enjoys interacting with younger students in her classes and says that age, per se, does not matter in a learning environment. She does not

appear to be seeking friendships at school, as she has an established network from the Newcomer's Club she joined when she first moved to Ladysmith. While Bunny considers herself to be "fitter than most people my own age," she pays attention to her general health and stamina, as she has a heart condition and a pacemaker.

The only barrier that Bunny experienced in adjusting to university-college life, was not receiving an introduction to campus facilities and resources. She has suggested that Malaspina offer mature students tours around campus, to minimize the difficulties she experienced finding the buildings she needed. She also did not know that she could use the gym facilities, nor was she aware that she could see an Education Advisor to find out about course availability. Bunny is concerned that upper-level Spanish courses might not be offered next semester and she has not been able to verify this information. She visited Registration for a course calendar and was surprised to learn that she had to pay for it, or access it online. She was not given clear information about how she might access a reference copy, given that she prefers using print resources. In addition, her Spanish professor recently cancelled the appointment she had made with her to ask questions about advanced courses.

Bunny raised the concern that her professor does not provide the class with much direction or clarity about using course material. Her Spanish professor was a new instructor and did not seem to be familiar with campus resources. In addition, her professor held an extra class, to make up for the snow-day, and did not communicate with the class until the last minute. Bunny missed this class and met with a couple of the other students, but this was not a productive effort. Group study was encouraged to prepare for the mid-term, but it was scheduled outside of class, at a time that was not convenient for her. While it was mentioned as a self-imposed constraint, Bunny did say that she did not feel comfortable complaining about her professor, because she was not a full fee-paying student.

During her follow-up interview, Bunny shared details of her winter trip to Mexico, and how she and her husband were more confident using their conversational Spanish. While it is still her ambition to become fluent in Spanish, Bunny is frustrated that it is such a slow process and she attributes this to a lack of practice. She has accessed a web-based, Spanish tutorial, but has reached a level where it is no longer free. Bunny has suggested that Malaspina offer a mix of self-paced language tutorials, as well as conversation groups that are organized by instructors around class time. She also recounted some experiences she had at McGill University, where she had joined an organized group for mature students that met regularly for tea and coffee. She found that because the mature students had such individualized and differing goals, the group eventually disbanded. She drew a comparison to her current situation where she finds that she has more in common with her classmates than others in her same age group—she emphasized that "it all happens in the classroom."

In providing additional details of her work experience, Bunny mentioned that she taught chemistry at Sheridan College after she was laid off as Chief Chemist for a Waste Management Company in Toronto. The College encouraged her, along with other new instructors, to take three courses on teaching techniques. Bunny believes that her teaching background gave her some insight into her Spanish professor's strengths and weaknesses as a new instructor. Bunny feels strongly that Malaspina should insist that new instructors take courses on instructional techniques to enhance their teaching expertise.

Cara:
Sustained by Accommodating Professors, Course Flexibility, Health/Wellness Goal

Influential Experiences

Cara has a strong attachment to the teaching profession, as her father and two sisters are all school teachers and her mother is a retired university librarian. She says that she has always known that she wanted to be a school teacher, and that she is committed to educating children about nutrition and healthy food choices. She has already tested her skills and knowledge by developing and implementing the Food Attitude Program for six elementary schools in the Comox School District, and recently she has been asked to facilitate a workshop for District teachers during their Professional Development Day. Cara is committed to attaining her career goal, because health and wellness education is her calling. She used a vivid metaphor to convey her belief that it is her fate to pursue a teaching career—"I am following a path that now, if I wanted to jump off it, I couldn't. The train would drag me along saying, get back on board, you fool!"

Cara describes how doors opened for her after she left a bad marriage, thus freeing her to focus her time and energy on her education goal. She mentioned that she had been thinking about going back to school for over 15 years, and that it was a life changing and empowering decision to finally enrol in university courses. She made this important decision after weighing all the options, in discussion with friends and family, and through careful planning. Cara explained how she was piloting her first Food Attitude Program with 12 elementary school children when she was diagnosed with cancer. She talked about how she used this experience to emphasize the importance of health and nutrition with the school children. Cara's clarity of purpose and vision seems to stem from the fact she is a six-year cancer survivor and that she has taken steps to facilitate her own positive life changes.

Cara talks about being inspired by her professors who are dedicated, professional teachers. She found it very reassuring that the majority of her instructors understand that "life happens" for adult students. When faced with emergencies or unique needs, she finds it more productive to receive an understanding and accommodating response from professors than to be reminded of rigid deadlines. She recounted several examples of how her professors offered her research paper extensions when her basement flooded during a winter storm, when her son went in for surgery, and when she needed to keep her health appointments. The positive relationship she has with her professors, and their flexibility with respect to deadlines, have enabled her to complete her assignments, while also maintaining her high grades. She talks about how mature students are upset if they get a grade below 75%, primarily because they have a higher "value system" and work ethic than the younger students. Cara believes that mature students must remain committed to their education goals, as they are juggling more responsibilities than high school entrants are (mortgages, car payments, home maintenance, jobs, and family obligations). Moreover, because adult students cannot concentrate solely on their studies, they must be highly motivated to achieve and complete their program of study.

Essential Themes and Issues

Cara's commitment to having a positive influence on children's health and well-being is the driving force behind her persistence. The reasons she gave for not pursuing a teaching career when she was younger, was that she did not know what to do, and she felt limited by traditional healthcare careers. She recognizes that she has found her niche in health and wellness education and she is now exploiting every opportunity to pursue her career goal. Cara has taken advantage of both formal and informal support resources at Malaspina University-College. She recently contacted a Physical Education professor at the Nanaimo campus and had a very motivating and validating conversation about her education options and career prospects. She also talked about needing to contact an Education Advisor to discuss her concern that she may be unable to complete her Foods Program at Malaspina, because the specialty program may be

moving to UBC. She would be “geographically challenged” if required to transfer to the Mainland; however, she is quick to point out that “I will find a way to make it happen,” as she is determined to contribute to this important public health area.

Cara is grateful to be receiving Student Loans and emphasized that the funds made it possible for her to enrol in full-time studies. She said that she would have returned to school earlier, if she had been eligible to receive maximum loans while she was married. She believes that married students are penalized by their reduced loan eligibility and that this has created a “black market for education.” She spoke of several instances where students have lied about their status, going as far as getting a marital separation, to qualify for a decent loan.

When asked to comment on her quality of life influences, Cara mentioned the importance of getting daily physical exercise and fresh air. She talked about the challenges of following a regular exercise program (visiting the gym or the pool) when she is devoting so much time to her studies. As an adult student, she has had to focus on integrating exercise into her daily routine by walking her dogs in the morning to “get the blood flowing and the brain working.” She also mentioned that she has had to delegate more household tasks to her son (preparing meals, doing washes, and walking the dogs) and that this has not only reduced her stress level, but has allowed her son to take on more responsibilities. Cara also takes her laptop to the beach near her home when she has a writing assignment that requires concentration and creativity. She finds that writing at the beach helps her to find balance and inspiration.

Cara talked about being fearful that younger students would surround her and that she would not be able to bridge the gap in age and life experience when going back to school. She described how her fears were put to rest after only two classes, because “no one was calling me Ma’am” and she was able to establish rapport with the students, regardless of their age and stage. She talked about being aware of “time running out” and feeling tired, because of her age. Cara finds it physically taxing to be lifting a heavy backpack filled with textbooks and a computer, when she comes to class. Her physical stamina and diminished energy levels are real issues for her, given her health history. She is also concerned that taking a full course load may be too overwhelming for her and, therefore, she may need to adjust her education plan.

While Cara appreciates being able to take Malaspina courses in Comox, she feels that the dedicated classroom space is too small at North Island College, and that it has posed a barrier to her learning. Students do not have the advantage of posting their work around the class and sharing insights, the way that the Liberal Studies’ students do at the Nanaimo campus. She suggested that Malaspina allocate appropriate classroom space for their off-site courses. Cara also suggested that Malaspina do a better job of promoting their main-campus resources at the “sister institution”—North Island College. She believes that it would be motivating for students—particularly adult students who feel that they may have missed the university-college experience—to attend various activities, guest lectures, student demonstrations, and theatre performances in Nanaimo, and those students could then experience, firsthand, how degree studies are the natural progression from entry-level courses.

During her follow-up interview, Cara mentioned that she feels even closer to “the end, or culmination” of her career goal. She also added that she has taken advantage of the OPPORTUNITY (her emphasis) to register for the four-week Liberal Studies Abroad Program. She will acquire nine credits while studying in an environment that would be otherwise inaccessible to her and that will expand her horizons immensely. She also spoke, with emotion, about the importance of family support. Her nieces and nephews recently pooled their babysitting money to buy her a digital camera for her trip. As a final comment, Cara suggested that Malaspina sponsor a Ride-Program/Commuter Van that would help students find cost-effective and environmentally-friendly solutions to their transportation problems. She mentioned that she had noticed a number of carpool requests posted on Students Bulletin Boards (at least 9-12 this past term). In this way, Cara believes that Malaspina could take the lead in encouraging mature

students to pursue academic upgrading and retraining, while also contributing to community development and employment growth.

Chloe:

Sustained by Teaching Goal, Advance Credits, and Professors' Encouragement

Influential Experiences

Chloe's story conveys a passion for teaching, captured through numerous accounts of teaching swimming lessons to children in her youth, as well as her recent experiences teaching English in Japan. She draws "huge inspiration" from the feedback she has received from children, parents, and students, and from her feelings of having made a difference in people's lives. Through vivid teaching vignettes, Chloe describes her love of teaching and her enthusiasm for pursuing her education goal. These experiences have instilled a sense of confidence and commitment to excel in the teaching profession.

