THE EXPERIENCES OF NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS UTILIZING STUDENT

SUPPORT SERVICES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

STEPHANIE J. BANNISTER

B.A., Fort Hays State University, 1992
M.S., University of Kansas, 1995

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs
College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2009

Abstract

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These themes captured the experiences of non-traditional students while utilizing student support services. Students who develop or experience a positive connection with a student support staff member or faculty member reported that those experiences leave them feeling engaged in the life of the university and satisfied with their student role. Non-traditional students were confused about what student support services were available and how to utilize them. When students seek the help of support staff, the student often left feeling as though the staff do not understand their needs. Student support service offices did not differentiate between programs specifically for non-traditional and traditionally-aged students. Students could identify student support service staff as connectors as playing the role of; academic advisor, admissions representative, financial aid advisor, housing staff member, faculty member or others who take the opportunity to engage with the student.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Grant and our children Sydney, William, and Grace. To my husband Grant: thank you for pushing me to be the best possible person and professional. To my children: I hope you understand that the time I spend at work is intended to serve others in a way that encourages them to do the same and, therefore, is worth my best effort. In sacrificing that time with you, I have to believe that the world you inherit will be full of adventure, hope, and possibility. I need you each to know that this journey of writing and the time away from you to do so was a gift and investment in me as a person, and I am so very thankful for that. Most importantly, know that my work and my dissertation pale in comparison to being your mom – for that journey is the one that has made me complete.

To my grandparents: thank you for instilling the value of education through your example and investment in me. To my parents: thank you for encouraging my education, for believing in my potential, and for loving me unconditionally. There are countless teachers, child care providers, family, friends, colleagues, mentors, and others who have touched my life and the life of our family to allow this journey to happen through their support – thank you!

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

Since the beginning of time, human beings have been on a journey to be in relationships with one another. Human beings have a story to tell and a need to communicate. While the methods through which we communicate and build relationships with one another have evolved from cave wall drawings to chat room blogging, the need to be in relationships with one another has remained.

The tradition of higher education was that the university environment was to serve as a realm in which students could engage in relationships with others in and out of the classroom to explore and expand upon knowledge gained through a multitude of disciplines. The underpinnings of higher education remain rooted in providing an avenue for training that leads to improving the course of one's life journey. The costs of education and dwindling resources encourage university administration to focus on retaining students.

Exploration of the factors that lead to non-traditional student persistence, retention, and eventual graduation have been studied and analyzed (Tinto, 1993). Yet, with no research has been done to evaluate the connection between student support services and non-traditional student engagement and satisfaction. Research into the unique needs of non-traditional students has been building since the mid-1980s, but studies specifically exploring the connection between student support services and student engagement and satisfaction are non-existent.

Overview

Due to a downturn in the number of graduating high school seniors in Kansas and a leveling off nationwide of graduates, an emphasis on retention is resurfacing. Universities and colleges in Kansas are facing declining enrollments. As a result, university administrators are increasingly aware of the significance of retention (P. Bosco, personal communication,

September 16, 2005). Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the leveling out of high school graduates

nationwide and in Kansas a downturn for a decade (The College Board, 2007).

In preparation for declining high school enrollments, Kansas State University will have to

explore and improve upon efforts to retain students from particularly unique populations. As the

traditional market of undergraduate students shrinks and/or levels out, the importance of

retaining the growing non-traditional student market is imperative.
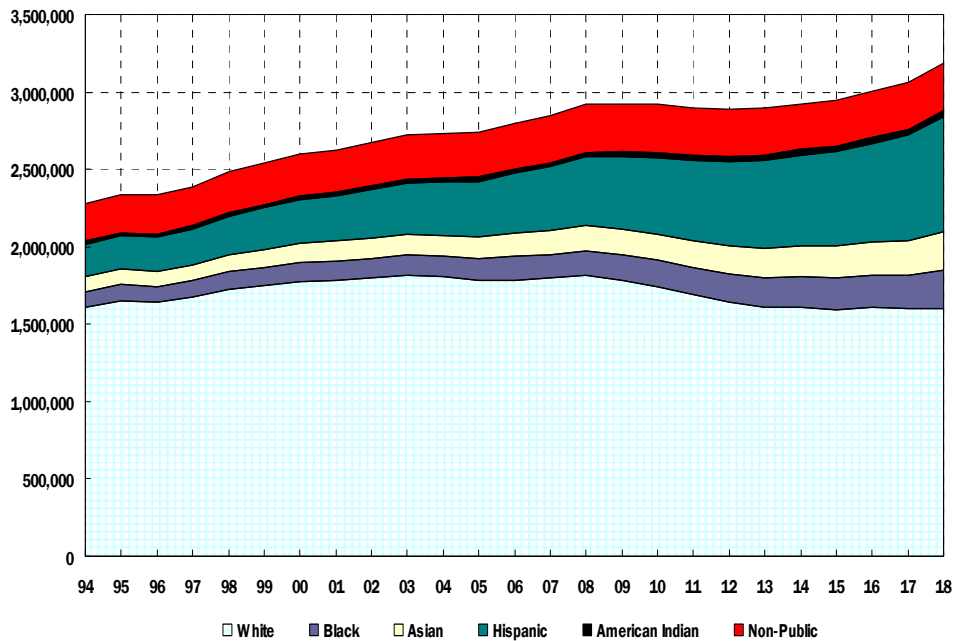
Figure 1. Nationwide High School Graduates, 1993 to 2018.
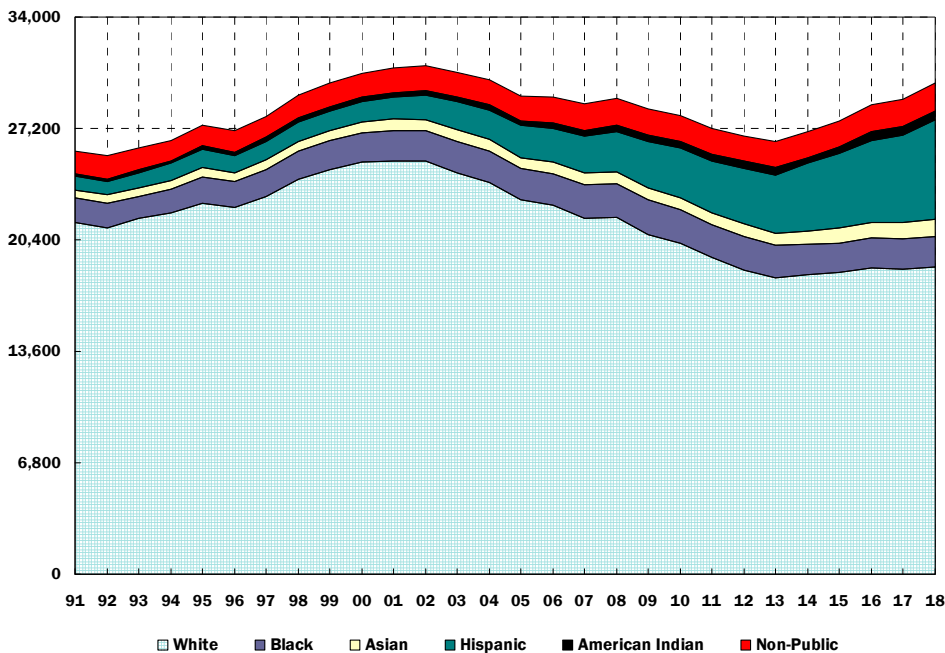
Figure 2. Kansas High School Graduates, 1991 to 2018.

One example of a unique population is the non-traditional student. Adult students, often called non-traditional students, are one of the most rapidly growing segments of today's college student population. From 2005 to 2016, enrollment of students age 25 and older is expected to rise by 21 percent at degree-granting institutions (NCES, 2002).

The circumstances faced by a non-traditional student are similar to those faced by a minority student. In the youthful world of most college students (traditionally college-aged 18 to 22 year olds), non-traditional and minority students can be marginalized to the mainstream of institutional life (Tinto, 1993). The specific challenges facing this population will be explored in the literature analysis.

At many universities, student support service functions, such as academic assistance centers, career and employment services, and financial aid, serve as a means of retaining students. The role that non-academic integration plays in non-traditional student life within the university setting is one area that is especially unclear (Lundberg, 2003). Non-academic

integration takes place in offices that deliver student support services. One might draw the conclusion that to capture and retain non-traditional students, student support service efforts will need to widen their focus. Therefore, it is important to ascertain if student support services are responding to the needs of this unique student population.

The experiences of non-traditional students will provide a new base of knowledge about the role that student support services play in the engagement and satisfaction of students. This data will provide recommendations for practitioners and programs in student support services at K-State and other institutions of higher learning. When analyzed and synthesized, the stories and feedback shared by students can provide a roadmap for building a stronger connection that can enhance the student's learning experience.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of non-traditional students while utilizing student support services and the impact these experiences have on the engagement and satisfaction of undergraduate non-traditional students at Kansas State University. Data gathering will include not only student interviews but support staff interviews and support service office observations.

For the purposes of this study, student support services is defined as non-academic departments or offices providing support services to students. On a national scale, non-traditional students are identified by their enrollment patterns, financial dependency status, family situation, and high school graduation status (Horn, 1996). At Kansas State University, non-traditional students are defined as undergraduate and graduate students who are married, have children, are reentering the education system after several years, or are 25 years of age or older (Adult Student Services, 2005).

Autobiographical Statement

For the researcher, this phenomenon has been experienced two-fold – both as a non-traditional student and as a student affairs professional working with non-traditional students. Upon entering graduate work, the researcher did not initially see herself as a non-traditional student. In the course of working through different graduate assistantship duties and academic coursework, the majority of experiences focused on preparing the student-practitioner to serve the needs of traditionally-aged students.

The opportunity to work with non-traditional students came about unexpectedly and initially was met with fear and distrust. What in her coursework had prepared her to serve under-represented groups such as international, non-traditional, and graduate students? The moment the researcher set foot on campus it was clear that working with the new and non-mainstream groups mentioned would challenge her and provide limitless opportunities to grow.

The researcher quickly learned through her own experiences that the majority of non-traditional students are at a point in their lives where they are committed to completing their education and are appreciative and eager for advice and support. Frustratingly, the program offerings and focus of student support services remained on traditionally-aged students.

Then the opportunity arose for the researcher to become a non-traditional student herself while pursuing a doctorate. This time around, the academic experience would be juggled along with work and a growing family. It became clear that as a non-traditional student, her needs for support were different and her approach to her education hinged upon many outside factors. The lens through which the staff member had been practicing her craft began to change. The researcher as a student began to see challenges from a non-traditional student's perspective.

The development of a dissertation topic and its subsequent exploration take time and endurance, and the topic must be of interest to the researcher to sustain him/her over time. The

research topic crystallized quickly – a study focusing on the experiences of non-traditional students. The chance to serve as a steward of new knowledge that could lead to improving the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students became the quest. The journey finds the researcher experiencing and studying the phenomenon simultaneously.

Research Questions

Exploration of the following questions allowed the researcher to assess the impact student support services have on the non-traditional student experience:

1. How do the experiences of non-traditional students when utilizing the services of university student support staff impact their engagement and satisfaction?

2. How do non-traditional students regard their experiences with student support services at Kansas State University?

3. What types of program offerings do student support services at Kansas State University provide specifically for non-traditional students?

4. What level of involvement with student support service functions do non-traditional students find as enhancing their learning experience?

These questions will be addressed through interviews with non-traditional students and support staff at Kansas State University.

Study Limitations

The challenge facing this study is the use of self-reported data. With self-reporting, the strength of the data depends to some degree on what those reporting wish to share. While the researcher can make efforts to ensure strong study design, develop open-ended questions, and build a foundation of trust, much of what the study yields depends on those being interviewed. The willingness of students to discuss both positive and negative experiences, with the researcher greatly impacts the outcome.

Given that little research into the impact of student support services on the lives of non-traditional students has been conducted, this study can serve as a basis for future research. The stories shared by students and the insights gained provide a foundation of knowledge and open opportunities for future research into the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students.

Definition of Terms

For this research study, the terms *engagement*, *satisfaction*, *involvement, non-traditional students,* and *student support services* are defined as:

1. Engagement: The student's involvement in purposeful activity that allow them to acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies (Kuh, 2001).

2. Satisfaction: An indicator of the degree to which a student enjoys the role of being a student and reports a lack of boredom (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

3. Involvement: The opportunity to spend time on campus engaged in activities and building relationships with members of the university that enhance student learning (Astin, 1993).

4. Non-traditional students: At Kansas State University, non-traditional students are defined as undergraduate and graduate students who are married, have children, are reentering the education system after several years, or are 25 years of age or older (Adult Student Services, 2005).

5. Student support services: Non-academic departments or offices providing support services to students as defined by Kansas State University and identified under administration of institutional advancement (Kansas State University, 2009).

Non-traditional Student Definitions and Data

There has been a shift in the demographics of college students in the United States. Adult student enrollment in postsecondary education increased from 2.4 million in the 1970s to 6.5

million in 2000 (Imel, 2001). Among the anticipated trends in enrollment was an increase in the number of women, minority students, international students, and older adult students (Hughes, Frances, & Lombardo, 1991). Since 1980, non-traditional students have shown a 50 percent growth rate nation-wide (Aslanian, 1996). At Kansas State University, the population of non-traditional students has grown to more than 20 percent of total enrollment.

It is difficult to obtain accurate data regarding the number of non-traditional students at Kansas State University because not every descriptor is flagged by the Registrar's Office. The only student applications that can be categorized as non-traditional are those of students age 25 and older or those indicating they are married. Students who may be single with children are not flagged as non-traditional. The actual number of non-traditional students at Kansa State University is not recorded, nor is the retention of this population tracked.

The concept of the non-traditional student is multifaceted. These students have been labeled as transfers, part-time, commuter, mature, adult and, finally, non-traditional. Bean and Metzner (1985) described a non-traditional student as

> older than 24, 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. (p. 489)

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) listed age as the most defining characteristic of this population, followed by enrollment patterns, financial and family status, and high school graduation status (NCES, 2002). At Kansas State University, the Adult Student Services Office defined this constituency as, "25 years of age or older, married, a parent, or returning to school" (Adult Student Services, 2005).

NCES (2002) also noted that the criteria chosen to identify non-traditional students pertain to choices and behavior that may increase students' risk of attrition, and as such, are amenable to change or intervention at various stages in the student's academic career. Many of the characteristics of non-traditional students are interrelated. For example, a student may delay enrolling in postsecondary education or attend part-time because of work or family obligations.

Researcher's Perspective

Through data collection and observation, the personal experiences of the researcher might play a factor in the results. From personal and professional relationships with non-traditional students, the researcher has often heard that non-traditional students view the university as making minimal efforts to evaluate the delivery of support services to non-traditional students. The researcher acknowledges that she is entering into the research process assuming she will see a connection between the experiences of non-traditional students utilizing student support services and the impact of those experiences on the engagement and satisfaction on non-traditional students.

In the literature analysis to follow, Astin's (1993) theory of student involvement will be reviewed along with Tinto's (1993) views on student attention. This connection between student involvement and engagement into college life will provide a framework to analyze the experiences of non-traditional students while utilizing student support services. The literature analysis will explore efforts being made in academia to adopt practices that address the unique needs of non-traditional students. The analysis of adult-centered practices and engagement of non-traditional students will assist the researcher in analyzing interview and observation data for themes related to the delivery of services to non-traditional students.

CHAPTER 2 - Literature Analysis

Philosophical and Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework serves as a lens with which to guide the data collection process and analyze the relationship between student support services and non-traditional students. For the purpose of this research project, Astin's (1993) theory of student involvement will be utilized along with Tinto's (1993) views on student attrition. Although it is impossible to narrow either theory to just one point, the main tenet of Astin's (1993) work is that students' learning is affected through involvement on campus. Tinto's (1993) perspective was that a student's lack of incorporation into the life of the college is reflected in student departure from college. This connection between involvement and engagement into college life provides a framework to analyze the experiences of non-traditional students while utilizing student support services. Tenets of both theories were used to draft questions as part of the interview protocol.

According to student involvement theory, activities that draw student efforts off campus have a negative effect on learning because these activities leave students with less time and energy for involvement on campus (Astin, 1993). Due to their unique stage in life, non-traditional students may be the most time-challenged student population because of full-time work, family obligations, and other restrictions on their time. The resulting restrictions in their interaction with other members of the university community may severely constrain learning important patterns of social behavior that allow for full incorporation into college life (Tinto, 1993).

The time demands of family and work situations draw non-traditional students away from the opportunity to make contact with faculty, staff, and other students. Those demands also interfere with engagement in campus activities. Studies of retention among married students suggest that family responsibilities may sometimes hinder academic persistence and does so

increasingly for females more than for males (Astin, 1993). The demands of full-time

employment can constrain academic persistence more so than part-time employment. The effect

upon persistence is related to the amount of employment and the degree to which it removes the

individual from campus life. While off-campus work limits one's interaction with faculty and

students, on-campus employment seems to enhance one's interaction with other members of the

institution. As the non-traditional student is more likely than the traditional college student to be

married, live off campus, or be employed while attending college, non-traditional students are

also more likely to encounter greater problems finding time for involvement on campus (Astin,

1993).