Chloe's year teaching English in Japan was instrumental in clarifying her teaching goal. Another deciding factor was receiving transfer credits from Malaspina that significantly shortened the time required to complete her Bachelor of Arts Degree (one and a half years). The reduced timeline is critical in helping her to maintain her focus, as she can see "a light at the end of the tunnel." She also says that having a "set goal in mind and sticking to it" is her motivation for persisting.

A pivotal point in deciding to return to school was Chloe's realization that "it was now, or never." She describes how her fast-paced career, rising income, and comfortable lifestyle were enticing her to accept "the golden handcuffs" from the insurance company. She felt that it would be too difficult to leave work and enrol in university-college, if she left it any later. Chloe also credits her work for giving her time management skills, the ability to prioritize multiple tasks, and the willingness to put in a hard day's work. Chloe believes that her work ethic and self-discipline are largely responsible for her success in managing the transition to post-secondary education.

Chloe is no stranger to managing "big transitions" having changed jobs, gotten married, bought a house, enrolled in school, and relocated to Nanaimo from Calgary, all within a 2-year period. She has the attitude that they are "not a big thing anymore" once you have experienced a few major life changes. A resilient and optimistic spirit also seems to be contributing to her expectations of success. In addition, she acknowledges the importance of sharing all recent life transitions with a supportive partner.

Essential Themes and Issues

Chloe credits her SIAST experience, with its small class sizes and close relationships with professors, as the positive learning environment that she sought to replicate, when she enrolled in her Bachelor of Arts/Education Program at Malaspina University-College. She describes her current semester at Malaspina in glowing terms:

it's just been an absolutely positive experience for me, so far...I want to do good, because there's such a great support system. The professors are wonderful. They want to be there for you, and they want to help you. And the class sizes are a huge contributing factor to why I chose Malaspina in the first place...

When asked about specific experiences at Malaspina that have allowed her to pursue her educational goal, she states, emphatically, that it is the encouragement from professors that makes it possible for her to move forward.

Malaspina was able to provide Chloe with almost immediate acceptance after she submitted her online application, and this factored into her decision to enrol quickly in her first semester. Early acceptance also enabled Chloe to take advantage of a number of key institutional resources, including New Student Orientation events and meetings with Educational Advisors. She describes how Orientation helped her to find buildings, locate resources, and deal with those “rocky first couple of days” in an unfamiliar setting. She describes how not getting lost when finding classes and negotiating the small campus was a “huge perk.” Chloe also met with general and degree-specific Advisors to map out her courses. She found this to be very helpful in keeping her “on the right track” and taking only those courses that were needed to fulfil degree requirements. It was in these meetings that she discovered that she could complete her BA/BEd Degree in one and a half years.

Chloe was quick to highlight the support of her husband, when asked about those key elements in her university-college experience that contribute to her quality of life. She feels that her partner truly understands what she needs and wants to do, and that his emotional and financial support makes it possible for her to pursue her education goal. In addition, Chloe spoke about the encouragement of professors as influencing her quality of life. In particular, she appreciates how they have created an environment where she feels comfortable asking questions and contributing to class discussions. In addition to acknowledging her previous life and academic experiences, the encouragement of professors also boosts her self-confidence.

When asked to elaborate on the “rocky” experiences of the first weeks of semester, Chloe mentioned that she had difficulty adjusting to the dramatic shift in routine from a structured 8:00am-4:00pm job, to a seemingly endless 12-17 hour schedule. She had to get into the habit of “dedicating her whole life to school,” even though she had good work habits and welcomed the full-time study focus. She also talked about being intimidated by the fact that high school students who were the same age as her younger brother and sister surrounded her. She was concerned about being able to form relationships with students who were five to 10 years younger. It was helpful for her to find out that there were some older students who did not come straight to university from high school, and many who came from outside Nanaimo.

Finances were the first item mentioned, when asked if there were any experiences that created barriers for her, or made it more difficult to stay focused on her goals. She found that it was difficult to go from two household incomes to one, with the constant worry of how to make the next payment. Chloe can concentrate on school full-time and “get through this, as quick as possible,” because her husband is paying the bills and she has student loans. Chloe suggested that Malaspina offer bursaries to create a financial support system for older students who are returning to school. In Chloe’s opinion, bursaries would help to alleviate one of the major stresses for older students—“real financial worries.”

During her follow-up interview, Chloe mentioned that her second semester was similar to her first. Chloe was pleased to report that she did very well in her second semester—two A’s and three B’s. She took five English courses (including three upper levels); however, she found that the course load was heavier and more stressful this past term. She attributes this to the fact that she was forced to find work to manage her finances, and she was working and studying on a full-time basis. Chloe’s biggest obstacle this past term was financial. She stated that she “could not have one without the other—I could not afford school without working, because my Student Loans ran out.” She is taking two upper level English courses in the Summer Session, and she did not pursue additional loans. She indicated that the summer semester was not what she had expected—“I did not expect it to be this heavy. Within four weeks, I had term papers due and a lot of reading and in-class assignments. It is very stressful!” Her husband is her major support system and she credits him with helping her cope with her stressful schedule.

Chloe had a major update to report. Because of an English course that she took in the Spring (Cultures of Resistance), she has changed her educational focus. She no longer wants to pursue

a teaching career, and instead, wants to work for the United Nations. For her class research paper, she chose a book on child soldiers. She ended up being able to interview the author, Ishmael Beah, when he was speaking at Malaspina. She described it as a phenomenal and life-changing experience for her. The author invited her to help support the work of his foundation. When she completes her degree, she intends to go to Sierra Leone with the goal of helping children affected by war reintegrate into society.

Chloe attributes her academic successes to three things: “perseverance, family support, and goals.” She is motivated to complete her degree; because she is the first of her three siblings to get a degree, (the others have certificates and diplomas). She is persistent, because she knows that her degree will open up many more doors for her when she is done. She also says that she is now so close to realizing her goal that she can “see the light at the end of the tunnel.” She intends to be finished next summer and is taking summer classes primarily to lighten her load for next year, so that she can work and study more easily. With respect to recommendations, Chloe wishes that Malaspina would lower tuition fees. She would also like to be able to sell her textbooks for a more reasonable price. She commented on paying \$110 for books that she could only recover \$20 for when she sold them on campus. As a final comment, Chloe said that her experiences at Malaspina have been very positive—“the professors are really good. They all want to see you do well, and you get out of it what you put into it!”

Elmar:

Sustained by Structured Writing Focus, Advanced Credits, Free Tuition

Influential Experiences

Elmar is completing his second Bachelor of Arts Degree with the aim of learning more about the writing process. He is taking one creative writing class this Fall and has registered for a second journalism course in the Spring semester. The goal-oriented format of his creative writing course gives him the structure he needs to write regularly and to receive constructive feedback from his professor and classmates. He has written many short stories and has completed a book on steam train travel in British Columbia. He has submitted his book to a Victoria publishing house, and is waiting to hear if it has been accepted.

Elmar found it very motivating to learn that his writing had improved significantly over the course of the semester. He attributes his success to the high level of student-professor involvement in the classroom, claiming that it is the major reason why he remains committed to his studies. In addition, he is motivated to continue in his degree program, because his wife is “totally supportive” of his academic pursuits and they have established shared routines for managing household tasks and functions.

Course location and timing are important considerations for Elmar when deciding where and when to enrol in classes. He would prefer to take all of his courses at the Cowichan campus for ease of commuting. He has also restricted his schedule to daytime offerings, as he prefers not to drive at night. Elmar does not look forward to the time when he will have to travel to Nanaimo for his upper-level courses.

Essential Themes and Issues

A major contributing factor in his decision to return to university-college was being granted transfer credits toward his degree from his previous undergraduate experience. Elmar was delighted to learn that he needed only 60-credits to earn a second Bachelors’ degree:

I like the idea of getting a second BA. I’ve earned it. But I did wonder how many credits I was going to be given, and at first I was told it would be 90, and later I found out, by

looking at the site on the internet, that I was being given 60 credits, which is half what I would need. That was great!

The fact that his tuition is free, as a senior, was also a catalyst for resuming his studies. He hastened to add that he probably would have registered for classes anyway; however, it served as an added incentive.

Elmar reported that his experiences have been very positive, thus far, starting with the warm welcome he received from Malaspina's support staff. He found them to be "absolutely phenomenal" compared with staff at the other two universities he has attended in the past. He also enjoyed the mix of students in his class, with ages ranging from 21 to 81 years. He has had no concerns about taking classes with a predominantly younger student group. In fact, he claims that he has benefited from their critiques and varied perspectives.

When asked to comment on important aspects of his quality of life, Elmar mentioned that music is an essential component and that he practices every day on the baby grand piano that he inherited from his parents. Current events are also important to him, given his political science background, and he listens to the news and reads the newspaper on a daily basis. Elmar also talked about retreating to his home when writing, and when needing to be alone. For him, the ideal writer's life would be living in a setting where he could choose to be alone or in the company of others. He prefers to work at home, as he is easily distracted and needs quiet conditions to concentrate on his writing.

Elmar shared that he is estranged from his only daughter and grandson and he spoke about how this affects his peace of mind. He mentioned that he thinks about the situation daily, and has "conversations with her in my mind" to try to resolve things. Following his divorce from his first wife and after moving to the west coast, Elmar attempted to contact his daughter. Several years ago, he got his daughter's address from his older brother and sent her flowers in an attempt to renew contact. It was very painful for him to receive a hand-written note from her saying that she was putting an end to their relationship. He feels that it is especially unfair of his daughter to prevent him from establishing a relationship with his only grandson, as time is limited and his grandson is too young to make contact on his own. Elmar has attached his daughter's note to his will to explain why she is not included as a beneficiary.

One of the main obstacles Elmar faces at Malaspina is not being able to register for local writing courses. To progress with his studies, he would like to take at least two writing courses at the Cowichan campus each term. He referred to his previous experiences as a mature student at the University of Waterloo, where he achieved an A- average, based on a continuous, part-time course load. He is also not currently taking advantage of course planning resources, and more general writing support available on campus. He anticipates using Malaspina's Library in the summer months, when he will need to seek refuge from the outdoor noises surrounding his home. He talks about purchasing a laptop and taking it to the Library, to have more flexibility and independence with his writing.

Elmar suggested that Malaspina offer more courses in creative writing at the Cowichan Campus to promote local access and to facilitate degree completion for mature students. He also recommended that several structural changes be made in the classrooms to accommodate seniors' needs. He would like to see all of the green boards converted to blackboards, with the use of white chalk, for better visibility. He also asked that the lighting be adjusted to avoid glare on the writing surfaces. Elmar has a chronic health condition that affects his ability to block out background noises, such as echoes and side conversations. His hearing would be greatly enhanced in classrooms that contain more sound absorbent material.

During his follow-up interview, Elmar was pleased to inform me that he did very well in his Fall creative writing course—"I was given an A+. I was shocked out of my wits, and I am very happy

about it!" Elmar also reported that while he had signed up for the Spring journalism course at the Cowichan campus, he dropped it after only five sessions. He has decided not to take additional journalism courses, because he does not feel that he is cut out to be a reporter, and he wants to focus his energies on creative writing. He also mentioned that he did not care for the instructor's style of delivery and the short times they were given to complete assignments:

I didn't care for the quality of instruction. The instructor didn't seem to be well organized and that was upsetting to me. She would change her mind about assignments, or the requirements. I felt jerked from point to point.

He is planning to take another creative writing course in the Fall and two more in the Spring semester. He emphasized the fact that he is taking two evening courses, although he would like to avoid night driving. Unfortunately, he had no choice in the matter, as they were the only creative writing courses offered at the Cowichan campus. He was given a registration date of June 14th and he will need to register online, as he will be attending a wedding in Hamilton Ontario, at that time. He is concerned that the classes may be filled by then, and he believes that those registering earlier have an unfair advantage in getting into the courses they want.

When asked for additional insights into what helps him continue with his studies, Elmar stated that he really enjoys having courses offered at the Cowichan campus—"It is wonderful that there is such a high-level educational institution so close by, only 20-minutes from my home." He also offered the following advice to other mature students:

Be persistent, and know what you want. Mature students have a better chance of knowing what they want, because they have experienced more of life. Generally speaking, they have saved their money and can afford to take courses. I feel sad for those paying full tuition fees and the fact that many won't be going to university, because they can't afford it.

Elmar signed off his interview by saying:

Learning is very, very important. It can extend your life. Lifelong learning enhances the quality of your life.

Krystahl:

Sustained by Parental Support, Children's Security, and Career Goal

Influential Experiences

Krystahl's commitment to her education goal stems from her need to support herself and her children as a single parent. She describes how her recent separation "forced her hand" to enrol in university-college to upgrade her skills. Her story also highlights a personal drive to do well, based on her desire to excel at her studies—her goal is to get "A's"—as well as her wish to avoid disappointing her parents. She is very grateful for the emotional, financial, and childcare support that her parents are providing. Krystahl also wants to do well academically for her children, with hopes that they will be motivated and encouraged by "seeing mommy doing well." She believes that she is an important role model for her children.

Krystahl is willing to work hard to fulfil her career goal of becoming a dental hygienist and is excited to be a university-college student. She believes that having a "real goal" is not only a compelling reason for returning to school, but also a major motivator for persisting. Her positive academic experience, thus far, also reinforces the fact that she made the right decision to return to school. She is pursuing a plan of gradual re-entry, as she feels that it is better for her to get good grades than to progress too quickly. She is taking three courses in her first semester to

manage her workload and to increase her grade point average. She believes that this strategy will improve her chances of being accepted into the Dental Hygiene Program in September 2008. Because of her part-time schedule, she has been able to help her children integrate into a new community, adapt to new schools, and adjust to their new family status. She accompanies her children on the ferry each weekend, so that they can spend time with their father. Her positive framing of a stressful situation has made it possible for her to use the ferry ride—the “mini-cruise,” as she calls it—to plan, reflect, and study. Krystahl is proud of the fact that her children have managed well amidst adversity, and that she is providing for their basic needs.

Essential Themes and Issues

Shortly after relocating to Nanaimo, Krystahl visited the Career Centre in Parksville, where she learned about her eligibility for Employment Insurance benefits. Not only did she receive important emotional support from an Employment Counsellor, but also she was encouraged to apply for benefits claiming that her move was necessary to support her dependent children. She was fortunate to receive 21 weeks of benefits, which effectively paid for tuition expenses for her first semester. These benefits relieved her financial stresses and enabled her to focus on her schooling without having to pursue part-time work. She did not seek financial assistance through Malaspina University-College, as she felt that her immediate financial needs were met.

Krystahl has made good use of Malaspina's support resources. She participated in the campus tour during orientation and this allayed her fears about not being able to locate buildings and access resources. She was concerned about “getting lost in a sea of people” and being the only person unable to figure things out. On her first day, it was helpful to meet several other students who were experiencing the same concerns. She readily asked for help and found that, in doing so, she received timely and important information. Krystahl also made several appointments with Education Advisors on campus to develop an education plan that would support her goal of meeting requirements for the Dental Hygiene Program. She describes these meetings as being “really helpful to getting me focused and figuring out my goals.”

At the beginning of term, Krystahl developed the routine of arriving on campus early to find a quiet space for studying in the Library. In this way, she was able to maximize her study time, in between classes. Once into the routine, she was pleasantly surprised to find out that she had enough time to devote to her children and her other daily responsibilities. This realization gives her confidence that she will be able to manage a full course load when she enters the Dental Hygiene Program.

Krystahl explained that the biggest boost to her confidence was realizing that the professors were willing to explain what was expected academically. She describes how everything was laid out for the term with detailed instructions, and she was given many opportunities to ask questions and seek clarification. This helped her, immensely, in returning to school as a mature student, especially in relation to being introduced to the “process of learning” at university-college. She is very appreciative of the fact that the teachers believed in her potential and that they were willing to support her in the critical first weeks of her semester. She holds the professors responsible for motivating her to continue.

When asked to elaborate on factors that influence her quality of life, Krystahl immediately identified the importance of friendship and having people who care about her in her life. It was interesting to note that she does not seek social connections with students outside of class, as she seems contented with her interactions in the classroom. In addition, Krystahl does not see the need for engaging in extracurricular activities on campus as a way to socialize with other students. Her contact with fellow students in her classes is sufficient to meet her social needs, and does not detract from her family commitments—“meeting people in my classes...that's enough for me.” She also emphasized that her interactions with professors are integral to her feelings of belonging and successfully integrating into campus life.

At the outset, Krystahl was nervous about not being able to figure out the “structure” of school—that is, how to use campus resources and access needed information. She identified this as one of the first obstacles she encountered at university-college. She did say that this was a temporary situation which was ameliorated by attending orientation and taking advantage of advising services. She also talked about being worried that she did not have the self-discipline to study and keep up with the reading required in university-level courses. Again, her fears were put to rest by professors who encouraged her and took the time to explain specific expectations. Krystahl also talked about her fear of “sticking out like a sore thumb” by being the only older person surrounded by “young kids.” Even though she sometimes feels “old,” she has not had difficulty striking up conversations and finding things in common with her younger classmates.

The main barrier that Krystahl experienced and continues to face is not being able to get into the biology course that she needs as a pre-requisite to gain entrance into the Dental Hygiene Program. She must wait a full year, while remaining on a “huge” waitlist for both classroom-based and online course offerings. She would choose the classroom-based course for the interaction, as she feels that this is how she learns best. It is aggravating for her to “put off (her) plans for a whole year,” while she waits to get into her required course. She describes this set-back clearly: “being 34, having two kids, wanting to get out into the workforce (to) support myself, (not) being a leech on my family ...that’s kind of been the one thing that really bummed me out.” However, Krystahl is resolved to pursue her goal tenaciously, and talks about being the first person in the line-up when the biology course finally opens up for registration. She is prepared to take one course and work part-time, while waiting to gain acceptance into the Dental Hygiene Program.

During her follow-up interview, Krystahl reported that she successfully completed four first-year courses in the Spring, and is now taking an intercession chemistry course. She did very well this past term and attributes this to having learned how to work her studies around her children’s needs during the first term. She is keener than ever to get accepted into the Dental Hygiene Program, although she is still upset that Malaspina has not helped her access her pre-requisite biology course sooner than September, 2008. Krystahl will need to submit a personal profile to enter the Dental Hygiene Program, and 60% of her application will hinge on work experience in the dental field. She talked about using the year to get dental office experience and to save money for her program. If she has difficulty getting a job in a local dental office, she can volunteer in her friend’s dental practice on weekends, on the Mainland.

Finances are the only challenge that Krystahl is dealing with now. She described how her financial situation has gotten worse, since her Employment Insurance Benefits ran out. She feels guilty that her parents are picking up her financial burden. She also reported that things have actually improved with her ex-husband, when she takes her children to see their father every two weeks, on the Mainland.