The environment of non-traditional students pulls their time and energy away from

campus involvement opportunities. Tinto's (1993) position was that the causes of non-traditional

student departure are significantly affected by the degree of their intellectual and social

involvement in the life of the institution. There are various factors influencing these forms of

student involvement. Informal interaction with other students and faculty outside of the

classroom seem to be of particular importance (Tinto, 1993). No matter if the contact is

academic, social, informal, or formal, contact that connects non-traditional students to the

university appears to be a foundational component in the social and intellectual development of

non-traditional students.

One limitation of studies focusing on time away from campus hindering the student

learning experiences is that they have yet to be applied to students 30 years and older (Lundberg,

2003). As a result, the experiences of a large subset of non-traditional students have never been

examined using this framework. Bean and Metzner (1985) offered a model of the college

departure process for older or non-traditional students that is influenced by one or more of the

following variables: academic performance, intent to leave, previous performance and educational goals, and environmental variables. The researchers indicate that environmental variables (e.g., finances, hours of employment, outside encouragement, family responsibilities and opportunity to transfer) have a greater impact on departure decisions of adult students than academic variables (e.g., study habits, academic advising, absenteeism, major certainty, and course availability). The connection between a students' opportunity for involvement and the environmental variables that often draw them away from campus warrants additional research. Bean and Metzner (1985) proposed that the most important retention variables are likely to differ for subgroups, such as older students, part-time students, ethnic minorities, women, and academically under-prepared students at different types of institutions.

In a recent study regarding time limitations and its impact on adult learners, the quality of relationships between university administrators and non-traditional students was a strong predictor of learning (Lundberg, 2003). This research found that students learned more when they experienced interactions with university support staff that could be categorized as helpful, considerate, and flexible. Increased student learning and engagement lend themselves to the retention of students. The significance of Lundberg's (2003) findings when coupled with Astin's student involvement theory (1993) was that it calls upon universities to ensure that non-traditional students are able to experience successful relationships with university support staff and administrators. Meaningful involvement can be achieved through extended office hours, restructuring of services, and providing staff training regarding the unique needs of non-traditional students. Non-traditional students are often less willing to ask for assistance in making the transition to college (Lundberg, 2003). For that reason, some institutions have made it a point to have specific orientation programs designed specifically for older students. Other universities

establish organizational units whose task it is to communicate with and assist older students (Tinto, 1993). The policy implications of research findings such as Tinto's (1993) appear to be quite clear – institutions should encourage contact between non-traditional students and the university community whenever and wherever possible.

In 1996, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) drafted a document titled, "The Student Learning Imperative," that asserted that the central role of student affairs functions is to foster student learning. At many universities and colleges, student support service functions foster learning in an effort to retain students through entities such as academic assistance centers, career and employment services, financial aid, etc. This retention occurs through the university's ability to create an environment that encourages learning and positive involvement. Studying the delivery and use of student support services by non-traditional students may allow for connections to be drawn between engagement, student satisfaction, and ultimately retention. Currently, there is no data on the non-traditional student perspective of this connection. This study explores the phenomological experiences of non-traditional students as it gathers their stories and feedback regarding the role that student support services plays in the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students. Persistence in college may arise in academic and the social systems of the institution and reflect the intellectual and personal integration and incorporation of the individual into the college community (Tinto, 1993). Greek organizations, on-campus living groups, union programming events, lecture series, extracurricular programs and intramurals may all provide individuals with opportunities to establish repetitive contact with other members of the institution in circumstances which lead to the possibility of integration in to college life (Tinto, 1993). The challenge is to find a way to connect students who have fewer opportunities for involvement with activities that can fit in their time-challenged lives. One

might suggest that student services need to reach out and not to trust a student's ability to navigate the institutional maze on their own.

A study by Graham and Gisi (2000) showed the more time that adult students were engaged in courses, other related learning activities, and campus activities, the greater their reported learning outcomes. The benefits of involvement and the value of student-to-faculty and student-to-student interactions are difficult to achieve because engaging non-traditional students in the broad campus environment is difficult. Non-traditional students have fewer opportunities to become involved in the campus environment and interact with peers and faculty due to time constraints. This lack of involvement could have negative ramifications for students who miss out on key elements of the college experience if they are not involved in the out-of-class activities that stimulate learning (Graham & Gisi, 2000).

Utilizing the work of Tinto (1993) and Astin (1993) as a foundation for the study will allow for an increased understanding of how the opportunity to develop relationships with administrators and support staff can impact students. The degree of involvement can affect the learning and retention of non-traditional students.

The use of Tinto's (1993) perspective on the importance of student integration into the life of campus will allow for analysis on how the opportunity for engagement can impact satisfaction. Tinto (2008) asserted that research points to six conditions within institutions that are supportive of student success; commitment, expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning. These conditions are identified by Tinto (2008).

1. Commitment: Institutional commitment is a true investment of resources to enhance student success.

2. Expectations: Students quickly pick-up on the differing expectations that institutions

have for students in how we treat and label them. These expectations validate their

presence on campus.

3. Support: Support that promotes success must include elements that are academic,

social, and financial in nature.

4. Feedback: Monitoring and feedback are critical components to success. Settings that

provide faculty, staff, and students' feedback about performance provide an

environment for success.

5. Involvement: Described by Tinto (1993) and Astin (1993) as academic and social

integration, it is a key to student success. Educational communities must be built to

involve all and not just some students.

6. Learning: Students who learn are students who stay. The more time a student can stay

engaged in learning the more successful the institution will be in graduating the student.

Case studies conducted in the United Kingdom (Bamber & Tett, 2000) called for a two-

way process of change and development at universities if they desired that non-traditional

students enjoy a successful experience. This process begins with that gathering of feedback to

determine needed changes and adaptations in the delivery of services to non-traditional students.

What follows step 1 is the development of procedures based upon recommendations for change.

For universities, this means that their policies and processes must be inclusive and allow

adequate support of non-traditional students. A phenomenological study that yields stories and

experiences of non-traditional students can help student affairs practitioners examine their

programs and efforts at involvement opportunities to boost student retention. To achieve this

goal, the questions used in research will be grounded in Tinto's (2008) conditions for student

success. Each question will seek to address one or more of the following institutional conditions: commitment, expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning.

Analysis of Related Literature

The overall goal of this review was to investigate what has been written about the impact of student support services on non-traditional students and their specific needs as related to recruitment and retention. This segment of the review examines what is needed to ensure that higher education institutions are developing adult student centered practices.

During the 1980s, the number of non-traditional students increased at colleges and universities (Allen, 1993). Many factors led to increased adult enrollment in higher education institutions in the last two decades. These include an aging American population, equal-opportunity legislation, and the existence of focused, non-traditional educational experiences. As people are living longer, they are seeking educational experiences for job fulfillment and self-actualization (Allen, 1993).

Within the population of non-traditional students there are unique subsets of students. Women over the age of 30 make up one of the largest subgroups of non-traditional students (Noel, Levitz, & Saluri, 1985). For many women, the motivation to return correlates with the stage they are in life. As their children enter school and women find more time for themselves, they look towards their own development (Noel et al., 1985). Another subset of non-traditional students is international students. Increasingly, larger universities are looking towards international student recruitment and retention to boost sagging high school enrollments. At Kansas State University, new undergraduate programs established with Japan, China, and Saudi Arabia are providing an influx of new, traditional-age students with non-traditional needs each semester (Kstatement, 2005). In a sense, this program has created a unique subset of students whose needs are non-traditional. Unfortunately, very little research has been conducted to

determine if the needs of international students differ from other non-traditional students (Allen, 1993). University officials must examine whether the findings from decades of research on traditional college students hold true for non-traditional students. This is especially relevant regarding campus involvement (Graham & Gisi, 2000).

Retention of Non-traditional Students

An emerging issue in higher education for the 21st century is the development of adult-centered educational practices that are responsive to the unique needs of non-traditional students (Mancuso, 2001). Factors that affect the retention or attrition decisions of non-traditional students are difficult to determine. The underlying difficulty comes in defining the typical non-traditional student because the characteristics of this population are constantly changing. This diversity of student population makes tracking factors difficult. Non-traditional students are people who have assumed major life responsibilities such as work, family, and community activities. The attrition rate for non-traditional students has been reported at approximately 32% (Villella & Hu, 1991). In 1997, the Commission for a Nation of Lifelong Learners found that many current higher education practices were ill adapted to the needs of employers and adult learners. They pose barriers to participation, which include a lack of flexibility in calendar and scheduling, academic content, modes of instruction and availability of learning services.

Limited research has been conducted to identify specific factors that can lead to persistence in college by non-traditional students. However, some factors that affect persistence include communication about educational services, understanding previous educational success, availability for non-credit classes, and attention to adult developmental stages (Allen, 1993). Student activity programs that promote college achievement for non-traditional students should be supported. Some of the factors that will keep these students reenrolling are promoting participation in special activities of the school, acquiring a part-time job on campus, providing

child care on or near campus, and providing adequate parking near classroom buildings (Allen, 1993).

Retention efforts must emphasize academic and social integration of students at the beginning of a semester and throughout the year. Support services for the non-traditional student should be maintained to provide the nurturance necessary for academic achievement. College administration, faculty, and staff need to be aware of non-traditional students on their campuses and recognize the category of non-traditional may be divided into many subgroups (Allen, 1993). Orientation programs should serve as a continuing process of integrating students into college life rather than just a transition between high school and college. Periodic sessions should be held so that students can share their frustrations and needs, in addition to providing learning skills workshops (Allen, 1993). Academic advising must be improved through better training and evaluation of academic advisors. Institutions should provide competent advisors and well-trained staff who are alert to the special needs of non-traditional students who are at risk of dropping out of school. Counseling programs should be available that will help the student communicate the importance of both educational endeavors and the need for the support of family and friends if the student is to succeed (Allen, 1993).

Academic Adaptations

The literature analysis revealed one institution attempting to tailor coursework towards the unique needs of non-traditional students. A brief look at this institution provides a case study for how to create specific programs tailored for non-traditional students. At Indiana University Purdue at Fort Wayne, the School of Engineering, Technology and Computer Science worked with a high population of non-traditional students – adults who have been out of school for several years (Henry Goff & Pomalaza-Raez, 2003). These students, like other non-traditional students, usually hold full- or part-time jobs in local industry and are motivated to earn a degree

in a technical field; but their knowledge of engineering, technology, and computer science is limited. Other challenges facing this unique student body are a lack of a proper mindset and attitude for academic success, limited computer skills, few opportunities to interact with others, no experience to bring a design into a working prototype, and poor written and oral communication skills (Henry Goff & Pomalaza-Raez, 2003).

IUPU Fort Wayne created a high-tech student success course that helps students acquire sufficient computer and personal development skills for a successful college career. Computer skills and the right attitude towards obtaining a technical degree have been strongly correlated with retention (Henry Goff & Pomalaza-Raez, 2003). The culminating activity of the course was a team project that required students to work collaboratively to build a mobile robot. Small teams of students designed, built, programmed, and tested a mobile robot. This project provided students with the opportunity to work on a team that fostered their creativity, logic, and problem solving skills. By working on the project, students were introduced to product development, working with systems, working in teams, modality and abstraction, feedback and control, attention to aesthetics, and the value of simplicity and robustness (Henry Goff & Pomalaza-Raez, 2003). The importance of this introductory course to the engineering, technology, and computer science disciplines has been highlighted. The main objective was to increase retention; the course is coupled with academic counseling and career information (Henry Goff & Pomalaza-Raez, 2003). With the addition of the course to the required curriculum the percentage of students retained to the academic program grew from 62.86 percent to 95.92 percent (Henry Goff & Pomalaza-Raez, 2003). While the results are only for a one year period they point towards a positive retention outcome (Henry Goff & Pomalaza-Raez, 2003). This connection with student

support services achieves the goal of involving students in meaningful engagement with members of the university community.

Adult-Centered Practices

As evidenced at Indiana University Purdue Fort Wayne, practices focused on adult students can be developed and implemented that positively impact retention. What is needed for their development is careful assessment of student needs during the first few weeks, including advising that is tailored to adult students, and specialized student services. In other words, adult students need specialized services (Senter & Senter, 1998). By employing the use of benchmarking, a research team designed and implemented a comprehensive study to identify and describe best practices within adult-centered institutions (Mancuso, Strange, & Zakos, 1999). Their findings revealed that institutions centered on adult learners have a culture in which flexibility, individuation, and adult-centered learning drive institutional practices (Mancuso, Strange, & Zakos, 1999). Flexibility and expectation of change pervades every aspect of the institution. These institutions have:

1. Clearly articulated missions that permeate the institution and inspire and direct practice.

2. Institutional decision-making that is a shared responsibility that uses collaborative processes inclusive of faculty, staff, and students to create rapid, flexible responses to student and community needs.

3. Curriculum that is designed to meet the individual needs of the adult learner.

4. Prior learning assessment programs to honor and credit the learning which adults have previously acquired and to help plan new learning.

5. Multiple methods of instructional delivery that help adult learners meet their learning goals.

6. An inclusive, non-competitive admission process designed to determine the best educational match for the adult learner.

7. A way to engage adult learners in an ongoing dialogue designed to assist learners to make informed educational planning decisions.

8. Student services that are easily accessible and convenient to adult learners through many venues.

9. Full-time faculty in a blended role which combines instruction, student services, and administration.

10. Part-time faculty that enhance quality through their special expertise, make connections to workplaces, and deliver an accessible, flexible curriculum while assuring financial viability.

11. Technology to enrich one-on-one communication.

12. Continuous and deliberate efforts to ensure that its education remains affordable for adults while maintaining access and quality. (Mancuso 2001, p. 170-172)

The adult-centered institution has a culture and ethos in which educating and serving adult learners is seen as the role of every employee and is reflected in flexible and individualized practices (Sperling & Tucker, 1997). These institutions embrace an approach that understands, respects, responds, and partners with individual learners. Students learn from the curriculum and faculty in addition to the infrastructure formed by the principles that guide the selection of faculty, the creation of curriculum, and the delivery of student support services (Sperling & Tucker, 1997).

Special Considerations

The impact adult-centered practices have on outcomes such as student learning, satisfaction, and retention is not addressed in adult-centered research (Mancuso, 2001). This

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literature review revealed no research that addressed the impact of student support services on the retention of non-traditional students.

For states such as Kansas that have declining high school graduation numbers, this marks a decline in the number of in-state students universities can count in their enrollment number. However, the community college market with its unique niche in higher learning will continue to support a healthy draw of post-high school enrollees. Initially, community colleges were viewed as having the responsibility for assisting students in their transfer process, but that expectation is changing. Four-year institutions are increasingly viewed as responsible for students' successful transfer and transition (Berger & Malaney, 2003; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005). After helping these students transfer, the four-year institution then has the responsibility of orienting, advising, and providing support services (Kerr, King, & Grites, 2004).

As expressed in Tinto's (1993) work, the integration of academic and social opportunities for engagement is a predictor of academic success among students. In a campus environment where these opportunities and programs are geared towards traditional students, the transfer or non-traditional students are overlooked and they might not be retained (Herman & Lewis, 2004). Creating a sense of institutional belonging through the integration of academic and social endeavors will more likely lead to persistence, but it does not guarantee success. The factors drawing a student's time away from campus through work and family responsibilities must be recognized and addressed. Many of these factors affecting student performance can be addressed through effective advising and targeted delivery of student support services.

Although much research has been conducted on the significance of a seamless transfer process, particularly when transferring credit hours, little attention has been paid to the specific responsibilities that institutions are shouldering to ensure a successful transition (Townsend &

Wilson, 2006). Student support services have an increased responsibility to ensure this smooth transition. Although suggestions for assisting in these processes have been made, including learning communities and student interest groups, no assessment of these services on the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students has been conducted (Townsend & Wilson, 2006).

Non-traditional Student Engagement

As mentioned previously, one of the challenges facing the non-traditional student is the demand on their time that pull them away from campus. Time and effort spent on academic pursuits and other educationally purposeful activities are viewed as student engagement (Kuh, Gonyea & Palmer 2001). Beyond the traditional engagement activities associated with learning, there are other key activities that have come to the fore front. Collaboration with peers on group projects, problem solving opportunities and community services are included in this expansion (Kuh, 2001).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is administered annually to assess the degree to which students at four-year institutions take part in educationally purposeful activities that are associated with high levels of learning and personal development. George Kuh and colleagues evaluated the NSSE results for 2000 and 2001 and were able to identify benchmarks of effective educational practice (Gonyea, Kuh, & Palmer, 2007). These benchmarks call upon student support services to provide connections between support offerings and non-traditional students.

The challenge of academic coursework, opportunities for collaborative learning, interaction with peers and faculty activities enriching the educational experience, and a supportive campus environment were identified as benchmarks. The opportunity to communicate with students from different backgrounds, participate in volunteer work and community service,

and field experiences with peers were identified as substantive (Gonyea et al., 2007). An environment that assists students with their non-academic responsibilities and encourages social interaction and quality relationships also factors into student engagement (Gonyea et al., 2007). Those offices connected to providing students with non-academic involvement need to understand the impact their program offerings and service delivery can have on the engagement and satisfaction on non-traditional students. Researching the work of student support staff and their efforts to enhance the learning experience outside of the classroom can shed light on the impact of their efforts to enhance student engagement.

Summary

Through the literature analysis above, the researcher provided examples of multiple theories that provide insight into essential elements that can lead to the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students. Through the exploration of student involvement theory (Astin, 1993) as well as Tinto's (1993) research on student attrition, it can be concluded that a non-traditional students' involvement and incorporation into the life of college impacts student engagement. From the understanding of adult-centered practices and educational benchmarking in the arena of non-traditional student engagement, it is reported that student learning can be enhanced.