Krystahl believes that being a mature student is actually helping her to stay focused on her studies. She finds that she is more goal-oriented than her younger classmates, and more concerned about getting good grades and progressing through her courses quickly. She also feels that having the constant support of her friends and family has made a big difference in being settled into her new community. She added that most of her friends were made in the community, as opposed to at school.

I have made new friends in Nanaimo, and they are mostly parents of my children’s friends. I have made friends at school, but I don’t hang out with them outside of school. I am settling into Nanaimo. I would only go back to the Mainland if I can’t find work here, when I am finished my schooling. I love it on the Island—it is much less stressful and my family support is here.

As a final comment, Krystal mentioned that she has not taken advantage of other support services on campus, but she knows that they will be there for her, if she needs them.

Louis:

Sustained by Family-Business Prospect, University Transfer, Affordable Living

Influential Experiences

Louis is attending Malaspina University-College to gain entrance into the 2nd-year of the UBC Engineering Program. He is changing his career direction, and hence his academic credentials, because he cannot envision himself diving as a marine biologist at age 50. In addition, the promise of inheriting his father's company and securing employment that is more viable are major motivating factors.

Louis has calculated that, by devoting 12 hours per month to his consulting work, he can finance his tuition and living expenses. He is within easy commuting distance to both Island and Mainland locations, from Nanaimo. The more affordable cost of living in Nanaimo also enables him to maintain a comfortable lifestyle while studying and working part-time. He is grateful that "I didn't have to disrupt my life" to go back to school. However, he does not look forward to selling his house in Nanaimo and renting in Vancouver, when he transfers to UBC. In fact, he wishes it were possible to complete two years at Malaspina to stabilize his income and his grades, before transferring into the third year of the Engineering Program. He believes that he would be in a better competitive position after two years at Malaspina, thus improving his chances of being accepted into the UBC Program.

The fact that Louis has already completed several years of post-secondary education has helped him to anticipate and meet course expectations. He mentioned how it took him several years to complete his undergraduate degree, because he "struggled" in his first years and this negatively affected his confidence, as well as his grades. He looks forward to being able to enter "second and third year, in a position of strength, rather than being demoralized and struggling." Louis feels strongly that all students should enter smaller colleges first and then transfer to a larger institution, to experience an easier adjustment to post-secondary studies and to avoid failure. Louis also believes that, with clear goals and a "better work ethic," mature students have an academic advantage over typical high school entrants.

Essential Themes and Issues

Louis is committed to obtaining his Engineering Degree, and the industry experience he needs, to take over his father's well-established electrical contracting company. He attributes his first-semester success at Malaspina to its supportive infrastructure. He talks about benefiting from the smaller class sizes, where "I've found that you have great access to your professors" and it is not intimidating to ask questions. He is worried about the significantly larger classes at UBC, where he will have reduced access to professors. Louis is also pleased that he can commute to his Malaspina classes in about 10-minutes, allowing him to save on fuel and to go home for lunch in between classes. In addition, the lower tuition fees and affordable housing costs have made it possible for him to maintain a comfortable lifestyle, which directly affects his quality of life. With respect to balancing his school work with other life commitments, Louis recognizes that going to school all week and doing his consulting work in the evenings and on weekends causes stress on his relationship. He has resigned himself to the fact that four years is not a long time and that it will be worth the sacrifice over the long-term. He talks about needing to "keep (his) eye on the bigger picture" to get him through his four-year program.

The biggest barrier Louis faces at Malaspina University-College is not having one day off during the week to devote to his consulting work. He is disappointed that his three science classes

require him to be on campus daily, from Monday to Friday. He wishes that he could compress his schedule, or take a mix of daytime and evening classes, to give him more flexibility with his courses. He also feels that he is wasting precious time and energy figuring out his assignments on his own, when he could be learning so much more through additional group work. He believes that increased use of group assignments would result in “higher quality” work and an important opportunity for students to “bounce ideas off other people.” He wonders if the lecture format is being used to cater to younger students, given the fact that the majority of his classmates are straight out of high school and they seem to need the extra time in class to learn the material; only about 10% of his classmates are mature students like himself. He has suggested that Malaspina place more responsibility for learning on the student to reflect the needs of adult learners. He would also appreciate being able to sell his expensive textbooks to other students at a fair recovery price. It is a “bone of contention” with him that the used-book sales on campus prevent him from recouping his high textbook costs.

During his follow-up interview, Louis mentioned that his final Malaspina transcript has already been sent to UBC and that he has received unofficial 2nd-year status. As a next step, he will declare an engineering specialty and then his application will be assessed against specific benchmark criteria. He proudly reported that his marks this past semester were “the best I have ever gotten,” and he feels confident that his “A” average will increase his chances of success. He added that, “my decision to go to Malaspina was confirmed by these results, and I feel prepared now to enter the Engineering Program at UBC.”

With respect to obstacles encountered this past semester, Louis admitted that he was a little burnt out at the end of semester. He had a much heavier workload this past term necessitating many late nights of study. He reiterated the need for longer Library hours during the week and flexible course scheduling. In his assessment, the majority of courses at Malaspina are geared for full-time study, with little accommodation for working students. When asked for additional insights about his own persistence, Louis mentioned that the quality of professors is a key factor. He feels that the experienced professors present material in a variety of ways, come prepared for class, and do not rely so heavily on textbook learning. In his best class, he talked about the professor having a depth of knowledge, and a real enthusiasm for the subject that was very motivating. He described his Math professor as being an asset to Malaspina, stating that “he drives you hard, but in a good way—a way that makes you work harder.” Overall, Louis experienced his professors as approachable, willing to provide extra help outside of class, and genuinely interested in how students are doing. Louis commented that “what I take from my experience at Malaspina is a strong foundation that will influence my future success.” He is excited at the prospect of embarking on three years of study in the Engineering Program at UBC, and he plans to relocate to Vancouver by mid-summer.

Lucy:

Sustained by Constant Effort, Graduate Degree Access, Meaningful Work

Influential Experiences

Lucy was attracted to Malaspina’s Geography Program based on the strong reputation of its professors and the opportunity to benefit from their extensive field experience. She is taking courses this semester to “beef up” her graduate school application and looks forward to receiving high grades and good recommendations from her professors. She is seeking admission into a Masters Program in Urban Planning to pursue her environmental and urban design interests. She made an abrupt decision to return to school for career development, after returning from teaching English in Taiwan. She said that she became preoccupied with the idea of working in urban planning, when she returned to Canada and noticed Edmonton’s rampant growth and altered landscape. She is committed to making a meaningful contribution to the field of urban growth and

development. Lucy is having fun this semester and is motivated by the fact that she is learning so much from her education as a mature student.

Essential Themes and Issues

Lucy has been primarily focused on doing well in her first semester courses, so that she can realize her goal of being accepted into graduate school. It has helped to have flexible work arrangements, where she accomplishes 13-15 hours of telecommuting work creating a database for a land development company in Edmonton. She also talked about the importance of having a supportive partner to help her adjust to the routines of school. When asked about specific experiences that have helped her manage her course load this past semester, Lucy claims that it is because the professors are approachable, and they make time for their students—"the geography faculty are awesome here." She feels that it was a "bit presumptuous" of her to be asking professors to write letters of recommendation after knowing her for only six months; however, all the professors she approached were willing to support her graduate school application.

When asked to elaborate on those factors that contribute to her quality of life, Lucy said that she appreciates having a comfortable lifestyle while attending school. She explained how it has taken time to re-establish her life in Nanaimo, and that it was important for her to find a nice home close to campus, so that she could walk to her classes. She also made the comment that the bus service in Nanaimo is very bad, adding that it actually costs more to buy a monthly bus pass than it does to purchase a student-parking pass for a full semester. Lucy raised this as an environmental concern and stated that Malaspina should do something to rectify the situation.

Friends are also very important to her, and she feels like she is missing social opportunities. Her daily routine is: "come to school, do my work, go to the library, and go home." She mentioned that because there is no designated place for meeting students outside the classroom, she is not motivated to "stick around campus" after class. This has become a social obstacle for her, as she feels disconnected to the campus and she has been unable to meet students in her own age group. She talked about being reluctant to participate in classes, because she is older than most of her classmates and she does not want to be perceived as having an advantage based on her previous degree. As a mature student, she is aware that she has different interests and motivations than her younger counterparts.

Lucy finds that the most difficult aspect in returning to school as an older student is making the "re-adjustment in time management" to get her academic work done, and done well. She said that it was "awful" at first, and that "I've worked basically the whole time, this whole semester, and on weekends—everything is school!" She is still trying to cope with the transition of switching all of her responsibilities over to school. She is worried about being able to sustain this unremitting pace at graduate school. Lucy also talked about the difficulties she experienced with respect to managing the "logistics" of school. For example, she had to re-learn how to format her research papers to meet course expectations, and this was achieved through trial and error. She also found that it was awkward trying to establish rapport with her professors when she was approaching them for letters of recommendation in the middle of her first term.

When asked for suggestions to improve the situation for mature students, Lucy recommended that Malaspina create a "campus neighbourhood" by dedicating community space for socializing. She said that if Malaspina offered a "cluster of cafes," like those available at other universities, then older students would feel more integrated into the campus environment. She said that the younger students seem to use the campus pub for this purpose, whereas she feels that older students would be more inclined to use a centrally located community space to get together with their peers. As a final comment, Lucy shared the following insight, as a mature student: "learning is really fun, and you don't really get a chance to do that for yourself, when you are working."