The current study attempts to discover various themes regarding the experiences of non-traditional students when utilizing student support services and the impact of those experiences on the students' engagement into college life and satisfaction with their role as a student. The remainder of this dissertation addresses the methodology for the study, the data collected through interviews and observations, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 3 - Methodology

Research Design

This chapter describes the research methodology used to conduct the study. This was a qualitative study that relied on participant observation and interview methods to answer the research questions. In many research scenarios, a qualitative approach is used when little is known about a phenomenon and one seeks to gain a perspective that will be unique, new, and richly detailed (Creswell, 1998). Because there has been limited research regarding the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students, there has not been an inquiry into the impact of student support services on the retention, engagement, and satisfaction of non-traditional students. This study focused specifically on undergraduate non-traditional students and those university offices providing student support services at a large, four-year, comprehensive university.

This qualitative study explored the experiences of undergraduate non-traditional students in relation to student support services. The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. How do the experiences of non-traditional students when utilizing the services of university student support staff impact their engagement and satisfaction?

2. How do non-traditional students regard their experiences with student support services at Kansas State University?

3. What types of program offerings do student support services at Kansas State University provide specifically for non-traditional students?

4. What level of involvement with student support service functions do non-traditional students find as enhancing their learning experience?

Methodological Perspective

The researcher used the phenomenological methodological perspective. This approach is used when the researcher attempts to understand the experiences of individuals or groups who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). This approach was appropriate for this study because the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with non-traditional students that allowed the researcher to listen, record, observe, and analyze the student's experiences. The researcher also interviewed student support staff and observed student support offices and interaction between staff and students for additional perspective into the non-traditional student experience. The research questions were developed to provide the researcher with themes related to the experiences of non-traditional student's while accessing student support services and also the experiences of student support staff in meeting the needs of non-traditional students.

The goal of the interviews and observations was to gather data related to the experiences of non-traditional students at Kansas State University and the degree to which those experiences with student support staff and programs impact student engagement and satisfaction. Additional consideration was given to the perspective of the non-traditional student experience through the lens of student support staff.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Tinto (2008) asserted that research points to six conditions within institutions that are supportive of student success. These six conditions will be used as a basis for the development of research questions used in this qualitative study. Table 1 offers a brief description of each condition and the connection to the interview questions that were developed for this study.

Table 1

Tinto's Six Conditions that Support Student Success

Condition	Description	Student/Staff Questions
Commitment	Institutional commitment is an investment of resources to enhance	• What type of experiences with student support services left you feeling as

	student success. These questions explore the commitment student support services are making to the success, of non-traditional students and students' perceptions of the efforts being made to engage them in campus life and satisfy their university experience.	though the university served you well? • How does Kansas State University address the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students?
Expectations	Students can identify the differing expectations that institutions have in the way they are treated and labeled. These expectations validate their presence on campus. The ways the university demonstrates an investment will be explored.	• In what ways does Kansas State University demonstrate an investment in you as a non-traditional student? • How does your office demonstrate an investment in non-traditional students?
Support	Support that promotes success must include elements that are academic, social, and financial. The services being delivered specifically to non-traditional students and the utilization of said services will be explored.	• What type of student support services (e.g. registrar, financial aid, admissions, housing) have you utilized most frequently during your time at Kansas State University? • Based on your experiences, what are the other student support service areas at Kansas State University that offer services geared for non-traditional students?
Feedback	Settings that provide faculty, staff, and student's feedback about performance provide an environment for success. The development of questions that allow students and staff to provide feedback on the impact of student support services will yield data that both can learn from.	• What are the things that Kansas State University could do to make your time at the university more enjoyable and enhance your learning experience? • In what ways does Kansas State University evaluate the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students?
Involvement	Described by Tinto (1993) and Astin (1993) as academic and social integration, involvement is a key to student success. The exploration of the phenomological experiences of students and staff should capture the meaning of the relationship between student support services and their non-traditional student clientele.	• What type of experiences with student support services left you feeling as though the university could have done more? • What type of experiences with student support services left you feeling as though the university served you well? • What type of experiences with non-traditional students left you feeling as though the university could have done more? • What type of experiences with non-

		traditional students left you feeling as though the university served them well?
Learning	The more time a student can stay engaged in learning, the more successful the institution will be in graduating the student. Questions should provide reflection on whether or not student support services make efforts to enhance non-traditional students' learning experiences.	• What could be done to make your time at the university more enjoyable and enhance your learning experience? • What are the ways in which your office enhances the leaning experiences of non-traditional students?

Background on Kansas State University

Kansas State University is a comprehensive, research, land-grant institution that was founded in 1863. As a comprehensive university, Kansas State University has responsibilities to develop human potential, expand knowledge, enrich cultural expression, and extend its expertise to individuals, business, education, and government (Fact Book, 2007). These responsibilities are addressed through a variety of undergraduate and graduate degree program offerings, research activities, as well as outreach and public service programs. In addition, its land-grant mandate, based on federal and state legislation, established a focus on its instructional, research, and extension activities. The development of land-grant institutions gave rise to an academic trilogy: instruction, research, and service – a description that nearly every institution of higher learning possesses, however different the interpretations (Johnson, 1983).

Through quality teaching, the University is committed to provide all students with opportunities to develop the knowledge, understanding, and skills characteristic of an educated person. To meet their responsibility to prepare students for successful employment or advanced studies, the institution dedicates itself to providing academic and extracurricular learning experiences that promote and value excellence and cultural diversity (Fact Book, 2007).

Kansas State University's mission includes enriching the lives of the citizens of Kansas by extending to them opportunities to engage in lifelong learning and to benefit from the results

of research (Fact Book, 2007). With program offerings on two campuses, research and extension sites at numerous locations, outreach programs offered throughout Kansas and the United States, and international activities, the university is able to extend services to a variety of students and other constituents.

Background on the Researcher

The researcher is a Caucasian female who was raised in a Midwestern area of the United States. At the beginning of the study, the researcher had direct responsibility for the operation of a student support office at K-State and was a doctoral candidate in the Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs in the College of Education.

The researcher has extensive experience interacting with non-traditional students and was a non-traditional student herself. Her vested interest in this topic began with her work in student support services at K-State. The opportunity to interact, advise, and provide support to non-traditional students revealed an appreciation of the unique needs of these students. The development of personal relationships with non-traditional students gave her insight into their desire and need for support. In addition, the researcher had the opportunity to interact with many student support service functional areas and study their program offerings and outreach to non-traditional students.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to test the interview questions and ensure they could provide rich data for analysis. Rich data was provided through analysis that included a detailed description of student experiences. This pilot included three student interviews that were recorded, transcribed, and then coded for themes. Before beginning the pilot study, all appropriate materials were submitted to the K-State Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects who gave approval for the study. The researcher gathered student volunteers and

scheduled interviews. Each student was given a copy of the consent form and the purpose statement for their review. The students were interviewed at a date, time, and location of their choosing. Of three undergraduate non-traditional students, two were non-traditional in the categories of age and both were single parents returning to school after being in the work force. The third student was of traditional age, yet married.

To code the data, the researcher used a step-by-step approach to phenomenological analysis that was suggested by Creswell (1998). Analysis began with reviewing the interviews, jotting notes in the margins, finding statements in the interviews that described how the individuals were characterizing the topic, and then grouping them into meaning units. Next, comparisons and contrasts between the codes or themes were reviewed for patterns that describe the phenomenological experiences of non-traditional students.

Pilot Study Conclusion

It was clear from the results of the pilot study that non-traditional students were often left to their own devices to navigate their transition into university life. From the student perspective, there are challenges to overcome in order for the student support staff to improve their ability to develop relationships with non-traditional students. The researcher felt confident that the themes unearthed in the data would be rich and detailed. Analysis of the three transcripts provided common themes of commitment, expectations, and support.

The pilot study allowed the researcher to fine tune the interview protocol to allow the opportunity to learn about the personal journey of the student to K-State before jumping into their experiences as a non-traditional student. The researcher used Tinto's (2008) six conditions within institutions supportive of student success to further develop the interview questions and provide additional structure to the study. Additional questions were added to the interview protocol to gather data related to the students' satisfaction with their role as student, their

perception of efforts made to engage them into the life of the university, and asking them to describe opportunities for involvement into the life of college.

The researcher also refined her interview scheduling to encourage the student to select an interview location of their choosing. This allowed the researcher to meet the student in a familiar and convenient environment yet encourage them to select a location where they could speak comfortably and freely.

Sample

Research participants were selected from data provided by the Office of Adult Student Services (OASS), whose mission is to provide support services for non-traditional students. OASS is given a list of all students 25 years of age or older or those who identify themselves as being married on their application by the Registrar's Office. Utilizing, the information provided by the Registrar's Office OASS maintains a listserv of students identified as non-traditional and sends out informational updates to approximately 4,600 students via e-mail. The listserv includes students who self-subscribe to the listserv but may not be flagged as non-traditional by the Registrar's Office. For example, a traditionally-aged student with a child who wants information on child care may contact OASS and subscribe to the listserv.

A phenomenological approach calls for a more narrow range of sampling strategies because all participants must have experienced the phenomenon that is being studied (Creswell, 1998). Criterion sampling was used to allow the researcher to select participants who met certain criterion: (a) full-time student carrying 12 credit hours; (b) undergraduate student; (c) married, traditional-aged student (18 to 22 years of age); (d) married, traditional-aged student with children; (e) non-traditional student age 25 years or older; and (f) single parent, non-traditional student.

Participant Selection

        All non-traditional students subscribed to the OASS listserv were contacted via e-mail utilizing the OASS listserv to explain the purpose of the study and request their participation in a brief online survey. To encourage students to participate in the survey, there was an incentive of the opportunity to win a gift card to a retail store by completing the three-question survey (Appendix A). The three questions asked the students to self report basic demographic information, rate the frequency of use of student support services, and finally indicate their willingness to participate in an interview with the researcher.

        The e-mail text was approved by the director of OASS, K-State Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects, and major professor before its dissemination. The purpose of the survey was to gather demographic information and verify which student support services were used most frequently by non-traditional students. A query of various student support service offices revealed that each office has a unique perspective on the definition of frequent contact. Depending on the nature of services offered, frequency may be weekly, monthly, or once a semester. For that reason, the student was asked to define "frequent" during the survey by indicating daily, weekly, monthly, or once a semester use of student support services (Appendix B). The final question of the survey asked students to indicate their willingness to participate in an interview. Students who indicated a desire to participate received a follow-up phone call or e-mail based on the respondents preferred method of communication to schedule a 60-minute interview.

Student Sample for Interviews

        The researcher consulted with Dr. Trudy Salsberry, a qualitative researcher and professor of qualitative methods course, to define a representative sample. It was determined that a representative sample included 3 to 5 participants/respondents from each of the defining

characteristics for non-traditional students at K-State. These characteristics can be found in the university's definition of non-traditional students and included: undergraduate students over the age of 25, married students, single students with children, or an undergraduate student returning to the educational system. Some of these defining characteristics overlap, so a large enough sample to have 12 to 20 individuals who could speak to each element was necessary to add relevance to the findings.

The online survey was active from October 9 to 17, 2008. A total of 381 students started the survey; 334 completed it and 47 people quit before finishing the survey. Figure 3 shows the total number of survey respondents (n =381) and a visual breakdown of respondents who indicated their willingness to participate in a voluntary interview with the researcher. The largest portion of the pie chart includes 229 respondents who indicated a willingness to participate in an interview. This data was then cross-referenced with the criterion to be part of the sample which was full-time, undergraduate, non-traditional student status, which left 88 in the pool.

From the 88 remaining students a total of 44 completed the demographic information allowing the researcher to determine participants remaining in the sample that met the descriptors of non-traditional age single parent, traditionally-aged married, traditionally-aged married with children, and non-traditional by age.

n = 377 Survey Respondents   n = 44 Respondents
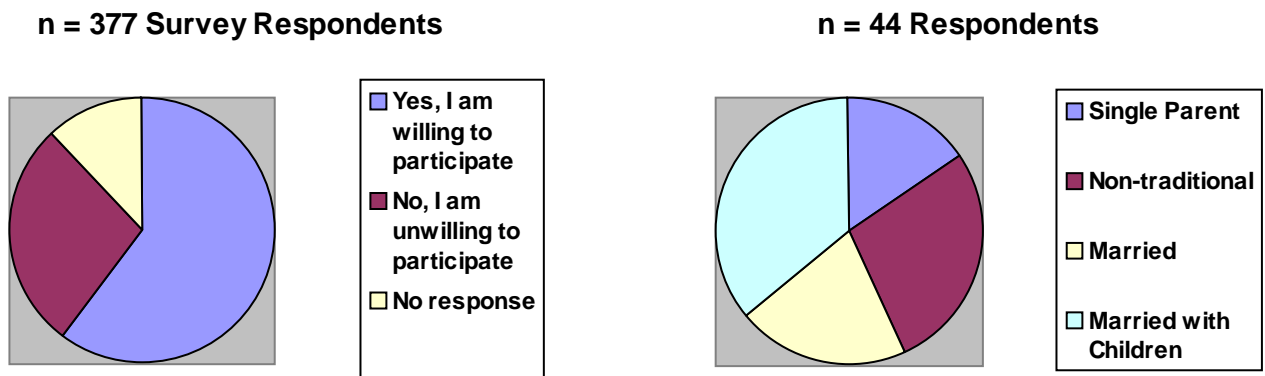
Figure 3. Respondent pool.

The second pie chart shows the breakdown of students who self-reported as non-traditional single parents ($n = 7$), traditional-aged married students ($n = 9$), traditional-aged married with children ($n = 16$), and non-traditional not meeting any other descriptor ($n = 12$). From there, the researcher contacted the remaining students in each category to verify their willingness to participate in an interview. The researcher was able to obtain a representative sample of 5 students for each descriptor.

Support Staff Sample

The student support services interviewees were selected based upon data from the e-mail survey results and consultation with OASS about the top five most used offices by undergraduate non-traditional students at the university. OASS staff indicated that frequently used student support services offices included admissions, financial aid, counseling services, educational support services, and disability support services.

The survey results were analyzed for the highest percentage of users in the frequency descriptors of daily, weekly, monthly, and once a semester. Within that data set, the researcher assessed which student support offices were used most frequently. Recreational services had the highest daily rate at 6.82% and the highest weekly rate at 17.85%. Lafene Health Center had the highest monthly rate at 16.54%. The top three most frequently used student support service offices once a semester were the Registrar's Office at 55.91%, financial aid at 53.28 % and parking services at 49.08%.

The researcher evaluated the frequency of use for each descriptor of daily, weekly, monthly and semester (Appendix C). While there were clear breaks in reported frequency for daily, weekly and monthly – semester use was more difficult to determine. OASS staff had verified financial aid and the Registrar's Office as frequently used by non-traditional students

therefore the researcher included those offices along with the next most frequently used by semester, parking services, to interview and observe.

Preparations to Collect Data

The student participants were selected from the individuals who indicated that they would be willing to participate in an interview through the online survey. Participants were contacted via phone or e-mail to schedule an interview time and location and answer any questions about the interview process. The actual appointment was scheduled for an hour to allow for ample interview time. Student participants were given the opportunity to review the interview questions in advance of the interview and to select the location for the interview. Only two students requested to review the questions prior to the interview. The student interview guide was submitted to the appropriate university offices and committees for clearance so that data collection could begin (Appendix C).

A senior administrative staff member from the student support offices identified by students as frequently used was contacted by the researcher to explain the purpose of the study, share the student survey results, and to request their participation in the research project. Appointments for interviews were scheduled for one hour, followed by a half-hour spent touring and observing office dynamics. The interview guide was submitted to the researchers, major professor, doctoral committee and K-State Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects for clearance so that data collection could proceed (Appendix D).

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher provided each participant with the informed consent form and reviewed the form with the participant before each interview (Appendix E). Participants were asked to provide their address and a copy of the consent form was mailed to them. The researcher

explained that she would be taking field notes throughout the study, in addition to using an audio recorder.

Field notes were taken before, during, and after the interview to record the environment in which the interview was conducted and the nuances that could not be captured on audio tape. Initial notes focused on the process through which interviews were scheduled, as well as challenges and concerns on behalf of the participant or researcher before the actual interview. During the interview, the environment and physical and emotional factors that could influence the process were documented. The notes reflected the body language of the interviewee and their physical reaction to the questions and environment around them, providing additional perspective for data analysis. The non-identifiable participant codes that were used to code each participant's interview were identified in the field notes before beginning analysis.

The interviews were designed to allow each participant the time to share their journey to K-State as a non-traditional student and explore the research questions. The length of the interviews varied from 19 to 69 minutes. Several of the student participants and all but one of the support staff participants remained in contact with the researcher. Participants were interested in the progress of the study and in some cases had identified the researcher as a resource able to connect theme to services at the university. It was evident as the student interviews unfolded that students were eager to be heard and this was the first time they felt as though someone was willing to listen.

Follow-up questions arose during the interviews. The need or desire to ask a follow-up question came from the researcher's interest and engagement with the information being shared. Time spent putting the student at ease before starting the interview yielded a rapport that allowed the participant to feel safe and comfortable engaging in conversation. During this time it was

noted in the field notes that the body language of the participant became more open and relaxed. The participants began to unfold their arms, lean in when answering questions, and take time to pause and think before answering.