During her follow-up interview, Lucy mentioned that there were no changes to her academics in the second semester, aside from that fact that she took an online course that she really enjoyed; for the most part, her courses were extensions of her first semester with mostly the same professors. Lucy also stated that she received an A- average in her first semester, and that she got a B average in her second semester. She attributes her lower grades in the second semester to the fact that she was much busier. She was not as enthusiastic this past term, as she found it more difficult to balance her studies with her telecommuting work. She ended up working about 20 hours per week, in the second semester. She also found it disheartening to hear back from four graduate schools that she had not been accepted. She described how she lost her “get up and go” until she got a positive letter from the University of Toronto. Lucy was pleased to report that she was accepted into a Master of Landscape Architecture Program at the University of Toronto. It is a 3-year program, and she is impressed by the calibre of the faculty and the relevant course content. She believes that she will have a good chance of finding work in her field, when she graduates from her Master’s Program.

Lucy mentioned that one of the biggest challenges in returning to school as a mature student was “maintaining job commitments and sticking to them, while making sure that you can feed yourself on that income.” She also faced an obstacle during the Spring semester when her husband was not able to find meaningful work in Nanaimo. He ended up going to the Mainland and living with a friend to work as an ESL teacher. While she found it difficult to be apart, she was able to focus exclusively on her school work. She is very pleased that her husband is prepared to make the move to Toronto and that it works for him to register in an Education Degree program. Lucy listed the support of her partner as the number one reason that she has been able to persist with her studies. She also credits her parents’ support as helping her to cope with a series of financial roadblocks in her second term.

Lucy recommended that Malaspina establish a mature students’ club, or offer brown bag luncheons, as a way to connect mature students with each other to exchange practical information and support. Because she believes that mature students are more eager to do things in their chosen field, she would like to see the University-College offer work-related apprenticeships or co-op experiences. This would capitalize on the fact that older students are “eager to capture their energy and put to work what they are studying.” She would have benefited from acquiring some work experience this past term, as it would have enriched her learning and it would have helped her to find work. When applying for summer jobs, Lucy learned that she was disadvantaged by not having work experience in her specific area, and that all of the sponsored programs were geared for younger students (she was no longer eligible for Federal Summer Student positions, based on age criteria).

Randy:

Sustained by Granddaughter’s Custody, Healing Path, Meaningful Work

Influential Experiences

Randy’s main motivation for completing his education is to secure a more promising future for his 9-year-old granddaughter. While it was a struggle to obtain sole custody of his granddaughter after the tragic death of her mother (his daughter), he now has “peace of mind” knowing that he plays an important role in her development. He describes how he and his granddaughter have “leaned on each other” to overcome the significant losses they have both endured, including Randy’s marital separation and the deaths of his two sisters. Randy described how he came to an important realization one day, that “if his granddaughter can do this, then I can move on and do things,” and he holds her responsible for starting him on his learning pathway. He is proud of the fact that he has made a positive choice to move on, after experiencing multiple losses and occupational setbacks.

Randy's determination to complete his education and to help his granddaughter "adjust to the system" was evident throughout the interview. He talked about the oppression that native people experience, because of residential school abuses and the devastating removal of Aboriginal children from their families and their communities. His insight into the causes of the pervasive drug and alcohol problems in his community has spurred him on to pursue his Social Services Diploma. He wants to upgrade his skills and knowledge to obtain a well-paying, interesting job that will enable him to support his granddaughter and to help other native children and youth.

Randy candidly shared how his anger/rage problems were holding him back—"I always threw hooks out behind me, so I could stop myself, because I didn't want to go any farther." His fear of taking the first step was preventing him from taking the training that the Workers' Compensation Board had agreed to sponsor. He talks about "resisting" going back to school, for the longest time, because he did not believe that he was smart enough to do the work, and he was angry that he could not return to logging—he loves the woods and the physical work that he has done all his life. He also spoke about the deep hatred he has towards his father for the damage that he did in their family, resulting in the drug and alcohol-related deaths of his brother and sisters, and ultimately, his own daughter. Randy told the story of how he eventually walked away from his family, when he realized that their beliefs did not fit with his. He blames his parents for not taking ownership of their problems and for not assuming responsibility for what they taught their children. Randy proudly told me, "I am walking my own path now," based on the realization that he cannot control what happened in the past and that he can choose to accept things to progress. It is apparent that Randy's firm resolve to "move on" has been the driving force behind his ability to surmount serious obstacles. At one point, he mentioned how he has always needed to place challenges in front of himself to survive a childhood that denied him basic support and encouragement.

Randy decided to try the job-retraining courses and he was impressed by the results. The information that he learned about himself, from the True Colors Personality Assessment, helped him to identify that he was in the middle of a major life transition. He affirms that the Drug and Alcohol Counselling Certificate Program called attention to the changes that he was undergoing, while also providing him with the skills and support he needed to deal with his multiple losses. He described a pivotal experience that happened over the Christmas break, while he was completing his Certificate Program. He had a conflict with the Program Facilitator that threatened to have him withdrawn. Over the holidays, he "focused" on this conflict and the problems that he was experiencing in the Program, and he decided to take responsibility for initiating a "shift" in his own mind and attitude. After the break, he made a conscious decision to continue in the Program and to take advantage of his learning opportunity. Shortly thereafter, he received direct encouragement from the Facilitator to pursue a career in social work, or child and youth care, and he believes that this was the reason why he successfully completed the Program—the "first graduation" that he had ever earned. He describes how this positive outcome gave him the confidence and commitment to continue with his studies. He maintains that the WCB courses laid the foundation for his long-term education goal.

Essential Themes and Issues

For Randy, having a meaningful career goal is sustaining him. He also benefited from the instructor's feedback indicating that he was capable of doing the academic work, and of contributing to his community. He recognizes that, through personal transformation, he is making deliberate choices to progress with his studies. In addition, the fact that he was given credit for a full-year of study from his Drug and Alcohol Counselling Certificate is also helping to maintain his momentum. With four pre-requisite courses almost finished, he is confident that he can manage two additional years to complete his Diploma.

Randy is adept at finding the right people in the system who can support his progress. He has regular contact with an Educational Counsellor who "listens to his troubles" and offers personal

and practical support, when needed. He talks about working through sample exercises with the Counsellor—or “crunching”—to prepare for his English 11 finals, and to pave the way for him “going another two or three yards” towards achieving his goal. He also enlisted the support of his niece, surviving daughter, and ex-wife to care for his granddaughter while he attends evening classes in Nanaimo. However, the “final piece of the puzzle” for Randy was finding out that the Cowichan Tribes would top up his WCB benefits, so that could live comfortably while raising his granddaughter and concentrating on his schoolwork.

Randy stated, emphatically, that his granddaughter is his priority and that she influences his quality of life on a daily basis: “I will not let anything come between me and my granddaughter...she comes first, no matter what.” Sometimes he assumes the role of Grandpa, Dad, Uncle, and Grandma, and will do whatever it takes “to put a solid foundation under her.”

Raising his granddaughter gives him purpose, focus, and a strong desire to succeed. He also talked about surrounding himself with healthy people, and how this has helped him make positive choices that have contributed to his persistence. He described, very clearly, that this has meant severing ties with troublesome people from his past, and accepting only those who have dealt with their problems—those who are also on their “healing path.”

With respect to barriers and issues, Randy mentioned that he felt “extremely out of place” in his first classes because the majority of students, and the instructor, were younger than he was. He was particularly surprised by the age of his instructor. He also talked about the difficulties he experienced “being absorbed into the system,” as he has always been a loner and has had problems adjusting to unfamiliar situations. He suggested that Malaspina make special efforts to help integrate native people who have experienced “aleness” because of their oppressive, residential school experiences. He believes that the institution could do a better job preparing all students with the tools they need to be open to change when making the transition to university-college.

Ross:

Sustained by Family Contact, ESL/Degree Completion, Business Goal

Influential Experiences

Ross is committed to completing Malaspina’s International MBA Program to fulfil his parents’ wishes and hopes for his future success. He faces significant family pressure to pass his ESL courses and acquire his MBA Degree, stating that “if I can’t finish it, or if I can’t finish it well, I don’t know how to face them.” He recently met with an immigration officer who made it clear that his study permit would not be extended if he did not gain entrance into the graduate degree program. His way of coping with this “extreme stress” is to focus exclusively on his studies.

Ross is highly motivated to improve his knowledge of North American culture, as well as his English skills, so that he can realize his goal of opening a trading company that will connect Chinese and North American businesses. He appreciates being able to study in a small community that does not have a high proportion of Asian immigrants. In Nanaimo, he is forced to speak English every day, whereas in Vancouver, he often reverted to speaking Cantonese with Chinese merchants and waiters.

Essential Themes and Issues

Ross is learning a great deal about local culture through the research reports he is writing for his ESL directed-learning course. He visited the Nanaimo Art Gallery, attended a Port Theatre concert, and has written reviews of these performances. He sees it as a “bonus” that he has been allowed to take an academic anthropology course while completing his ESL courses. For his anthropology course, he is expected to interview local people and report on his discussions about

family customs, cultural events, and future plans. In both his academic and ESL courses, he has to acquire critical thinking skills. He believes that this is his most important learning, because critical thinking is his connection to North American culture. He describes how the North American way of thinking is dramatically different from the style in China. He says that he must practice “linear” thinking in Canada, as opposed to the “rotational” reasoning of his own cultural background.