During the interviews, the researcher found herself having to refrain from adding her opinion and thoughts about the interviewee's answers. It is hard to remove one's self from the emotional connection one feels to a topic and focus on being an active listener, but it was a necessary part of the research. It became easier over the course of the 25 interviews.

Allowing participants the chance to pause and consider the question before giving an answer was critical. The researcher knew that the participants needed time for reflection before answering to adequately express thoughts and feelings that were coming to the surface.

Office observations were conducted at Lafene Health Center, parking services, financial aid, recreation center, and the Registrar's Office. The student support service staff participant provided the researcher with a facility tour and then an introduction to staff. The participant explained what the researcher was there to observe – student-staff interaction and the office. Field notes included a drawing of office layout and a tally of incoming phone calls and foot traffic. Each observation lasted approximately 30 minutes and at the end of the observation, the researcher thanked the staff for their time. Following each support staff interview, tour, and observation, thank-you notes were written and distributed to participants.

Data Organization

The audio tapes were transcribed verbatim following the interviews. Each transcript was given a non-identifying descriptor to differentiate among participants while protecting participant identity. Every participant transcript was labeled with their descriptor and color coded to sort by group before analysis. Included in each folder were field notes and copies of the signed consent form.

The researcher used the same process for the student support service staff interviews and all files were color coded and sorted into the same group. The observation notes were included in the participant folders as well as any handouts or materials provided to the researcher by student support staff.

Analysis

There is no consensus regarding the forms of analysis for qualitative research, but there are common themes and similar processes recommended by multiple authors. Creswell (1998) suggested that the initial sorting process starts with a general review of all information by reading through all collected data and jotting notes in the margins of transcripts and field notes.

Using the work of Moustakas (1994), there are specific analysis steps related to the phenomenological analysis. The researcher begins analysis by reflecting on his or her own experiences as a non-traditional student. For the purposes of this study the researcher documented journal entries about her experiences as a non-traditional student and as a staff member working with non-traditional students. The journal was reviewed and those entries assisted the researcher in clarifying researcher bias through use of an autobiographical statement. The researcher then read and reread the transcripts while looking closely at the words used by participants to describe their experiences to reduce the data and sort for commonalities. This sorting of topical statements describing the experiences of non-traditional students is referred to as horizontilization and each statement is viewed as having equal worth (Creswell, 1998).

The meaning statements were grouped together within each of the four student and one staff participant groups. The participant statements of their experiences as non-traditional students were reviewed, analyzed, and assigned a code that captured the essence of the meaning unit. Each code was given a textural description. Not surprisingly the codes related back to

Tinto's (2008) elements of student success framework that was utilized in the interview protocol

development. The codes, symbols, and their textural description are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Data Analysis Codes

Symbol	Code Name	Textural Description of Code
+	Commitment	Student's perceptions of efforts to engage and satisfy them through an investment of university resources.
=	Expectations	Demonstration of investment in the students and validation of their presence on campus.
@	Support	Provision and utilization of support services that promote student success.
$	Involvement	Student perceptions of the relationship between student and support staff. Opportunities for academic and social integration.
#	Learning	Efforts to enhance the learning experiences of non-traditional students.
{ }	Feedback	Suggestions for change and improvement to the non-traditional student experience.

Verification

Analysis and interpretation of the data explored the experiences of non-traditional

students, how they experienced relationships with student support staff, and the essence of what

those experiences meant to their engagement and satisfaction as a non-traditional student. These

experiences or themes are presented in Chapter 4 through tables demonstrating the reoccurrence

of meaning units, statements, or themes.

In a qualitative approach, the term *credibility* is used to verify the data instead of validity.

Credibility can be determined through various means. Creswell (1998) identified eight ways to

achieve verification that are considered the standard for qualitative researchers.

1. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field building trust, learning

    the culture

2. Triangulation. The researcher uses multiple and different sources, methods, and

investigators and theories to corroborate findings. This corroboration sheds lights on

the themes.

3. Peer review and debriefing provides an external check of the research. The peer

debriefer serves as a devil's advocate who keeps the researcher honest and asks hard

questions about the methods and interpretation. It may be a peer or another researcher.

Notes of sessions should be kept.

4. Negative case analysis. The researcher refines their hypothesis as the study advances

in light of negative findings.

5. Clarifying researcher biases from the outset explains researcher's assumptions. The

research exposes prejudices or past experiences that have shaped the approach to the

stuffy.

6. Member checks. Solicit the participants' views on the transcripts, findings and the

research.

7. Rich and thick description describes in detail the participants and the setting for the

study.

8. External audits. Allow an outside consultant with no connection to the study to

examine the process and the product. The consultant can determine if the findings and

conclusions are supported by the data.

Creswell (1998) recommended that at least two of these strategies be engaged in any

qualitative research study. The researcher used a peer debriefer, clarified researcher bias, and

provided rich and thick description. Clarification of researcher biases occurred through

reflexivity and was achieved through journaling and use of the autobiographical context included

in Chapter 1 as the autobiographical statement. Creswell (1998) defines reflexivity as the researcher's awareness of his or her biases, values and experiences that are brought into the qualitative research process. The researcher spent time journaling about her experiences as a non-traditional student and her experiences working with non-traditional students.

A university administrator and researcher who had conducted quantitative and qualitative research into the lives of non-traditional students served as a peer debriefer. The researcher and the peer debriefer met periodically through the course of the research development to develop and test research questions, sample population, and interview protocol. For verification purposes the researcher met with the peer debriefer and reviewed the data analysis, findings and recommendations.

The analysis explored the thick description and rich detail of the participants' report of their experiences. Those experiences are summarized using the theoretical framework to structure the findings. They are further validated through exploration of their relationship to answering the research questions. This description allows the reader to see that the findings from data analysis are shared experiences.

CHAPTER 4 - Presentation of Data and Themes

Data Analysis

The researcher used the descriptors provided by Kansas State University to define the population and sample. The university definition of a non-traditional student is any student who is 25 years of age or older, married, a parent, or returning to college after an absence. In order to provide a meaningful sample, the researcher interviewed 20 students representing each of the non-traditional student descriptors.

Many individuals assume that a non-traditional student is older than the traditionally-aged college student, but that is not always the case. Many traditionally-aged students (18- to 22-year-olds) are married or a parent and are classified as non-traditional students. The researcher interviewed five students of traditional age who were married without children and five students of traditional age who were parents. This allowed the researcher to study the experiences of traditionally-aged students whose life circumstances place them in the category of non-traditional. The researcher also interviewed five students of non-traditional age that were single parents and five students of non-traditional age who were returning the university following a stop out.

The researcher then read and reread the transcripts while looking closely at the words used by participants to describe their experiences to reduce the data and sort for commonalities. These statements were highlighted and notes jotted in the margin of each transcript. The researcher then reread the highlighted meaning statements, reviewed field notes and began grouping the meaning statements together.

The meaning statements were grouped together within each of the four student and one staff participant groups. Upon reviewing each group of meaning statements a textural description

was written to describe the grouping of statements. This textural description was narrowed down to a word and code that captured the essence of the statements.

There were two additional codes that were assigned that are not included in the presentation of data and themes. The codes were challenges and journey. When students were asked if they had ever considered leaving and not completing their degree meaningful data related to the challenges they had over come were shared. While there was no consistent element among the challenges facing the students the desire to achieve their educational goals was what kept them focused on completing their studies. Students and staff were asked what brought them to K-State. Each participant described their journey to K-State and how they found themselves in the role of a non-traditional student and/or a staff member working with non-traditional students. Again there was not a consistent pattern to why students found themselves in the role of a non-traditional student. Each staff member story of what led them to working with students was different. While the data was interesting it was not related to the research topic and thus was not included in Chapter 4.

Table 3 shows the breakdown of coded themes within each data group and the number of respondents contributing the statements. The table provides a visual demonstration of the frequency of the codes. The themes capture the experiences of non-traditional students and are discussed within each interview group to provide structure to the analysis.

Table 3

Breakdown of Data Themes for Student Interviews

Theme	Group A – Number of Statements	Group B – Number of Statements	Group C- Number of Statements	Group D – Number of Statements	Total Participants Mentioning Theme
Commitment	15	16	12	12	**18**
Expectations	10	7	11	9	**13**

Support	8	21	14	17	**16**
Involvement	4	17	8	15	**17**
Learning	3	7	6	2	**11**
Feedback	8	5	0	5	**7**

Note: Interview group definitions are as follows Group A = Traditionally-Aged Student Parents, Group B = Traditionally-Aged Married Students, Group C = Non-traditional Single Students, Group D = Non-traditional Single Parent Students.

Analysis of Group A – Traditionally-Aged Student Parents

Commitment. Student perceptions of the university's commitment ranged from a lack of understanding about what student support services were available to awareness that support was there if needed. Institutional commitment was seen as an investment of resources that empower student success. However, students seemed to struggle to navigate access to services as described by this student:

> They do a really good job of making you feel as though everyone is cared for, but of course some days you just kind of wonder. As far as the university as an entity, I think it is very hard for the average student that doesn't have either the time or the knowledge of the services to get an interaction with the university on a level that demonstrates an investment. It is interesting because you don't just walk into the Dean's life and they just don't walk into your life. I know the university does care and that they are interested in making a connection with a student on that level and I know that there are a lot of programs out there designed to help the student, but I feel as though they would make a greater impact if there was more information available about them. I know we have so many clubs and organizations out there, but sometimes it is easy to get lost within that list.

Students in this group shared that they access services and resources on their own without parental support or other intermediaries. Without anyone advocating for them non-traditional students are often alone in seeking out resources and commitment on behalf of the university seems lacking. A student reflected on her experience:

Yeah, I had to do all my calling and setting things up – and financial aid has always been really helpful. The people at the front desk are not always really sure what they're supposed to be doing exactly – like when I've gone in and asked about different scholarships they're not, I guess since they're not really in charge of the full scholarship line up, they don't know exactly what's out there and who to call either, so they're not really good for extra information, but if you go in there and want to check something out or something they're pretty helpful.

Perhaps due to the time-sensitive nature of their schedules, these students appreciated the times that faculty and staff invested time and energy to resolve their concern or connect them to resources. A student who went in expecting difficulty said:

When I had to get my name changed, I went into an office to see what I needed to do. The front lady at the desk didn't know everything I needed to do and she wasn't sure if there had been policy changes so she made sure they [the staff] all got together and were all talking about it and decided on a game plan to where to send me and then they sent me off and I went to all those places and I got it worked out. I didn't have a big mess or anything and I thought it was going to be a mess.

If a student sensed a commitment on behalf of the university, he or she communicated in a manner that seemed engaged and satisfied. This made them more likely to persist in their endeavors and ultimately use their degree. A student who aspired to teach shared:

I love being a student. I love learning. You know, some of the teachers that I have are just

inspirational. They are what keep me going. Sometimes when I'm like, well, you know if

I get this degree and my husband makes enough money, I won't have to go out in the

workforce, but then I'm like I just really want to take that leap and in a couple of years

use the degree that I'm getting. I'm really inspired to be a teacher because of those

teachers I've had and I really appreciate the time that they give and the effort that they

put in to do that [teach].

Expectations. Echoing comments made regarding the commitment the university was

making towards the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students, the demonstration

of an investment was seen as an appreciation of the student's time. Students can identify

differing expectations that the university has for them in the way that the student is treated or

labeled. Offering services that are mindful of non-traditional students validate their presence. A

student married with children who works full-time commented:

As a non-traditional student, I am thankful for the opportunity to take online classes. I

commute 90 minutes one way just to finish my degree in family studies. Most of those

classes could be offered online, in my opinion. Why aren't they? I'd like to know.

When support staff makes efforts to cut through bureaucracy and solve student problems

quickly and at the lowest level, it signaled a clear investment in the student. This investment

allows the student to feel as though they are an important part of the community and their

concerns are valid. One student shared a recent experience:

The financial aid office helped make an adjustment for child care – we went in and we

talked to my financial aid advisor and she said someone has to review it before you can

get your financial aid, but I am pretty sure you are going to get the credit. So she went

ahead and put it out on my student account when they had been telling us it could be up

to two weeks before we would know if we would get more financial aid. By that time,

our daughter had already started daycare and our daycare payment was past due. We

must have looked disappointed because she said wait a minute, you qualify I am going to

do it right now, we are really backlogged and there are others in front of you but I am

going to go ahead and take care of it right now. It was really nice.

Without an orientation session dedicated to non-traditional students, there are no clear

expectations communicated on how to connect to university resources. This lack of service

leaves the student feeling disconnected. The non-traditional student is left wondering why they

are treated differently than traditional students coming to K-State straight from high school, as

shared from this student's perspective:

It has been a really hard transition and I think I would have liked some help to know what

to expect. Keeping up is hard, you know? They [the university] have an orientation for

the general population. I wish they would have done something for adult students. There

was no effort made to refer me to resources that could help with my transition.

When students were asked about how the university demonstrates an investment in them

as a student, students said that online classes, financial aid resources, tutoring, and the

opportunity to work on campus were meaningful. One student shared about the opportunity to

live on campus and work as a resident assistant. The student described finding purpose:

Being a RA, I have found an ambition to continue on at the university. It gives me more

of a sense of purpose within the university. It makes me feel as though I have a family

here. I feel like I have support. It goes a long way to helping me push myself when you

are talking to residents who are getting ready to graduate, and then all I want to do is get

that diploma. It is so hard sometimes to visualize tomorrow and then it will come and you

need to get things done. I got to be part of Homecoming and I got to be Willie on the

float, so having never been involved my first two years I actually get to be the school

mascot for the float. It just gives you a sense of purpose within the university.

Support. Due to the web-based delivery of university services, including enrollment and

financial aid, many students commented that academic advising was their main face-to-face

support services connection with the university. Almost every other service could be accessed

via the Internet.

When students do need to access support services, they were usually in need of

immediate services such as emergency student loans and lifting holds. While students indicated

that staff was friendly and willing to track down answers, they often had a difficult time getting

connected to resources in an efficient, meaningful manner. One student shared how she felt:

It's like you're asking the wrong questions – they [student support staff] look at you like

why aren't you asking the normal questions? I went into financial aid one time because

another student had told me she had thought there might be scholarship opportunities for

daycare. So I went in to ask the financial aid office about non-traditional students' day

care – since that is where the other student said she had gotten her information. I asked

them about scholarships for that kind of thing they looked at me like oh my gosh I have

no idea how to answer your question - and so they went to the people that worked in the

back and everything and you know people looked at me like why would you come here. I

left there feeling stupid.

To learn how to navigate the university system and get the support they need, students

must be resilient. One student described how he viewed the situation:

I would say part of it is the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing within the department that you are talking to, and so you may know that you need an appointment with somebody, yet someone else is telling you to go another route. The way I get past that is I just walk past the secretary and go straight to my financial aid advisor and say I am here for my appointment. To get to that point was kind of hard because knowledge is power especially in the collegiate setting. Knowing the right way, knowing the services available.

Even though the students were consumers and adults, they often struggled to feel as though they have the credibility to ask for what they need. Students seemed to be waiting for the university to offer to make accommodations and didn't seem to want to draw attention to themselves by asking for help. If students were not persistent in their request or confident in asking, they often ended up making the accommodations to support themselves. A student and mother shared:

When I was still nursing my daughter, I went in to a teacher in history, a class that was an hour and a half long and asked if I could leave the last five minutes of class and he said no. I talked to another mom and that mom said your mistake was you asked. You should have gone in and said that this is the way it's going to be. I haven't even dared to tell him that I wanted to nurse, so my daughter has kind of had to switch around her feeding schedule and things like that.

Involvement. In an age where most communication involves technology rather than face-to-face interaction, it was interesting how the inability to relate to others so heavily influenced students' integration into the university. Many students get discouraged and turn away short of

getting the face-to-face time they need with support staff, despite many attempts to make a connection. A student shared his challenges in scheduling an appointment:

I went to talk to my advisor to set up an appointment. When the office opens, my advisor's schedule for the next week is released. You can't make an appointment ahead of time and it fills up pretty fast. I went in at 10:30 that morning to try to get an appointment and they only had a few spots on Friday when I work. The secretary asked me what the meeting was for and I said getting my flag raised so I can enroll in classes. She looked at me like why do you even need to meet and then she stated that there are other students out there that have bigger problems and really need to meet with an advisor other than just getting a flag raised. You know it is really not cool to do that because I am really not doing too hot in a class that I have already failed twice already and I am really needing to see about getting that replaced because I am going to have to get A's in order to pass. I guess my problem was that I didn't try to get an appointment with her sooner. I said I need to speak with my advisor, I just need five minutes of her time, and the secretary says do you have an appointment and I said no but it is an emergency, I really need to speak with my advisor and she said I am sorry I can't help you.

The same student indicated that they would remain in the class because the drop date had passed and if they failed, they would have to take the class over. For students with limited financial resources, finding five minutes to connect with them assistance can be vital. When a student works up the courage to search for help and ends up feeling like they are an imposition, they may be less likely to establish a relationship with that office that would help them to be more engaged on campus. One student gave her perspective on how she was received:

For the most part the staff are really personable. The only people that ever looked at me differently like I can't understand what you're saying, you look like you're lost, I don't know what to talk to you about, are the students that work in the financial aid building. They look at me like, I don't know, I have no idea, don't ask me.

Learning and Feedback. For these students, the need for child care was a paramount issue. All students shared their struggle to find an affordable, secure, and convenient solution. Students acknowledged that there was a child development center on campus, but struggled to find a connection with staff that could explain the resource. A student parent said:

Child care is important – more readily available with better hours. I tried looking up information over the summer, I wanted to bring the little ones with me to spend more time with them, but I could never get any information. The websites were always down or being worked on. I think that is a big issue for those of us that have small children. I realize we are a small percentage of students, but we count, too.