When asked about the key elements that support his quality of life, Ross spoke of the importance of family. His parents call him weekly from China to update him on their family news. After their telephone conversations, Ross says, “I feel recharged.” The second factor to influence his quality of life is sports. Ross plays soccer in a community league every Monday evening where he has opportunities to socialize with other international students and local community members. He emphasized the fact that he particularly enjoys getting together with other Chinese students to talk about his past, and to mark important Chinese holidays. Food was the final aspect of quality of life that Ross mentioned and he explained how “eating” is very important in Quzhou—his home community. He says that the food in Malaspina’s cafeteria is boring and unhealthy, and he looks forward to being able to cook for himself on the weekends.

Ross mentioned that there are two major obstacles to his success as a mature student, namely, motivation problems and language barriers. He attributes his lack of motivation to the fact that he does not enjoy studying with teenage students in his ESL classes. He has no interests in common with his younger classmates. He wants to discuss his future plans and political issues with his classmates, while they seem to be more concerned about shopping, and the movies they have seen. As a result, Ross is not participating well in class and he is not completing his daily review sheets. He is worried about passing his ESL courses, because of his motivation problems.

Cultural and language barriers also affect Ross’ studies. He finds that he misses some of his anthropology lectures, because he does not understand his professor’s idiomatic expressions and cultural references. He faces this cultural divide in all of his classes, and he describes how it would take a “500-word essay” to provide the cultural context for many conversation topics of interest. Ross also discussed how difficult it is for him to make inroads into the local community. He talked about feeling “blocked” in his attempts to integrate with local people. He used the vivid image of having “a rock in my way” to explain how he needs to devote more time and energy to learning English, as a result. He expressed feeling “separate” from people in the community, because there are so few opportunities to socialize with them. Ross also talked about having no time to pursue other interests, like camping and dating girls, because of his intense study schedule.

Ross’ main suggestion for improving his student experiences at Malaspina University-College was for the institution to create two parts to the cafeteria—one for Asian style food and the other for North American fare. He would also like to see Malaspina offer more facilities, like a swimming pool on campus. As a final piece of advice to other mature students, Ross would encourage students not to be “shy” about talking with the local people, and to seek volunteer opportunities and join more community committees. He also said that “the most simple (things) are the most work.”

During his follow-up interview, Ross proudly reported that he had passed his ESL, AP4 level, in the Fall and he completed his anthropology course with a B+. He says that his academic course helped him to secure his study permit (receiving a six-month extension). He passed his ESL AP5, the highest level, in the Spring, when he focused solely on improving his core language skills. He also took a Directed Learning course enabling him to complete three reports to get a 5% bonus to his final grade (achieving 65%). He described how he is more confident speaking with local people, and that he uses every chance he can get to improve his English language skills (in restaurants, stores, and on the bus). He was also pleased to report that he has been accepted

into Malaspina's MBA Program for July, 2007. He does not expect to encounter any difficulties extending his study permit for 16-months, while he completes the program.

Ross moved closer to campus during the Spring semester. He moved out of his home stay arrangement and he now rents a townhouse with several Asian friends (most are his same age). Ross said that this is a much better living situation for him, as it is less boring and he has more people to talk to and socialize with on a regular basis. With respect to recommendations, Ross suggested that Malaspina offer some scholarships for those accepted into the MBA Program and that they focus on upgrading the credentials of the teachers. He discovered that most of the MBA instructors have only a Masters Degree and do not have much business experience, compared with faculty in the UBC and SFU Programs.

As a final comment, Ross said that he is looking forward to having a one-month break before he starts his MBA Program. He has received his book list and will start reading and familiarizing himself with business terms in the weeks ahead. After he finishes his MBA Program, Ross hopes that he will be able work in Canada for one or two years to get some work experience that will help him launch his career in international trade.

Wayne:

Sustained by Quality Teaching, Course Flexibility, Career Advancement

Influential Experiences

Wayne is completing his Bachelor of Arts Degree primarily to improve his business-writing skills for career advancement. He recognizes that his employment opportunities are limited without a degree. This semester, he is taking four English and creative writing courses that fit into his full-time work schedule. Most of his courses are delivered in three-hour, evening lectures, and he recognizes that this format has both advantages and disadvantages. He is pleased that he can take a mix of both classroom and online courses to get his degree done quickly, without "languishing around for years," and while continuing to work during the daytime. He feels fortunate to be able to reduce the time he is on campus to one day per week, with access to later classes and online courses.

For Wayne, high quality teaching is essential to his success. He talked about having both good and bad classes and how these experiences have affected his motivation and effort. Wayne entered Malaspina with a "romantic vision" of what a university education should be, described as: meeting with like-minded students; being with by people who are excited by their education; and investing time for learning outside of class. In two of his classes, these expectations were not met. The professors were "not on their toes" and they did not encourage collaborative discussion. In one three-hour class, the professor consistently dismissed the class early and displayed a "lackadaisical attitude" and no interest in his subject area. His online course was also a disappointment because students were left on their own to figure out assignments and no interactive features were used. Wayne felt that the professor was not comfortable with the technology, and therefore was not able to exploit its potential as a learning tool.

By way of contrast, Wayne gave glowing accounts of his two English courses, stating that the professors encouraged active participation, and conveyed a sense of passion for their field. In one class, the professor had students attend a theatre performance on campus, and then share their reviews with other classmates. In addition, the instructor created an environment where students were engrossed in the discussion, with nobody left out, and he "pushed students to get the most out of you." He stressed that "an excited prof is a big plus!" He also admitted that if the professor is not very demanding, and the course offers an easy credit, there could be some benefit to simply taking the course for a good grade. In summary, Wayne stated that if all four of

his classes were bad experiences, then he would not come back—he emphasized that course quality has a direct impact on his willingness to continue with his studies.

Essential Themes and Issues

Wayne was able to juggle his work and school commitments by having a flexible course schedule and accommodating professors. He appreciated that his professors granted him extensions when he was required to travel for work. He talked about experiencing the most conflict between work and school toward the end of his semester, when the bulk of his assignments and exams were all due at the same time. He recommended that professors pace their courses more evenly throughout the semester, so that students did not absorb the brunt of the “crunch” at the end of term.

One of the main obstacles Wayne faced, because of minimizing his time on campus, was not having time to socialize with his classmates. He described being remote, and feeling like he was missing opportunities to get to know classmates his own age. He plans to adjust his schedule next semester so that he can spend more time on campus meeting other students. Wayne talked about his social circle being one of the main contributors to his quality of life. He also emphasized that having vibrant professors and enjoyable classes were important factors for him. When asked for suggestions that would improve his student experiences at Malaspina, Wayne was quick to point out that mature students expect value for their money and they have a right to a good learning experience. He gave specific examples of what this would entail, including: knowledgeable and well-organized professors who spell out expectations clearly; incentives for students to show up and participate in classes; effective use of technology and a standard format for using web-based learning systems; more classroom participation and opportunities for students to engage with others outside of class; and longer evening and weekend hours in the Library for working students. He also suggested that Malaspina direct students to the social spaces on campus. For instance, the lobby of the Library is a great environment for meeting other students. In addition, he thinks that Malaspina should encourage mature students to spend more time on campus, while respecting their need to balance school with their other life commitments. Wayne also asked if Malaspina could provide new students with information about professors’ teaching styles and interests. Other than watching the waitlists for popular courses, he felt that he had no gauge of quality and no sense of what classes to choose. As a final comment, Wayne recommended that mature students make their professors aware of their situation so that they can seek flexible arrangements when needed.

During his follow-up interview, Wayne reported that his course load for the Spring semester was similar to his Fall schedule. He was pleased with his grades for both semesters (earning A’s and B’s). He did experience a problem in his advanced composition course, as he found that the open format was too unstructured. When he discussed his concerns with the instructor, he received a defensive and unsatisfactory response.

There were no changes to his education goal, although he may place more emphasis on creative writing as he progresses. Wayne registered for an online English course during the first Summer Session, but withdrew from the course just after the withdrawal deadline because of concert commitments. He was very pleased that the institution allowed him to drop the course without penalty, stating that, as a small school, Malaspina showed flexibility and an acknowledgement that mature students have other life commitments. He has signed up for a second Summer Session online course, as he likes the compressed format of summer courses. Wayne would like to see more online courses offered in the Summer semester, and has suggested that this would be an excellent way for Malaspina to meet students’ needs for flexibility while also boosting course enrolment. With respect to additional recommendations, Wayne mentioned that he was not heavily involved in campus life and, thus, felt like he was missing socializing opportunities. He suggested that Malaspina orient new students to natural gathering places on campus. For example, he learned later in the semester that there were lobby areas in most departments that

could serve as meeting places for students and faculty. Wayne also suggested that Malaspina offer departmental open houses or informal ways to introduce students to faculty and other students at the beginning of the year to help students integrate into their specific departments.

Zoe:

Sustained by Local Offerings, Overcoming Fears, Fiction-Writing Goal

Influential Experiences

Zoe made it clear that she is taking credit courses of interest, one at a time, as opposed to pursuing a Bachelor of Arts Degree. She finds that the courses help her to maintain her momentum, while she is working towards her goal of becoming a full-time, fiction writer. She takes advantage of courses offered during daytime hours at the Cowichan Campus to avoid transportation issues and night driving. She heard about her current creative writing course by perusing the Malaspina calendar, where she was pleased to learn that there were relevant, credit-based courses offered locally. She describes how she prefers to learn in a classroom setting, where she can interact with others and enjoy the energy of the younger students. For the past two years, Zoe has been writing seriously and participating actively in writers' groups in order to have her work critiqued. She values the opportunity to "keep learning" and plans on taking courses, until she becomes a published author.

Family obligations limit Zoe's participation in classes. She registers for courses, only when it fits into her personal life. Because of her caregiving responsibilities, and the feeling that "your life belongs to everybody else," it is a challenge for her to commit to a 13-week semester. She was able to dedicate a block of time for her studies this semester, outside of when she was needed in Courtney to help with her daughter's newborn. She expects to resume her studies again next Fall, as she will be providing vacation care for two of her grandchildren over the summer. Since her son's martial break-up, Zoe has helped him cope with summer childcare. Zoe will look into the possibility of taking a shorter, summer course in Nanaimo, if it is compatible with the children's school and holiday schedules. She talks about needing to replenish her energy levels, because sometimes the summer childcare "does me in." In addition to her current care commitments, Zoe anticipates that she will assume the role of primary caregiver for her 80-year-old mother when her health declines. While she sometimes resents having to suspend her studies to accommodate family, Zoe is appreciative of the fact that she can make the most of "pockets of time when no one needs me."

Essential Themes and Issues

By taking a single course at a time, Zoe feels that she can stay on top of her reading and writing assignments. When she first started her studies, she was concerned that she might not be able to keep up with her younger classmates. It boosted her confidence to find out that she actually had an advantage with respect to concentration and self-discipline. She attributes this to the steady writing pace that she established when she first moved into her new community. She also made an appointment with an Education Advisor to review a sample of her writing before she signed up for her first university-college course; she was pleased to receive positive feedback about her writing abilities. In addition to these individual preparations, Zoe feels that the small classes at Malaspina's Cowichan Campus are less intimidating, and the "good mix" of students has helped her to adjust to university-college life.

Fear was the biggest barrier that Zoe faced when embarking on her post-secondary studies. She was very concerned that her older mind might not be flexible enough to "bend" to course expectations and requirements. She was also extremely nervous about speaking up in class, because of previous, bad school experiences. She was able to relax when she saw the quality and quantity of younger students' interactions. It was comforting for her to find out that her

younger classmates faced these same fears and issues. She also talked about the importance of simply jumping right in as a way to conquer fear, and how this has helped her to survive the experience. In fact, she offered the following advice to other mature students who might be reluctant to pursue a post-secondary education—"just do it!" As a way to help mature students address the common fears and anxieties associated with returning to school, Zoe suggested that Malaspina staff take time to describe a typical classroom situation to older students. She was not prepared for the less strict and more casual environment in the classroom. In addition, she would have appreciated receiving reassurances that her considerable life experience would be an asset as a returning student. She believes that all mature students should be reminded of the "incredible life skills" they bring to the classroom.

Finances are also a challenge for Zoe, as the credit courses are much more expensive than the non-credit offerings. She would like to pay half of the tuition, because she is not intending to accumulate credits towards a degree program, nor does she need to take the exams. She is also concerned that course availability may be an obstacle for her, in the future, because advanced creative writing courses are not offered each semester in Duncan. For instance, the journalism course that she is interested in taking may not be offered at the Cowichan Campus next semester.

During her follow-up interview, Zoe reported that she cancelled her enrolment in the Spring journalism course because she helped her daughter with household duties and childcare after the birth of her second child. She recently returned from a vacation in Mexico and describes how "the garden has been calling to her" ever since. Zoe suspends her full-time writing every Spring, to allocate about four-six weeks for intensive gardening on her large acreage.

After reading her interview summary, Zoe was surprised to learn how "far I am bending for my family." She is resolved to find a better balance between her writing goals and her family obligations. She will make her family more aware of the importance she attaches to her writing, as well as her need to say "no" when she is taking courses. Zoe is checking into summer writing courses at Malaspina to see if she can "squeeze one in." If she is unable to find one, then she will sign-up for a non-credit community workshop or wait until the Fall to take her next creative writing course at the Cowichan Campus. Her ideal course would be organized as a week-long program, so that she does not have to commit to a full semester. Because she does not intend to pursue a Degree, Zoe would prefer to take shorter, daytime or weekend courses that are specifically geared for mature students. She recommended that Malaspina experiment with course models for mature students to offer a wide variety of writing courses that would have the same basic structure as the credit-based courses, but without the high tuition and longer duration.

She felt that this would cater to adult learners, while also freeing up class space for younger students. She stated that "I come from the old school, where you use education to get ahead," although she did admit that she may need to rethink her stance, in terms of addressing mature students' needs.

When asked about recent changes or challenges, Zoe raised the concern that she has not written a word since December. This is stressful for her, as it interrupts her writing progress and she has three major writing projects underway. She attributes this disruption to not having a block of time to focus on her writing. Over the past two years, she has taken creative writing courses and workshops and has participated in writing groups, as a way to maintain her momentum. She says that a summer course would help her regain her focus and would "definitely get me back on track with my writing." She hopes that she will be "going upstairs to her loft, soon" to resume her regular writing routine.

In her final review comments, Zoe shared the following insights that capture the essence of her post-secondary journey:

After reviewing the interview summary, I feel the process has provoked me into thinking and planning my next move. For this, I thank you. You will be happy to know that I managed to squeak into the summer session in Nanaimo and have also set up my courses for this Fall and the following Spring. You have been the much needed catalyst to set my wheels once again turning. . .thank you, again.

Appendix M.

Individual Factors Influencing Participants' Quality of Life and Retention

Influential Experiences

The second round of data reduction resulted in a summary of the Individual Factors and Quality of Life Indicators that were perceived by mature students to support their quality of life and retention. Participants' personal accounts of what contributes to their individual quality of life, defined as participants' ability to enjoy the important possibilities of his/her life, are reported in alignment with the three core components of the Adult Quality of Life Profile, namely: Being, Belonging, and Becoming. In addition, a summary is included of the Institutional and External Factors that were perceived as Facilitators/Opportunities and Barriers/Obstacles toward attaining participants' goals and aspirations at the University-College.

Individual Factors

- Decisions to enrol in university level courses were triggered by major life transitions (e.g. separation/divorce, work-related injury, health setbacks, work-related relocation, involuntary job loss, or simply attaining a life stage where it was possible to realize educational goals).
- Decision-making was linked to careful planning and preparatory activities (e.g. weighing different educational options, considering the impacts on family, pursuing financial resources and assistance, and meeting with Educational Advisors for education planning). Adjustment was necessary to manage new routines, acquire self-discipline, balance school with other life commitments, and learn how to use resources efficiently.
- Embarking on education was viewed as a life-changing event and an empowering experience. While all respondents were strongly goal-directed in their educational pursuits, their goals were more varied than degree attainment, and included personal development aspects.
- A goal-directed approach to education was evidenced, wherein education was pursued primarily for changing career direction, enhancing employment prospects, preparing for program or graduate school entrance, seeking a more meaningful contribution to society, and enjoying the challenge and stimulus of learning.
- A strong achievement-orientation and a personal drive to do well were noted as assets and were seen to distinguish them from their younger peers. Students were motivated to drop courses or seek extensions for extenuating circumstances, so that grades did not suffer.
- A high level of motivation and determination was needed to manage school in the context of other life commitments.
- Educational goal attainment was viewed as role modelling for children and grandchildren.
- A strong work ethic, work-related skills (e.g., time management, organizational, and multi-tasking skills), and life experience were seen as academic advantages.

- Expectations of value for money resulted in critical assessments of teaching quality. Students expected knowledgeable, well-organized professors who made course expectations clear and who used teaching techniques and technology appropriately; students also expected challenging, interactive, inclusive and enjoyable classes—they had an awareness that their academic performance hinged on teaching quality.
- Ability to defer gratification and make sacrifices enabled participants to endure obstacles/discomfort, if they believed they were reaping longer-term benefits.
- Having an optimistic and resilient attitude was associated with a firm resolve to persist amidst adversity.

Quality of Life Indicators

Being

- Ability to provide for family and have financial security were critical aspects (e.g., injured worker pursuing re-training, First Nation student raising granddaughter, and participants being able to afford some extras like occasionally going to movies and restaurants).
- Integrating health and wellness activities into daily routines was important (e.g., caring for own health for the cancer survivor and student with heart condition, as well as safeguarding the health of family members and caring for son with diabetes).
- Maintaining a comfortable lifestyle while going to school was emphasized (e.g., having affordable housing, lower tuition, less fuel costs, and being able to walk home for lunch).
- Having a university-college infrastructure that supported school re-entry was influential (i.e., course location and timing that enabled students to work part-time and study on evenings/weekends).

Belonging

- Having a social circle and making friends in class was sought, as opposed to making friends outside of school.
- Meeting like-minded students and peers with similar life experiences was important.
- Having supportive relationships was a major factor (i.e., receiving the support of family, friends, and having professors who cared about students' welfare).
- Being surrounded by healthy people was mentioned by the First Nation student (i.e., being surrounded by other people who are on a "healing path").
- Having opportunities to maintain culture and discuss important holidays was raised by the International student (e.g., having Asian food in the cafeteria to promote healthy eating and to create an at-home feeling).

Becoming

- Students recognized the value of learning for its life enhancing qualities.
- Education was viewed as a way to make a meaningful contribution to society.
- Vibrant professors that stimulate and challenge students' thinking facilitated student development.

- Students gained confidence from the academic feedback they received (e.g., encouragement from professors to contribute to class discussions, and receiving good grades to validate academic potential).
- Students gave examples of taking advantage of opportunities to expand their horizons (e.g., Liberal Studies Abroad Program, interviewing author from Sierra Leone).

Appendix N.