Another student shared that while he and his wife had literally walked in and happened to get the last infant spot at the on-campus child development center, cost was still of concern. Life responsibilities; finances, securing child care etc. when unresolved impact the non-traditional students learning. The student said:

For English composition, I wrote a paper on reduced-cost or no-cost child care for students in exchange for community service hours and addressed that to student life and adult student services, and I think there is some feasibility to it. This is a world in which people work double shifts just to pay for the little things, but child care it is hard to find especially infant care. We walked into a spot, luckily.

When it came to the notion of the university seeking feedback from students regarding their environment, students agreed that outside of a mandatory advising survey, the university did nothing to solicit their feedback. When asked about ways the university could enhance their learning students were able to offer feedback for change. One student's answer to what could make them more satisfied and more likely to feel engaged in the life of campus was simply:

> I wish there was a billboard. Just put it up on a billboard, white in purple letters, K-State students – problems - let us help, give one number and have that person trained to refer students to the right person.

Many students expressed the need for an orientation session geared at non-traditional students. The following student used the OASS, but found that she is often the only individual at programs. She commented:

> Some sort of orientation events at the beginning of the year [would be helpful]. I think if they [the university] could realize that they say you need to be involved on campus, but most of the things they have are aimed at traditionally-aged students. They have the brown bag lunch for OASS and I go and I am the only one there. I mean if there was something else or even just some sort of group where you could meet more often, it might help.

Analysis of Group B – Traditionally-Aged Married Students

Commitment. Student responses indicated a perception that the university's commitment to them changed over the course of their time on campus. Students with strong academic advising connections indicated a higher level of satisfaction with the commitment being demonstrated by the university. This student shared that her initial perception changed over time:

> I just feel like the bureaucracy of K-State is just overwhelming and it's deceiving because for example; the admissions process, when you come for your visit you're attended to

promptly and my phone call was returned and that's why I chose K-State. So it was really deceiving that that office is like that, but it doesn't carry into any other issue or any other service.

All students interviewed in this category became non-traditional by definition after starting at the university as a traditionally-aged student. One student met her husband during her time living and working on-campus. She felt that the university's commitment to her changed as her life choices changed. Her husband, who was a reservist, was quickly called up to active duty and deployed overseas. She had yet to find an advocate for her as she coped with multiple and long deployments that left her stateside alone and working full-time while attending school full-time. She stated:

I would say I've had a couple of professors that have definitely gone out of their way to either give me leeway when I needed it or support me. I actually had a professor refer me to Student Life because I had a professor that wrote me an e-mail that said, I know I'm paraphrasing, that I was worthless, I should have never gone to college, I was the one of making the stupid mistake of marrying someone in the military. So that's how I became aware of them [the Office of Student Life]. So I went in to meet with them, but then when it came down to it they weren't cooperative. I had a real struggle with getting the support I needed, which was really frustrating.

For those students connected to a strong academic advisor, their perception of their experience was overwhelmingly positive. This personal relationship allowed them to overcome other obstacles on their path towards degree completion. The students with a connector on campus felt that connector was committed to their success. A senior in his final semester shared,

I don't remember my advisor's name when I was a freshman, but that was an interesting

experience. She seemed kind of scatterbrained about what was going on - she allowed me

to enroll in physics as a first semester freshman and I think there was another class and

there were prereqs for it so on the first day I got kicked out and told I needed to go

reenroll and went back in and she's like, "oh yeah I should have thought about that." I

was glad to get another advisor, who is a great guy. He is one of the best advisors I've

ever met. Any question I have at all, be it academically related or just personal, he's

always known who to call whenever I have any issue. Generally any problem that I have,

I always go through him first and he's always able to redirect me to wherever I need to

get help.

The same student shared that while he might use a student support service such as Career

and Employment Services, he would still have his advisor review his resume. A stronger

personal connection, trust, and rapport with his academic advisor have been built upon

successful results with referrals that work to solve the student's problem.

Expectations. Students in this group did not have favorable opinions on the university's

efforts to validate their presence on campus. The hallmarks of quality education and personal

touch were echoed by students as relevant to feeling as though an investment was being made in

them. This investment or lack there of related to the expectation the university communicated

regarding the non-traditional students presence on campus. One student's viewpoint was:

I would say that the university hasn't – I would say that the university as a whole has

done nothing to keep me here. I mean, I didn't think the experience was anything super

special. I thought that there was definitely significant professors that if it wouldn't have

even been for those professors I wouldn't have stayed.

One student shared that the personal phone call and handwritten note from admissions representative was what sold her on attending. However, once into her major, she didn't feel efforts were made to clarify what was expected of her as a student. She said:

That's a hard one. I kind of have an idea of what expectations there should be, but I feel like I got into the journalism and communication school and don't feel like they really contacted me and I just don't feel recognized by them. I noted that when I was talking to my advisor and he was talking about the alumni newsletter and I thought you know he was asking in class for ideas and stressing the importance of contributing and it was like maybe you should make students feel a part of things before they leave.

Support. Students in this group who had a personal connection with a staff member at the university said that they were getting the support they needed. There was frustration over the delay in connecting with support services that could promote success. Again, the themes of knowing someone to guide them through the bureaucracy and an investment of time by another human being were paramount. For students who were working and attending classes, there was the additional challenge of finding time to use services. This student shared how she coped with getting what she needed. She said:

Yeah, and most of the offices around here are pretty weird. I mean, they're closed on lunch breaks. They open at, like, 8:30. You know they close and often times the last person left to talk to left at 4:30 and it's, just, it's really tiresome. With financial aid, they need usually they need me to sign something and I can't get there with my work schedule. If you argue with them for so long for so many days they'll eventually fax it to me and then I'll drop it by because with them its forms, after forms, and they'll argue

with you and tell you they can't fax it but they eventually do. It's frustrating because you've done it by fax the last semester but it's like they don't remember.

Unfortunately, even those students with strong connectors to the university still struggle from time to time to navigate support services. A student with a strong academic advisor tried working through the system to get what he needed and finally went to his advisor. He described the incident:

> Well, we dealt with the financial aid office for a while just by ourselves and it got to the point that classes had started and we were getting late fees on the account and then my wife wasn't able to get football tickets and it was coming up to the first game and it was like we really need to get this in order. I actually came to my advisor and he got me in contact with one of the head guys over at financial aid and he explained what was going on. Before that we just talked to students that were working there and kind of had been getting the run around, things like, "well we don't know what's going on" - all this. Once we got to him, he was actually the one that said we'll take away the late charges here's your check within a day of talking with him we had a check in the mail so that worked out really well.

While generally students had a limited view of what support services were available to them, the true frustration was in the wasted time and energy before being connected to a service that could improve their experience. A student explained:

> When I looked at your survey, there were a lot of things listed I didn't even know existed - that I never used. That was kind of alarming. The academic career information center was one of those things I wish I had found sooner because I changed my major maybe five or six times and when I finally went to them and I was in the right place [with a

major] I wish I had known about that before. I mean on the whole, every interaction I have had with staff here they love K-State and my experience has always been positive, it's just that I didn't know about all of the resources. I finally have a great advisor and it is because of him that I'm focused on public relations. I think he is very good about investing in me without bothering me and making me feel valued.

Students expressed a true appreciation for student support services or staff members who took the time to invest in them and understand their needs. A student involved in club athletics shared:

Another really cool thing about my program is that I talked to my advisor she knew I was playing club soccer, which is important to me and she worked with me around my labs, horticulture has tons of labs, she really took a lot of time to go through and sit down with me and make sure that my lab times weren't overlapping my club soccer practice times and if they were she'd let me enroll in a different lab. I don't know if she was supposed to, but she went through it with me. It was huge and she, like, helped me to really figure out my schedule and even if we could limit it down to one day where I would show up to soccer an hour late and we'd get that and we'd figure that out. She was really helpful.

Involvement. This group of students had a strong connection to involvement on campus. The majority of student's were living on campus or had lived on campus, which had allowed them to connect socially and academically. Several students' academic programs had made extra efforts to connect them to meaningful outside-of-class experiences. A student said:

I didn't think I would ever get the chance to be this involved, but it's kind of like everything else – you're as involved as you want to be. I know of students that take 13 hours a semester and they think that's just the worst thing in the world that they're taking

so many hours and they never have any free time and I know people that take 20 hours a semester and school's their life – it's what they do – and then people like me are involved in every place that they can possibly be. I work on campus and I'm here on campus sometimes on the weekends – either at work or at school or involved with clubs or something else.

Living on campus provided a student still competing in intramurals during their senior year the opportunity to look back and pinpoint that the connection to that group of peers was started as a freshman by their resident assistant and had evolved into a larger network that reached across several fields of study. Another student shared that the opportunity to participate in campus ministry and participate in volunteer activities came about through her time living on campus and relationships developed with other students.

It was beneficial for students to develop relationships with fellow students and support staff while utilizing their classroom experiences. This exchange of knowledge helped them find meaning in the investment they had made during their time in the classroom and validated what they hope to achieve outside of the university. A student graduating in 2009 said:

I'm getting the opportunity to develop a financial planning and life change program for Reserve and Guard soldiers. One of my professors just said I'd be great for this and got me started and I love it. It's personal. I mean, it's my life and it's what I enjoy, so it's right up my alley.

For academic programs with a tradition of active student groups, faculty, and staff support of student groups, the student's opportunity for involvement seemed limitless. Students shared that the outside-of-classroom connections keep them engaged with campus life. One student said:

At the university, you can go to the football games, of course, and use the rec center. I'm president of the feed science club and vice-president of the Alpha Mu – that's the entire department wide honor society. I got invited and I signed up for – NCSC – National Collegiate Scholars. I never dreamed I would be so involved.

Learning and Feedback. Students in this group felt that accessibility to staff and financial resources were critical to their learning experiences. A student shared:

I would say if they would just make themselves more accessible. I feel like as a university they should be accessible. They should be open over lunch hours if that's what the students need, especially the non traditional because we – I – just feel like they [the university] purposely have hurdles just to weed out people. I really feel like even if you try and try, they don't return your call or they wonder why you get agitated with them but I don't have time to mess around I don't have time to be on hold for 32 minutes and then disconnected because they transferred me incorrectly.

Students were aware that providing more financial aid to all students is difficult, but that providing more financial resources is an obvious way to enhance their learning experience. While many students are fiscally responsible and would put the aid to good use, there are those who would not. A student admitted:

The general thing just every student wants – increase scholarships – the more you increase scholarships, the less workload it takes from the students. The less the student has to worry about taking out student loans, you know, its kind of the double-edged sword though because it kind of depends on how financially responsible the student is if they just get that money and go straight out and spend it.

In a depressed economy with tuition on the rise, students need the university to take steps to ensure that when students are asked to invest financially, that their time is valued and they get a return on their investment. Enhancing student learning was difficult when the student did not feel that their time was valued. Another student shared about the investment of scholarship dollars and actual course offerings. She said:

> I kind of get a little upset. I just enrolled in an upper level class this semester, but all we're doing is going over the textbook in class. I mean, nothing that we're learning in class could I not learn just by reading the book by myself. It's a complete waste of my time. It would be nice if you could even e-mail the instructors before you enroll. I never thought about that, but just to make sure that class will be a good use of your time and money.

The students in this group had limited feedback, they were scheduled to graduate at the end of the academic year and they seemed to be disconnecting from their role as consumers with perspective to share. They seemed uncertain about efforts the university was making to solicit their ideas for improvement. When one student pressed for suggestions, he remarked:

> It's hard for me to think of instances where there are evaluations outside of professors and things like that – I know that's completely different. I guess maybe I just don't really have that many concerns. I don't have these opinions about how things should be done differently, so I don't think there is anything I need to do about it [feedback].

As with previous participants, several suggested it would be helpful to have one place to ask all questions to and office hours that were more flexible than 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. There was a suggestion to develop a database where students could search for their problem and find different solutions or contact information for staff at the university who could assist.

Analysis of Group C – Non-Traditional Single Students

  Commitment. This group of students began their undergraduate careers after working or pursuing other interests following high school. As they shared their perspectives, it was clear that they had a different grasp on what it meant to be receiving an education. There was a stronger sense of independence and a more realistic view of the university environment as an adult student. Each participant commented on their age in relation to their traditionally-aged peers, and how their stage in life impacted their view of the university experience.

  Several students commented that the university's willingness to accept transfer credits demonstrated a commitment to the student on behalf of the university. A student recently discharged from the military shared:

> What brought me to K-State was the availability and ease. I served seven years in the military. I was at Fort Riley and I got out, it really was not my intent to stay in Kansas. But applying to various universities was just a hassle. I already had my associates' degree and a lot of other schools didn't want to accept all the credits because I got my degree in 1994. K-State is looked upon as a good university and they were willing to accept my credits and take me and they also gave me in-state tuition because I was in military and got discharged at Fort Riley. Anywhere else I was considered an out-of-state student, so I would incur all of those fees. I don't want you to think it was totally easy, but K-State was more willing to work with someone in the military.

  One student shared that she felt efforts to engage students and enhance their learning experience were made, but in a false, unrealistic way. While false sense of reality did not translate to true commitment in the view of the student. She explained:

> I was walking across campus yesterday after class – walking on the lawn, and I was like, you know what a manicured world this is, what a false world, everything's so pretty and

everything's laid out so nice and it's a college campus, but these kids come straight from their homes to this. There's so much more out there to experience and I've seen the realities of it and I've talked and I've worked with various organizations. I've had lots of experiences and it sort of, like, to me like a false sense of reality. When these kids get out in the real world, it will be different.

The need for personalized services reemerged as a theme in this group. Students felt that there were not individual responses to their life situations and the key to satisfaction and getting the resources was knowing who they needed to talk to. One student described a situation that she went through when she needed a personalized response. She said:

I think a lot of their information is spit out by a computer. I don't think the computer leaves a lot of room for exceptions and it is talking to the right people who know how to look past the computer. Financial aid was a hassle for awhile. When I came back to K-State, I wasn't talking to my parents and didn't have access to their information for the FASFA and you have to go through this whole appeal processes [sic] every semester to prove that you are independent from your parents until you hit 25. This semester I thought I'd be fine and I was picked to verify my independence so I still had to go get references. It is like never-ending hoops to jump though, but in the end you get the degree so you do it.

Expectations. This group struggled the most with finding validation of their presence on campus. They also struggled to understand what they could expect as a consumer from the university. A student said:

I don't know – it gets really confusing where stuff is – the school's responsibility and my own responsibility. I have had some really tough times up here, like moving out of Clovia

in the middle of semester and I had not planned to move out and it was a big surprise so I was homeless for 12 days. I had nowhere to go all my friends lived there and I didn't know where to go. I don't know if there is someone who could help with that at the time it happened so fast I didn't even know where to go to look for help.

The majority of students in this group felt they were viewed differently by fellow students, faculty, and staff. This perception created frustration as one student described:

I think one of the main things I notice as an older student is that I get a lot of looks like why are you here? Are you actually a student? I get a lot of questions when I'm walking into a place and I ask for assistance like for example the library. Are you a student here? I'm like of course I'm a student here, I wouldn't be asking for a book if I wasn't a student here! That's the main thing I find most that whole perception I have found to be most frustrating.

Often students communicated that they felt as though the university was unable to make enough time for a relationship which would validate their presence as a student. It was a challenge to feel a sense of commitment on the part of the university when the student to staff ratio was skewed or the timeline to access service restricted. A student described her first day on campus:

The day I enrolled, there didn't seem to be enough time, but there were a lot of transfer students, which was frustrating. So I kind of got slammed all at once.

While many students in this group felt as though their academic advisor served as their liaison to the university, if students couldn't connect to their advisor, they were left alone and retreated within themselves to solve problems and find solutions. A student returning to the university after a stop out said:

I mean it would really help to have a liaison, I think. Since I don't have an advisor – kind of, I mean, I do - but I can't ever get them to call me back. When I was checking on the classes I need to enroll in for next semester just regular sessions and it would be nice to be 100% sure that these classes deal with things I need and I think the class I'm signing up is going towards what I need – I can't get hold of my advisor to ask. My advisor is not responsive. He's got a lot on his plate obviously, I think, and a lot of students. I don't know. I went through a ton of crap to get here – and I don't take it for granted. I've got the government paying for school. I've earned it – five years in the Army fighting in wars, and you appreciate it more.

This group of students was unable to identify ways in which the university was demonstrating an investment in them. They knew that efforts were made to engage students, but did not feel that those efforts were directed at non-traditional students specifically. When asked how K-State demonstrated an investment in them, a student remarked:

I don't think they do [show an investment]. I don't think they do at all. I feel like I'm an outsider trying to get in with other students. It's like I don't really see that there is anything for non-traditional students. I work every day, I work 10 hour days and I'm off on Friday which is good, but a lot of times all the activities begin around 5 o'clock or 5:30 and if you get off at 5 o'clock and if you have to go home or if you have children what do you do? I would like to participate, but are there any separate events for non-traditional students if they just want to come together and do different things? Everything is catered towards the students who live here in the residence halls. I don't really think there's too much advertising of events that are taking place that even if I want to participate a lot of times I hear about them after the fact.

Support. Students within this group had limited interaction with student support services. Those out of classroom interactions were primarily limited to advising and often times not enough support was provided. A student said:

> Last spring when I was switching majors I talked to my advisor for a few minutes and I said I'm going to switch to geography and he's like here's the course list and you'll have to start taking these classes and that was it – and I haven't talked to him since. I don't think he knows who I am. I've walked by him and I don't think he recognized me. Initially when I went to talk to an advisor he ended up not being my advisor, he's like well I'm going to push you off on this guy because I've got too many students. I didn't know what to make of it. I really don't know anything about college I have not really had any help.

One student found support, but had to find a new source of guidance because she received misinformation. The student was disappointed to be graduating late, but also seemed willing to accept the outcome as part of her university experience. She said:

> For a short time in there, my advisor was in another department and I had a new one that I got bad information from, she didn't know, she didn't mean to give me the wrong impression about the class that I had to take this semester that threw everything off. Then my normal advisor came back and she was like you didn't enroll in the right class for the fall. I felt a little silly, I suppose I should have looked it up myself but I don't even know where you find that information.

Students in this group have participated in orientation and enrollment sessions and seem to feel that while the services were impersonal, that was to be expected. A student said:

I really haven't taken much advantage of any of the student support services at this point just due to being extremely overwhelmed, it being my first year here. During enrollment and orientation there were hundreds of other people, so you didn't feel like you got real personal one-on-one attention, but that was very understandable.

Another student remarked, "They just gave me a map and showed me where to go."

There were several students within this group who had developed strong connections to the academic support staff within their degree program. A student in agriculture shared:

I spend most of time over in the agricultural school and everybody's so friendly, so open and come knock on my door. I guess I haven't thought about the student process outside of agriculture.

Finding a place to connect and feel cared for equated to one student as finding their family at K-State. She said:

When it comes to in [sic] the industrial engineering department they have been wonderful. It is like family. I feel like I am part of that family. Any questions you have they are on it, they follow you around make sure you are doing ok.

Involvement. Students within this group indicated a strong desire for the opportunity to integrate their academic and social experiences at the university. Each was striving to establish a connection, find an opportunity, or maintain avenues to experience being engaged in relationships with others. A student new to the university shared:

I'm kind of running a club right now that is just starting this year with the military veterans. We're trying to get it off the ground. We have five members right now and it's hard. It's something I want to support. I want to support that group because it's the right idea to me. We need a group like that on campus. I don't have a lot of time, but it's the

right idea and I want to support it as much as I possibly can, even if we just get together

and talk, that's all we really need.

For those students returning to school after a stop out, there seemed to be a general sense

of being overwhelmed and unsure of where to begin with getting connected. A student described

her experience:

I use the rec center. It is a nice facility and it's part of your fees. Everything has been so

overwhelming going from a full-time job where you are told what to do all day; to now

I've got a schedule but my own time is managed by me. What am I going to do with my

time?

Another student shared that she knew there were opportunities to make connections, but

she needed to wait until she was not so overwhelmed. She said:

I definitely know what I want to do, but at the same time, K-State is an incredibly harder

program. I'm extremely overwhelmed and discouraged a lot of the time. I think that one

of the biggest things for me being in agriculture, a male-dominated field, and the fact I'm

a woman, there's not a lot of support in agriculture and that's the hardest thing for me –

probably not really having any type of support.

One student suggested that perhaps the university could do a better job of using non-

traditional students as a resource. Instead of bringing in speakers or encouraging students to

attend outside lectures – use the life experiences of those on campus. The same student indicated

that she felt labeled as old and was not a valued member of the university community, but she

still desired the opportunity to become engaged. She said:

It's difficult because I like more, I prefer human interaction, and I think that's part of the

college experience that interaction with other people from different walks of life. People

need that human interaction, that human touch, that face to face. I don't see where there's a push or there's an emphasis to get non-traditional students involved. You have a wealth of expertise of student's right here – a resource, a pool that is untapped. I want to get involved in the student organizations, but I feel like, well you're too old and maybe it's just me and my perception of it. I look at some of the events that I say how could I make this better? What could I have done to bring more people to the mix? I would like to sometimes be involved in more activities but I just don't.

Learning and Feedback. When asked about ways that the university could enhance the student learning experience, students offered responses such as smaller class size. When asked about enhancing her learning experience, a student said:

Smaller class sizes – I am sure it is just the freshman classes, but to come here and walk into a class with 300 people. In my psychology class, there are more people than worked in our corporate headquarters of my old job. That is a lot of people in one room - in a company you even split your meetings so they aren't so big.

One student saw it as his responsibility to enhance his experience. "I don't really need anything – I'm older obviously - and I don't need someone holding my hand," he said.

Students in this group were interested in developing ways to enhance their learning experience that could build from their unique life experiences. One shared the following perspective:

I went to an event yesterday and there were a lot of young girls and people there and it was fun, but I'm past that stage. I was looking out and kind of felt like well this is not my thing. Where are the professional women? You know, we work full time and I don't really see that type of group and I would like to even if it's every other week or once a

month. If there's an organization where we can come together and we can sponsor an

event. I look at a lot of these young kids, I call them that now that I'm 34 and they're just

naive to the ways of the world. There could you be [sic] a mentoring program. I'm a non-

traditional student, I'm older, I'm working, and I've got my associates degree. That's a

lot of information that I think we, as non-traditional students, we can impart.

Analysis of Group D – Non-Traditional Single Parent Students

    Commitment. This group of students communicated a deep appreciation for support staff

that worked around their busy schedules and life challenges to deliver services. There were

continued concerns about the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. time frame, which limits the accessibility of

support and programs. One student said:

        I believe there was a general orientation session, but it was during the day and I believe it

        was the beginning of summer and with the office that I am in, at that time there were

        limited employees there and at that time there would have been no feasible way for me to

        attend that session because we were down to two employees.

    One student shared that she felt fortunate that her work hours allowed her to pick up

course materials over lunch or after work, but that was not the case for her peers in class. If a

student worked normal business hours or drove in for a course, they could not make it in to pick

up course packets. She shared that in one class the instructor picked up and brought the packets

to class. Still students are left to juggle advising appointments and other on-campus

appointments between full-time work, family, and school schedules. Students find that they must

take time from at least one area of their lives, if not more, to make those appointments happen.

    When the university personalized services for non-traditional students, it signaled an

investment on behalf of the university in the engagement and satisfaction of the student. A

student said:

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I got into a bind this summer. Financial aid [in the summer] is a lot different than spring

and fall because of they way they distribute the money, you can start school the end of

May, but aid does come in until July and I try to go to school on all financial aid rather

than to use my own home money. I called [financial aid] and explained my situation and

they offered me an emergency loan to buy books and I thought that was very helpful.

Expectations. Expectations were made clear to this group of students through the words

used by staff and the availability of programs and services. There were students who felt as

though nothing was being done to reach out to them and that the university was not prepared to

adjust their protocol to respond to their needs. The power of the spoken word was demonstrated

through the experience of one student:

The dean and the assistant dean have both told me I am important because I can converse

and understand at-risk youth. They have really made me feel as though everything

negative I went through in my past life before turning 36 is just a prelude to all the

positive things I will be doing for the rest of my life.

However, there are students who had yet to find validation of their presence on campus.

One student shared:

In my opinion, I think besides the non-traditional students that work here, you would

want to reach out to those that don't work here. I don't feel like I am being asked to

participate in extracurricular things or activities or things like that, and they are trying to

make a connection with me and saying we are glad you are here.

Again, students raised the question of whether it is their responsibility to demand services

or the support staffs' responsibility to identify the non-traditional student and offer services

tailored specifically to them. A student shared her confusion:

I think with financial aid I haven't maybe demanded enough. I feel like if I went in and

demanded more help. I never knew about scholarships or anything because it wasn't a

possibility for me, but I think if I went in and when I go in with specific questions they're

always really good about answering my specific questions but I do have a big financial

need and I feel like it maybe I have different needs and they're not like, hey here are you

doing this or do you know about these things?

Ultimately, for this group of students, support services offered by the university indicated

a clear validation of their existence as students and were evidenced in their work towards the

satisfaction and engagement of students. A student living on campus said:

That's a good question – I think the availability just of the fact of all the support services

sends a pretty clear message about what K-State wants their the student community to

look like – the kind of experience they want for their students. I certainly think, you

know, that when you go to college you have to be ready and in a big university like this

you have to be ready to put yourself into it. I think that the fact that K-State does try so

hard to anticipate its students needs and it makes such an investment – I mean look at

Jardine [student housing community] and all the different kinds of student needs that are

being met through this one community is a really good example.

Support. This group of students had varied levels of satisfaction throughout their

experiences with support services. Similar to the other student groups, they seemed to struggle

initially identifying which support services they could access, but upon reflection could share

experiences from a variety of offices. A student said:

Financial aid has been outstanding. The only thing that is difficult is the tutoring services.

They have lots of tutors. To sign up, they give you a form to fill out and I put the hours I

am available. I put after 5 p.m., but everybody wants [sic] to meet at 10:30 in the morning. They don't make any adjustment to the schedule or offer you different times. I am willing to be flexible, but they are working on an 8 to 5 schedule and I can't do that with my work schedule.

Another student shared her experience getting connected to counseling services. Initially, connection was electronic, but the student sensed that her needs were being addressed during each step of the process. She said:

I have done quite a lot of work with the counseling office and they, I think, do just a fabulous job of respecting peoples' anonymity. When you first seek counseling, there are lots of different ways to apply to counseling and then it's sort of an automated system. I think you also probably could talk to a human being if you felt like you needed to, but I think in some cases you don't want to explain the issue that you're having over and over again, and they do a really good job of sort of keeping it all very impersonal until you're connected with your one live human being and then you can develop a relationship. There's so much follow up and follow through, at least in my experience.

Students' stories illustrated the different extremes to which student's access services. One student said, "The only one [student service] that I have actually ever called is the financial aid office and I have only called them. Everything else I have done online and I really had no contact with any of the other offices and some of those I didn't even know existed. I haven't really utilized any of them because I didn't really know they existed." If students in this group accessed the service in person and established a relationship, then they viewed their experience positively. One student said, "I think that K-State has incredible staff and I think that you definitely get back what you put in. So, you know, as an older student, I'm a little bit more willing to share."

Involvement. The opportunity for involvement that provides time for the integration of all aspects of the student experience can be difficult for the time-challenged non-traditional student. Many students retreated to the use of electronic means of accessing assistance in an effort to balance their time demands. A student explained:

Most of it is electronic, but you still have to meet with your advisor to go over your course schedule, so that is an issue with work commitments so you have to make sure you can get off work. As far as taking classes, two classes I have taken so far have needed course packs that are available in the copy center that is closed over the lunch hour in the arts and sciences building.

For those students that seek person-to-person interaction, they often feel constrained by time and leave feeling rushed. A student said:

Financial aid is really the only one [student service]I have dealt with on a regular basis and it is always over the phone or when I go meet with my advisor the only thing about when I meet with my advisor is I wish I had more time and sometimes I feel like I am rushed.

Students in this group indicated an understanding of the importance of connecting their academic experiences at the university to their lives outside of academia, be it through conversation that reinforces their educational choices or through programming or services that provide a connection to community. A student shared this story:

I have met with financial aid a couple of times which, has proved very important because I'm going to actually graduate the semester before I run out of available financial aid. I have to tell you a story that just happened – when I talk about Jardine [on-campus apartment community] now I get a little teary. We know the cleaning crew. My son and I

met them in the laundry room and probably a year ago and we've just gotten to know

them. They came and reversed trick-or-treated my house while I was I out. I had just

gotten home from the grocery store and they brought him a packet of little healthy treats

and all four of them are on my doorstep and they're all decked out [in costume] and you

know they wrote his name on a note – that's our neighborhood, you know? I mean

Jardine is just an amazing place.

The opportunity for involvement that provides a meaningful co-mingling of their

experiences had a positive impact. However, time plays a role in finding opportunity for

meaningful involvement. A student parent explained:

It is frustrating to be at a place in my educational career where I really want to be more of

a joiner and I would like to participate. I always have some kind of demand on my time,

but so it can be hard to turn things down that I think that other students maybe take for

granted their time, but that sort of goes along with being satisfied. I am happy as a

student so I want to participate but I don't and I don't have enough time. They have so

many activities for where you can bring your kids and there are outlets other things I

think that campus is a really friendly place for kids to be. I know I'm talking about my

son, but to me that's a really big deal. Even my teachers sometimes have welcomed him

into the classroom if that has needed to happen.

Learning and Feedback. In keeping with the tenets of student development theory, it

was evident that students need to know that they are able to seek fulfillment while in their

student role. They also need to know that their needs can be met so they can focus on being a

student. In the case of single parents, this means not only their own safety and security, but the

need for their children to be cared for as well.

When asked how the university could enhance their learning experiences, student feedback varied from support for their ideas to basic needs being met. A student shared that she felt her ideas were supported.

> I am trying to bring to their attention a documentary so they [support staff] let me try to come up with a proposal to show the movie. It will mean a lot to even that one student, so to try to do something like that. I am big on humanitarian things. They are letting me express my ideas.

Another student expressed the need for child care when she said:

> Oh wow! You know child care. I know that child care is a big worry for a lot of families. We were able to find a good classroom for our son and we have grant money that we receive, but I know that for a while that was a worry. It was not really clear – the process of finding that and making that connection was not easy for us. I know I was really stressed out about that and so I think if there was a group on campus that was students who have small children or even a single parents group. I'm really willing to be, like, I'm an old mom and I'm still in the classroom and it's ok, but I think that that doesn't hold for everybody and I think that that could definitely could be a strength if there was some kind of community for people who are parents at K-State.

Students in this group did not see that the university was making an effort to engage them in offering feedback, but they offered substantive ideas during the interviews for how the students could increase engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students. One student idea was:

> I wish there was some way they could flag you if you are a non-traditional student and then maybe extend some sort of invitation to set-up an evening meeting with you to kind

of go over what services are available at K-State – what opportunities and how to go about navigating the web site, how to enroll in the classes. It was totally new to me so it was just kind of an intimidating experience at first. Whenever I have called financial aid it has been on behalf of someone else and we kind of just compare answers and make sure we are getting the same information.

The notion of combining high-tech and high-touch was raised through the use of a web portal which would allow non-traditional students to connect and build relationships. A student said:

I would like to know what all the programs are available and how to use the resources [sic] and navigate things. Even if it is just a website – maybe even a website for non-traditional students where they can post information and say contact this person or this office or this meeting or get together things like that. It is a technology driven society, but you still need human interaction – personal connection – so you don't feel like a number and they are just here to get your money. I think it would enhance my learning experience.

Finding new methods to deliver services outside of the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. time frame is important for these students.

I think offering more evening classes – there is not a lot to choose from in the evening and that is worrying me because when it is time to get down to the nitty gritty and get my degree and all the classes are during the day, I will have to wait each semester to take one class. Right now I can take 12 hours, and 9 of them are at night, but that won't work with all-day classes. We have to take our work time to run around and get what we need from student support offices and then you can't do what you need to do.

Analysis of Student Support Staff Interviews

   This portion of data analysis proved to the most challenging for the researcher. When the researcher made contact with each office, the response was positive. Staffs in each office were willing to participate and interested in the research. Table 2.1 shows the breakdown of themes and the number of responses from this data group.

Table 4

Breakdown of Data Themes for Support Staff Interviews

Theme	Support Staff Participants	Total Participants Mentioning Theme
Commitment	6	**5**
Expectations	9	**5**
Support	5	**4**
Involvement	4	**2**
Learning	3	**2**
Feedback	5	**4**

Note: Support staff participants were representatives from recreational services, Lafene Health Center, financial aid, registrar's office, parking services.

   The researcher's challenge was to find a meaningful way to structure and discuss the findings. For consistency, the analysis of this one group of five interviews was structured in the same way as the student interviews. In addition, a discussion on the office observations was included.

   When reviewing the transcripts, the researcher found it ironic that several of the support staff expressed that their office treated non-traditional students as they would any student. Yet later in the interview, they acknowledged that the non-traditional students' needs were unique and required a different type of service. Most support staff said that they felt as though non-traditional students were being served well. However, when asked if they gathered feedback on how the office could enhance the learning experiences of non-traditional students, each staff said they needed to improve on gathering feedback.

The researcher was curious when the Registrar's Office contact directed her to meet with staff in the Division of Continuing Education. Recent restructuring within the university had led to a change in staffing to encourage a stronger staff connection with the creation of a Registrar's position within continuing education. While it is true that many students who take distance education classes are non-traditional students, students had indicated that when they think of the Registrar's Office, they equate that to securing transcripts and an actual office visit, not enrollment in a distance education course. The researcher found the interview with support staff from the Registrar's and continuing education offices quite valuable, but also found it necessary to schedule a second appointment to complete an office observation.

Commitment. Staff saw the commitment of efforts to engage and satisfy non-traditional students from a multitude of perspectives. A staff member remarked that they could not think of a student support office on campus that was not providing services to non-traditional and traditional students, and felt like it should be noted that there are services available strictly for non-traditional students. Another staff member shared that they did not feel like their office did anything different to engage or satisfy non-traditional students. He said:

> We understand that the student's needs are different than those of a traditional student
> and the non-traditional population keeps getting bigger and bigger so we understand the
> things they (non-traditional students) have going on and what they are bringing with them
> as far as life experiences. We just try to anticipate their stress areas.