Institutional and External Factors: Facilitators/Opportunities and Barriers/Obstacles

Institutional and External Factors

Facilitators/Opportunities

- Receiving advanced credits from previous post-secondary institutions encouraged enrolment and helped sustain students.
- Flexibility in course scheduling enabled participants to take advantage of mixed offerings, both classroom-based and online, and access to evening and weekend courses accommodated work and facilitated timely degree completion.
- Ability to take concurrent course offerings expedited students' progress and integrated students into the academic culture earlier (e.g. ESL and academic courses, ABE and academic courses).
- Small class sizes were less intimidating, promoted interaction, and facilitated establishing rapport with professors.
- Mix of ages in the classroom raised energy, and offered a variety of perspectives and interaction opportunities.
- Relationships with professors were pivotal for encouragement, and included tangible support (e.g. for extensions on assignments and papers when work deadlines or family emergencies took priority, and for seeking clarification on specific course expectations).
- Positive classroom experiences and teaching strategies enriched learning (e.g. group work facilitated friendships, helped produce higher quality assignments, and generally enriched learning through shared ideas); also, the professor's ability to create inclusive, stimulating and enjoyable classes was mentioned as a critical component.
- A supportive institutional infrastructure and having access to support services eased students' transition into University-College (e.g. receiving early acceptance letters, warm welcomes from support staff, orientation tours, visits with educational advisors, and having access to well-appointed library facilities and tuition-free courses for seniors).
- Extracurricular activities and socializing outside of class were not sought due to time constraints or structural issues (e.g. when taking only one 3-hour course a week), although participants appreciated it when opportunities to socialize were integrated into course designs (e.g. group assignments, field trips, library tours).
- Previous post-secondary experiences helped to instil confidence and reduce the anxieties of re-entry; also receiving good grades and getting encouraging feedback from professors enhanced confidence.
- Gradual re-entry, by having a reduced course load (especially in the first semester), instilled confidence, raised GPA, and supported the development of study routines and life balance.
- Support from partners/spouses, family, friends, and employers helped students solve practical problems and made the school transition feasible (i.e. specifically in relation to

childcare, tuition support, housing and shared household routines, and flexible work arrangements).

Barriers/Obstacles

- Older students expressed having fears about their abilities to meet expectations, sustain the pace required, access needed resources and figure things out, contribute to class discussions, and form relationships (e.g. concerns were raised about “sticking out like a sore thumb” and not being able to relate to younger students).
- Having significant family obligations that competed for students’ time, energy and resources presented barriers (e.g. single parents and students with eldercare responsibilities were particularly affected). These commitments created financial pressures, as Student Loans were often not available or were inadequate to offset financial burdens.
- Feelings of being disconnected socially and segregated from peer groups were expressed. For some students, this created motivation problems when taking classes with younger students who did not share their interests or outlook. Other students reported having home stay arrangements that were isolating and boring, that they were shunned in group-work situations, or that they felt like an outsider or were culturally excluded.
- The health implications of returning to school were described by older students as feeling tired and stressed, having reduced energy, and carrying heavy backpacks.
- Unavailable courses for required pre-requisites and lack of access to local offerings (Cowichan campus) affected course continuity and timely degree completion.
- Inflexible course schedules, limited course options during evenings and weekends, and limited access to online courses were seen as disadvantaging working students.
- Life-role stress was experienced because students had little discretionary time/life balance due to juggling studies with work and other life commitments—this was especially the case for students enrolled in full-time studies.
- Students were not offered an introduction to campus or departmental resources and consequently they had difficulty locating appropriate study and storage spaces as commuting students.
- Language and cultural barriers were experienced—the International student was under significant family pressure to excel and integrate into Canadian culture and society, and the First Nation participant experienced the burden of being a “first generation” student.

Appendix O.

Pan-Canadian Study Merged Dataset: Variable List for PCA and Model for Regression Analyses

Dependent Variables/Labels

Intent to Change/Transfer Program (DV 1)

- EQ118. Agreement rating:
I may try to transfer into another program at the end of this semester.
- EQ128. Agreement rating:
I'm beginning to think the program I'm taking is not what I want.
- REQ135. Agreement rating:
I will continue in my present program next semester.
- EQ147. Agreement rating:
I considered dropping out of my program at least once this semester.

Intent to Leave/Continue Studies (DV 2)

- EQ136. Agreement rating:
I may quit my studies before I finish my program.
- EQ146. Agreement rating:
I may not continue with my studies next semester.
- REQ129. Agreement rating:
I will continue my studies at this college next semester.

Satisfaction with Faculty Relationships (DV 3)

- EQ84. How many of your faculty/instructors would you say showed an interest in helping students succeed?
- EQ91. How many of your faculty/instructors would you say made themselves available to meet with students outside of class?
- EQ95. How many of your faculty/instructors would you say had a good relationship with their students?

Satisfaction with Teaching Methods (DV 4)

- EQ86. How many of your faculty/instructors would you say encouraged student participation/involvement in class?
- EQ87. How many of your faculty/instructors would you say used the lecture method to teach classes?
- EQ89. How many of your faculty/instructors would you say incorporated group work or group discussions as a part of their classes?
- EQ93. How many of your faculty/instructors would you say provided opportunities to practice and apply new learning?

Satisfaction with Institutional Resources (DV 5)

- EQ100. Would you say your institution tries to help students and faculty interact regularly?
- EQ101. Would you say your institution is interested in helping students succeed?
- EQ103. Would you say your institution provides sufficient space for students to study in groups?
- EQ105. Would you say your institution has specific programs or strategies to help students adjust to college studies?
- EQ107. Would you say your institution makes sure students have the resources they need to learn?
- EQ108. Would you say your institution has the necessary services to support student learning?
- EQ109. Would you say your institution provides services to students so that using them is easy?

Educational Commitment (DV 6)

- EQ115. Agreement rating:
It is important that I complete my program and obtain a diploma/certificate/degree.
- EQ150. Agreement rating:
I am determined to finish my college education.
- EQ122. Agreement rating:
I always try to do the best I can in whatever I do.
- EQ131. Agreement rating:
My studies are one of the most important things in my life.

Confidence (DV 7)

- EQ116. Agreement rating:
I am capable of getting a B+ average (78%) or better in my courses.
- EQ138. Agreement rating:
I have the ability to succeed in college-level studies.
- EQ134. Agreement rating:
I think I am well prepared to be a successful student in college.
- EQ148. Agreement rating:
I am very certain that I will obtain a college diploma/certificate/degree.

Selected Independent Variables/Labels**Financial Concerns/Financing College (IV 1)**

- EQ24. Concern rating:
Having enough money to pay your college studies and living expenses this year?
- EQ25. Concern rating:
The amount of debt you think you will have by the time you complete your post-secondary education?
- EQ26. Concern rating:
Your ability to repay any student debt you accumulate within a reasonable timeframe?

- EQ27. On average, how many hours per week have you been working for pay during your studies this semester?
- EQ110. Agreement rating:
I could benefit greatly from special help in securing financial aid for my education.
- EQ113. Agreement rating:
Difficulty financing my studies may mean that I will have to leave college.
- EQ142. Agreement rating:
Paying for my education is not going to be a problem for me this semester.

Peer Interaction/Friendships (IV 2)

- EQ153. Agreement rating:
It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students.
- EQ156. Agreement rating:
Student friendships in college have helped me cope with stress of college life.
- EQ158. Agreement rating:
The friendships I have developed in college are enjoyable.
- EQ162. Agreement rating:
At this time I feel like I 'fit in' at this college.
- EQ165. Agreement rating:
Since coming to this college I have become close friends with several students.
- EQ167. Agreement rating:
Students I know in my program are willing to help each other with problems.
- EQ169. Agreement rating:
I find it easy to make friends in new situations.

Faculty Interaction/Relationships (IV 3)

- EQ152. Agreement rating:
I have developed a good relationship with at least one faculty member.
- EQ154. Agreement rating:
My interactions with faculty have helped me better understand my future job.
- EQ155. Agreement rating:
So far, college staff have been friendly and welcoming.
- EQ157. Agreement rating:
Faculty in my program have been willing to help with course-related problems.
- EQ160. Agreement rating:
Outside of class discussions with faculty have influenced my interest in ideas.
- EQ161. Agreement rating:
College staff I have had contact with care about helping students with problems.
- EQ163. Agreement rating:
Faculty have referred me to other staff on campus.
- EQ168. Agreement rating:
If I needed extra help, I received it from my teachers.

Goal-Orientation (IV 4)

- EQ121. Agreement rating:
I feel undecided about what my career will be after I finish college.
- EQ117. Agreement rating: I have chosen the program I am in because I have a particular career/job in mind.
- EQ125. Agreement rating:
I feel that I'm making progress toward achieving my college goals.

Perceived Relevance of Studies (IV 5)

- EQ114. Agreement rating:
This semester, I often thought what I was doing was a waste of time.
- EQ151. Agreement rating:
I find most of what I am learning in my program irrelevant.
- EQ119. Agreement rating:
I would decide to remain in college even if offered a full-time job.
- EQ145. Agreement rating:
If I had a chance to have a full-time job I would take it and leave college.
- EQ126. Agreement rating:
I would rather be working full-time than studying right now.

Perceived Advantages of College Education (IV 6)

- EQ124. Agreement rating:
A student's writing skills can be improved with a college education.
- EQ127. Agreement rating:
Attending college creates a good foundation for future learning.
- EQ132. Agreement rating:
College graduates have a better chance of getting a good job than those who do not graduate.
- EQ143. Agreement rating:
A college education enhances a student's understanding of him/herself.
- EQ149. Agreement rating:
A college education develops a person's ability to think critically.