Another support staff member shared that they felt the entire student life division is concerned about all students and the retention of all students. This individual felt that the university's commitment was evident through the general awareness that all students from start to finish of their academic experience, regardless of their age, are important. While staff

members said there was a focus on retaining all students equally, there were also numerous descriptions of university bureaucracy that created barriers to students feeling engaged and satisfied. A staff member shared:

> The university is a complex place…I came from the military and it was a complex place where you couldn't always find one person who could give you what you need, if you are new and coming in and trying to figure out how to get here, it can be frustrating. One day, a call came in and somehow that call came to me. There was a student on the line trying to figure out how to take a class I could tell she was about ready to go off. I explained that I worked in parking and I had no idea who she needed to talk to, but I was sure I could find somebody so I took down her name and number and make sure you get called back. She said she has been bounced to four different places. I think that is part of our problem, we have a lot of people who don't understand how the system works.

> ***Expectations.*** When asked about the ways in which their office communicated validation of the non-traditional student's presence, there were responses of specific examples, general approaches, and changes in mode of service to better serve students. A staff member shared a specific example of their offices efforts to invest in non-traditional students:

> We realized we were not meeting the needs of student spouses. I went back and looked at it, and we were charging the wrong amount, so we changed the price and kept those prices at the lower level even when other fees were raised. We want to encourage student spouses to come and use our facilities. They are a part of student life.

> Lafene Health Center has a promotion and wellness area that develops programming to meet student needs in an effort to be proactive about health-related issues. Staff is sensitive to the unique needs of non-traditional students and they are aware of that when designing programs.

Staff pays attention to the needs and the background of students and the actual medical care the student receives remains sensitive to individual needs. Each member of the staff addresses what students bring with them into the encounter and the different concerns they might have.

A word that was used repeatedly by student participants and staff was "bounced." The students finds themselves getting bounced from office to office and person to person in an effort to get assistance. A staff member described being bounced:

I think one of the things we seek to cause not to happen is we don't want a student being bounced around from office to office. Not everyone knows the answers, so there has to be some of that transferring. Everyone seems to be so busy and saying to themselves that is not my problem so I am going to transfer them to someone who can help them. We have worked with students that have literally been transferred four and five times and what we do is stop the train. We get the information down, figure out the problem and call the student back. Asking the right questions is important for anyone working with students.

Another staff member shared that "there just isn't enough of an investment." The staff member shared that any time offices can come together to create opportunities to inform and educate non-traditional students about resources, there will be more investment. Joint programming occurs such as a scholarship workshop sponsored by OASS featuring guest speakers from financial aid, but in the view of the interviewee, it was still too little, too late.

Support. Participants felt that if the need of the non-traditional student was expressed that the support service staff were willing to hear it and rise to the challenge. Staff members shared several examples of altering the standard delivery of services or options to meet the needs of non-traditional students. Fee structures were changed in recreation services and student health to

accommodate student spouses. Finding avenues to allow the voices of non-traditional students to be heard was a challenge. A staff member said:

> The non-traditional student coming to college probably doesn't have the connection with other students. I think within the classroom, the students are fearful of how other students will react to them, so they hold back. A lot of the activities through the student organization seem to be a challenge because of scheduling and availability.

The offices that had student advisory boards spoke to the importance of having student representation that included non-traditional students. Efforts to diversify representation, frequent and regular meetings, and membership that recruit volunteers to replace them allow better delivery and utilization of services.

Efforts to refine services and keep pace with technology while providing a human connection were identified as critical components of support. A staff member shared:

> The basic sense around the country is that students don't care what time it is in Manhattan, Kansas. They are taking a class at K-State and they expect help. Help center hours will continue to expand. The continued use of technology to deliver materials is cost-effective and efficient. That will continue to be a trend. Responsiveness needs to continue to be available. That is the paradox of technology. You are not talking to a person, but you want reassurance from a person so people want to go to their phone for help.

Involvement. Staff members identified opportunities to provide connections and forge relationships with students, but the opportunities were delivered with the traditional student in mind. Across the university, traditional business hours remain the standard approach. Each office has a presence at recruitment and orientation events and has staff available to meet with students.

However, there is not a recruitment or orientation event specifically designed for non-traditional students. It was clear that facilities, programs, and services are in place. A staff member said:

> I think we provide a facilities and programs [sic] that are conducive to encourage people
> of all different life situations to use at a reasonable price. Anytime we hear of an idea
> from a student, we are more than willing to try it out. We feel like we are getting
> information to everyone – whether or not they choose to read it is up to them.

Support staff shared that they are more than willing to go out to reach student groups or community living environments to build a relationship and share information. However, this method may be ineffective for a non-traditional student not involved in a student group or not residing on campus.

Learning and Feedback. Recreational services have responded to a need to diversify their operational and office hours to meet the needs of students. Office hours have been expanded to allow for those who work a traditional 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule to come into the office and purchase a user card or ask questions. The recreational center now opens at 5:30 a.m. to allow those who work the chance to come in before heading off to work or school.

When asked about the chances of providing come sort of 24-hour, web-based service, there seemed to be some wariness at attempting to deliver a service that students might want that does not match the high-touch image of the university. A staff member remarked:

> I don't know that K-State will ever go web-based [in the area of student services]. There
> are a lot out there [web-based services] – canned responses – where a word can trigger
> and pull a canned response. We are experimenting with online chat. We are reluctant to
> go there, some think it will save a lot of time, but I don't believe it will. I don't think that
> is what K-State is all about.

Most offices attempted to institute some sort of routine satisfaction survey to gather feedback. While some had not done a major survey for years, others surveyed every two years. Financial aid surveys students every year to gather a benchmark for average costs, but not to explore the specific needs of non-traditional students. Paying attention to a pattern of concerns from students was deemed necessary to ascertain meaningful suggestions for change. A staff member said:

> Students are not shy about giving feedback, but I prefer valuable feedback, not comments like, I'm not happy with parking, or we need more parking. Well…that is not a parking issue – that is an upper administration decision. If we get one person that is unhappy, okay, but if we have 15, we better have already started looking at a change.

> There was a feeling that students need to understand that support services cost money. More staff was a frequent request, but more staff costs more money, which translates to a financial burden for the student. Students do not want to pay more students fees, but for support services such as the health center and recreation center, which are funded by privilege fees, that can mean a reduction in services.

Office Observations

The office tours and observations provided the researcher a view of facilities and staff/student interaction from a student perspective. All offices did a good job of having materials on display for students. Several office locations have a lack of waiting area space and space for comfortable student/staff interaction. Unfortunately, these offices were those with the highest level of customer traffic. Due to the demand of services, these offices often employ student staff as their front line support.

Often, students would serve a customer and have to leave and go find an answer or look over their shoulder to a professional staff member for guidance. The researcher did not witness

students being offered the opportunity to retreat to a more private setting for conversations. For matters related to student finances and enrollment, it would seem imperative that before the conversation advances too far that it be moved to a more private setting.

Another high-traffic office had challenges with handling walk-in traffic and phone calls. In this environment, there was little time for greeting and building relationships. Service was focused on information gathering and moving the student through to the next step. This environment was efficient, but seemed impersonal.

For support services such as the recreation center, the blessing of dedicated space was put to good use. On the day of the researcher's observation and tour, she was able to watch two non-traditional student spouses find a quiet exercise bike area that had televisions airing different shows. The staff guide shared that intentional efforts were made to find program space away from the heavy traffic areas for a more private and comfortable exercise experience.

As the researcher toured each office and visited with various staff about the data being collected and the researcher's professional connection to the university, many new ideas surfaced. The researcher's presence was viewed by the staff members as a time to share ideas and ask questions of a student support colleague. Once again, this interaction reinforced the idea that all human beings desire face-to-face conversation. Unfortunately, constantly addressing student needs leaves little time for casual conversation, networking, job shadowing, or brainstorming. The researcher's own work environment is not conducive to providing time to focus on planning and connecting with others. A positive offshoot of the observations and tours was the free-flow of ideas that led to support staff from other units taking the opportunity to tour and job shadow in the student housing environment.

CHAPTER 5 - Discussion and Recommendations

Introduction

The researcher's literature analysis revealed no literature related to the impact of student support services on the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students. Although a limited amount of literature was found relating to the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students this research did not address the role that student support services plays or could play in the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students.

This study is significant because it addresses the experiences of non-traditional students when utilizing student support services and the impact made on the student's engagement and satisfaction. The final chapter of this phenomological study includes a restatement of the research questions and methods employed by the researcher, discussion of the results, suggestions for future research and recommendation for practice.

Restatement of Research Questions and Methods

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of undergraduate non-traditional students at Kansas State University while utilizing student support services and gather data on the connection between those experiences and engagement and satisfaction of the students. The study captured the experiences of non-traditional students through qualitative interviews with students and student support staff. The four research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. How do the experiences of non-traditional students when utilizing the services of university student support staff impact their engagement and satisfaction?

2. How do non-traditional students regard their experiences with student support services at Kansas State University?

3. What types of program offerings do student support services at Kansas State University provide specifically for non-traditional students?

4. What level of involvement with student support service functions do non-traditional students find as enhancing their learning experience?

Discussion and Implications of the Findings

The discussion of the findings is based upon the themes which emerged from the interview protocol. The interview protocol framework was provided by Tinto (2008) who asserted that research points to six conditions within institutions that are supportive of student success: commitment, expectations, support, feedback, involvement, and learning. While eight themes emerged only six were relevant to this study. The themes of challenges facing the student, and journey to non-traditional student status are not discussed in the chapter. The six themes that emerged are: (1) commitment - student's perceptions of efforts to engage and satisfy them through a commitment of university resources, (2) expectations - demonstration of investment in the students and validation of their presence on campus by communicating clear expectations, (3) support - provision and utilization of support services that promote student success (4) involvement - perceptions of the relationship between student and support staff and opportunities for academic and social integration, (5) learning - efforts to enhance the learning experiences of non-traditional students, (6) feedback – gathering of suggestions for change and improvement to the non-traditional student experience.

Commitment. Students who could describe a personal relationship with a support staff member were engaged and satisfied with their student experience. These students viewed the university as making an investment in them as an individual and in return were more involved on campus and integrated in university life. Student's expressed a desire for greater connection to support services at the university. Many students were unaware of the resources and services

available to them. Student support services still offer programs and services on a traditionally-aged student schedule of 8 am to 5pm. Front-line employees in the five support service offices observed were traditionally-aged students with minimal training in the developmental needs of non-traditional students. The university has demonstrated a willingness to provide flags to student records for students that are first-generation and legacy students, but not non-traditional students.

Expectations. Without an orientation session designed for non-traditional students, it is difficult for the university to communicate its expectations. Students expressed a desire to know they are valued and want to learn about and how to use resources at the university. Students who had received assistance communicated that they felt valued, often times this was as simple as answering a financial aid question. Those students who had yet to find a connection seemed unclear as to there role as a student.   Student support staff stated a need to accept responsibility to not bounce students off on another colleague without confidence that they have referred the student to the person who can help the student solve the problem.

Support. What is needed for non-traditional student to feel supported, which should include advising that is tailored to adult students, and specialized student services. In other words, adult students need specialized services (Senter & Senter, 1998). Support that promotes success must include elements that are academic, social, and financial. Student support staffs were unable to identify resources and programming offerings for non-traditional students and instead saw those offerings as being no different than those for traditionally-aged students. Students who felt connected to the university said they felt supported. For students who had yet to develop a connection, it was difficult to find support for academic advising, opportunities for involvement, or financial advising.

Involvement. Academic and social integration is a key to student success (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Educational communities must be built to involve all students. Students who lived on campus reported a higher degree of engagement and satisfaction with their role as students. Students who had found involvement in student organizations or meaningful work on campus felt engaged and satisfied. The opportunity for students to gain knowledge and confidence gave them power as a manager of their learning experience. This knowledge and power gave them insight into achieving their educational goals.

Learning. As outlined in the literature analysis, institutions centered on adult learners have a culture in which flexibility, individuation, and adult-centered learning drive institutional practices (Mancuso, Strange, & Zakos, 1999). The more times a student can stay engaged in learning, then the more successful the institution will be in graduating the student. Student participants who experienced quality teaching, work experiences, and meaningful involvement in organizations reported that those events enhanced their learning experience. A few students suggested that a program in which non-traditional students served as mentors for traditionally-aged students would enhance the learning of both traditionally-aged and non-traditional students. Students reported that they were not seen or used as resources.

As revealed during the literature analysis, what had not been addressed by adult-centered research is what impact adult-centered practices have on student learning, student satisfaction, and student retention (Mancuso, 2001). The findings of this study reveal that efforts to engage and satisfy non-traditional students through student support services positively impact student learning and satisfaction. Students who had experienced a positive connection to the university communicated that they would do what was needed to achieve their education goals and receive their degree.

Feedback. Periodic sessions should be held so that students can share their frustrations and needs, in addition to providing learning skills workshops (Allen, 1993). Non-traditional students did not feel as though the university is actively interested in what they have to say. Student support service staffs offered minimal and inconsistent tracking of student experiences to yield data about changes that should be made. It was clear from student and staff interviews that both are willing to share and learn from one another. Unfortunately, it was also evident that few people are taking the time to learn from each other and gather data. Students stated that they were willing to serve as resources for change and improvement.

Theoretical Framework Review

Reflecting on the work of Tinto (1993) and his perspective regarding the importance of student integration into campus life student attrition coupled with Astin's (1993) view that student's learning is affected through involvement on campus, the results of this research support both theories.

The data found in this study supports the idea that when a non-traditional student is involved on campus they report a greater degree of satisfaction in their role as a student. Students who had support that was social, academic, and financial in nature shared a greater connection to the university community and a desire to achieve their educational goals.

Answering the Research Questions

Research question one sought to answer how the experiences of non-traditional students when utilizing the services of university student support staff impact their engagement and satisfaction. Students who had developed or experienced a positive connection with a student support staff member or faculty member reported that their experience left them feeling engaged in the life of the university and satisfied with their student role. When comparing findings between the four groups of students, the major difference was the developmental perspective of

the non-traditional students by age. These older students communicated that they were willing to demand more from those around them in an effort to achieve their educational goals. There was also a realization that their life experiences, while at times setting them apart, could be a resource for traditionally-aged students.

Research question two sought to answer how non-traditional students regard their experiences with student support services at Kansas State University. The research points to a lack of intentional relationship building between student support staff and non-traditional students. Generally students responded that their interaction with student support staff was meaningful. When asked to share about specific instance in which they felt their needs were or were not met the answers were more emphatic. Those students, who had no personal relationship with a student support staff member, communicated a lack of engagement in the life of the university and dissatisfaction with the quality of student experience. The findings support a study regarding the impact of time limitations on adult learners. The quality of relationships between university administrators and non-traditional students was a strong predictor of learning (Lundberg, 2003). Students were confused about what student support services were available and how to use them. In instances where the student had sought the help of support staff, the student often left feeling as though the staff did not understand their needs.

Research question three sought to answer what type of program offerings do student support services at Kansas State University provide specifically for non-traditional students. Student support service offices did not differentiate between programs specifically for non-traditional and traditionally-aged students. When asked to share an example of a change that had occurred the meet the needs of non-traditional students support staff identified a change in

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service hours, program requirements, or requirements to meet the needs of non-traditional students.

Research question four explored what level of involvement with student support service functions non-traditional students find as enhancing their learning experience. Students shared ideas to enhance their learning experiences; many indicated a desire for technology to be used to share resources and information. However, each time a student shared a high-tech idea, it was followed with the desire to have a person to connect with who could verify that the student had found what they needed. The need to have human contact through a live conversation remains the desired experience of students. Finding one's place at a large, bureaucratic institution requires a gatekeeper for the student – a person who helps students navigate their journey. Students identified these gatekeepers as having various student support services roles that of; academic advisor, admissions representative, financial aid advisor, housing staff member, faculty member or others who have the opportunity to touch the lives of students. Without a solid relationship that supports and assists the student experience, students stated that they were frustrated and overwhelmed.

Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research

For university administrators and staff, sharing experiences will not be enough; more needs to be done before change becomes a reality. For those reasons, a quantitative analysis of student support services and their impact on the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students would be meaningful.

The university is successful in recruiting students to campus and does an excellent job of recording and publishing those numbers. While offices of the university are becoming better engaged through the use of satisfaction surveys, the concept of following up with students is not consistent and pervasive. One student felt like there was a commitment to track her engagement

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and satisfaction her first year on campus, but after the first year, that commitment disappeared. The university does not have any data on why non-traditional students leave without completing their degree, nor do they track numbers. With non-traditional student enrollment on the rise and tightening distribution of tuition dollars, it is imperative that universities track the retention of all student sub-groups. A study that analyzes the retention of non-traditional students might yield rich data that could enhance programs and improve student satisfaction and engagement.

The future of higher education reflects the future of America. The diversity of the United States and the world is reflected in the changing student body in higher education. At this moment, the typical ways of training workers, conducting business, caring for our planet, providing for home ownership, and accessing education and health care are no longer enough. As new business and education practices unfold, higher education will be viewed as a leader in creating change and opportunity for people and processes. During this time of change, it is imperative that higher education reevaluate its approach to student success. By listening and understanding the experiences of non-traditional students at K-State the researcher identified three policy recommendations to improve student engagement and satisfaction that will position the university to successfully retain and recruit non-traditional students.

Recommendation 1: Annual Review of Institutional Practices Related to the Delivery of Services and Support of Non-Traditional Students

The results of the study indicate a need for an institutional policy that encourages an annual review and monitoring of student support services. As detailed in the literature analysis, institutions can develop adult-centered cultures where flexibility and individualization of service drive institutional practices. An evaluation of Mancuso's (2001) work, cross-referenced with data from this study, point to a need to review and analyze these institutional elements.

1. Does the institution engage adult learners in an ongoing dialogue designed to help learners make informed educational planning decisions? Students expressed that they do not feel the university was interested in their feedback.

2. The institution makes student services accessible and convenient to adult learners through many venues. Student support service offices and delivery of services were still being offered around a traditionally-aged student's 8 am to 5 pm schedule.

3. The institution makes continuous and deliberate efforts to ensure that it remains affordable for adults while maintaining access and quality. Students stated that their time was of great value. When students took time to seek assistance they did not feel as though they received a return on their investment of time.

Based on student comments, there is work to be done in assuring that student services are accessible. It is also evident that non-traditional students at K-State do not feel they are being engaged in effective dialogue that improves their learning experiences. While some students found their niche on campus and felt that efforts were being made to engage and involve them, there were many who did not. If students are unable to access services and make informed decisions as consumers, their educational experience can become cost prohibitive. Students expressed a need and desire for orientation sessions offered around non-traditional students' schedule to acclimate and connect them with services from the start.

Recommendation 2: Development and Implementation of a Universal Customer Service Model

The university should establish a comprehensive customer service model that focuses on training student staff to understand the university's mission and message. The plan should include all student staff and front-line employees who interact with students. Numerous students commented that student employees served as gatekeepers of information within student support

offices. Often, non-traditional students felt they had to figure out how to get through the student gatekeeper to someone else that had the answer and could help them.

In an era of difficult economic times, it is likely that the workforce at most universities will remain student based. Students are a cost-effective way to deliver services. This learning-through-work approach directly supports the educational mission of the institution and student development. Limited training is provided to front-line student personnel, yet the complexity of clientele and questions can be over whelming. When students are unable or unsure of how to respond, the customer leaves feeling unsatisfied and is less likely to get assistance. As a result, one of the university's biggest marketing challenges becomes controlling its message to the customer through the voice of the front-line student employee.

K-State has prided itself on putting students first. In order for its actions to live up to that self-professed standard, the university needs to train student staff to provide more efficient and effective customer service. This is a challenge in a world of instant gratification technology and standards. There is no reason that a student staff training program cannot be developed. We need to ask the right questions and listen to our customers. By training student staff to understand the different needs of different students, they can begin to understand the different approaches they need to deliver effective customer service. If a student has a 5-minute question that can be researched and answered completely and correctly, offices should strive to provide that service. Just because a student may have a 20-minute question that requires research, consultation, and a plan of action does not mean they should go unserved. Students are willing to find time to get the answers they need, but they need to know that someone has listened to their situation, is researching the options, and will provide them with choices.

Recommendation 3: Non-traditional Student Experience Leadership Seminar

Universities are paying more attention to freshman-year experience courses, leadership seminars, and university experience classes to clarify student expectations for involvement and best practices in good citizenship. The university should spend time exploring and developing a similar experience designed for non-traditional students. This would provide a direct connection to validate the non-traditional students' presence on campus, nurture their development, and could increase retention.

The opportunity for non-traditional students to give back to the university through curriculum designed to share their real life experiences with other students and staff would enhance their student experience and enrich the lives of others. There are programs in place that were developed to meet the needs of other under-represented student groups that could serve as models.

Closing

Throughout the study, when the researcher was asked about the findings, there seemed to be a lot of interest in the experiences of the non-traditional student. When asked about the proposed recommendations, the researcher was told, "We [K-State] can't be all things to all people".

The research tells the story of unheard voices: They are the voices of the minority, atypical, non-traditional student. Support staff shared that student retention is about helping every student succeed and complete a degree, and that it is the responsibility of every person at the university who touches the life of the student. Listening to their stories and learning from their stories cannot be enough. Support staff, faculty, administrators, and students must engage in dialogue that creates opportunities for involvement and growth outside of the classroom.

The research found that there was a connection between student support services and its role in positively impacting the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students. The research also found that little time was set aside to focus on opportunities dedicated to providing relationship building, information sharing, and feedback gathering. The study calls for more extensive exploration of non-traditional student needs and more frequent evaluation of services to meet those needs. It does not ask the university to be all things to all people, but to make intentional efforts to provide support mechanisms for non-traditional students. In doing so, students will be empowered to serve one another, achieve their educational goals, and provide answers to future generational challenges.

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Appendix A - E-mail Text Sent to OASS listserv

Good afternoon adult* students! We hope your semester is going well!

Below you will find an opportunity to participate in research regarding
your experience as a non-traditional student at K-State. The Office of
Adult Student Services did not compile the research; however, we have
agreed to distribute the survey link through our listserv. Although
this is an independent research endeavor, the results of this research
will be shared with our office. Should you decide to participate, our
hope is that your input will assist us in better serving the
non-traditional student population. Please understand that this survey
is completely voluntary. If you are willing to take part in this
survey, please see below.

Thank you for taking the time to read about a unique opportunity to
participate in a study regarding the experiences of non-traditional
students at K-State and the chance to win one of two $25 Target gift
cards. Like you, I am a non-traditional student at K-State, working
towards completing my doctoral work. I am approaching the data
collection stage in my dissertation and am looking for students willing
to participate in my study.

I will be conducting interviews with students regarding their K-State
experience. To become eligible to win one of two $25 Target gift cards
simply click the link below to complete a very brief three question survey.
Clicking below will take you directly to the survey.

https://surveys.ksu.edu/TS?offeringId=91495

Thank you for taking the time to assist me with my study! Should you have questions about the study you can contact the individuals below:

Stephanie Bannister
sbann@ksu.edu

Dr. Fred Bradley
fbradley@ksu.edu

* You have received this email because you have been identified as a non-traditional student. We identify students as non-traditional based on one or more of the following criteria:
- Students who are 25 years of age or older
- Students of any age who are married
- Students who are parents
- Students returning to school after an absence of 3 or more years

Adult Student Services
101 Holton Hall
785-532-6434

You have received this message because you were identified by the KSU Registrar's Office as being an adult non-traditional student. If you do not meet these qualifications, or no longer wish to receive these messages, please reply to the address above or visit www.listserv.ksu.edu.

Appendix B - Online Survey Questions

1.) Please check below all the descriptors that define your student status:

__   Undergraduate

__   Graduate

__   Full-time Student

__   Part-time Student (less than 6 graduate or 12 undergraduate hours)

__   Married

__   Married with children

__   Single Parent

__   Under 25 years of age

__   Between 25-39 years of age

__   Over the age of 40

__   No response

2.) Please indicate below the frequency with which you interact with the following student support service offices (Frequency descriptors: D=daily, W=weekly, M=monthly, S=once a semester, N=never, N/R=no response):

__   Academic and Career Information Center
Frequency: D W M S N O
__   Academic Assistance Center
Frequency: D W M S N O
__   Admissions
Frequency: D W M S N O
__   Adult Student Services
Frequency: D W M S N O
__   Career and Employment Services
Frequency: D W M S N O
__   Computer and Telecommunication Services
Frequency: D W M S N O
__   Controllers Office
Frequency: D W M S N O
__   Counseling Services
Frequency: D W M S N O
__   Disability Support Service
Frequency: D W M S N O

    __   Educational Support Services
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   Graduate School
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   Housing and Dining Services (Residence Halls and Jardine Apartments)
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   International Programs
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   Lafene Health Center
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   Parking Services
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   Recreational Services
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   Registrar's Office
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   Student Financial Aid
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   Women's Center
Frequency: D W M S N O
    __   Academic Advising
Frequency: D W M S O

3.) Would you be willing to participate in a short (no longer that 45 minutes) interview with the researcher about your experiences at K-State?

    __   Yes

    __   No

4.) In order to be entered into the gift card drawing please provide your contact information including name, valid email address, and phone number where you can be reached at:

Thank you for your participation you will be entered into a drawing for one of two $25 Target gift cards. Winners will be notified via email by October 28, 2008.

Survey Name:

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Offering Name:

Adult Student Services Listserv

Offering Date:

10/9/08 to 10/17/08

Statistics

A total of **381** people started this survey.

334 people completed it.

47 people quit before completing it.

Question 1

Please select below all the descriptors the define your student status:

Undergraduate	198	(52.52%)
Graduate	176	(46.48%)
Full-time Student	260	(68.97%)
Part-time Student	79	(20.95%)

(less than 6 hours graduate and 12 hours undergraduate)

Married	144	(38.25%)
Married with children	130	(34.38%)
Single Parents	25	(6.53%)
Under 25 years of age	42	(11.14%)
Between 25-39 years of age	236	(62.6%)
Over the age of 40	74	(19.63%)

Question 2

Please indicate below the frequency with which you interact with the following student support service offices:

2.1   Academic and Career Information Center

Daily		4 (1.05%)
Weekly		5 (1.31%)
Monthly		15 (3.94%)
Once a semester		68 (17.85%)
Never		243 (63.78%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.2   Academic Assistance Center

Daily		3 (0.79%)
Weekly		10 (2.62%)
Monthly		13 (3.41%)
Once a semester		33 (8.66%)
Never		276 (72.44%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.3   Admissions

Daily		4 (1.05%)
Weekly		5 (1.31%)
Monthly		18 (4.72%)
Once a semester		164 (43.04%)
Never		144 (37.8%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.4   Adult Student Services

Daily		3 (0.79%)
Weekly		6 (1.57%)
Monthly		16 (4.2%)
Once a semester		69 (18.11%)
Never		241 (63.25%)

N/R   46 (12.07%)

2.5 Career and Employment Services

Daily		7 (1.84%)
Weekly		6 (1.57%)
Monthly		29 (7.61%)
Once a semester		86 (22.57%)
Never		207 (54.33%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.6 Computer and Telecommunications Services

Daily		7 (1.84%)
Weekly		8 (2.1%)
Monthly		36 (9.45%)
Once a semester		88 (23.1%)
Never		196 (51.44%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.7 Controllers Office

Daily		4 (1.05%)
Weekly		6 (1.57%)
Monthly		16 (4.2%)
Once a semester		140 (36.75%)
Never		169 (44.36%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.8 Counseling Services

Daily		6 (1.57%)
Weekly		7 (1.84%)
Monthly		22 (5.77%)
Once a semester		24 (6.3%)
Never		276 (72.44%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.9   Disability Support Services

Daily		5 (1.31%)
Weekly		6 (1.57%)
Monthly		5 (1.31%)
Once a semester		14 (3.67%)
Never		305 (80.05%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.10   Educational Support Services

Daily		4 (1.05%)
Weekly		4 (1.05%)
Monthly		6 (1.57%)
Once a semester		22 (5.77%)
Never		299 (78.48%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.11   Graduate School

Daily		12 (3.15%)
Weekly		7 (1.84%)
Monthly		29 (7.61%)
Once a semester		95 (24.93%)
Never		192 (50.39%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.12   Housing and Dining Services (Residence Halls and Jardine)

Daily		12 (3.15%)
Weekly		10 (2.62%)
Monthly		20 (5.25%)
Once a semester		11 (2.89%)
Never		282 (74.02%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.13   International Programs

Daily		5 (1.31%)
Weekly		11 (2.89%)

Monthly		17 (4.46%)
Once a semester		27 (7.09%)
Never		275 (72.18%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.14   Lafene Health Center

Daily		5 (1.31%)
Weekly		8 (2.1%)
Monthly		63 (16.54%)
Once a semester		98 (25.72%)
Never		161 (42.26%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.15   Parking Services

Daily		7 (1.84%)
Weekly		5 (1.31%)
Monthly		12 (3.15%)
Once a semester		187 (49.08%)
Never		124 (32.55%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.16   Recreational Services

Daily		26 (6.82%)
Weekly		68 (17.85%)
Monthly		38 (9.97%)
Once a semester		45 (11.81%)
Never		158 (41.47%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.17   Registrar's Office

Daily		1 (0.26%)
Weekly		5 (1.31%)
Monthly		15 (3.94%)
Once a semester		213 (55.91%)
Never		101 (26.51%)

N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.18   Student Financial Aid

Daily		1 (0.26%)
Weekly		5 (1.31%)
Monthly		37 (9.71%)
Once a semester		203 (53.28%)
Never		89 (23.36%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.19   Women's Center

Daily		4 (1.05%)
Weekly		4 (1.05%)
Monthly		7 (1.84%)
Once a semester		25 (6.56%)
Never		295 (77.43%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

2.20 Academic Advising

Daily		5 (1.31%)
Weekly		13 (3.41%)
Monthly		54 (14.17%)
Once a semester		143 (37.53%)
Never		120 (31.5%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

Question 3

Would you be willing to participate in a short (no longer than 45 minutes) interview with the researcher?

Yes		229 (60.1%)
No		106 (27.82%)
N/R		46 (12.07%)

Appendix D - Student Interview Guide

Student interviews will take place on campus at a location agreed upon by the researcher and participant. The participant will be given the appropriate paperwork to sign indicating their willingness to participate in the study. I will explain that I will be taping the interview and taking notes which will allow me to go back and transcribe the tape for data collection. It will be important to spend time putting the subject at ease with basic conversation before jumping in to the interview questions. A test of the microphone on the recording device will take place before we begin.

Student Interview Questions

1.   Why did you choose to attend Kansas State University?

2.   What type of student support services (such as registrar, financial aid, admissions, housing etc.) have you utilized most frequently during your time at Kansas State University?

3.   What type of experiences with student support services left you feeling as though the university could have done more?

4.   What type of experiences with student support services left you feeling as though the university served you well?

5.   Can you describe for me your experiences with student support staff?

6.   In what ways does Kansas State University demonstrate an investment in you as a non-traditional student?

7.   Have you ever considered leaving Kansas State University and not completing your degree?

8.   What are there things that Kansas State University could do to make your time at the university more enjoyable and enhance your learning experience?

Appendix E - Support Staff Interview Guide

Staff interviews will take place in the student support services offices. It is significant that the interviews take place in the offices to allow the researcher to observe and record the office environment. The participant will be given the appropriate paperwork to sign indicating their willingness to participate in the study. I will explain that I will be taping the interview and taking notes which will allow me to go back and transcribe the tape for data collection. It will be important to spend time putting the subject at ease with basic conversation before jumping in to the interview questions. A test of the microphone on the recording device will take place before we begin.

<u>Student Support Service Staff Interviews</u>
1.   What brought you to Kansas State University and your current position?

2.   What changes have you seen in the menu of services provided by your office?

3.   Based on your experiences what are the other student support service areas at Kansas State University that offer services geared for non-traditional students?

4.   How does your office demonstrate an investment in non-traditional students?

5.   What type of experiences with non-traditional students left you feeling as though the university could have done more?

6.   What type of experiences with non-traditional students left you feeling as though the university served them well?

7.   What are the ways in which your office enhances the leaning experiences of nontraditional students?

8.   In what ways does Kansas State University evaluate the engagement and satisfaction of non-traditional students?

9.   What changes do you see as necessary in the delivery of students support services to non-traditional students?

Appendix F - Informed Consent Form

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE: The Impact of Student Support Services on Non-Traditional Students: A Qualitative Study

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: February 2008 **EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:** February 2009

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):   Fred Bradley / Stephanie Bannister

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: **fbradley@ksu.edu** 785-532-5937

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: University Research Compliance Office, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, 66506, (785) 532-3224, Fax: (785) 532-3278, comply@ksu.edu
Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 315 Justin Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, 66506, (785) 532-1483, rscheidt@ksu.edu

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to understand the impact of student support services on the engagement, satisfaction and retention of undergraduate non-traditional students at Kansas State University. For the purposes of this study, student support services will be defined as non-academic departments or offices providing support services to students.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: This will be a qualitative study relying upon qualitative interview methods to answer the research questions. Research participants will be selected from data provided by the Office of Adult Student Services (OASS) whose mission is to serve non-traditional students. OASS maintains a listserv of students identified as non-traditional by the Registrar's Office and sends out informational updates to approximately 4,600 students via email. Initially, students will be contacted via email utilizing the aforementioned listserv to explain the purpose of the study and to request their participation in a brief online survey. The purpose of the survey will be to gather demographic information and verify which student support services are used most frequently by non-traditional students. The final question of the survey will ask students to indicate their willingness to participate in additional qualitative research in the form of interviews. Students who indicate a desire to participate will receive a follow-up phone call or email depending upon sample size asking them to schedule a 60 minute interview. The student support services interviewees will be selected based upon input from email survey results and the OASS as to the top five most used offices by undergraduate non-traditional students at the

university. A representative from each office will be contacted via phone and an appointment scheduled to explain the purpose of the study. The actual appointment will be scheduled for an hour to allow for ample interview time. The interviews will be transcribed and the transcripts coded for emerging themes. These themes will be compared and contrasted with the data from student interviews and support service staff interviews.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

LENGTH OF STUDY: February 2008 – February 2009

RISKS ANTICIPATED: No extreme risks are anticipated as the participants have self-selected themselves and are comfortable in sharing their perspective.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Participants will be able to reflect on their university experience and take new meaning and ownership over the utilitzation of student support services. The research will also potentially benefit future non-traditional students in the delivery of student support services to them in a manner that increases their satisfaction and engagement with the university.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Upon transcription of the data, no names will be used or reported in the results. At the conclusion of the research project, the digital recordings will be professionally deleted. Transcripts of interviews will have no personal information connecting them to individual participants

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS:

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: N/A

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant)

Participant Name and Date:

Participant Signature and Date:

Witness to Signature and Date: