

AN EXPLORATION INTO FIRST GENERATION ADULT STUDENT ADAPTATION TO  
COLLEGE

by

CAROLYN SPEER SCHMIDT

B.G.S., University of Kansas, 1989

M.A., University of Iowa, 1991

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AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Leadership

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

Manhattan, Kansas

2005

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to further develop an understanding of the nature of the adaptation process of adult first generation students to the undergraduate college experience. This study utilized the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) in conjunction with personal interviews to explore whether first generation adult college students adapt differently to college than do their continuing generation peers and if there is a commonality of experience, across demographic differences, for first generation, adult college students. Fifty-five adult college freshmen were surveyed using the SACQ. From this sample, sixteen first generation volunteers were interviewed regarding their college experience.

T-test analysis of the SACQ scores showed that the first generation students were not adjusting to college as well as their continuing generation peers on the overall measure to adjustment and on three of the four subscales. The personal interviews indicated that while there was variation in the first generation students' adaptation with seven of the sixteen volunteers classified as adjusting poorly to college, three with mixed adjustment, and five with good adjustment, there were also commonalities in the students' experience, regardless how well they were adjusting to college. Eleven meta themes emerged from the interview data, and these themes correlated with characteristics of nonpersisters as compiled by Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002).

This research indicated that further investigation into adult first generation college students is appropriate especially with regard to how these adults view themselves as role models. In addition, this study indicates a need for future research into the links between adult students' first generation status and persistence problems in their college experience.

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Approved by:

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Major Professor  
Dr. W. Franklin Spikes

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## DEDICATION

For my mother

## CHAPTER 1

### The Problem

*I went back to school and I thought that I would be in class with all these people who don't have families, who maybe are just married, maybe sometimes single. I didn't expect to see women and men in their late 30's and early 40's also attending college and having been through the same life situations that I have. That was nice. It was nice to see that there are more people than just me out there.* (First-in-family student Diane Palmer, personal communication May 18, 2005)

### *Introduction*

The narrative of American life is changing. In the United States, more people regardless of race (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2001a), and more minorities, are going to college now than historically (NCES, 2001b). In addition, the United States Department of Labor projects a growing need for a college degree or other post-secondary educational award (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2001; Dohm & Wyatt, 2002). These changes have helped to fuel the dramatic increase in the number of adult students, defined as those 25 years and older, who are enrolled in college (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002; Kasworm, 2003). In the past three decades, the U.S. has seen a 171.4% increase in the percentage of adults enrolled as college undergraduates (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002). Today, almost one-half of American college students are adults, and approximately half of these adults are first generation college students (NCES, 1995; Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002, NCES, 2002b).

Research into adult college students is ongoing, and “[h]igher education has much to learn about the adult student population.... [with] many questions and curiosities still unexplored and unexplained” (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002, p. 5). These research deficits need to be addressed in order for programs and services to be effective (NCES, 1995):

Postsecondary institutions must know more about the characteristics and needs of older students in order to plan, market, and deliver programs and services to them effectively. It is often argued that older students have unique needs and face significant barriers to participation in postsecondary education. (NCES, 1995)

For example, although first generation students comprise the majority of adult college students (NCES, 1995; NCES, 2002b), the first and only focused discussion regarding this population was a 1992 volume of *New Directions for Community College Students* edited by Zwerling and London. Yet, continued research into this first generation population could prove valuable (Hellman, 1996). By focusing on first generation adult students, researchers could look for a commonality of experience regardless of differing demographic characteristics, thus presenting an opportunity to understand the first generation adult student population in the face of demographic change.

### *Pluralism and the Push for an Education*

#### *Demographic, Educational, and Job Trends Snapshot from 2000 Census Data*

According to 2000 Census data, the number of minorities is growing in the United States and this trend is led by an explosion in the Hispanic population (Bernstein, 2004;

Social Science Data Analysis Network [SSDAN], n.d.d). As of 2003, the total Hispanic population in the United States was 39.9 million, and it was growing at three times the rate of the total population (Bernstein, 2004). By the year 2050, the total Hispanic population is projected to reach 96.5 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 1997, para. 4). In 2000, the first year that the United States Census Bureau collected information on multi-racial heritage, 2.4% of the population self-identified as multi-racial (SSDAN, n.d. c). The percentage of foreign-born residents also increased in 2000: 11.1% of the population identified themselves as foreign-born in 2000, an increase of 12.97% over 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, para. 1).

The nature of the workforce and jobs has also changed in the past decade. In 2000, when the most recent decennial census was conducted, more people had some college, had graduated from college, or had a graduate or professional degree than in 1990 (SSDAN, n.d. a), and according to the U.S. Census Bureau, 27% of adults age 25 and older had at least a bachelor's degree in 2002, a 1% increase over 2001 (Bergman, 2003). This increase in educational attainment is reflected in the jobs people hold (Dohm & Wyatt, 2002). While the number of people in managerial and professional occupations went up from 26.39% in 1990 to 33.65%, in 2000 the number of people in occupations requiring less education generally went down (SSDAN, n.d. b): The fields of agriculture, construction, manufacturing, and retail all lost jobs in the ten years between 1990 and 2000 (SSDAN, n.d. b). Only service occupations had a notable increase in that same period (SSDAN, n.d. b). As Duderstadt (1999/2000) argues:

The United States is evolving rapidly into a postindustrial, knowledge-based society, just as a century ago it evolved from an agrarian into an industrial nation.

Industrial production is shifting steadily from material and labor-intensive products and processes to knowledge-intensive products. A radically new system for creating wealth has evolved that depends on the creation and application of new knowledge. (para. 5)

In addition to preparing the worker for a more knowledge-based workplace, a college degree also correlates with a higher income. In 2001, bachelor degree-holding adults over 18 earned an average annual salary of \$50,623 while those with a high school diploma alone earned an average of \$26,795 (Bergman, 2003). As Dohm and Wyatt (2002) argue: “On average, college graduates enjoy advantages – ranging from more job opportunities to better salaries – over their non-college-educated counterparts.”

#### *The Impact of Pluralism on Higher Education*

As Whitley (1999) argues, “The diversification of the college student population has mirrored the diversification of the American population” (p. 3). As the number of minority students enrolled in college increases and workplace educational demands continue to rise, it follows that first generation students will continue to be an important sub-group of adult college students (Nuñez, 1998). The most recent available figures indicate that approximately half of all adult college students are first generation students, with the likelihood of being first generation increasing with age, from 39.7% of adults 24-29 having first generation status to 52.7% of adults 30-39 and 62.0% of adults over the age of 40 being categorized first generation (NCES, 2002b). According to Aslanian (2001), only 6% of the adult college enrollment is comprised of African-American students, and 6% is comprised of Hispanic students. Nevertheless, according

to Rubinson and Hurst (1997), the pressures of the job market, societal expectations, status competition, and the impact of rising socio-economic aspirations on the part of citizens are working together to expand the base of potential college enrollees:

[T]he continual growth of enrollments that is so characteristic of U.S. schooling has been primarily driven by the process of status competition, in which all groups see education as a kind of cultural currency that can give them some advantage in the competition for access to occupations and social status. This process leads to a constant demand for education, since the increase in schooling for one group lowers the value of previous levels of schooling for all other groups, causing all groups to demand more schooling to maintain their status positions. This process creates the spiral of educational expansion. While initially this status competition was primarily among protestant and Catholic groups, and among the many immigrant European ethnic groups, eventually status competition has come to characterize all cultural groups, whether defined by race, ethnicity, class, gender, or other identity. Consequently, education has expanded from the bottom up, due to demand from all groups for more schooling. (Rubinson & Hurst, 1997, p. 62)

Throughout its history, the United States population has become increasingly diverse (Moe, 1990). Nevertheless, according to Guy (1999), “the *significance* of that diversity has rarely been as important as it is today” (emphasis in the original) (p. 8). Duderstadt and Womack (2003) argue that the United States’ diversity is an important opportunity which provides the country with “an extraordinary vitality and energy as a people” (p. 3).

### *Trends in Adult College Enrollment*

As Richardson and King (1998) point out, “Of course, in comparison with the ‘traditional’ student population, the body of adult students [includes] disproportionate numbers of women and members of ethnic minorities...” (para. 13). The proportion of adult students is itself high; adults (24 and above) were 28% of the undergraduate population in 1971 compared to 35% in 1997 (Kasworm, Polson, Fishback, 2002, p. 3). Of the undergraduate institutions in which adults were enrolled, more adult students are found in regional institutions and community colleges with 58.7% of the students at public two-year institutions classified as adults in 1999-2000 (NCES, 2002a).

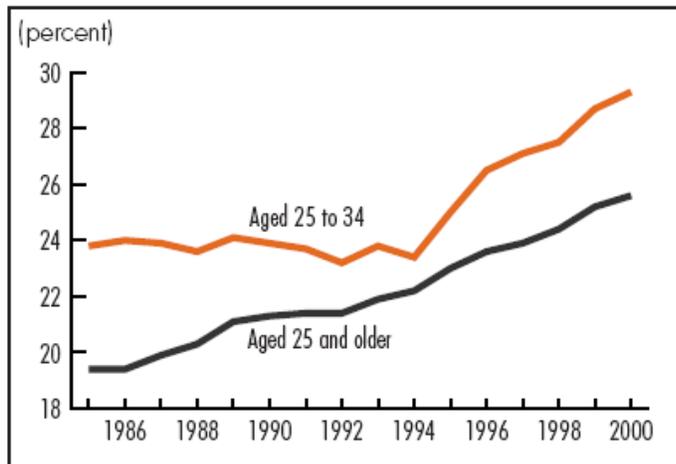
The highest concentration of adult students is found in specialized programs targeted toward adult students (Kasworm, 1995b), a reflection of “the commitment by American higher education to more open access and egalitarian outreach to all populations” (Kasworm, 2003, p. 4). The enrollment of adult students in degree-granting institutions is expected to continue to increase through at least 2012. At the same time, the percentage of adult students in respect to traditional-aged students is projected to decrease as increasing numbers of traditional-aged students opt to attend college (NCES, 2002a).

At the same time, Census Bureau figures indicate that the proportion of the population completing four or more years of college has also been trending up for adults aged 25 and over generally and specifically for those aged 25 to 34 (Dohm & Wyatt, 2002,):

---

Figure One  
Population completing four or more years of college, 1985-2000

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(Dohm & Wyatt, 2002, p.4)

---

*Research Concerning Adult Student Persistence in Higher Education Settings*

Although post-secondary institutions have witnessed large increases in their adult student populations since 1970 (Aslanian 2001), the students' persistence to graduation remains an area of concern in adult higher education (NCES, 1995). Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002) suggest that persisters and nonpersisters have identifiable differences. These distinctions range from the nonpersisters' past negative college experience and deficiencies in basic skills to their perceived family and work demands (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002). The students' first generation status is also a factor in persistence with persisters tending to have parents with college experience and nonpersisters tending to have parents with high school educations only (Stanfiel, 1973; Terenzini et al, 1995; Thayer, 2000; Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002; Olenchak & Hebert, 2002). In addition, as Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002)

point out, adult students are less likely to have access to supportive people than are traditionally-aged college students, yet Chartrand's (1992) research indicates that such support is essential to keeping adult students from stopping out of college.

### *Research About First Generation College Students*

Knowledge regarding first generation students is surprisingly limited (Terenzini, et al 1995). First, very little research has been conducted on first generation students as a group (Grayson, 1995; Terenzini, et al 1995), and those studies that do exist rely on small sample sizes (Inman, & Mayes, 1999). Second, the research that has been conducted focuses almost completely on traditional-aged students (Zwerling, 1992). Third, outside of research that looks at first generational status as it relates to issues of a particular minority [African American experiences, for example: (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Aiken, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2001)], most of the current adult first generation student literature focuses on the community college experience alone (Zwerling, 1992). This community college focus is explained by the fact that 65% of all adult students are enrolled in two year/community colleges (Aslanian, 2001; NCES, 2002a). Far less data concerning the experience of the other one-third of the adult college student population currently exists.

Nevertheless, some working conclusions can be drawn from the existing research. First generation students represent a unique and researchable population (Cross, 1981; Cross, 1990; Terenzini et al, 1995; Terenzini et al, 1996). London's (1992) research indicates that the adult first generation population is described by personal feelings of cultural risk:

Though the cultural context may vary, such struggles are reported by [first generation] students of diverse backgrounds, whether white working class, African American, Native American, Hispanic, or Asian. If there is a common element to their poignant stories, it is that these students live on the margin of two cultures. (London, 1992)

Inman and Mayes (1999) summarize the research this way, "...[F]irst generation students often feel they have to make an all-or-nothing decision about maintaining that present way of life or rejecting their family's culture to pursue an academic goal" (p. 5).

In addition to these feelings of cultural risk, first generation students also face many academic challenges. Terenzini et al (1996) found that first generation students are more likely to be poor and to be Hispanic than are continuing generation students. In addition, they found that this population is described by lower critical thinking abilities at the time of initial enrollment, lower degree aspirations, and less parental support for college than are continuing generation students. According to NCES (2001), only 28.4 percent of all college graduates during the years 1999-2000 had parent with a high school or less than high school education. Finally, Terenzini, et al (1996) found that first generation students tend to be older students with children and jobs, stressors that can negatively impact academic achievement. Thayer (2000) points out that first generation students are the least likely to persist to graduation. Nevertheless, as a group, first generation students seem to be aware of their academic challenges (Tulsa Junior College, 1995).

While these apparent similarities among first generation students are built upon a somewhat limited literature base (Terenzini et al, 1996), this research seeks to explore

the argument that first generation status may itself represent a cultural category distinct from, but at times related to, ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic status. By viewing first generation students from a macro cultural perspective, research can seek to build “upon principles and structures that are meaningful across cultures...with students from families and communities who have not historically experienced success in higher education” (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995, p. 9).

According to the most recent data available on this subject, within the adult college student population, being a first generation student seems to be particularly characteristic even when controlling for generational differences in rates of college graduation (NCES 1995):

Although many older students’ parents belong to a generation that was less likely to complete high school or attend college, it is noteworthy that even those aged 24-29 were less likely to have parents with a bachelor’s degree and more likely to have parents with only a high school education or less. (NCES, 1995, p. 9)

Given the preceding discussions, it would seem that a better understanding of first generation adult students is necessary (Zwerling, 1992; Terenzini et al, 1996), especially given that demographic and enrollment trends indicate that an even-greater proportion of first generation students is likely to enroll in college in the future (Levine, 1989; Nuñez, 1998). More research is needed to help tailor recruiting, programming, and retention services to this increasing, at-risk population (Zwerling, 1992; Inman & Mayes, 1999;).

### *Statement of the Problem*

The problem that this research seeks to address is the current limitation of knowledge regarding first generation adult college students. While existing research into traditionally-aged first generation students indicates that first generation students face increased difficulties in college, the lack of research into their adult counterparts precludes researchers and student services personnel from recognizing and addressing possible problems in the first generation adult population.

### *Statement of the Purpose*

The purpose of this research is to develop a further understanding of the nature of the adaptation process of adult first generation students to the undergraduate college experience. According to Kasworm (1990a), the adaptation of adult students to the undergraduate college experience is a significant sub-theme in the adult undergraduate higher education literature. By focusing specifically on the adaptation of first generation adult students, this study is designed to research a majority population in adult higher education regardless of demographic differences. As Zwerling (1992) argues, adult educators need to know more about the first generation adult college student journey in order to meet the needs of the field, program designers, and the students themselves.

### *Theoretic Rationale for the Study*

#### *Adaptation of First Generation Students*

The research of Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, and Jalomo (1995) provides the primary reason for measuring adjustment to college. Terenzini et al have argued that first generation students face significantly more challenges as they

adjust to college than do continuing generation students. “Among nontraditional, primarily first-generation, college students, however, the adaptation to college was far more difficult” (Terenzini et al, 1995, p. 58). Their adjustment is described as “significant and intimidating” and Terenzini et al felt that college represented a disjunction and a feeling of “breaking away” from family and tradition. Inman and Mayes (1999) present a review of research that further supports investigation into the experience of the first generation college students’ adjustment when they point out that not only do these students not receive as much support from their families as do continuing generation students, they also feel less socially accepted within the college environment. While these findings deal primarily with traditional-aged first generation students, Richardson and King (1998) note adult students’ difficulties with adjustment:

One example of a specific need of adult learners includes adjusting after reentry into the academic environment. Adult students often must confront issues of balancing family and career demands. Some women who reenter the academic scene have to consider the prospect of taking low-paying jobs in clerical or social services areas....They question their ability to understand and retain large quantities of information. Although they may be effective problem solvers for many life demands, adult learners may exhibit fewer skills for coping with an academic environment. (paras. 5-6)

### *First Generation Adult Students*

Indeed, while traditionally-aged first generation college students and adult first generation college students may be linked by their generational status, adult students as a group differ from traditionally-aged students in important ways that should be

considered by researchers (NCES, 1995). While adult students do not necessarily have a single set of common characteristics, they do tend to have “greater maturity, more complex life experiences, as well as more significant heterogeneity and complexity than those who are younger” (Kasworm, Polson & Fishback, 2002, p. 3).

While the research into adult first generation college students is limited, a few recent studies have examined some aspects of first generation adult students’ adjustment to college. Most notably, secondary findings in the work by McGee (2004) indicate that generational status may not influence college adjustment as measured by the SACQ. The McGee study was designed to investigate the impact of a California state-funded program entitled the Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS), which offered assistance to low-income nontraditional college students. In McGee’s study, however, the recipients of EOPS assistance were disproportionately first generation students, and therefore the lack of a difference in college adjustment between first and second generation college students may be attributable to the EOPS assistance first generation students tended to receive (McGee, 2004).

### *Research Questions*

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the college adaptation process of first generation college students?
2. Are there differences in the process of college adaptation for first generation adult students versus continuing generation adult students? If so, what is the nature of those differences?

3. Are there similarities in the story of the college adaptation process among first generation adult students as a group, and if so, what is the nature of those similarities?

### *Study Design*

This study explores first generation adult college students' adaptation to college through use of a two-step research process. The first stage of the study involved administering the SACQ (Baker & Siryk, 1999) (Appendix A) to first generation and continuing generation students who are enrolled in an adults-only, semester-based associates degree program at a private, Midwestern liberal arts college. The SACQ questionnaire measures adaptation in three areas: Academic, Personal-Emotional, and Social. The SACQ also provides an index of student attachment to the institution and an overall measure of adaptation based on a summary of each of the four areas.

The SACQ results were then divided into "first generation" and "continuing generation" categories on the basis of the generational survey (Appendix B), and the students' t-scores in each adaptation area were then calculated and averaged by category. In an effort to address the first research question of this study, a two-tailed t-test for unequal variances was performed comparing the mean scores of the first generation students with those of the continuing generation. After that analysis, further two-tailed t-tests were run comparing the data by race (White and non-White) and by gender.

After the administration of the survey, the students were then asked to indicate to the researcher if they would be willing to be interviewed with follow-up questions at a

later date. Those students who agreed to be interviewed provided their names, contact information, and their generational status.

Interviews of the first generation volunteers were held after the survey data were analyzed. Initially, interviewees were randomly chosen from the sample of first generation volunteers, but eventually all volunteers who agreed in the end to be interviewed became part of this study in an effort to achieve category saturation in the interview data. Using a preliminary interview protocol created through a pilot study (Appendix C), and considering the trends apparent in the First Generation SACQ results, the volunteers were questioned about their college adaptation process. In an effort to minimize intervening and confounding variables, the interviews were conducted within a single week of May, 2005. The researcher coded the data as it was received using a constant comparative method (Creswell, 1998). In an effort to achieve thematic saturation within all coding categories, the researcher conducted interviews until the pool of willing volunteers was exhausted. Once the researcher completed initial coding, the data were forwarded to an outside reader for re-coding. The researcher and the outside reader then compared coding categories and came to an agreement regarding the themes. The researchers agreed that thematic saturation had been reached.

#### *Pilot Study*

The structure of this research project is based on a pilot study which was conducted in the spring and summer of 2003. At that time, a pilot study that used the SACQ and personal interview was conducted (Appendix C). During this preliminary phase, the researcher developed the interview protocol. In addition, initial coding

categories were identified in the pilot data. While only four interviews were eventually coded (out of six conducted), preliminary evidence of themes began to emerge.

### *Significance of Study*

This study is significant for four reasons. First, it finds that the first generation students studied did adapt more poorly to college as measured by the SACQ and that these differences did not extend to racial or gender divisions in the data. Secondly, it raises questions about how adult students define their own first generation status: these students may see themselves more as parents than children. Third it indicates that first generation status may correlate with many indicators of persistence problems as compiled by Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback (2002). Finally, it indicates that institutional barriers such as poor academic advising are a concern for first generation adults, regardless of how well they are adapting to college.

### *Assumptions of Study*

The following assumptions were made for this study:

1. College and university study represents a type of adult education consistent with the definition proposed by Darkenwald & Merriam (1982).
2. First generation adult college students represent a unique demographic population worthy of study (Cross, 1990; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).
3. Respondents will give honest answers to the questions on the SACQ and in the interviews.
4. Respondents will be accurate in their self-identification of generational status.

### *Limitations of Study*

The proposed research has two primary limitations:

- a. Participants are limited to PACE students self defining as freshmen and enrolled in a private, non-sectarian, liberal arts university in the Midwestern United States during the spring, 2005 semester. This group, while containing a high proportion of first generation students, is not as ethnically diverse as the rest of the country. This sample includes a higher proportion of Caucasian students than might be expected in other areas of the country.
- b. The researcher's twelve-year association with the university represents an opportunity for a possible research bias as the researcher is well-known throughout the PACE program. To address this bias, the researcher has refrained from teaching courses offered in the first two semesters of the PACE program during the course of this study to date and will continue to do so until the study is complete, thereby limiting contact with possible participants.

### *Definition of Terms*

The following definitions are being applied:

Adult Education—"Adult education is a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 9).

Adaptation to College—How well a student is handling the demands of college as measured by the SACQ in the four specific areas: academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and attachment to the institution (Baker &

Siryk, 1999). Used interchangeably with the phrase “adjustment to college” (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

Adjustment to College—Used interchangeably with the phrase “adaptation to college” (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

Adult Student—Individuals PACE program at the target university.

Continuing Generation Student—A college student who had one or more parents who attended a two-year or four-year college or university.

First Generation Student—A college student who does not have one or more parents who pursued postsecondary education at a two-year or four-year, degree-granting institution (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, Nora, 1996; NCES, 2002b).

Freshman—A college student with zero to 28 transcribed college hours. Freshmen in this study are self-identified.

PACE—Project for Adult College Education, a semester-based program for adult college students pursuing an associate’s degree.

SACQ—Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire developed in 1989 by Robert Baker, Ph.D. and Bohdan Siryk, M.A. and distributed through Western Psychological Services.

Semester-Based Programming—A college program that follows the traditional fall, spring, summer 16-week semester format.

### *Summary*

The demographic face of America is changing. Along with this change, the demand for skilled workers is increasing. Adult student college enrollment has begun to reflect these trends. According to the most recently available statistics, almost 55% of

adult college students are first generation students (NCES 2002a). Unfortunately, information about first generation adult college students has been underrepresented in the research literature.

Adult education research needs to continue to look at how adult college students are doing as this group becomes more ethnically, culturally, racially, economically, and educationally diverse. This research explores first generation adult college student adaptation to college through quantitative and qualitative measures.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Related Literature

*When I started back to school...well, I was horrified, I was absolutely horrified. It was just coming back, I think, that gave me that fear. But in all my classes, I established a relationship with at least one person, kind of to get through the class with. I think everybody needs that, a buddy or something that helps you get through.* (First in family student "Maxine," personal communication, July 21, 2003)

#### *Introduction*

In 2001, 15.5% of adults aged 25-34 were participating in some kind of college or university credential programs (NCES, 2003a). Existing research into adult education participation generally and adult higher education participation specifically offers some insight into this group as a whole. Unfortunately, first generation adult college students, the majority of all adult college students (Kasworm, Polson, Fishback, 2002; NCES, 2002b), has remained an under-researched group. The research surrounding the issues related to this study is large and varied. It includes literature within the fields of adult education, higher education, the sociology of education, and student services. There is related research within the literature of traditionally aged, first generation students as well as within that of community college students. What follows is a summary of the findings related to this research.

#### *What "Counts" as Adult Education*

As Courtney (1989) argues, "[t]he value of a definition lies in its precision or ability to illuminate" (p. 23). Unfortunately, definitions of adult education sometimes do

not shed much light on the concept. Issues such as the voluntariness of learning, the commitment to growth, and the purposeful structuring of educational activities have all been cited when defining adult education (Courtney, 1989). The definition listed in Chapter One of this document (Darkenwald, & Merriam, 1982), is but one of many, and not all definitions highlight programs consistent with college and university education for adults. Consider as an example the 1969 definition which emerged from the Exeter Conference:

[Adult education is] a process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular full-time basis...undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding, or skill, appreciation and attitudes; or for the purpose of identifying or solving personal or community problems. (as cited in Courtney, 1989, p. 17).

As all-encompassing as this definition is, the restriction that adult education happens after people have finished with attending school on “a regular and full-time basis” excludes many of today’s adult college and university students (Kasworm, Sandmann, & Sissel, 2000).

Nevertheless, there is a large and increasing literature within the field of adult education that deals with adult college and university students [including the work of: Ackell, Epps, Sharp, & Sparks, (1982); Apps, (1987); Breese, & O’Toole, (1994); Fishback, (1997); Graham, Donaldson, Kasworm, & Dirkx, (2000); Kasworm 1990, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 2003; Kiger, & Johnson, (1997); Mangano, & Corrado (1980); Schlossberg, Lassalle, & Golec, (1989); Sewall, (1984); and Spanard, (1990)]. For the

purposes of this research, it is assumed that the college and university instruction of adults falls within the definition of adult education as defined by Darkenwald & Merriam (1982) and it is situated within the general framework of formal adult education.

### *Participation Research*

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) has been collecting data on adult education participation for 14 years, a period that began in 1991 and ended in 2003. These NCES surveys have revealed an increase in adult education participation over the years from an overall participation rate of 34.2% in 1991 to a 47.4% rate in 2001 (most recent data available) (NCES, 2003b). Prior to these surveys, the Department of Commerce conducted the Current Population Survey (CPS) every three years from 1969 to 1984 and again in 1992. These two sets of surveys have shown similar results with increases in participation by adults in educational pursuits being noted from the CPS surveys to the NCES surveys. These increases have been attributed to many possible factors including a change in methodology over the years to possible increases in demand due to the changes in technology and the job market in that period (Kim, Collins, Stowe, & Chandler, 1995). Kasworm (2003) points out “[the] increasing expectations in adult work worlds are requiring access to new knowledge through collegiate participation” (p. 4). And, in fact, according to Aslanian (2001), 85 percent of adult students say that their primary reason for enrolling in college is to benefit their career.

### *Research on Academic Advising and the Adult Student*

Lowe and Toney (2000/2001) argue that academic advising has had a problematic history in the university setting. It has suffered from inconsistent

implementation and insufficient coordination. These problems are due, they argue, to “the lack of consensus around the major responsibilities of advisors and poor training for personnel” (p. 94). In 1993, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) identified poor academic advising as a significant concern in adult degree programs (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning [CAEL], 1993). CAEL’s research indicated that the “key to quality is the provision for adults [to receive] advising by professionals who have attitudes, knowledge, and skills to meet their needs” (CAEL, 1993, p. 26).

Today, academic advising is delivered following many different models ranging from “full-service advisement centers to the assignment of a student to a faculty member” (Lowe & Toney, 2000/2001, p. 96). Computer-assisted advising models are also emerging and are viewed as being the “best solution to one of the most common advising problems: the distribution of accurate academic information to advisors and students” (Glennen, 1997, p. 120). With regard to adult student advising, CAEL (2000) has found that while a wide variety of advising models exist,

successful practitioners in this area have frequently settled upon systems of mentoring and/or student cohort groups. With mentoring, adult learners establish a trusting, long-term relationship with a person of accomplishment and who has mastered the discipline they are to enter – a person who may or may not be a faculty representative (although preferably should be). (p. 11)

According to Creamer, Polson, and Ryan (1995), there is insufficient research into academic advising for the adult student population. Nevertheless, they go on to argue that:

Adult students generally look for the same kinds of academic skills and knowledge in their advisors as do younger students. They want advisors to be accessible, provide specific and accurate information about the school's programs and policies, and give them good advice and counsel (p. 116).

CAEL's (2000) research concurs with these observations. CAEL has found that while the misperception that adult students need limited guidance from their university still exists in the realm of practice, in fact, adult students require as much or even more guidance than do traditionally-aged college students. When adult students do not receive adequate advising, enrollments suffer due to attrition (Creamer, 1980; Habley, 1981; Fuller, 1982; Backhus, 1989; King, 1993; CAEL, 2000).

CAEL's (2000) research led to the following best practice statements for adult student advising:

1. Faculty and staff provide individual attention to adult learners in order to inform them of the institution's programs and services designed to provide them with academic and personal support.
2. Support services address the life circumstances of the adult (e.g.: Child care, support networks, adult-centered orientation and advising) (p. 12)

#### *Adult College Enrollment Trends*

In the 1989 *Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education*, Stubblefield and Keane note that "higher education institutions have played an increasingly important role in economic development. They have greatly expanded their services for the working adult to meet the desires for credentialing and continuing education" (p. 33). This trend continued in the 1990s, and by 2001, according to the Aslanian (2001), the

majority of adult undergraduate students are degree seekers, and of those students, approximately 64% are seeking a bachelor's degree, and 36% are focusing on an associate's degree. According to *The Condition of Education, 2003* (NCES, 2003a), in the year 2001, 15.5% of all adults in the United States were participating in some sort of university credentialing program, including degree-granting programs as well as other credentialing programs.

Not only is a significant proportion of adults participating in college programs, the adult undergraduate population increased dramatically in the past four decades in the United States. In terms of their percentage of the total number of undergraduates, adults' participation has skyrocketed from 28% of all undergraduates in 1971 to 41% in 1991. According to NCES (2002) the dip in percentage to 35% in 1997 is more reflective of increases in traditionally-aged students than in a large decrease in the number of adult students. Overall enrollments of adult students dropped by only about 100,000 in that time period (NCES, 2002b). The general trend of increases is projected to continue, even in the face of continued decreasing percentage share. The number of adult students in college is projected to be 6.7 million in 2012, a net increase of 700,000 students over 2000 (NCES, 2002b). In fact, the increases of adult college students follow a general trend in higher education. "The profile of higher education detailed in *The Condition of Education, 1997* suggests that higher education is following the same historical pattern that earlier transformed first primary and then secondary schooling into mass educational systems" (Rubinson & Hurst, 1997, para. 1).

According to Hatfield (1989), the earliest formally-organized adult education programs within a university system began in 1873 in England. At that time, Cambridge

University organized “a syndicate of local lecturers consisting of professors who held classes beyond the university. Later the name was changed to extramural studies, having the literal meaning in Latin, ‘outside the walls’” (p. 304). This concept of extending education from a central source to the community quickly spread to the United States in the form of the extension programs. The passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 created the Cooperative Extension Service, and a distinction began to be drawn between university extension and the co-op extension associated with agriculture education (Hatfield, 1989).

Nevertheless, it was the return of World War Two veterans and the opportunities that flowed from the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, popularly known as the G.I. Bill, that spawned the first major wave of adult college students (Stubblefield, & Keane, 1989). The G.I. Bill brought approximately two million adults into the higher education system (Stubblefield & Keane, 1989.) As Kasworm (1997) observed, “[While] many institutions viewed this influx of WWII veterans as a temporary effort and quickly reverted back to youth-only environments....there were a few institutions [that] valued this change and continued to support adult access” (p.4).

The next wave of adult college enrollment was linked more to institutional offerings than to major governmental programs. These changes encouraged the thirty-year growth in enrollments from 18% of the total enrollments in 1947 to 34.7% in 1978 (Kasworm, 1980). According to Kasworm and Blowers (1994), one of the major higher education developments of the time included the establishment of enhanced women’s outreach programs. These programs coupled with an increased institutional effort to

target business and industry helped to expand colleges' customer base (Kasworm & Blowers, 1994).

In the 1980s and 1990s, these partnerships with business and industry grew and were supported by the technological advances in distance learning, online access, and multimedia curriculum formatting. Today, while the overall percentage of adult undergraduates who are enrolled in college fluctuates, their presence in the university classroom is well established.

#### *Adult Persistence in Higher Education*

College enrollment statistics alone cannot tell the entire story of the adult undergraduate experience. Another important aspect of the narrative is the likelihood that any particular enrollee will persist to graduation. The *Condition of Education, 2002* contained a focused discussion on nontraditional undergraduates. In that study, the NCES found that “nontraditional students are much more likely than traditional students to leave postsecondary education without a degree” (NCES, 2002a). Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002, p. 37) analyzed and compiled a large quantity of descriptive research regarding the types of adult students who are likely to persist to graduation “persisters” and those who are unlikely to persist “nonpersisters” (Apps, 1987; Beal & Noel, 1980; Bean & Metzner, 1996; Carter, 1982; Kiger & Johnson, 1997; Knoell, 1976; Malloch & Montgomery, 1996; Naretto, 1995; Spanard, 1990). Their findings are presented in Table 1 which follows:

Table 1  
Characteristics of Adult Persisters and Nonpersisters

Persisters	Nonpersisters
Parents with college experiences	Parents with high school education level
Past positive experiences in attending college or previous completion of two or more years of college	Past negative college experiences first time entry into college or limited prior college work
Strong academic abilities	Major deficiencies in basic skills
Clear set of goals and declaration of a concentration or major	Uncertain goals or unrealistic goals of long-term consequence
Strong study habits and higher aspirations	Difficulty in adjusting to the routines of formal study, insecurity about ability to learn, nervousness about tests, and inadequate work habits.
Strong self-discipline and determination	Low-level achievement drives; poor motivation, as well as being indecisive And disorganized
View formal college course work as developing skills in self-directedness	Value formal learning that directly relates to life experiences, often in concrete, practical and specific ways
More often multilplistic or relativistic thinker	Lack of intellectual independence; often a concrete thinker
Support by family, by significant others and by employers studies	Unclear or negative messages regarding support and valuing of college in one's life
Perceived limited family demands demands	Perceived significant family-work
Financial resources from self, family and work to support college studies	Financial difficulties, both in general and with support of college studies
Flexible in course scheduling and in taking multiple courses	Limited flexibility in scheduling courses and limited time to support course work
Clear support resources from the college and program for adult students	Unclear or limited resources from the college and program to support adult students

In short, adult persisters tend to have parents with college experience, have strong academic abilities and positive educational experiences. In addition, they tend to

be supported by family and/or significant others and employers. Nonpersisters, do not necessarily have these and/or other factors supporting their college experience.

### *First Generation Research*

The current state of the first generation student literature is limited in three ways. First, very little research has been conducted on first generation students as a group (Grayson, 1995; Terenzini, et al 1995, Eliot & Mayes, 1999). Second, the research that has been conducted focuses almost completely on traditional-aged students (Zwerling, 1992). Third, outside of research that looks at first generational status as it relates to issues of a particular minority [African American experiences, for example: (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Johnson-Bailey, 2000; Aiken, Cervero, & Johnson-Bailey, 2001)], most of the current first generation literature focuses on the community college experience alone. While the majority of adult students are enrolled in community colleges, 65% according to the most recently available statistics (Aslanian, 2001), according to Kasworm (2003), four-year, private, not-for-profit institutions have approximately 9.4 percent of the total adult student college enrollment.

Despite this general lack of information, some working conclusions can be drawn from the existing research. First, first generation students represent a unique and researchable population (Cross, 1981; Terenzini et al, 1996). Research indicates that this population is characterized by two things: the feelings of cultural risk encountered by many first generation students (London, 1982; London, 1989) and the characteristics of the students themselves.

Though the cultural context may vary, such struggles are reported by [first generation] students of diverse backgrounds, whether white working class,

African American, Native American, Hispanic, or Asian. If there is a common element to their poignant stories, it is that these students live on the margin of two cultures. (London, 1992)

The similarities in cultural risk are matched by many similarities in group characteristics. Terenzini et al (1996) found that first generation students are more likely to be poor and to be Hispanic than are continuing generation students. In addition, they found that this population is characterized by lower critical thinking abilities at the time of initial enrollment, lower degree aspirations, and less parental support for college than do continuing generation students. Finally, they found that first generation students tended to be older students with children and jobs. Other research has found that first generation students are at risk for attrition (Stanfiel, 1973; Terenzini et al, 1995; Olenchak & Hebert, 2002). Second, first generation students enroll predominantly (but not exclusively) in community colleges (Willett, 1989), and as a consequence, community college enrollments are comprised by a disproportionately high number of first generation students (Willett, 1989; London, 1992).

Demographic and enrollment trends indicate that an even-greater proportion of first generation students is likely to enroll in college in the future (Levine, 1989; Nuñez, 1998). Consequently, more research and better programming are needed to help tailor recruiting, programming, retention services, and other college services to this increasing but at-risk population (Inman & Mayes, 1999). Particular effort is also needed in the area of adult first generation college students (Zwerling, 1992), especially in light of the fact that approximately half of all adult college students are first generation (NCES, 2002b).

### *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire*

The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) (Appendix A) was originally developed in the early nineteen eighties and contained 52 items (Baker & Siryk, 1984). It has since been increased to 57 items and incorporates measurements of four specific areas: Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Personal-Emotional Adjustment, and Institutional Attachment (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Each of the 67 items consists of a statement that the subject responds to on a nine-point scale ranging from “doesn’t apply to me at all” to “applies very closely to me” (Baker & Siryk, 1999). On each measure, as well as on the total measure entitled “overall adjustment,” a higher score indicates a better adjustment to college and a lower score indicates a weaker adjustment (Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992).

The SACQ can be scored by hand or by computer (Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992; Baker & Siryk, 1999). The instrument contains the tables necessary to translate raw numeric scores to normalized T-scores specific to the gender of the participant (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

This instrument focuses on the quality of the student’s adjustment rather than an evaluation of the college environment itself (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Consequently, the SACQ is used both as a tool for counseling individual students and as a tool for academic research. Since its publication in 1989 with Western Psychological Services (WPS), the SACQ has been used in 98 dissertations (Dissertation Abstracts List of Records, 2005) (Appendix E). Dissertation research using the SACQ has ranged from studies of the academic success of first-generation community college students (McGee, 2004) to a study examining the relationship between psychological androgyny

and college adjustment within the Korean American population of college students (Kim, 1996).

The SACQ was originally designed to evaluate freshmen at Clark University. “At the present time, all but one of the published studies employing the SACQ have involved freshmen, so its empirically determined suitability for students from other year levels – while seen to be promising – is yet to be clearly demonstrated” (Baker & Siryk, 1999). In fact, of the 98 dissertations that employ the SACQ since 1989, only three of them have researched primarily non-freshman populations (Dissertation Abstracts Online List of Records, 2005).

Nonetheless, the SACQ is limited in a few ways. First and most notably is the transparency of purpose associated with the measurement. The statements included in the questionnaire are clearly associated with adjustment, and a student wishing to skew a result or to give a false result would have an opportunity to do that (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Second, the norms associated with the test are based on data from only one college, Clark University (Dahmus & Bernardin, 1992). Nevertheless, subsequent studies indicate that the findings do generalize to other universities (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

The SACQ is currently published and distributed by Western Psychological Services (WPS) of Los Angeles, California. The questionnaire’s reliability and validity have been well established (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Because the test is intended to give a snapshot of an individual, and not intended to measure enduring aspects of individual’s personhood, reliability has been established through estimates of internal consistency reliability rather than test/re-test reliability (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

Coefficient alpha values for the current SACQ range from .81 to .90 for the Academic Adjustment subscale, .83 to .91 for the Social Adjustment subscale, .77 to .86 for the Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale, .85 to .91 for the Attachment subscale and .92 to .95 for the Full Scale (Baker & Siryk, 1999). These data were gathered for both first semester freshmen and, separately, for second semester freshmen and students further along in their college careers. The data were gathered over several years' of testing (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

SACQ validity is established from inter-correlation data from 34 separate administrations of the questionnaire at 21 different colleges and universities. The Academic Adjustment subscale shares one item with the Attachment subscale, and the Attachment subscale shares eight items with the Social Adjustment subscale, so consequently the intercorrelation figures are higher for these pairings. For the other pairings, the intercorrelation figures garnered from the 16 small-school samples (Clark, Holy Cross, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute) and the other 18 samples from other institutions are comparable: Academic Adjustment/Social Adjustment, .45 and .39; Academic Adjustment/ Personal-Emotional Adjustment, .60 and .55; and Social Adjustment/ Personal-Emotional Adjustment, .49 and .42 (Baker & Siryk, 1999). In addition, the original questionnaire and the later 67 item questionnaire were validated through criterion relations (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

The Academic Adjustment subscale was measured against the two criteria of freshman-year grade point average and election to an academic honor society available at Clark University. The hypothesis was that students who were scoring higher on the Academic Adjustment subscale would be more likely to show academic success in

college and vice-versa. Significant correlation was found between scoring high on this subscale and academic achievement based on GPA and on election to the honor society. No other subscale was found to have a significant correlation (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

The Social Adjustment subscale was measured against the following two criteria: a social activities checklist and whether or not the student became a dorm assistant in their sophomore or junior year. Again, there was a significant correlation found both between extracurricular activity and the subscale and with becoming a dorm assistant and the subscale (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

The Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale was measured against whether or not the student was “known” to the Clark University campus psychological services center. Students scoring lowest on the Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale were significantly more likely to have sought psychological counseling at that university (Baker & Siryk, 1999). To check the validity of the Institutional Attachment subscale, the researchers correlated it with attrition. Although attrition was significantly correlated with the Academic Adjustment subscale, its strongest correlation was with the Institutional Attachment subscale.

In overview, the SACQ subscales—for both the earlier and final versions of the questionnaire, and in studies over several years at Clark University as well as at several other institutions—relate to a statistically significant degree in expected directions to independent real-life behaviors that may be regarded as especially relevant to particular subscales. These independent criteria, moreover,

represent important behaviors, decisions, or accomplishments in the lives of students. (Baker & Siryk, 1999, p. 49).

Since the publication of the current version of the SACQ in 1989, 98 dissertations have employed the instrument (Dissertation Abstracts Online List of Records, 2005). Of these, 24 dissertations looked at some aspect of minority student adjustment to college (for example Corbett, 1991; Dewitt-Parker, 1999; Fabian, 2002; Kim, 1996). Another area of interest has been the impact of family structure or support on college students' adaptation to college, an area for 15 dissertations (for example Clauss, 1995; Erikson, 1996; Hutto, 1998). Other areas of research application have to date included adjustment of first generation students (Kessler, 2002; McGee, 2004), the impact of freshman orientation programs on adjustment (Brown, 1996; Brunelle-Joiner, 1999), and the influence of personal emotional characteristics on college adjustment (Fassig, 2003; Mann, 1998). Only three dissertations have shown research into populations not primarily composed of college freshmen, and none in the past 11 years (Harris, 1993; Roman-Koller, 1992; Toney, 1989).

### *Summary*

While there has been some discussion over the years as to what constitutes adult education (Darkenwald, & Merriam, 1982; Courtney, 1989), the existing research supports the idea that adult higher education is one facet of the field (Ackell, Epps, Sharp, & Sparks, 1982; Apps, 1987; Breese, & O'Toole, 1994; Fishback, 1997; Graham, Donaldson, Kasworm, & Dirkx, 2000; Kasworm 1990, 1995a, 1995b, 1997, 2003; Kiger, & Johnson, 1997; Mangano, & Corrado 1980; Schlossberg, Lassalle, & Golec, 1989; Sewall, 1984; and Spanard, 1990). Participation research has been useful in

understanding adults' general participation in adult education, and also offers insight into their participation in higher education (Kasworm, 2003; NCES, 2003b). One aspect of adult college participation that needs to be addressed is adult student advising which appears to pose a continuing problem at many colleges (CAEL, 1993; CAEL, 2000).

Enrollment trends indicate that, as a percentage of each population, adults' higher education participation is similar across gender and ethnicity (NCES, 2003b). While matriculation levels may be similar, research into higher education persistence indicates that certain groups may encounter more difficulties in the college environment (Kasworm, Polson, Fishback, 2002). Unfortunately, the current literature base is not adequate to make conclusions about first generation adult college students.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

*I didn't have any global expectations about what I thought college would be like. My deciding factor was that this university seems to have a pretty well-established program that was geared toward people like me. They seem to have a pretty straight-forward program that says "hey, if you follow these road markers, you will end up where you want to be." So that was the main thing to me. (First generation student Todd Farmer, personal communication, May 1, 2005)*

### *Introduction*

The research design utilized in this study represents a mixture of two traditions: quantitative inquiry and qualitative inquiry. Ragin (1987) characterized the distinction between these two traditions by arguing that qualitative researchers tend to use few cases and many variables while quantitative researchers do the opposite, relying on many cases and few variables

The mixed methodological design is based on a reality in social science research: when dealing with human beings, there is interplay between the data and the examination of the data. As Ragin (1987) puts it:

In practice...no intentional gulf between hypothesis or concept formation and data analysis usually exists. Most findings, at least most interesting findings, usually result from some form of grounded concept and hypothesis formation based on preliminary data analyses. In other words, most hypotheses and concepts are refined, often reformulated, after the data have been collected and

analyzed. Initial examinations of data usually expose the inadequacy of initial theoretical formulations, and a dialogue, of sorts, develops between the investigator's conceptual tools for understanding the data and the data analysis itself. The interplay between concept formation and data analysis leads to progressively more refined concepts and hypotheses. (p. 56)

In this study, the mixture of inquiry traditions allowed the researcher to pursue interesting quantitative findings in depth through the personal interview. Research question two poses a quantitative question while research questions one and three exhibit the "how and what" lines of inquiry common to qualitative studies (Creswell, 1998).

#### *Research Questions*

1. What is the nature of the college adaptation process of first generation college students?
2. Are there differences in the process of college adaptation for first generation adult students versus continuing generation adult students? If so, what is the nature of those differences?
3. Are there similarities in the story of the college adaptation process among first generation adult students as a group, and if so, what is the nature of those similarities?

#### *Pilot Study*

To better understand how to implement the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and to develop an effective and useful interview protocol, a pilot study was conducted in March, 2003. The interviews were coded in order to finalize the

interview protocol for the main study (Appendix C; Appendix D) and to give the researcher practice coding interview data.

The pilot study was beneficial to the development of the qualitative aspects of the study. The initial set of thirty questions in the six areas of general information, entry/transition, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, academic adjustment, and attachment to the school (Appendix C) was altered and expanded to include a total of thirty-two questions in the six areas (Appendix D). The additional questions expanded the question base in the areas of personal-emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and academic adjustment. Further, the pilot study allowed the researcher to generate preliminary data coding categories in order to simplify and streamline the later data coding in the main study.

### *Main Study*

#### *Participant Profile*

The population for this research is described as all adult college freshmen enrolled in the adults-only associates of general studies program at a private, non-sectarian Midwestern university during the spring semester, 2005. Students attending this university during 2004-2005 have been a heavily studied group (see for example: Boden, 2005; Collins, 2005; McCray, 2005). According to university records, approximately 55-60 freshmen were enrolled in that program in the spring, 2005 semester, but university records were not complete for many of the students so a finalized number was not available (personal communication, Bongartz, 2005). Because the population size was manageable, no further sampling was needed for the quantitative portion of the study, and the research sample in the quantitative portion of

this study is the same as the population. Freshmen were identified by the researcher going to all courses offered in the mandatory freshman curriculum and asking for freshmen to self-identify on the SACQ. Fifty-five freshmen were identified and all agreed to participate in the SACQ. Five additional students completed the SACQ, but all of these self identified as sophomores, and their SACQ surveys were not included in this study. Interview participants were selected at random from the fifty-five SACQ participants. Interview participants were randomly sampled from a pool of twenty-six first generation freshmen volunteers identified during the SACQ survey process, and all available 16 interview volunteers were eventually interviewed to help ensure coding category saturation. Interviewees were offered a \$20 honorarium for their participation in this study. Fifteen interviewees accepted the honorarium.

College freshmen were chosen in part because adult freshmen “are higher risk students because they often bring limited college prep coursework from their high school backgrounds” (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002. See also Solomon and Gordon, 1981; Kasworm and Blowers 1994; NCES, 2002a). In addition, it was necessary to access the students early in their college careers in order to reach those students who might have the most trouble in school and therefore become nonpersisters (NCES, 2002a). Because many of the characteristics of adult nonpersisters are also characteristics of first generation students (eg: not having parents with college experience, having deficiencies in basic skills, and/or having unclear or negative social support in the decision to return to college) (Kasworm, Polson, & Fishback, 2002), it was important to interview students in their freshman year.

In addition, this study was designed to investigate college freshmen in to keep the research in line with other published and unpublished studies employing the SACQ. The SACQ authors recognize that the empirically-determined suitability of the SACQ for students other than freshmen has yet to be clearly demonstrated (Baker & Siryk, 1999). In fact, of the 98 dissertations that have employed the SACQ since 1989, only three of them have researched primarily non-freshman populations (Dissertation Abstracts Online List of Records, 2005).

The private, non-sectarian Midwestern university chosen for this study has a well-established and successful adult college program in the style that Kasworm and Blowers (1994) argue contains the highest proportion of adult students. This population was also available to the researcher as she had taught at the university since 1993. At the time of the study, the minimum age for entering the program without going through the university exceptions process was 25 years old. The group of 55 students who participated in the SACQ for this study included three students between the ages of 21 and 24. The program chosen only provides freshmen and sophomore-level coursework, and does not admit degree-holding students; therefore the program contains a high proportion of freshmen students.

In an effort to keep her relationship to the university and its adult programs from affecting the research population, the researcher had not taught freshmen courses in the program since 2001. Furthermore, the researcher addressed each group of survey participants using the same script (Appendix F) and did not mention her relationship to the university during her presentation.

## *Quantitative Instrumentation and Analysis*

### *Instrument*

The SACQ was originally developed for publication in 1989 and is currently distributed through Western Psychological Services (WPS). The current version contains an updated manual and became available in 1999 (Baker & Siryk, 1999). The 1999 instrument and manual are being used in this study.

The SACQ (Appendix A) is a 67-item, self-report questionnaire which can be administered to individual students or to groups in approximately 20 minutes (Baker & Siryk, 1999). The instrument is designed to evaluate a student's college adaptation in four principal areas: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment (for full instrument see Appendix A). Each subscale has a number of questions related to it; nevertheless, all areas except the personal-emotional adjustment area have at least one question that shows up in another subscale. In total, there are 24 items in the academic adjustment subscale, 20 items in the social adjustment subscale, 15 items in the personal-emotional subscale, and 15 items in the institutional attachment subscale. Some examples of each subscale's prompts are as follows:

#### Academic Adjustment

1. I know why I'm in college and what I want out of it.
2. Most of the things I'm interested in are not related to any of my course work at college.

#### Social Adjustment

3. I feel that I fit in well as part of the college environment.

#### Personal-Emotional Adjustment

4. I have been getting angry too easily lately.

#### Institutional Attachment

5. I wish I were at another college or university.

Items from each subscale are scored on a nine-point scale in gradations ranging from “applies very closely to me” to “doesn’t apply to me at all.” The authors of the instrument assigned each point on the scale a numeric scoring value ranging from one to nine. Survey respondents do not see the scoring values associated with their responses. Because the scale for some of the items have the 9 point scale in ascending order and other items have the scale arranged in descending order, the particular value of a point on the nine-point scale depends on the statement to which it is related. For example, the farthest point to the left indicating “applies very closely to me” is scored as a “1,” or lowest adaptation score for the statement “I have been feeling tense and nervous lately.” The same point on the scale would be scored a “9” or highest adaptation score for the statement “I enjoy writing papers for courses.”

In this study, two SACQ statements had no relevance to the researched population. These statements are “I enjoy living in a college dormitory” and “I am getting along very well with my roommate.” Both of these statements are found in the social adjustment subscale. The authors anticipated this problem would come up in some studies and suggested in the 1999 manual that these questions be omitted when students do not live in on-campus housing. In order to keep the social adjustment subscale from recording unusually low scores as a result of the omissions, the authors

suggest substituting the missing scores with the average value for the social adjustment subscale, and that was done in this research (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

Since the current version of the SACQ became available, it has been used in 98 dissertations (Dissertation Abstracts List of Records, 2005). The research history of the instrument has allowed the authors to establish reliability and validity figures. Reliability has been established through estimates of internal consistency reliability rather than test/re-test reliability because the instrument is designed to give a “snapshot of the individual” rather than a measure of the individual’s personhood (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Coefficient alpha values for the current SACQ range from .81 to .90 for the Academic Adjustment subscale, .83 to .91 for the Social Adjustment subscale, .77 to .86 for the Personal-Emotional Adjustment subscale, .85 to .91 for the Attachment subscale and .92 to .95 for the Full Scale (Baker & Siryk, 1999).

SACQ validity was established from inter-correlation data from 34 separate administrations of the questionnaire at 21 different colleges and universities. The Academic Adjustment subscale shares one item with the Attachment subscale and the Attachment subscale shares eight items with the Social Adjustment subscale, so consequently the intercorrelation figures are higher for these pairings. For the other pairings, the intercorrelation figures garnered from the 16 small-school samples (Clark, Holy Cross, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute) and the other 18 samples from other institutions are comparable: Academic Adjustment/Social Adjustment, .45 and .39; Academic Adjustment/ Personal-Emotional Adjustment, .60 and .55; and Social Adjustment/ Personal-Emotional Adjustment, .49 and .42 (Baker & Siryk, 1999). In

addition, the original questionnaire and the later 67 item questionnaire were validated through criterion relations.

### *Data Analysis*

Once all of the surveys were administered and raw scores were translated into standardized T-scores, the T-scores were analyzed through the use of a two-tailed t-test for unequal variances in order to evaluate a set of research hypotheses designed to investigate whether first generation adult college students' adjustment to college differs from continuing generation college students' adjustment. Further analysis using the two-tailed t-test for unequal variances was used to examine whether mean score differences existed when the population was analyzed by race (White compared to Non-White), and by gender.

Given the lack of a comprehensive research base that could allow a directional hypothesis, all data were analyzed using a two-tailed t-test for unequal variances with the assumption of no difference in means between the research populations. The following hypotheses were tested:

1.  $H_{01a}$ : there is no significant difference in overall mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.
2.  $H_{01b}$ : there is no significant difference in academic adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.
3.  $H_{01c}$ : there is no significant difference in personal/emotional adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.

4. H<sub>01d</sub>: there is no significant difference in social adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.
5. H<sub>01e</sub>: there is no significant difference in institutional adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.
6. H<sub>02a</sub>: there is no significant difference in overall mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.
7. H<sub>02b</sub>: there is no significant difference in academic adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.
8. H<sub>02c</sub>: there is no significant difference in personal/emotional adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.
9. H<sub>02d</sub>: there is no significant difference in social mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.
10. H<sub>02e</sub>: there is no significant difference in institutional attachment mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.
11. H<sub>03a</sub>: there is no significant difference in overall mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.
12. H<sub>03b</sub>: : there is no significant difference in academic adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.
13. H<sub>03c</sub>: : there is no significant difference in personal/emotional mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.
14. H<sub>03d</sub>: : there is no significant difference in social adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.

15.  $H_{03e}$ : : there is no significant difference in institutional attachment mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.

### *Qualitative Instrumentation and Analysis*

#### *Instrument*

As the creators of the SACQ point out, assessment of self-reported adjustment to college, especially in light of the transparency of the measurement tool, is a difficult and complex task (Baker & Siryk, 1999). Baker and Siryk (1999) suggest that the results of the SACQ should be supplemented, corroborated if possible, and investigated by use of the personal interview. The addition of the personal interview lends an aspect of qualitative inquiry to this study. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complete, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 6)

By adding the personal interview, the researcher was better able to explore the complexities of being a newly-participating, adult student.

According to “Designing Structured Interviews for Educational Research” (Department of Education, 1997), once the appropriate respondents are selected, the most important criteria for writing interview questions are relevance and ease of response. Accordingly, and in order to establish questions with a high degree of relevance, the interview protocol that was used in this study was designed through use of a pilot study and was patterned after the SACQ in that it contained questions in each of the four areas of the adaptation subscales: academic adjustment, social adjustment,

personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment. In addition, the protocol included questions regarding the choice to enroll in college and the life transitions represented by returning to school.

To facilitate ease of response, the protocol was organized into categories. Each participant was asked a minimum of one core question in each of the categories. From that question, the participants guided the questioning through their own answers. Those participants who had more to say in any particular area were asked more questions in that area. As categories began to emerge throughout the interview process, more questions became standard within each interview, with the result being that the interviews became slightly more standardized as the interviews progressed.

These 16 were then personally interviewed concerning their experiences as college students and adaptation to the college environment. Each interviewee agreed to an approximately one-hour, semi-structured interview conducted either face-to-face at a conference room in the library of the university or on the telephone as dictated by the schedule and preference of the interviewee.

All interviews were audio taped using a cassette player and were transcribed into typed transcripts by the researcher. Additional follow-up questions were handled by email and telephone contact. All interviews were conducted within a five-day period between the dates of May 16, 2005 through May 19, 2005. The researcher's intention in scheduling interviews as close together as possible was to minimize the likelihood of a major confounding event.

### *Data Analysis*

Immediately upon conducting an interview, the researcher made field notes with impressions and insights into emerging themes and possible thematic saturation. It became clear to the researcher as the interviews unfolded that it would be in the best interest of the study to attempt to maximize the number of interviews to ensure category saturation. After each interview, the researcher transcribed the taped data into typed transcripts. Then, by prior arrangement, each transcript was emailed to the interviewee to be checked for accuracy, completeness, and privacy issues. Two transcripts were modified as a result of this process. Once the transcripts were returned and modified as necessary, they were subjected to coding.

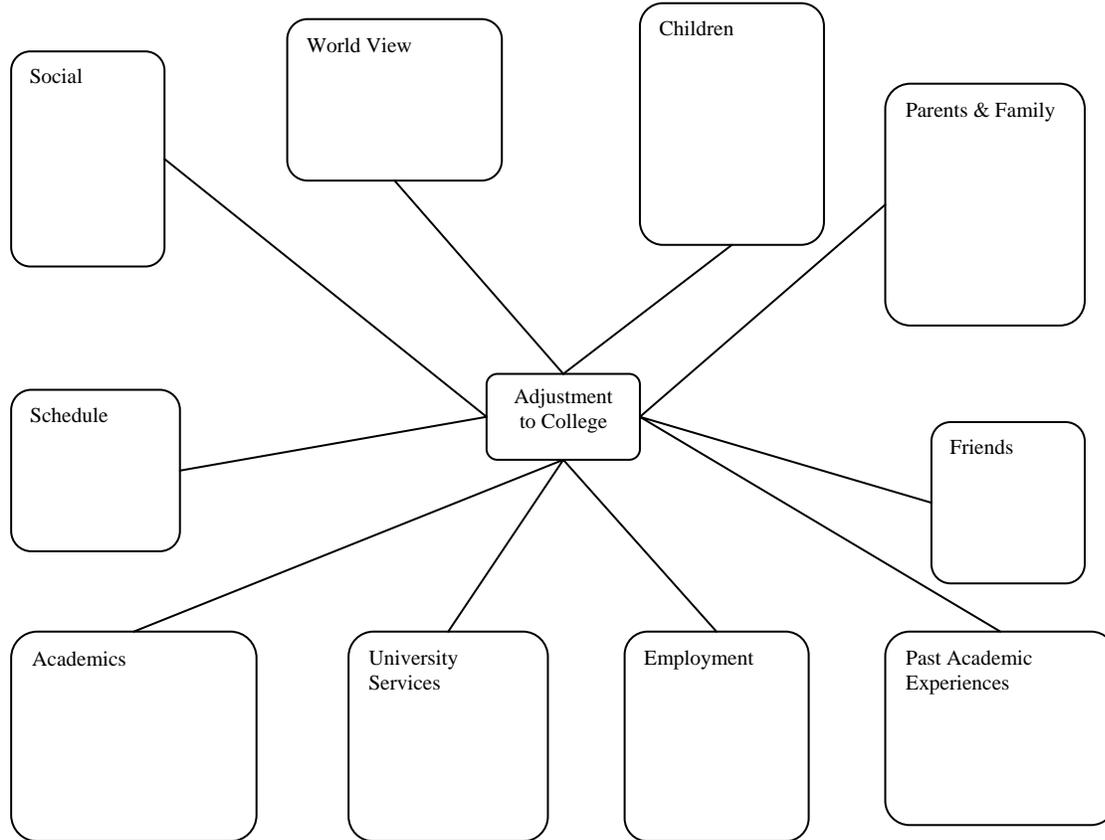
After initial coding was completed, and without initial coding cooperation, the researcher forwarded the transcripts to an outside reader for parallel coding. Once both researchers had their initial coding categories and any additional impressions recorded, they began a process of cooperation and consultation to finalize a coding scheme and to agree on overarching themes in the data. Thus, this initial data analysis phase yielded ten coding categories and separate but often related overarching themes in the data. The coding categories identified by the researcher and supported by the outside reader are:

1. Comments about Social Influences at the University
2. World View Characteristics of Interviewee
3. Comments About Interviewee's Children
4. Comments About Interviewee's Parents and Family
5. Comments About the Interviewee's Friends

6. Interviewee's Past Academic Experiences
7. Comments about Interviewee's Employment and Employer
8. Comments about University Services Offered by the University
9. Comments about Interviewee's Academic Experience at the University
10. Comments about Interviewee's Personal Scheduling

The coding categories were then organized into a generic flowchart designed to organize these data in a clear, visual manner. The goal was to fill out a flowchart for each interviewee and thereby visually explicate each individual's college adaptation while simultaneously allowing any meta themes in the data to be easier to identify and communicate:

Figure 2: Flowchart Template



Therefore, using this generic flowchart as a template, an individualized flowchart was created for each of the interviewees (Appendices G-V). Each piece of data that was fitted into an individualized flowchart was then assigned a value that both the researcher and the outside reader agreed upon: (+) for categories that positively influenced the interviewee’s adaptation to college; (-) for categories negatively influencing the interviewee’s adaptation to college; and (n) for categories that seemed neutral with respect to the interviewee’s adaptation to college. If on the flowchart a coding “box” contained only negative influences, the box was shaded gray. If the box contained only positive influences, the box was left “white.” When the box contained both positive and negative influences, the box was shaded with a stripe pattern. Boxes that contained only neutral influences were given a dotted border. When a box contained neutral and

positive influences, it was categorized as positive and vice versa for boxes containing neutral and negative influences.

What emerged was a set of sixteen individualized flowcharts that each functioned as a type of cognitive map of the interviewee's adaptation to college. These maps could then be interpreted individually, collectively, and comparatively allowing the researcher to assign a rough relative college adaptation rank to each of the sixteen interviewees (Appendix W). At this point, each interviewee was assigned a new name by the researcher. Care was taken to choose names that would protect the identity of the students while still evoking who they are as people.

### *Summary*

This research design contains two elements: the objective measurement of college adaptation offered by the use of the SACQ and the more subjective measurement offered by personal interviewing. Every attempt was made to make all qualitative observations as unbiased as possible including using two researchers to develop the coding categories and thematic observations. This study utilized a mixed methodological design in an attempt to fully describe the researched group.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results

*When I was younger, none of my family went to college. They never pushed the issue that when you get out of high school you need to go to college. Never touched it. And when I sat back and looked at my son, he's only in the first grade, but his real father has no college, none of his family does, and my family doesn't have college, and that's not a good example for him when today's society is the way it is. You gotta have some type of degree. So I looked at it: hey I'm going to make the first move. That way he can see that he can do it. (First generation student, Stephanie Miller, personal communication, May 16, 2005)*

### *Introduction*

What follows are the data collected from a two-part research study designed to explore the college adaptation of a group of first generation, adult college students. The initial portion of the study used a quantitative measure to gauge if the first generation students enrolled in an adults-only associate's degree program at a private Midwestern liberal arts college are adapting as well to college as their continuing generation peers. This section of the study also takes a look at the data from the point of view of race/ethnicity and gender to help understand the data as a whole.

The second portion of the study uses the personal interview as a qualitative measure to delve in-depth into the college adaptation of sixteen first generation volunteers taken from the original survey pool. The qualitative data is then presented narratively in order to communicate the data's meta themes.

## *Quantitative Findings*

### *Introduction*

For the quantitative portion of this study, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was administered to all available freshmen enrolled in an adult associate's degree program on the main campus of a Midwestern liberal arts college during the spring semester, 2005. Freshmen were identified through visiting all freshmen courses offered in the PACE program and accepting self-reporting data. A total of 60 surveys were administered, and of these, 55 were deemed useable. Five surveys were returned with self-reported data indicating that the student was not a college freshman.

### *Demographic Characteristics of the Sample*

Every effort was made to capture all adult freshmen in an attempt to have the greatest possible racial and ethnic diversity of the sample. Later interviews done with a sub-sample of this group indicate that some of this demographic data was inconsistently reported in the original survey. For example, there were zero self-reporting first generation Hispanic SACQ survey respondents, yet there were two self-defining Hispanic interview respondents and one additional interview respondent who self-identified as mixed race White/Hispanic. In addition, the survey data indicated that there was only one African American male in the sample, but two interview respondents self-identified as African American.

The self-reported demographic data as reported indicates twenty-seven percent of the survey population was non-White, and sixty-seven percent of this number self-reported as first generation students. Judging from the numbers as presented in Table

2, more first generation students were female than male, and while there were more first generation students who were White than Black, a larger percentage of Black students was first generation as compared to White students (see below).

Table 2  
*Demographics of the Research*

	First Generation	Continuing Generation	Total	%
Sample	32	23	55	100
Female	24	10	34	62
Male	8	13	21	38
Asian	0	1	1	2
Black	9	1	10	18
Hispanic	0	3	3	5
Native American	1	0	1	2
White	22	18	40	73
Non-White	10	5	15	27
White	22	18	40	73
21-24	1	2	3	5
25-35	8	10	18	33
36-45	11	6	17	31
46+	5	1	6	11
Non Reporting	8	3	11	20

*Discussion of SACQ Results by Generational Status*

The SACQ's scoring system automatically converts raw survey scores into standardized T-scores, and in order to test whether groups were adjusting to college differently from each other, simple two-tailed t-tests for unequal variance conducted. A two-tailed test was chosen because there was no overwhelming body of data to indicate that a reasonable directional hypothesis was possible with this data. Initially, the data were tested to see if a difference existed in the overall mean SACQ scores for first generation students versus continuing generation students. The hypotheses for these

data were as follows:  $H_{01a}$ : there is no significant difference in overall mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.

Table 3  
*t-test Results for Overall SACQ Score Means by Generational Status*

	First Generation	Continuing Generation
Mean	45.78	53.39
Variance	102.37	84.07
Observations	32	23

n=55  
alpha=.05  
 $H_{01a}$ = No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.00856  
P(T≤t) two-tail = .005431

At a .05 alpha, the data prove to be significant, and therefore the null hypothesis for these data was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference in overall college adjustment of first generation adult college students as compared to continuing generation adult college students as measured by the SACQ. Overall, the first generation adult college students in this sample were adjusting less well to the college experience than are their continuing generation peers. This trend is easier to see with a line graph:

Figure 3: Distribution of SACQ Scores by Generational Status

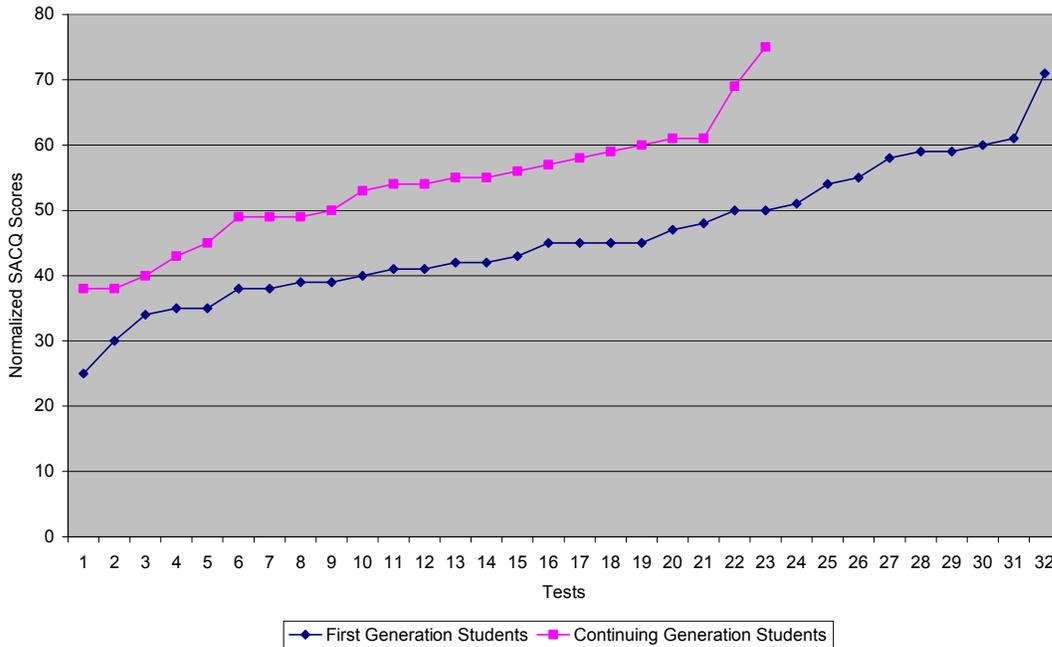


Figure Two illustrates that the first generation SACQ T-scores are lower than the continuing generation T-scores across the board. In fact, 66% of the first generation scores fall below the mean, whereas only 35% of the continuing generation scores do.

The overall SACQ score is also broken down into four subscales: academic adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment. It is instructive to investigate each of these four subscales for more specific information regarding the differences in these populations. Each of the four subscales was analyzed using the same t-tests. For the academic adjustment subscale, the hypothesis was as follows:  $H_{01b}$ : there is no significant difference in academic adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.

---

Table 4

*t-test Results for SACQ Academic Subscale Score Means by Generational Status*

---

	First Generation	Continuing Generation
Mean	50.94	56.09
Variance	116.71	88.54
Observations	32	23

n=55

alpha=.05

H<sub>01b</sub>= No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.007582

P(T≤t) two-tail = .065721

---

At a .05 alpha, the null hypothesis of no difference between the mean academic adjustment subscale scores is accepted. There is no statistical difference between the academic adjustment of first generation adult college students as compared to continuing generation adult college students at a .05 alpha level. The data does, however, appear to be approaching significance with an alpha of .0657.

For the personal/emotional subscale, the hypothesis was as follows: H<sub>01c</sub>: there is no significant difference in personal/emotional adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.

Table 5  
*t-test Results for SACQ Personal/Emotional Subscale Score Means by Generational Status*

	First Generation	Continuing Generation
Mean	44.63	51.87
Variance	114.76	104.39
Observations	32	23

n=55

alpha=.05

H<sub>01c</sub>= No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.009574

P(T≤t) two-tail = .01425

At a .05 alpha, the data prove to be significant, and therefore the null hypothesis for these data was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference in personal/emotional adjustment of first generation adult college students as compared to continuing generation adult college students as measured by the SACQ. In these data, first generation students' personal/emotional adjustment to college T-scores are lower than the personal/emotional adjustment T-scores of continuing generation students.

For the social subscale, the hypothesis was as follows: H<sub>01d</sub>: there is no significant difference in social adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.

Table 6

*t-test Results for SACQ Social Subscale Score Means by Generational Status*

	First Generation	Continuing Generation
Mean	41.88	47.09
Variance	45.21	39.08
Observations	32	23

n=55

alpha=.05

H<sub>01a</sub>= No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 1.675905

P(T≤t) two-tail = .004765

At a .05 alpha, the data prove to be significant, and therefore the null hypothesis for these data was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference in social adjustment of first generation adult college students as compared to continuing generation adult college students as measured by the SACQ. In these data, first generation students' social adjustment T-scores are lower than the personal/emotional adjustment T-scores of the continuing generation students.

For the institutional attachment subscale, the hypothesis was as follows: H<sub>01e</sub>: there is no significant difference in institutional adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between first generation students and continuing generation students.

---

Table 7

*t-test Results for SACQ Institutional Attachment Subscale Score Means by Generational Status*

---

	First Generation	Continuing Generation
Mean	48.16	54.26
Variance	79.56	69.10
Observations	32	23

n=55

alpha=.05

H<sub>01a</sub>= No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 1.676551

P(T≤t) two-tail = .012097

---

At a .05 alpha, the data prove to be significant, and therefore the null hypothesis for these data was rejected. There was a statistically significant difference in institutional attachment of first generation adult college students as compared to continuing generation adult college students as measured by the SACQ. In these data, first generation students' institutional T-scores are lower than the institutional attachment T-scores of continuing generation students.

*Summary of SACQ Results by Generational Status.*

T-test analysis of the SACQ data indicates significant differences in the adjustment of first generation adult students when comparing them to continuing generation adult students in this sample. On the overall measure to college adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment first generation students scored significantly lower than did their continuing generation peers. Only academic adjustment failed to be significant at the .05 level, but approached significance at .0657.

### *Discussion of SACQ Results by Race/Ethnicity*

The overall number of non-White students in this sample was not high enough to allow these data to be analyzed by specific racial and ethnic categories. In an effort to allow some discussion of these data by race/ethnicity, the researcher chose to compare the adjustment of White adult college students with that of non-White adult college students. These data were analyzed with the same techniques used to investigate the mean scores of first generation students compared with continuing generation students. Once again, the data were subjected to two-tailed t-tests for unequal variance. A two-tailed test was chosen because there existed no overwhelming body of data to indicate that a reasonable directional hypothesis was possible with this data. Initially, the data were tested to see if a difference existed in the overall mean SACQ scores for White students compared with non-White students. The hypotheses for these data were as follows:  $H_{02a}$ : there is no significant difference in overall mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.

---

Table 8  
*t-test Results for Overall SACQ Score Means by Race/Ethnicity*

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	White	non-White
Mean	49.15	48.47
Variance	119.11	81.98
Observations	40	15

n=55

alpha=.05

$H_{02a}$ = No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.04227

P(T≤t) two-tail = .815674

---

At a .05 alpha, the data prove be not statistically significant. The null hypotheses for these data is accepted. It appears that Whites and non-Whites in this sample are adjusting to college equally well as measured by the overall SACQ scores.

As with the generational data, the overall score is also broken down into four subscales: academic adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment. Further investigation of the data is warranted to examine whether the lack of significant differences in adjustment by race persists across all of the SACQ data. Consequently, each of the four subscales was analyzed using the same two-tailed t-test. For the academic adjustment subscale, the hypothesis was as follows:  $H_{02b}$ : there is no significant difference in academic adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.

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Table 9  
*t-test Results for SACQ Academic Subscale Score Means by Race/Ethnicity*

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	White	non-White
Mean	52.76	53.93
Variance	109.82	115.92
Observations	40	15

n=55  
alpha=.05  
 $H_{02b}$ = No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.059537  
P(T≤t) two-tail = .72341

---

At a .05 alpha, the null hypothesis of no difference between the mean academic adjustment subscale scores is accepted. There is no statistical difference between the academic adjustment of White students compared to non-White students as measured by the SACQ in this sample.

For the personal/emotional subscale, the hypothesis was as follows:  $H_{02c}$ : there is no significant difference in personal/emotional adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.

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Table 10  
*t-test Results for SACQ Personal/Emotional Subscale Score Means by Race/Ethnicity*

---

	White	non-White
Mean	48.33	45.87
Variance	135.05	87.41
Observations	40	15

n=55  
 alpha=.05  
 $H_{02c}$ = No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.039515  
 P(T≤t) two-tail = .423924

---

At a .05 alpha, the null hypothesis of no difference between the mean personal/emotional adjustment subscale scores is accepted. There is no statistical difference between the personal/emotional adjustment of White students compared to non-White students as measured by the SACQ in this sample.

For the social subscale, the hypothesis was as follows:  $H_{02d}$ : there is no significant difference in social mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.

Table 11

*t-test Results for SACQ Social Subscale Score Means by Race/Ethnicity*

	White	non-White
Mean	44.13	43.87
Variance	56.47	30.12
Observations	40	15

n=55

alpha=.05

H<sub>02d</sub>= No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.032243

P(T≤t) two-tail = .889729

At a .05 alpha, the null hypothesis of no difference between the mean social adjustment subscale scores is accepted. There is no statistical difference between the social adjustment of White students compared to non-White students as measured by the SACQ in this sample.

For the institutional attachment subscale, the hypothesis was as follows: H<sub>02e</sub>: there is no significant difference in institutional attachment mean scores on the SACQ between White and non-White students.

Table 12

*t-test Results for SACQ Institutional Attachment Subscale Score Means by Race/Ethnicity*

	White	non-White
Mean	51.30	49.13
Variance	94.52	53.27
Observations	40	15

n=55

alpha=.05

H<sub>02e</sub>= No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.032243

P(T≤t) two-tail = .379227

At a .05 alpha, the null hypothesis of no difference between the mean institutional attachment subscale scores is accepted. There is no statistical difference between the institutional attachment of White students compared to non-White students as measured by the SACQ in this sample.

*Summary of SACQ Results by Race/Ethnicity.*

In contrast to the SACQ data analysis by generational status, the analysis by race/ethnicity shows no statistically significant results. On the overall measure of college adjustment and on all four subscales, the null hypotheses of no difference in mean scores between White and non-White students failed to be rejected. These results are tempered by the observation that some of the survey respondents self reported a different race/ethnicity during the SACQ survey process from the one reported when they were interviewed. Of the 17 students from this sample who were chosen to be interviewed in the qualitative portion of the study, two interviewees self described as Hispanic and one of mixed race White/Hispanic. Two men self reported as African American. Yet the self-reported demographic data associated with SACQ results indicates that the sample contained three Hispanic students and all three of them reported as continuing generation students. In addition, in these data, only one man self reported as African American, but two men self described themselves as African American in the qualitative portion of the study. If these students represented their race/ethnicity as White rather than Hispanic or Black, it would be expected that less difference in means would exist on all survey measures by race/ethnicity.

### *Discussion of SACQ Results by Gender*

Finally, to investigate any difference in mean scores by gender the data were analyzed with the same techniques used to investigate the mean scores of generational status and those of race. Once again, two-tailed t-tests for unequal variance using Microsoft Excel were used to analyze the data. A two-tailed test was chosen because there existed no overwhelming body of data to indicate that a reasonable directional hypothesis was possible with this data. Initially, the data were tested to see if a difference existed in the overall mean SACQ scores for female students compared with male students. The hypotheses for these data were as follows:  $H_{03a}$ : there is no significant difference in overall mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.

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Table 13  
*t-test Results for Overall SACQ Score Means by Gender*

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	Female	Male
Mean	47.88	50.71
Variance	118.41	89.31
Observations	34	21

n=55

alpha=.05

$H_{03a}$ = No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.011739

P(T≤t) two-tail = .313796

---

At a .05 alpha, the data prove to not be statistically significant. The null hypotheses for these data is accepted. It appears that females and males in this sample are adjusting to college equally well as measured by the SACQ.

As with the generational data, the overall score is also broken down into four subscales: academic adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, social adjustment,

and institutional attachment. Further investigation of the data was warranted to examine whether the lack of significant differences in adjustment by gender persists across all of the SACQ data categories. Consequently, each of the four subscales was analyzed using the same two-tailed t-test. For the academic adjustment subscale, the hypothesis was as follows:  $H_{03b}$ : there is no significant difference in academic adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.

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Table 14  
*t-test Results for SACQ Academic Subscale Score Means by Gender*

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	Female	Male
Mean	52.79	53.57
Variance	126.29	87.26
Observations	34	21

n=55  
alpha=.05  
 $H_{03b}$ = No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.010634  
P(T≤t) two-tail = .782901

---

At a .05 alpha, the null hypothesis of no difference between the mean academic adjustment subscale scores is accepted. There is no statistical difference between the academic adjustment of female students compared to male students as measured by the SACQ in this sample.

For the personal/emotional subscale, the hypothesis was as follows:  $H_{03c}$ : there is no significant difference in personal/emotional mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.

Table 15  
*t-test Results for SACQ Personal/Emotional Subscale Score Means by Gender*

	Female	Male
Mean	45.88	50.52
Variance	137.56	86.86
Observations	34	21

n=55  
 alpha=.05  
 H<sub>03c</sub>= No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.00856  
 P(T≤t) two-tail = .110958

At a .05 alpha, the null hypothesis of no difference between the mean personal/emotional adjustment subscale scores is accepted. There is no statistical difference between the personal/emotional adjustment of female students compared to male students as measured by the SACQ in this sample.

For the social subscale, the hypothesis was as follows: H<sub>03d</sub>: there is no significant difference in social adjustment mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.

Table 16  
*t-test Results for SACQ Social Subscale Score Means by Gender*

	Female	Male
Mean	43.09	45.62
Variance	40.45	60.35
Observations	34	21

n=55  
 alpha=.05  
 H<sub>03d</sub>= No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.028091  
 P(T≤t) two-tail = .217382

At a .05 alpha, the null hypothesis of no difference between the mean social adjustment subscale scores is accepted. There is no statistical difference between the social adjustment of female students compared to male students as measured by the SACQ in this sample.

For the institutional attachment subscale, the hypothesis was as follows:  $H_{03e}$ : there is no significant difference in institutional attachment mean scores on the SACQ between male and female students.

Table 17  
*t-test Results for SACQ Institutional Attachment Subscale Score Means by Gender*

	Female	Male
Mean	49.94	52.00
Variance	91.60	70.20
Observations	34	21

n=55  
alpha=.05  
 $H_{03e}$ = No difference in means

T critical two-tail = 2.011739  
P(T≤t) two-tail = .399685

At a .05 alpha, the null hypothesis of no difference between the mean institutional attachment subscale scores is accepted. There is no statistical difference between the institutional attachment of female students compared to male students in this sample as measured by the SACQ.

*Summary of SACQ Results by Gender.*

As with the SACQ data analysis by race/ethnicity, the t-test analysis by gender shows no statistically significant results. On the overall measure of college adjustment and on all four subscales, the null hypotheses of no difference in mean scores between female and male students are accepted.

### *Summary of Quantitative Findings*

According to analysis by two-tailed t-tests, the only statistically significant differences in the SACQ survey results were found when comparing the mean scores of the first generation students with those of the continuing generation students in the sample. Of the five separate measures, the overall score, academic adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, social adjustment and institutional attachment, only academic adjustment failed to show a statistically significant difference. Analysis comparing the sample by race/ethnicity as measured by comparing the mean scores of White students with the mean scores of non-White students showed no statistically significant differences. These results are tempered by the observation that the self-reported race/ethnicity data associated with the SACQ may be unreliable. Finally, further analysis comparing the mean scores of female students with male students once again showed no statistically significant differences between groups.

### *Qualitative Findings*

#### *Introduction*

What follows is designed to be a narrative description of the first generation adult college student volunteers' adaptation to college based upon their personal interviews and the coding that organize that data. Supportive charts and tables have been assigned to appendices so the flow of the narrative will not be interrupted. After introducing the interviewees, this account will discuss the themes relating to the students' adaptation to college based upon the analysis made possible by the flowcharts. After this discussion and a short summary of the themes, the account will turn to additional meta themes in the interview data.

These meta themes emerged from the analysis of the coding and flowcharts, but they did not necessarily relate directly to the students' adaptation so they would not have come out in the earlier discussion. Given that all interviewees are first generation students, this discussion does not include a comparison of first and continuing generation experiences. These findings focus on the voices of the students themselves, and what follows is an honest attempt to hear and make sense of those voices.

### *Meet the Group*

What follows is introductory information about each of the sixteen study participants. All students names have been changed to protect their anonymity. Quotations are word-for-word except where participants discussed the university by name. In those instances, the quotation was modified to read "the university."

*Tammi Keane, Thirty-six, Married, White.*

Tammi is a homemaker and a married mother of three children. Now that her oldest child is eighteen and preparing to move out on her own, Tammi has come to a time in her life when she feels her children no longer need her constant attention and she has time to come to college. As she says:

[I decided to come to college now because] my children were grown and going out and putting in job applications, and it was hard to find a job and all that. And I figured I've got this free time and whatever, so I might as well go to do something with my life.

*Max Porter, Forty-two, Married, Mixed Race White/Native American.*

Max is the married father of four children, all but one of whom are grown and on their own. His wife of 22 years calls him a “workaholic” and Max agrees that might be a good description of him. Max has worked in the aircraft industry most of his adult life, and his current employer is now paying his way through college. If that funding is no longer possible, Max has a fall-back plan: as a partial Osage Indian, Max hopes that he could receive a tribal scholarship if his employer’s tuition remission ever comes to an end. Max is independent and resourceful, and he takes pride in that. When asked about his parents’ support for his decision to go to college he says:

Probably the best...the reason they are most proud is that [I have] pursued those avenues on [my] own without asking for any assistance from them. Not knowing that they couldn’t help but knowing that [I am] independent enough to see [my own] funding for school.

*Stephanie Miller, Twenty-six, Married, White.*

Stephanie chose the university because her husband’s grandmother graduated from it many years ago. She chose this time to begin her education for a wide variety of reasons, most of which seem to have something to do with her children. As she says:

I got four kids and it’s expensive to raise ‘em, so I wanted to go to college and get a degree and be able to find a better-paying job to help support them. I also wanted to give them a little push like to say: “hey, when you get older, you need to go to college.”

Her long-term plan is to stay in college for an advanced degree. She would like to become a psychologist.

*Charles Freeman, Forty, Married, African American.*

If Charles could pick his fate, he probably would not choose to go to college. He enrolled at the university because he sustained a back injury while serving for the U.S. Army in the Iraq War. Now, he finds himself unable comfortably to do the physical work he had done prior to his deployment. Charles sees college as something best completed while young so that it can be “done” by the time adult responsibilities kick in. In his own words:

I explained to [my daughter] that it’s best to try to get your schooling done when you’re young. No one really explained that to me when I was young. And I’m trying to instill that in her, so I think it’s sinking in...

*Nia Williams, Twenty-seven, Never Married, African American.*

Nia’s relationship with her older brother is a profound influence on her. His success with his bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and now Ph.D. program have shown her that success is possible in higher education. Today, college is Nia’s top priority, even out-ranking her job. The cost of the university is her only real concern:

The money part I’m not so happy with, but I figure I’m not going to worry about it. When I first went in to talk to one of the advisors, she had told me that she’s in debt bunches of money [from her schooling] and that she would take that debt over anything. And I got to thinking that yes, she’s right. Because education takes you a long way...[further than] a car or a house or something.

*Todd Farmer, Thirty-five, Divorced, White.*

Todd drives 90 minutes one way to get to the university. That drive has turned out to be more of a burden on his personal life and business than he expected. But this

challenge, like many others Todd is facing with school, is a thing that he sees as individual and not an aspect of his first generation status. In fact, like many other interviewees, Todd did not think of himself as a first generation student until he was asked about it for this research. He says:

I mean...when you mention that term [first generation student], I'm picturing somebody in Kentucky whose parents hardly went to grade school and .... "is this child going to make it?" you know? I don't see this as that big a hurdle.

Nevertheless, Todd describes college as stressful and by the end of spring semester he had abandoned plans to take summer classes.

*Oscar Oliva, Twenty-five, Married, Hispanic (Honduran Immigrant).*

Graduating from college is very important to Oscar. This theme comes out again and again in his interview. Initially Oscar faced many schedule-related challenges, but those have mitigated over time as he has worked out his time needs with his wife and developed more confidence in the classroom. He says:

Um, well getting used to it [college] first of all, was really hard. Trying to find the time to do the work after getting home and then trying to spend time with the family was really hard....Now it's kinda...I'm getting used to my schedule now, and it's kinda fitting in that way, you know? So it's getting easier.

*Fletcher Valadez, Thirty-nine, Divorced, Mixed Race (White/Hispanic).*

Fletcher has been a single parent for eleven years, and now his children are getting old enough for him to consider college. His goals center completely on his own desire to learn and better himself personally. His current degree aspirations are, however, dictated completely by his employer's willingness to pay for computer and

business degrees only. His long-term goal is to become a teacher. As for his education at the university, Fletcher is skeptical:

I'm almost under the impression that at [the university] we are getting a watered-down education. I think they are easy on us....It's the fact that I'm doing well that makes me skeptical. Because the work...it's a little bit challenging, and I have to spend some time, but it's not...maybe it's my perception of what I thought it would be like.

*Diane Palmer, Twenty-eight, Married, White.*

Diane initially chose the university because of its Christian heritage. She did not want to be “in the secular world” and saw the university as a place where she could get a degree to move up in her company without having to be exposed to secularism. Her situation has changed somewhat from first enrolling. Her schedule overload was so significant that she and her husband made a “family decision” for her to quit her job and become a full-time homemaker. She has also discovered that the university, while having a Christian heritage, is not nearly as conservative as she had thought or hoped. Regardless, she is happy to be enrolled in college so she can function as a role-model to her children:

[I came to college to] get a degree and turn the cycle in my family because, you know, my mom dropped out of high school and had me when she was 18, and I had my daughter when I was 18 but still graduated from high school, so I am kinda hoping that by going to college that [my daughters will] get all that done BEFORE they start a family...”

*Ida Harris, Forty-four, Divorced, African American.*

Ida has come a very long way. As a child she was one of eleven children living a very challenging life in southern Georgia. She attributes the high value she places on education to these early experiences:

We didn't...our life wasn't very good. That's another story in itself. We were like poor poor and staying in the deep South and all that. We didn't have a lot. That was a motivation right there. To get an education. You know you don't want to live like that all your life.

Today, Ida has two adult children, both of whom have attended college. Her son is about to graduate with a teaching degree. In her spare time, Ida is a voracious pleasure reader. She says that although she has never been able to travel, books have taken her all over the world.

*Olivia Smith, Thirty-three, Never Married, Hispanic (Mexican American).*

Olivia has faced more overt opposition and skepticism about her desire to go to college than most of the other interviewees. She attributes these challenges to her cultural ethnicity. Nevertheless, even in the face of poor family support, Olivia is happy that she has chosen to go to college and is happy about the university particularly. She says:

I haven't really had a whole lot of support from my family members which I was kinda expecting that too, so it doesn't bother me or anything like that. It was just a reaction that I knew that I would get from them. Kinda of a little skeptical. I guess because I'm Mexican-American. So, it's more like a cultural thing. They

don't ... they view success as the type of job you have or how much money you make, it's not about going to college.

*Robert Kern, Forty-nine, Divorced, White.*

Robert came to the university because his career field has dried up. He needs a new skill-set to find a completely different kind of job. At the same time, he is enjoying his college experience. He chose to attend a technical school and bypass college early in his life because of a bad experience in seventh grade English class:

I had an English teacher when I was in junior high school that [I] still to this day remember held up a thesis and said "you people can't even put together a good English sentence, how do you ever expect to write one of these in college?" and to me, that just stuck in my head. Ok, how am I ever going to be able to write one of those if I go to college, a four-year college? And that's one of the main reasons why I stayed away was because of English.

That experience has haunted him for many years. His success in writing classes has been a surprise to Robert, but a welcome one.

*Samson Rivers, Twenty-seven, Married, African American.*

Samson desperately needs a "normal life," and he sees college as a way to get it. As a child he was a ward of the state and did not have a relationship with his parents. After he turned eighteen years old, he was forced out of the foster care system and sent out on his own. Although he wanted to go to college, the cost of living kept him working two jobs and he felt that he did not have time for school. Today, Samson is the father of twin girls; he works full-time on third shift; and he and his wife share childcare duties in the home. He says:

I'm tired. I feel like I've been continuously working for 14 years and it's just trying to get things where I want to stop and actually relax. I want to get to a point in life where...I just go to work, have a life with my family, and have enough time to do so.

*Veronica White, Fifty-three, Divorced, African American.*

Veronica has tried college before, but each time she enrolled, she discovered she was pregnant and dropped out. Today, her sons are 27 and 17, and now it is time for her to try again. She says that up until now she has been living her life for her children, and even going to college is a way that she is defining who she is and what she does at least partly in terms of her children:

Now my son's going to be going to college....He's going to be a senior next fall and he wants to go to Southwestern. And you know, I want to let him know, you know? I want to show him something too....A parent is always a role model. Or should be, anyway.

In addition to wanting to be a role model for her children, Veronica brings a personal drive to succeed to her college experience.

*Michelle Guthrie, Thirty-one, Divorced, White.*

The day Michelle received the papers saying that she was officially divorced, she decided on impulse to consider college. She walked in to the university with some questions about financial aid and walked out enrolled for the upcoming semester. Right now, college is fun for Michelle, and that is good because as she says, if it were not fun or comfortable she would probably drop out:

I just jumped right in here and they made me feel comfortable, so until I'm not comfortable anymore, I'll stay right here....I'll just know [when I need to leave] when it comes along. It could be anywhere from not clicking right with a professor to starting to have problems with other students in the classes or whatever or if is that testy faculty member that really irks me off or something, then I'll start looking around elsewhere.

*Maggie Hubbard, Forty, Married, White.*

Maggie decided to come to college because her husband lost his job and she wanted to be able to make more money to help support their family. Her experiences have been mixed. On the one hand, the registration process made her feel "kind of stupid" and she has faced some significant challenges with institutional services. On the other hand, she finds the adult interactions she has at the university to be fulfilling and she feels that she is learning a lot about herself. These positive feelings are tempered, however, by feelings of guilt that she is taking herself away from her children too early in their lives:

My seven-year-old on the Mother's Day card that he made for me, he put in there that he hoped that I had a great time at work. Which means work and school, because I'm always doing that....And it was kind of sad because...he knows that I'm working on the computer doing my schoolwork after work. So, I think he thinks I really love to do that more than spending time with him.

### *Data Themes*

What follows is a discussion of the themes that emerged from the interview data. The data is hierarchically organized with themes that emerged from the students who

appear to be adjusting least well presented first and then followed by themes that emerged from students with mixed adjustment and ending with themes that emerged from those students who seem to be the strongest adjusters.

*Adapting to College: Just Getting By*

Of the sixteen students who shared their stories with this project, seven of them are encountering fairly significant difficulties with adaptation to college (Appendix W). Two people, Todd Farmer and Charles Freeman seem to be adjusting particularly poorly (Appendices G and H).

Todd's difficulties seem to reach back at least as far as high school. At that time, his parents encouraged both of his sisters to go to college but instead of encouraging Todd, they assumed that he would go directly into the family business after high school: "I think it would have been helpful if my folks had said 'no, you gotta go get your degree first and then come back [to the business].'" Since coming to the university., Todd has had poor experiences in most major areas: university services and programming, academics, scheduling, social relationships, and parent and family support. His experiences with both university services and academics seem to be problematic. Todd is especially critical of his academic advising. In addition, while Todd is goal-focused, his views that education is something that can and should be "finished" and should not be "abstract" do not seem to support his adjustment to the college experience. He also has had motivation problems when attempting homework, finds college stressful, and would not complain to an instructor if he had a problem with a course. As further evidence that Todd is adjusting poorly, he spoke plainly of being relieved about the end of the semester:

I'm glad I don't have class next Wednesday night, I'll put it that way. It was a relief to not have one last Wednesday night, so I'm glad I'm done for a minute....I guess I was thinking about taking some summer classes and [now] I'm not going to do that.

Charles' adaptation problems, while not being quite as dramatic as Todd's, are also serious. Like Todd, Charles was hesitant when discussing his parents' support of his going to college. Charles has a parent/son relationship with his mother only, and Charles feels that his mother does not support him in a "vigorous" way. Charles has struggled academically and this may be due at least in part to a coping skill he adopted in order to keep up with his homework: he does not do all of his reading assignments:

Some of [the schoolwork] was a little overwhelming because I had three different classes that required a lot of reading....so I was reading everything! Word for word! Then some of my friends said "hey, don't read it all! Just kinda skim through it!" Try to get the gist of it.

Ultimately, Charles' difficulties adapting to college might well be linked to his initial trigger, that is, he chose college because of his war injury and not because of a desire to be in college. In addition, since enrolling, Charles has had problems with university services including problems with the financial aid office, complaints about library hours and unsatisfactory experiences with his advisors. Regarding his academic advising, Charles says:

You know, being honest, I don't know what to expect from an advisor, in a sense. Because I've never really had good advice from an advisor other than the fact

that I need to take “this, this, and this.” There’s never been a one-on-one. I don’t know what to expect from them.

Of the twelve categories identified in the data, both Charles and Todd had several “negative” and “mixed” areas, and while each man had one “positive” area, in both cases the positive impacts seem to be overwhelmed by the weight of the adjustment problems indicated by the other categories.

In addition to Todd and Charles, five other students are facing significant challenges in their adjustment to college: Michelle Guthrie, Diane Palmer, Olivia Smith, Maggie Hubbard, and Samson Rivers. These five students share moderate to severe difficulties in scheduling, academics, and university services and programming. In addition, none of these students has positive past academic experiences to support them in their current efforts. Two of these five students, Olivia Smith and Maggie Hubbard are also encountering problems with parent/family support.

#### *Scheduling.*

Scheduling is a serious and universal problem for these students. Only Diane Palmer has managed to address her scheduling problems, and she was only successful by quitting her job:

Oh, when I was working, it was just hectic all the time....Our house was a mess. [T]he kids were on their own a lot, doing their own thing. We didn’t have any time to spend with them....[M]y old supervisor...[asked me] “how did you do it when you were working?” I have to say that honestly I can’t answer that question now. I have no idea.

When talking about scheduling, the other four students used words such as “stressful,” “burnt out,” “struggle,” and “difficult.” Michelle is especially concerned about scheduling difficulties in the future because she found that she had just enough time to keep up with her academic demands this semester, and she did not have a job outside of the home. In the fall semester, her plan is to go to work fulltime while maintaining a fulltime college schedule. Both Olivia and Maggie are concerned how their scheduling impacts their children. Maggie says that missing activities with her children “is the hardest part...”

Finally, there is Samson. Samson’s life is full of demands from providing fulltime childcare to his twin daughters during the day, going to college fulltime in the evenings, and working fulltime on third shift. He is only able to complete his homework by studying while at work, and his daytime childcare duties keep him out of the library and Writing Center. This pace is clearly taking its toll on Samson:

I’m burnt out but I really don’t...some people are burnt out and they show it, but I’m just so used to it. I AM burnt out. In my mind there are a lot of times where I just don’t want to do anything, but I’m so totally used to it...it’s so imbedded in my life that you know it’s part of me. So it doesn’t bother me. I’m numb from the fact that I have to carry so much load.

*Academics.*

Academics were a mixed influence on all five of these students. While none of these students expressed concerns with their grades, two expressed serious concerns about their writing. Samson attributes his difficulties with academic writing to the fact

that he did not begin formal schooling until sixth grade, and Michelle expressed difficulties writing about non-specific topics:

I have a very hard problem, if I know what I'm doing, that's wonderful. But if I have to COME UP with what I'm doing, like when you are going to come up with the idea that you are going to write about, that I really have a hard problem with.

On the other hand, Olivia found her writing experiences to be very positive and her success in them was a motivator to her. Other students in the group did not mention difficulties with writing.

Three of the five students expressed a concern with the content of the classes in which they had enrolled. Learning theory seemed to be a particular concern. Diane Palmer's reaction to theory and theoretical professors was the most extreme but indicative of the general feelings for this group:

I cannot...maybe this is a stereotype, but I cannot stand to listen to a professor who talks, *you know* three feet above my head. I have no idea what they are saying to me and it's almost like they live in a fantasy world about how the world SHOULD be and not how the world really is. I think, ok, that's all nice and utopia and wonderful, but that's not where we are. So talk to me in the real world and then I'll get it. But you can't talk to me outside that world because I don't get it.

Michelle had similar insights but instead of addressing theory directly, she mentioned her concerns about specific coursework, especially anything that would not address itself directly to her desire for a business degree: "I'd rather, you know, be taking something...business oriented, or people-oriented, something that would get you somewhere."

*University Services and Programming.*

The number-one challenge, expressed by four of these five students, centered on academic advising. Only Olivia Smith expressed no concerns with advising due to her coming to her advisor with her “mind set” about what classes she wants. The other students seemed to crave a more personal relationship with their advisor. As Maggie says:

Well, what I thought an advisor would do would be kind of more to I guess spend a little bit more time with me and go over things. But I have felt like I am on my own pretty much. You know, when you go in they hand you a card and tell you to fill it out....When I first started, I thought it was going to be more than that. I thought somebody would go over and explain more to me, but now I know that’s just kind of how it is.

Samson has a similar view, but he is less resigned to his situation. He says that if he could change anything about his experience at the university, it would be the advisors:

The advisors could actually have advising. You know, I guess asking what we want to do. Sometimes I kinda feel like when I go to get my classes, it’s like “ok, what class do you want to take? You need this and this to get out of the way.” I say “ok, I’ll pick that one” [They should ask] “what are you pushing for?” ....I don’t feel like they care or that they are really too interested in me. It’s more getting me through the process and the rest is pretty much on your own.

Diane told stories of unreturned emails and phone calls, missed appointments, and poor advice. She says:

It would be helpful if somebody would get down on a personal level with each individual student and say “ok, let’s look at this from your ultimate goal. Here’s how I think you should put this in order so you get to that goal. I think this is the best plan of action for YOU.” Instead, you walk in with your little card. They ask you what you want to take and you tell them that you don’t know, what should I take? And they say “I don’t know what do you want to take?” [So you say:] “OK, fine! I want to go to school on Wednesday. What’s available on Wednesday?” That pretty much is how it works and I have not been...and maybe that is the job of an advisor, but I just was not happy with the way that they do it.

Advising has not been the only concern these five students expressed about university services and programming. Concerns about the Writing Center’s hours and/or young tutors came out in four of the five interviews. Two students had concerns about the Registrar or the registration process, and one student mentioned that her desired degree is not offered by the university.

#### *Family Support.*

In contrast to the Todd and Charles, both of whom faced some limited family support, only two of these five students had concerns in this area. The remaining three students had universally positive family support. Olivia Smith attributes her family’s lack of support for her college endeavors to be linked to her Mexican-American heritage. She entered in to the college experience expecting this lack of support, so as she says “it doesn’t bother me or anything like that.”

On the other hand, Maggie seems somewhat taken aback by her father’s lack of support. When asked why she thought he didn’t really support her, Maggie said:

I don't know! I think he thinks probably that I have better things to be doing than spending my time doing that. I don't know; I don't know really what he means....But, I think he wants me to be done.

*Bright Spots.*

What sets these five students apart from the Todd and Charles is that these five are unified by two positive influences on their adaptation. They have their children and their social experience in college to help support them even when they struggle to adapt to their new experience at college.

All five of these students want their children to go to college, and they each, in turn, hope that their children will go to college right out of high school. When Olivia was asked why she hopes her children will go to college right out of high school, she answered "because I wish I would have done it because it is just so difficult now trying to work and raise a family and try to juggle my time with school. It's really difficult." Heather echoed that sentiment when she explains that she tells her children to "go to school, go to school. Because [my husband and I] figure that if we can get them to go to school, concentrate on that, before they start anything else in life, that's good." Peggy also spoke of having her children go to college right after high school: "[W]e are going to make sure that they go right after...that they will have the opportunity to go, and I hope that they will following high school. And that way they won't have to do it later when they are working and already have kids."

These five students also are having positive social experiences in college. They speak of "having fun" and making friends in the PACE program, and Maggie and Diane also spoke of the personal fulfillment that college has brought them. Diane mentioned

that while she chose to return to school because of her job, even after she has become a stay-at-home-mom, she feels that she stays because she “really needs to go” for herself. Maggie’s experience has made her happier and more fulfilled. All five of these students have friends or acquaintances in their program, and these relationships make the time they spend at college more fulfilling. Even Samson, who found the older adults difficult to make friends with, has made friends his own age, takes advantage of the student services coffee cart, and has even had some personal discussions with older students. He says of the older students:

They have their cliques, but it doesn’t always stay that way. They will branch out and talk to other people. You know, I think that’s kinda cool. That’s not like the younger kids, you know. THEY have their little clicks, but adults will branch out.

*Just Getting By: A Summary.*

Each of these struggling students is having an individual response to their college experience, yet some interesting themes seem to unite their struggle. Scheduling difficulties and poor academic advising both emerge as dominant themes with all seven students having moderate to severe scheduling problems in the first year of college. Six of these seven students also had moderate to severe difficulties with their academic advising. Largely, their concerns dealt less with poor advice than with perceived perfunctory treatment and a disconnect between what the students wanted by way of advising and what they received. In addition to these dominant themes, lack of family support emerged as a significant sub-theme with four of the seven students making some comments about mixed to poor family support.

Balancing these challenges, the five better-adjusted students in this group of weaker adjusters have their hopes for their children and the emotional support that comes with fulfilling social relationships at college.

*In the Middle: Doing What it Takes*

Three of the sixteen students, Tammi Keane, Ida Harris, and Oscar Oliva, seem to be having a mixed college adaptation. On the one hand, each of these students has at least one of the twelve adjustment categories scored as negative, yet at the same time, they each also have several positive categories and mixed categories. On balance, these three students seem to be adjusting better than the seven lowest adjusters, and in some ways they are doing very well.

Interestingly, while the seven poorest adjusters seemed to have many things in common, these three students have weaker thematic connection with each other, especially when considering the adjustment categories with a negative influence on them. For example, while Tammi and Ida have severe academic adjustment and performance issues, Oscar's academic challenges are much less severe. Yet, Ida's and Oscar's experience with the university has been similar with a poor relationship with their advisor uniting them.

*Academics.*

Academics was the one content area that did present a negative or mixed/negative impact on all three students. Tammi had significant academic struggles, failing two of her three classes. She also did not utilize the Writing Center although she understood that it was available to her and she felt that she needed additional writing help. Ida also expressed concerns about her writing and even posited the idea that she

might be an undiagnosed dyslexic. Oscar also expressed some concerns about writing, but his academic concerns seem to be less severe and did not extend to his final grades. Nonetheless, he finds asking for help embarrassing, and this embarrassment makes seeking help from an instructor or from the Writing Center more difficult for him. In Oscar's case, the academic struggles may be linked to his past academic experiences in high school in Los Angeles where he says "if you are not really that good at writing, I'm guessing they don't really bother that much. If you pass the class, that's fine with them. If you don't want to show up, that's fine with them too."

*University Services and Programming.*

One university service that is related to these three students' concerns about writing, is the Writing Center, and all three of these students had some problems with it. For Oscar, the problems stemmed from his embarrassment with asking for help. So, even though he recognized that he had some challenges with writing essays, he was loathe to ask for help from the university. Tammi also knew that she had writing problems, but she chose to never go to the Writing Center, and she says that she does not know why she made that choice. Finally, Ida did utilize the Writing Center but recounting those experiences moved her to tears in her interview. Of her experiences she says:

I don't know. I don't know. I don't, uh, like those red marks they put on my paper. Maybe they should use another color pen. But the RED mark, you know, you're like "uh" [sighs] I'm a failure again. And you know they been using those red marks for years. So. I don't like the red marks.

### *Bright Spots.*

All three of these students are also united in having supportive families, and these relationships seem to be important to the group as a whole. For example, Oscar's wife is very supportive and helps with his homework, Ida receives help on her homework from her son, and Tammi's husband has decided to go to college himself in the fall. In addition, these three students have also had much less difficulty with their scheduling than did the seven previous students. Only Oscar had problems initially, and he was able to quickly address those with his family and no longer considers scheduling to be a burden.

For two of the three, Oscar and Ida, their relationship with their children seemed to be an important support for their adjustment to college. Oscar's number-one goal in going to college is to set a good example for his child: "I'm pretty much the first one in the family to attend college, so I want my son to actually follow in my steps." Ida agrees that being an education role model is important, although her son has gotten a little ahead of her in school. In fact, she was able to share her schoolwork with her son and he would give her insight on her papers: "My son is always giving me the blues. He says 'mom, I'll look over that paper for you' and I let him look over it...."

### *World View.*

Finally, Ida and Oscar both exhibit world view characteristics that seem to be making college adjustment easier for them. Ida's life-long belief that education is valuable for its own sake is tied to her ideas about race and success. She spoke of this when re-telling what she has said to her children:

[I would say to my kids]...when they weren't doing that well in school, you know "get an education, because you ARE something. Get an education and nobody can take it from you. You could be the next Johnny Cochran; you could be the next Martin Luther King. You could be the President of the United States. Don't let them tell you that a black man isn't going to be anything. Because, you know, people are always going to say things....since they want to play the race card, and we have that color barrier, it's going to be just a tad bit harder for you, but that doesn't mean that you aren't going to be able to do it. You are just going to have to work harder to do it because you will have these people who are going to want to pull you down. If anything, that should make you want to do it more, so you can say 'you know what? I did that, and you can't take it away from me.'"

Oscar's devotion to education is similar to Ida's. While he did not talk at length about it at any one point in his interview, he did repeatedly return to one theme: "this is really important to me." His commitment to his academic goals was clearest when he spoke of the difficulties he had in a history class: "I made up my mind that I was just going to do what it took....I was just going to do the work...take the time and just no matter what I was going to finish that class."

*Doing What it Takes: A Summary.*

With only three students in the middle, it is difficult to identify dominant themes. It is worth noting, however, that two of these three students mentioned academic advising as a concern, thereby extending a dominant theme from the previous group to these students. This group also seems to be united by some academic and university

services/programming concerns, especially concerns about writing and, by extension, the use of the Writing Center.

Finally, these three students stand out from the previous seven in that these three have universal support from their families, with two of the three actually receiving homework help from a direct family member. Two of the three also have a strong desire to function as a role model for their children and also have world view characteristics that seem to be making college adjustment easier for them.

*Adjusting Best: Happy to be Here*

Six of the sixteen first generation students interviewed are adjusting much better to college than are the other ten: Robert Kern, Stephanie Miller, Veronica White, Fletcher Valadez, Max Porter, Nia Williams. In general, these six face fewer challenges; however, they do still face concerns with academics and university services, some limited family support, and some other areas of concern.

*Academics.*

All six students have mixed academic adjustment. Two students, Robert Kern and Veronica White did very well academically during their first semester in college, yet both of them worried that their successes would be temporary. When asked how he felt about earning a 4.0 grade point average in college, Robert said: "I somehow can't believe it yet. I keep figuring that I'll probably wake up next semester when I get my grades [then]." Veronica echoed that concern when she said, "I'm scared about the fall. I just think I was blessed with the right classes. I just hope to God that I also got the right instructors this time."

Two other students had similar academic experiences in that they did better than they thought they would, but they attributed their success to low academic standards on the part of the university rather than on their own good luck. Fletcher Valadez says:

I'm almost under the impression that at The university we are getting a watered-down education. I think they're easy on us....It's the fact that I'm doing well that makes me skeptical. Because the work...it's a little bit challenging, and I have to spend some time, but it's not...maybe it's my perception of what I thought it would be like.

Nia's point of view is similar. She believes that the university's standards are not "high at all" and that anybody who wants to go to college could meet the standards.

Max Porter also felt that the coursework was easier than he expected and he went on to say, "I don't believe...the instructors care if you are there or not. It's my responsibility as an adult. I'm paying for it to cut the class. If I don't go, so be it." Yet, Max did not "cut class." Instead, he applied himself diligently and earned all A's in his first college semester.

Three of the students commented that they did not see an application for some of their coursework in the "real world" or for adult students. These students echoed the comments made by some of the students with weaker college adjustment. For example, Stephanie says that she does not enjoy studying art and music because it is not applicable outside of class. Nia found herself asking "why am I taking this class?" about music appreciation. As she says, "I'm going to be a computer science major. I don't care about music and where it comes from." Robert's view was similar but focused on different courses:

I've had enough [history] in high school. I know enough about this. I LIVED through a lot of the history now that they probably teach. You know the Vietnam war and that. That probably I think, "why should I have to take those all over again?" And that's something in my 30 years of work I've never used. So, I think that probably to me those would be the ones I would say I feel aren't as needed as much as some of the others.

In contrast to the other students, these six seem to be enjoying and learning from their academic work. Robert called going to college a "Christmas present" he gave to himself. Max spoke of how much he learned and how much his writing improved in one semester: "My sentence structure, my development of thought, it really became easier to write." Fletcher, who worried that the curriculum at the university is "watered down" also spoke of enjoying his academic life in college: "What makes it fun is the learning part of it....Absolutely I can learn from [my instructors]. It's nice to hear what is coming out of their head."

Veronica has found that getting good grades is much more important to her than it was earlier in her life. When she received her grade card for her first semester in college, she "danced around and sang 'look! Look! Look what I got!'" Nia was also "happy and surprised" at her grades.

#### *University Support and Programming.*

One of the things that stands out with this group is their general willingness to use the Writing Center and their subsequent positive experiences with that service. Of the six, four students mentioned the Writing Center specifically, and they all had generally positive experiences. Even Robert, who was sometimes uncomfortable with

the younger tutors in the Writing Center and spoke of some role reversal concerns, still found his experiences positive: “I loved it! I don’t know what I would do without [the Writing Center]. I mean, I’ve probably been, um, I was there nine or ten times first semester.” Veronica also had some concerns with younger tutors who made her feel “like an older person,” but otherwise, her experience with the Center was good. Of the students with successful Writing Center experiences, Max stands out as having by far the most positive view:

They helped me out tremendously. It was really a good experience. When I have written my paper and looked at it and thought I had everything corrected and punctuated right, and then I went over to the Writing Center and they just started going through it, making a comment here “this doesn’t make sense” and I’d read it again, and sure enough! It didn’t make any sense. I was actually reading things in to what I had written. I do believe that they improved my grade at least one letter.

These students’ views of other university services and programming tended to be mixed. For example, two students mentioned having an adults-only environment as important, but the other three saw this as less important. Two students had very bad experiences with their advisors (Fletcher referred to the advising as “perfunctory”), but the other three reported positive relationships with their advisors. On balance, these students felt valued by the university, or at least valued enough to be comfortable. Nia’s view seems typical. When asked if she was valued, she laughed and replied “Actually, I really hadn’t thought about that,” but when pressed she said she thought she must be.

### *Family Support.*

Mixed family support is a significant theme for this group. Half of these students faced some negative family responses to their decision to go to college while the other three had generally positive reactions from their family. Fletcher refers to his family as supportive “to different degrees.” He points out that he has 12 brothers and sisters and they are each involved with their own families and not all of them pay much attention to him and his goals. He believes that his mother is supportive, however, because he is the only person in the family who has gone on to college.

In Mark’s case, it is also his mother who is most supportive. His father, however, is a different story:

My dad, you would probably have to really know him to appreciate this, but his first comment when I said I was going back was “that will make you more money, right?” .... So that was his comment, you know, as long as I was going to make more money, then that would be a good move.

Of the three students with family support challenges, it is Max who faces the most overt opposition to his college aspirations. Max’s wife did not finish high school, does not have any aspirations for her children to go to college, and does not support Max’s decision to go to college. “I really honestly wish that my wife would take an interest in what I’m doing. See that I’m actually putting forth an effort to achieve certain grades or goals. Be more supportive.”

### *The Rest of the Story.*

On balance, these six students are adjusting very well. Those students who want friends are making them; although Robert wishes that there was more of a social

life in his program. At home, these students, all but one of whom is a parent, see themselves as a positive role model in the lives of their children, and they value this role in their children's lives. Like many of the other interviewees, three of these students do find scheduling a problem at times, but in contrast to the others, those three have developed coping strategies and are able to succeed in the face of those scheduling challenges.

What stands out for this group is how supportive their world view types seem to be for successful adaptation to college. Robert is a cheerful person who rolls with adversity. Stephanie has an academic goal and is pursuing it directly. Veronica brings a strong sense of personal readiness and a "never accept defeat" attitude to her experience. Fletcher combines high personal standards with lack of fear. Max is a driven man who likes to work hard and independently. Finally, Nia expects to push herself and likes the life changes that her time in college has already brought her.

*Happy to be Here: A Summary.*

The best-adjusting students have some things in common. Most strikingly, they have positive outlooks and world view characteristics that may be making college adjustment easier for them. They tend to enjoy learning, and they are proud of their success. At the same time, the fact that they are succeeding in college is making some of these students question the standards at the university: Could standards possibly be high enough if they are doing well? They also tend to share some concerns that some of the content they are learning has no real-world application, with music and art appreciation being most suspect to them. Finally, while their role as parents and role

models is very important, some of these students face mixed support from their own families.

### *Themes Relating to College Adjustment: A Summary*

Seven meta themes relating to college adjustment of these sixteen students emerge from these interviews:

1. Some academic content does not seem to relate to the “real world” either because it is too theoretical or because the students have not yet had to use it in their adult lives and cannot imagine doing so in the future.
2. Academic writing is often found to be difficult and at times scary.
3. Students often greet their own success with skepticism, attributing it to such things as luck, good instruction, or the university’s low academic standards.
4. Many students have strong family support, but a significant sub-group encounters weak support by at least one family member.
5. Balancing time between work, family, and school is a major problem for many students.
6. Students who use university tutoring services like the Writing Center are uncomfortable working with younger tutors.
7. There is a disconnect between the students’ expectations for academic advising and the advising they are receiving.

With the exception of the third theme, which arguably could only have emerged from a group of academically high achieving students, each of these themes was represented across the entire data set.

### *Additional Meta Themes Emerging from the Interview Data*

Four additional themes emerged from the data but because they did not necessarily relate directly to the students’ adaptation to college, they were only touched upon briefly in the discussion above. The first of these is the important role that parenthood played in the lives of these interviewees. Of the sixteen students

interviewed, only Nia Williams had no children or stepchildren, a finding consistent with NCES (2002a) which found that 80% of all nontraditional college students in 1999-2000 were parents. All of the remaining students expressed a desire for their children to go to college, and most of them hoped that their experiences as a college student would serve as a role model for their children. Only Charles, Tammi, and Fletcher believe that the decision to go to college should be left completely up to their children. The remaining twelve students hope that their experience will encourage their children to pursue a college education.

In addition to this desire to be an academic role model, several of the interviewees actually sought and received homework help from at least one child. The children helped by looking over papers, assisting with PowerPoint presentations, and performed other supportive duties. The students reported that not only did they enjoy and appreciate their children's help, but that the children themselves appreciated the opportunity to be a part of their parent's educational life. Veronica spoke of being delighted to share her grades with her son, for example, and that, having helped with her homework made him all the more proud of her.

Parenthood also emerged, however, as a stressor for some of these students. Of the fifteen parents in this group, Olivia, Stephanie, Tammi, and Mark brought their children to class at least one time, and Tammi and Stephanie brought a child several times in the previous semester. This decision was coded as a stressor because it seemed to indicate role conflict, lack of family support, or scheduling problems, and even possible social adaptation problems on the part of the parent. In addition,

Veronica spoke of the chilling effect that having child in the classroom had on the ability of the students to discuss adult topics during class.

Finally, six of the fifteen parents mentioned their children's age in discussing why they chose this time to go to college. Although the children in question ranged in age from 7 to 27, in the parent's view their child or children had reached an age where they no longer required so much time and effort to raise.

The second meta theme deals with first generation status itself. Only one interviewee spoke of thinking about her first generation status before she came to college. And of the remaining fifteen students, six said that they did not think of themselves as first generation students until they were identified for this study. Two students did mention that their parents' struggles functioned as a "negative role model" for them, and they did not want to have to struggle like them, but neither of these students extrapolated from that observation that having parents who did not go to college might make them different from some of their college peers.

The third meta theme that emerged from this data was the belief that having a college degree would allow the student get a "better job." Fifteen of the sixteen interviewees mentioned the desire to get a better job as a primary reason for going to college. Four students received tuition remission from their employer, and of those, two of them plan to stay with their current employer, provided they are offered a better-paying position, and two of them plan to leave their current employer after graduation.

Finally, the fourth meta theme deals with the nature of education itself. Seven students directly or indirectly refer to education as something that can be finished, and should be gotten out of the way early in life when possible, even if that would mean they

would not have gotten as much out of it then as they are doing now. For example, several students mentioned wanting their children to go to college right after high school so they could “be done with” it before they had children. Some, like Todd and Robert, see education as something he should have gotten finished a long time ago, but they are taking on now because of life experiences.

Even Stephanie, who has academic goals beyond a bachelor’s degree, foresees a time when her education will be over and she can return to her pre-college role in her family. Not one of the sixteen students mentioned their college studies as a part of a life-long quest for education or knowledge. There is an internal tension to this theme, however. While these students clearly wish that they had gone to college earlier and believe that their education would be finished if they had done so, many also feel that they are getting more out of their college studies now than they would have as younger students. As Maggie said:

Of course, I wish I would have gone 20 years ago, but I didn’t, and I don’t know if I would have gone ahead and went then, I don’t feel like I would have gotten as much out of it. I just feel like that at this point, with my age and everything, that it is something that I really want. It’s more valuable to me. So, when I’m sitting there in class, it’s more important to me than when I was younger.

### *Summary*

The quantitative portion of this study found that the SACQ T- scores for first generation students were significantly lower than the T-scores for continuing generation students on the overall measure of adjustment to college and on three of the four sub-measures. The fourth measure was approaching significance. No other significant

differences in the scores were found when stratifying the data by race/ethnicity or by gender.

The qualitative portion of the study used the personal interview to gather in-depth data on the experience of sixteen first generation volunteers. This interview data was coded and then organized into a flowchart that allowed the students' adaptation to be compared one to the other. This process found that seven of the sixteen were adapting to college poorly. Three were in the middle with struggles and bright spots. Finally, six were adjusting well while still encountering some challenges to their adaptation. Eleven meta themes emerged from this portion of the analysis.

## CHAPTER 5

### Results

*I think I appreciate my education more than I would have maybe 10 or 15 years ago. Now it has value because I know it's going to provide a better life for me. As opposed to if I were right out of high school and went to college. It might be burdensome to me....Now my kids are making plans about what university they would like to go to....And I pretty much told them that they don't have a choice! They are going to go to college. And after watching me, they WANT to go! They have shown a desire to do that after they graduate high school. (First-in-family student Olivia Smith, personal communication, May 18, 2005).*

### *Introduction*

Quantitative and qualitative data were used together to investigate the college adaptation of a group of first generation adult college freshmen. What follows is a discussion of these research findings in light of three guiding research questions:

1. What is the nature of the college adaptation process of first generation college students?
2. Are there differences in the process of college adaptation for first generation adult students versus continuing generation adult students? If so, what is the nature of those differences?
3. Are there similarities in the story of the college adaptation process among first generation adult students as a group, and if so, what is the nature of those similarities?

### *Restatement of the Problem*

This project sought to address the current limitation of knowledge regarding first generation adult college students. While existing research into traditionally-aged students indicates that first generation students face increased difficulties in college, the lack of research into their adult counterparts precludes researchers and student services personnel from recognizing and addressing the challenges that first generation adult students face.

### *Summary of Research Methods*

This research followed Ragin's (1987) observation that interesting research happens when there is "interplay between concept formation and data analysis." To that end, this research was designed using a valid and reliable instrument with a solid research history to measure student adjustment to college, the SACQ (Appendix A) as well as personal interviews to build a better understanding of first generation adult student adaptation to college. The this research was preceded by a pilot study which used both measurements and which also helped finalize an interview protocol (Appendix C and D).

Fifty-five adult college freshmen were surveyed using the SACQ. From this group, sixteen first generation students were successfully recruited for hour-long personal interviews. The surveys were administered during the last week of April, 2005, and the personal interviews were held between May 16, 2005 and May 21, 2005. Initially, interview subjects were scheduled randomly from a pool of 26 volunteers, but in the end all available volunteers, sixteen students in all, were interviewed in an effort to achieve category saturation and as much diversity as possible in the sample.

The quantitative data were analyzed using a two-tailed t-test for unequal variances. The qualitative data were coded by the researcher and independently coded by an outside reader to help ensure the validity of the coding categories. Once coded, the qualitative data were then organized into flowcharts and analyzed for meta themes (Appendix G-V).

### *Discussion of Findings*

This research posed three related research questions. Because the first question is the one most fundamental to addressing the problem this research seeks to explore, and because it is best answered with reference to the other two questions, it will be handled last in this discussion.

#### *Research Question Two*

*Research Question 2: Are there differences in the process of college adaptation for first generation adult students versus continuing generation adult students? If so, what is the nature of those differences?*

In this study, there are differences between the first generation and continuing generation adult students' adaptation to college. The SACQ results are clear: overall, the first generation students are not adjusting to college as well as are continuing generation students. Using a two-way t-test for unequal variance, the overall SACQ score difference between first generation students and continuing generation students in this sample was significant to .005. The mean for the first generation students' standardized SACQ scores was 45.78, a full 7.61 points below the mean of the continuing generation students.

In all subscale scores, first generation students scored lower than did their continuing generation peers, and these scores met a standard of statistical significance of .05 on all subscales except for the academic subscale, which was approaching significance at .066.

### *Research Question Three*

*Research Question 3: Are there similarities in the story of the college adaptation process among first generation adult students as a group, and if so, what is the nature of those similarities?*

The SACQ data indicates that on every measure the first generation students' scores represent a greater variance than do the scores of the continuing generation students. The interview data also indicates that the first generation students differ in their adaptation, and in fact, the students can be stratified by their level of adjustment with seven students appearing to be adjusting poorly, three students with mixed adjustment, and six students with good to excellent college adjustment. Nevertheless, even with these variations, there are many unifying themes underlying the college adaptation of the first generation students in this study.

For example, while it is true that there is greater variance in the SACQ scores for first generation students than for continuing generation students, the chart on page 59 illustrates that the SACQ scores for first generation students are lower than the scores for the continuing generation students across the board. That is, the first generation students at the low end of the adaptation continuum have lower adaptation scores, the students in the middle of the continuum have lower adaptation scores, and the students at the high end of the continuum have lower adaptation scores. While there is variance

in the students' scores, these first generation students are consistently struggling more with adaptation than are the continuing generation students.

The interview data also supports the argument that there are similarities in this group despite the fact that the data represents variance within the group. Seven meta themes relating to adaptation and four additional themes emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interview data. Taken together, these themes tell the story of the seventeen first generation students interviewed for this project:

Being a parent is very important to them. They have put off many other things that are also important to over the years of their parenthood so that they could raise their family the way they feel is right. Now that their children are old enough to be more self-sufficient, they have turned their attention to college. Many of them have been thinking about college for years, and they have the sense that if they get a degree it will help them in their career. They are also concerned that their children understand that going to college is important. They feel their children will not ever be able to get a "good job" without a degree. In addition, the students feel that if their children see them go to college, they will understand both that college is important and that the "best time" to go is right after high school. They have a strong sense that it is best to get college "over with" before starting a family.

In general, they wish that their parents would have stressed the importance of going to college, but almost without exception that did not happen. They tend to believe that if their parents had focused on education, they might have gone to college earlier. Regardless, prior to being asked about it, these students did not think of themselves as first generation students and focus instead on being role models for their children.

Most of the time they seem to like college. They are able to make friends their own age, and they enjoy talking to people who have had similar life experiences. In fact, they seem a little surprised that there are so many other students just like them going to college. They do have scheduling problems that make doing their homework and sometimes getting to class difficult. In general, they did not enter college with any expectations, and they were surprised that going to college would require so much effort outside the classroom. They also occasionally experience motivation problems due in part from their fear of and dislike for writing. In addition, they often feel that what they are learning is not valuable outside the classroom. They frequently look to their work experience to vet their classroom experience, and if they are learning something that is not validated by their work experience, they have trouble valuing it.

On balance, their families are happy that they are going to college. Their children seem especially likely to be proud, and sometimes a child will help a parent with homework. When they encounter a person who is less than supportive, they attribute that lack of support to the individual instead of to themselves.

These students like The University and tend to equate the university itself with their instructors. They are frustrated with their academic advising, however, and they are confused about what their advisor's role is supposed to be. When they are academically successful, they tend to attribute that success to luck or low standards on the part of the university rather than to themselves and their hard work.

#### *Research Question One*

*Research Question 1: What is the nature of college adaptation process of first generation college students?*

The first generation students involved in this research are not adapting to college as well as the continuing generation students. Overall, they seem to be experiencing poorer personal/emotional adaptation, social adaptation, and attachment to the university. In addition there are indications that they might be experiencing more trouble adapting to the academic challenges of the college experience.

While there is a clear variation in these students' level of adaptation, there also many themes that emerge regardless of the students' overall adaptation. Perhaps the most striking theme is that these students did not tend to view themselves as first generation students. Unlike the work of London (1992) and Innman and Mayes (1999), there was very little indication of feelings of cultural risk expressed by this group. In fact, only one student attributed her family's lack of support to cultural reasons. The rest of the students who spoke of a less-than-supportive family member always attributed that lack of support to something specific to that family member saying things like "you would just have to know my dad."

While these students did not tend to see themselves as first generation students, they did have a powerful understanding that their decision to go to college made them a role model for their children. In other words, it might be that for this group first generation self awareness is less about how the students viewed themselves in relationship to their parents than how they viewed themselves with relationship to their children. If this is accurate, then their desire to be a role model might account for their lack of feelings of cultural risk: they have made a purposeful decision to change the direction of their family by improving the chances that their children will go to college.

Overall, parenthood had a significant impact on this group. Of the sixteen students interviewed, fifteen had biological children, stepchildren, or both. Being a parent seems to have led to both positive and negative impacts on these students' college adaptation. On the one hand, the desire to be a role model seems to help motivate the students to stay in college thereby supporting their adaptation. In addition, their children's pride that their parent is going to college and support through homework help also seems to help with adaptation. But having children in the home also tended to correlate with scheduling difficulties and role conflict concerns on the part of the students.

Another theme that unified the first generation students interviewed was the idea that going to college will help them get a better-paying, more satisfying job. In other words, these students are Houle's (1961) goal-oriented learners. But that goal-oriented view seems to interfere with their appreciation of the type of education that a four-year college degree is designed to deliver. These students are skeptical of the need for theory and do not have an interest in content fields that do not directly relate to their degree or career aspirations, a finding consistent with the observations of Zemke and Zemke (1984).

In fact, these students do not seem to have educational goals that go beyond the acquisition of a credential and the desire to be a role model for their children. They see a college degree as a means to a desired end and not desirable in and of itself. While a few students did express pleasure in learning, not one student claimed to be going to college with learning as a stated goal.

An interesting corollary to this insight is the fact that while these students expressed the desire for their children to go to college right after high school, the students themselves tended to believe that they were getting more out of the college experience now than they would have as a younger student. So, even though they recognize that their own experience is improved by attempting college at a later time, they still want their children to go to college “on time” and “get it over with.”

That might well be the key to understanding these students’ relationship with their college experience and by extension to their college adaptation: They see education as a discreet event that can be completed. Once the student earns his or her credential, they are finally able to benefit from going to college by getting a better job. Any benefit that the learning process holds in and of itself is, at best, secondary to this final goal.

Finally, this group of students expressed an almost universal dissatisfaction with their academic advising. Whereas they are treated as if they are self-directed and knowledgeable about their own academic goals and the university’s programs, in fact, these students crave a relationship with an advisor whom they can trust and who will listen to them, a finding consistent with the work of Creamer, Polson, and Ryan (1995) and CAEL (2000). Several students put the blame for their dissatisfaction with their advisor back on themselves saying things like “I thought that is what an advisor would do, but I guess I was wrong.” Given that few of the interviewees had a close personal relationship with a college graduate, the impact of this “hands off” approach to advising seems to have made adapting to college more difficult for them.

### *Implications of Research: Persistence Problems to Come?*

The sixteen students interviewed in this study are adapting to college at different levels. Unfortunately, many of the students involved in this study exhibited characteristics consistent with becoming a nonpersister. According to the data analyzed and compiled by Kasworm, Polson, and Fishback (2002), several characteristics of nonpersisters have been identified:

1. Parents have no college.
2. Students have negative college experiences, are first-time entrants, or have limited prior college work.
3. Students have major deficiencies in basic skills.
4. Students have uncertain goals or unrealistic goals of long-term consequence.
5. Students find it difficult to adjust to the routines of formal study, have insecurity about their ability to learn, are nervous about tests, and have inadequate work habits.
6. Students have low-level achievement drives and poor motivation. They also tend to be indecisive and disorganized.
7. Students value formal learning that directly relates to life experiences, often in concrete, practical and specific ways.
8. Students have a lack of intellectual independence and are often concrete thinkers.
9. Students are unclear or negative regarding support and valuing of college studies in their lives.
10. Students have significant family/work demands.
11. Students have financial difficulties, both in general and with regard to college.
12. Students have limited flexibility in scheduling courses and limited time to support coursework.
13. The university provides unclear or limited resources to support their adult students.

Comparing the eleven meta themes uncovered by this research with the thirteen characteristics of nonpersisters listed above paints a disturbing picture of the likelihood that many of the sixteen interviewees will stop out of this college experience. In fact, of the eleven meta themes uncovered in this study, ten of them relate directly or indirectly to one of the above characteristics. The themes uncovered in this research are as follows:

1. Some academic content does not seem to relate to the “real world” either because it is too theoretical or because the students have not yet had to use it in their adult lives and cannot imagine doing so in the future.
2. Academic writing is often found to be difficult and at times scary.
3. Students often greet their own success with skepticism, attributing it to such things as luck, good instruction, or the university’s low academic standards.
4. Many students have strong family support, but a significant sub-group encounters weak support by at least one family member.
5. Balancing time between work, family, and school is a major problem for many students.
6. Students who use university tutoring services like the Writing Center are uncomfortable working with younger tutors.
7. There is a disconnect between the students’ expectations for academic advising and the advising they are receiving.
8. Parenthood is very important in their lives, and being a “role model” for their children is of utmost importance to the students.
9. Students do not see themselves as first generation students.
10. Getting a “better job” is the number-one goal for these students.
11. These students feel that education is something that can be completed and should be gotten “out of the way” when a person is young.

For ease of comparison, the ten themes that relate to nonpersisters characteristics and the characteristics they relate to are organized in Table 18:

Table 18

*Comparison of Meta Themes with Characteristics of Adult Nonpersisters*

Data Theme	Nonpersister Characteristics
1. Frustration with academic content not connecting directly to the “real world” -- dislikes theory.	*Values formal learning that directly relates to life experience *Often a concrete thinker
2. Academic writing is often difficult and scary	*Major deficiencies in basic skills
3. Greets success with skepticism	*Insecurity about ability to learn
4. Significant sub-group encounters weak support by at least one family member	*Unclear or negative messages regarding support and valuing of college studies in one’s life
5. Balancing time a major problem	*Difficulties adjusting to the routines of formal study. *Perceived significant family/ work demands. *Limited flexibility in scheduling courses and limited time to support coursework
6. Uncomfortable with young tutors	*Unclear or limited resources from the university
7. Disconnect between students’ expectations for academic advising and the advising they receive.	*Unclear or limited resources from the university
8. Importance of parenthood	*Perceived significant family demands
9. Primary goal non-academic to “get a better job”	*Values formal learning that directly relates to life experience. *Uncertain goals
10. Education can be “completed”	*Poor motivation *Values formal learning that directly relates to life experience *Lack of intellectual independence, concrete thinker *Unclear or negative messages regarding support and valuing of college studies in one’s life

Ten of the meta themes relate to at least one characteristic of a nonpersister, and four of the themes relate to multiple nonpersister characteristics. In fact, the only theme that did not relate to a nonpersister characteristic was the one that found that the sixteen interviewees did not view themselves as first generation students.

Unfortunately, regardless how they view themselves, first generation status itself is also a characteristic of a nonpersister.

If the thematic data is broken down by the stratified categories outlined in Chapter Four, the implications for persistence problems are even more clear. In addition to the meta themes listed above, those students who are “just getting by” as identified by the analysis of their interview data exhibit additional characteristics of nonpersisters. Specifically, as a group, those seven students tend to have inadequate work habits and poor motivation.

In short, the first generation students identified for intensive study by this project exhibit many characteristics that would indicate they will stop out of this college experience. In addition, the university itself is adding to the problem by providing support services that tend to be uncomfortable or unavailable to these students and by not providing advising that the students find encouraging or useful.

### *Recommendations*

#### *Research*

The lack of a comprehensive research base regarding first generation adult students was a challenge from the outset of this project. The researcher encourages any research into this population. Specifically, a longitudinal study following a group of first generation adult students from orientation through to graduation would go a long

way to illuminating the complete process of college adaptation. This study is limited in that it looked at a snapshot of college adaptation and cannot, therefore, do more than explore a moment in that process.

Second, additional research of the type presented here needs to be done within other populations of students. A similar study performed in a community college setting would be illuminating as would a study in a more racially and ethnically diverse population. While this study found that racial and ethnic status, defined as White and Non-White, did not impact the SACQ results, whereas generational status did, additional work needs to be done to investigate this finding and see if it holds up with other, more diverse, populations.

Third, it is the recommendation of this researcher that generational status be added as a general demographic category whenever practicable. It is relatively easy to gather this information, and if future studies with adult college students would begin to record generational status as a matter of course, it would be easier to identify trends and possible future research questions.

Fourth, additional research is needed to investigate models of academic advisement for first generation adult students. Consistent with the findings of Creamer, Polson, and Ryan (1995) and CAEL (2000), this study indicates that a “hands off” model of academic advising is unsatisfactory for this group. Satisfaction and efficacy research is needed in this area.

Fifth, research into first generation students who have stopped out is clearly needed. While this project suggests that the first generation students studied are at risk for stopping out, in fact, at the time of the research they were all enrolled university

students. Interviewing students who did not complete their freshman year of college could add significantly both to the first generation and persistence research bases.

Sixth, future research into adult first generation college students needs to further investigate the finding here that these students do not see themselves as first generation students. Additional research into their self-concept as parents may help to illuminate a more fruitful way of thinking of what it means to be both “first generation” and adult.

### *Practice*

This research indicates a need on the part of classroom teachers to link abstract information to concrete applications. It is not the position of this researcher that theory should be removed from the college classroom in an effort to address the possible discomfort on the part of some first generation adult students. Instead, there is merely an observation that linking theory to practice will assist those learners who enter the classroom as concrete thinkers emerge with the skills necessary to appreciate the necessity of abstract knowledge.

### *Questions Yet to be Explored*

The process of this research suggested several questions. For example, many of the adults interviewed in this study discussed the importance they placed on being a role model for their children. One question that flows from that is what is the impact on children of having a parent go to college during the child’s youth? Are the juvenile children of adult college students influenced to pursue a college education themselves? What about the adult children of a first generation adult college student? Does having a parent attend college influence an adult child to also consider college? Finally, in the

course of this research, the researcher met one mother and daughter who were starting college together, and they both therefore fit the definition of a first generation student. Is there something special about families that produce two generations of first generation students and what is their experience like?

### *Summary*

First generation students are the majority in the adult college classroom (NCES 2002a). Nevertheless, little is known about this group. It is incumbent upon the field of adult education to continue to learn about these newcomers to higher education. While the research associated with this project is limited, it has opened the door to some interesting questions: Why is parenthood so central to these students' self concept, and what impact does that have on their adaptation and persistence as college students? Does a first generation adult student's college experience impact their children's likelihood to go to college? If so, does the child of a first generation adult college student adapt to college in a way that is more like their parents or more like other continuing generation students? What do we not know about this population that we should know in order to serve it best and help these students to achieve their degree?

Now is the time to take up these questions. A college degree is needed more now than before and is likely to become all the more important in the future. Learning more about these adult students who are trying to change the direction of their family will help society to change along with them.

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Appendix A.

Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire

## Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire

### Representative Questions

#### Academic Adjustment:

1. I know why I'm in college and what I want out of it
2. Most of the things I'm interested in are not related to any of my coursework at college.

#### Social Adjustment:

3. I feel that I fit in well as part of the college environment.

#### Personal-Emotional Adjustment:

4. I have been getting angry too easily lately.

#### Institutional Attachment:

5. I wish I were at another college or university.

The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire was developed by Robert Baker, Ph.D. and Bohdan Siryk, M.A. and is available through Western Psychological Services; 12031 Wilshire Boulevard; Los Angeles, CA; 90025-1251.

Appendix B.

Generational Survey

**Please do not detach this sheet from the survey**

Survey instructions and additional demographic questions:

- Please fill out this survey to the best of your ability.
- There is a front and a back to the survey. Please fill out both sides. Please do not open the survey.
- Please do not answer questions 26 and 33 as they do not apply to adult students. Nevertheless, please answer all other questions to the best of your ability.
- Please do not put your name or student ID number on the survey.

Demographic information (your gender, race, etc.) is being collected as part of this survey. This information is important to the analysis of the survey's findings. Nevertheless, if you would like to omit any or all demographic information, you may do so.

**Additional Demographic Information:**

1) Please circle the letter of the answer that best describes your parents' educational history:

- A. None of my parents attended a two-year or four-year college or university*
- B. One or more of my parents attended a two-year or four-year college or university.*
- C. One or more of my parents graduated from a two-year or four-year college or university.*

Appendix C.

Preliminary Interview Protocol

## Preliminary Interview Protocol:

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. The purpose of this time is for me to learn more about you and your experience as a college student. I am not “looking for” particular responses, and I want you to feel free to answer freely. If at any time there is something you don’t want to talk about, that is also fine. When the interview is finished, I’ll transcribe these tapes and use the interviews in my research study.

To get started, I have a few basic questions for you:

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. Has anyone in your family, including your spouse or children gone to college?
4. Has anyone in your family, including your spouse or children graduated from college?
5. You are being audio taped, do you consent to this taping?

## Entry/Transition

Thanks, ok, now to the fun stuff. Please tell me why you decided to go to college at this time.

For students who didn’t go to college first as a traditional student: Why did you choose not to go to college right out of high school?

## Social

1. How do you like it here? Are you having fun?
2. Do you feel like you fit in well with the other PACE students?
3. Are you glad you chose this school and its PACE program?
4. Is college different from what you expected? Better? Worse?
5. Has being in college altered any of your personal relationships with family and friends?
6. Do you get involved in any campus activities? Do you want to?

## Personal-Emotional

1. How did going back to school affect your schedule?
2. How are you coping with your schedule changes?
3. Do you find yourself worrying more now that you are in school?
4. Is college life stressful for you?

## Academic

1. How is it going in your classes?

2. Is the coursework different from what you imagined?
3. Are the teachers helping you learn?
4. Are you enjoying your academic work here? If no, what would you rather be learning?
5. How is it going with homework?
6. Are you able to keep up with all the academic work?

#### Attachment

1. How do you like it at The university? Are you glad you chose this school?
2. Are you planning to stay to get your associates degree from the PACE program?
3. Do you feel valued as a student at The university?
4. Was this the right time to come back for you?
5. Are you pleased about your decision to come back to school at this time?

Thank you so much for your time. I only have one more question: is there anything that you wish I would have asked you about your adjustment to college? What do I not know that I need to know to understand you better?

Appendix D.

Finalized Interview Protocol

## Finalized Interview Protocol:

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. The purpose of this time is for me to learn more about you and your experience as a college student. I am not “looking for” particular responses, and I want you to feel free to answer freely. If at any time there is something you don’t want to talk about, that is also fine. When the interview is finished, I’ll transcribe these tapes and use the interviews in my research study.

To get started, I have a few basic questions for you:

6. What is your name?
7. You are being audio taped, do you consent to this taping?
8. What is your age?
9. Did any of your parents go to college? (use this as an entrée into a question about whether their parents not going to college affected them, and use that to transition to next section)

### Entry/Transition

Thanks, ok, now to the fun stuff.

1. Please tell me why you decided to go to college at this time.
2. What do you do at work?

For students who didn’t go to college first as a traditional student: Why did you choose not to go to college right out of high school?

### Social

7. How do you like it here? Are you having fun?
8. Do you feel like you fit in well with the other PACE students?
9. Are you glad you chose this school and its PACE program?
10. Is college different from what you expected? Better? Worse?
11. Has being in college altered any of your personal relationships with family and friends?
12. Do you get involved in any campus activities? Do you want to?
13. Do you have support among your friends/family for your decision to go to college?
14. Are you an inspiration for someone going to school?

### Personal-Emotional

5. How did going back to school affect your schedule?
6. How are you coping with your schedule changes?
7. Do you find yourself worrying more now that you are in school?
8. Is college life stressful for you?
9. do you get any pressure from your family to quit college?

## Academic

7. How is it going in your classes?
8. Is the coursework different from what you imagined?
9. Are the teachers helping you learn?
10. Are you enjoying your academic work here? If no, what would you rather be learning?
11. How is it going with homework?
12. Are you able to keep up with all the academic work?
13. Ever wish you didn't have to take a particular class? Why?

## Attachment

6. How do you like it at The university? Are you glad you chose this school?
7. Are you planning to stay to get your associates degree from the PACE program?
8. Do you feel valued as a student at The university?
9. Was this the right time to come back for you?
10. Are you pleased about your decision to come back to school at this time?
11. Does the comfort of the facility matter to you?

Thank you so much for your time. I only have one more question: is there anything that you wish I would have asked you about your adjustment to college? What do I not know that I need to know to understand you better?

Appendix E.

Dissertations Using SACQ

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- Hollmann, N.C. (1997). *An exploratory multidimensional scaling study of stressful situations and students' perceptions of family responses to them*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Lehigh University.
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Appendix F

Consent Form

Informed Consent for Participation in Kansas State University Research

**Project Title:** THE FIRST GENERATION ADULT COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Franklin Spikes, (785) 532-5873

**Co-Investigator:** Carolyn Irene Schmidt, (316) 295-5552

**Kansas State IRB Chair:** Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 1 Farichild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224

**Purpose of the Research:** To better understand first generation and multi-generation students' adjustment to the college experience.

**Procedures to be Used:** Administration of the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire with follow-up personal interviews with students randomly selected from a group of volunteers. All subjects asked to volunteer demographic information and generational status.

**Alternative Procedures or Treatments That Might Be Advantageous to Subject:** None

**Length of Study:** Seven months

**Risks Anticipated:** None

**Benefits Anticipated:** Information can lead to better programming and student services

**Extent of Confidentiality:** Surveys completely confidential, demographic questions completely confidential, personal interviews published anonymously.

No Injury Anticipated

**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.

I recognize that a signed and dated copy of the consent form will also be kept by the primary investigator for a period of time not shorter than three years.

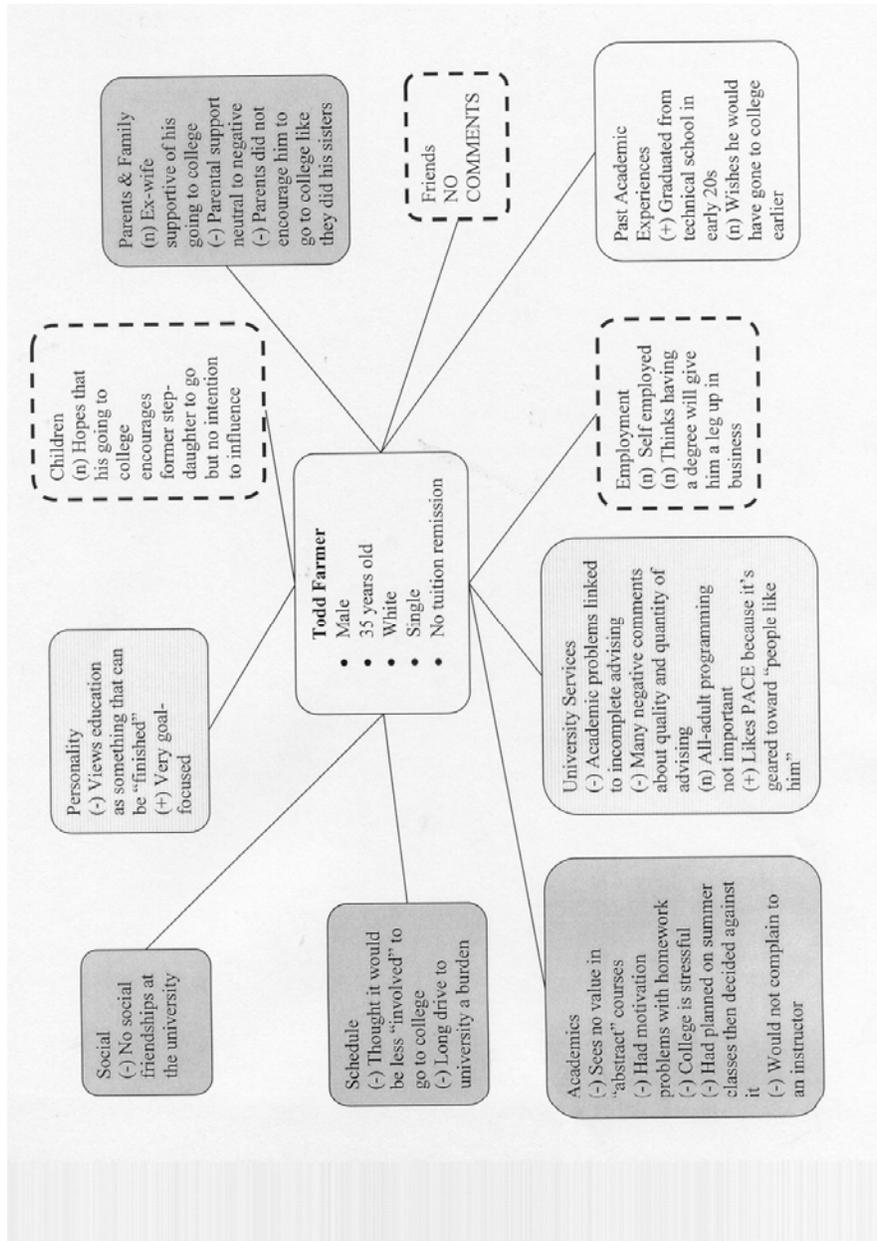
Participant Name (print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness to Signature: (project staff) \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

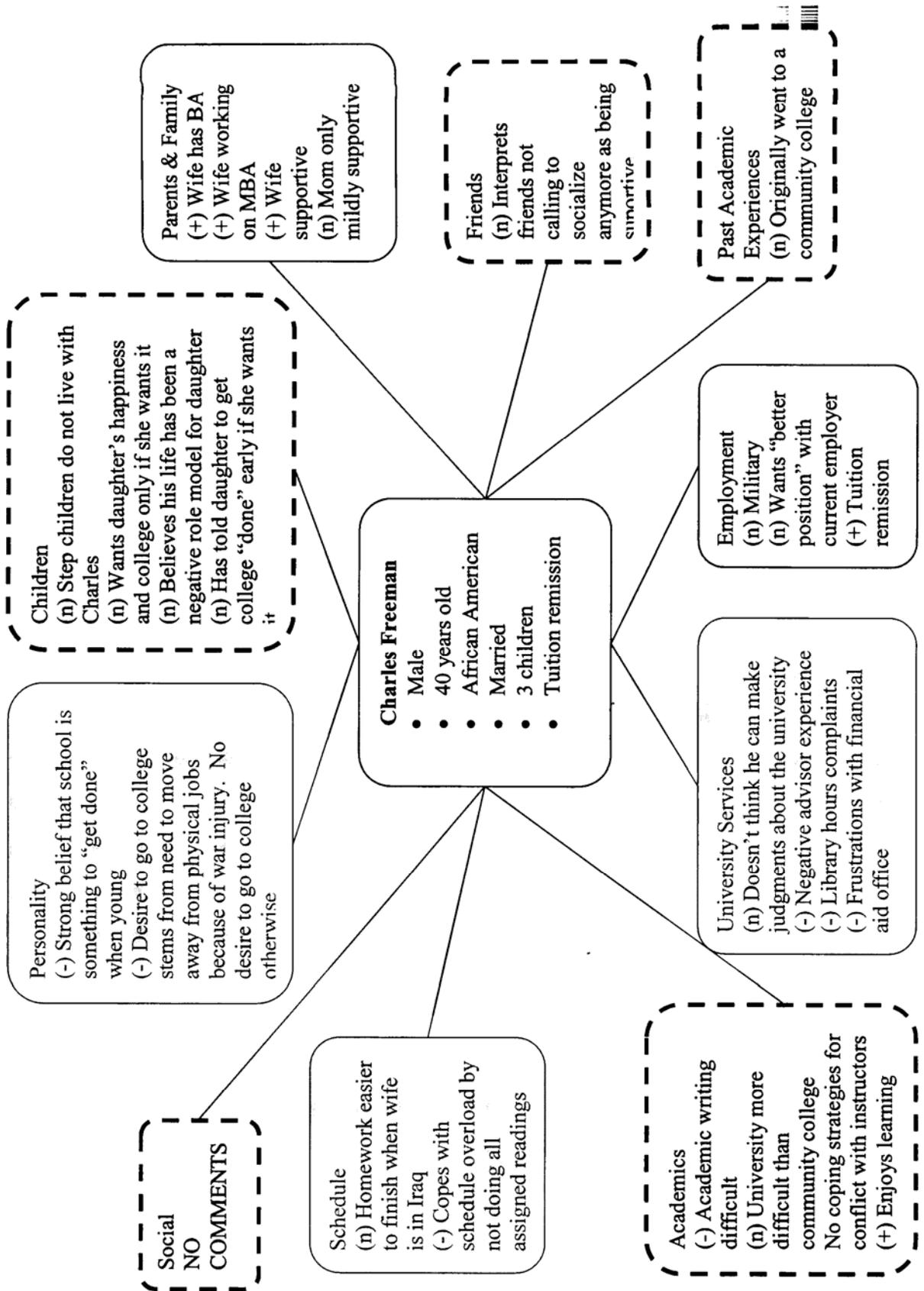
Appendix G.

Flowchart of Todd Farmer



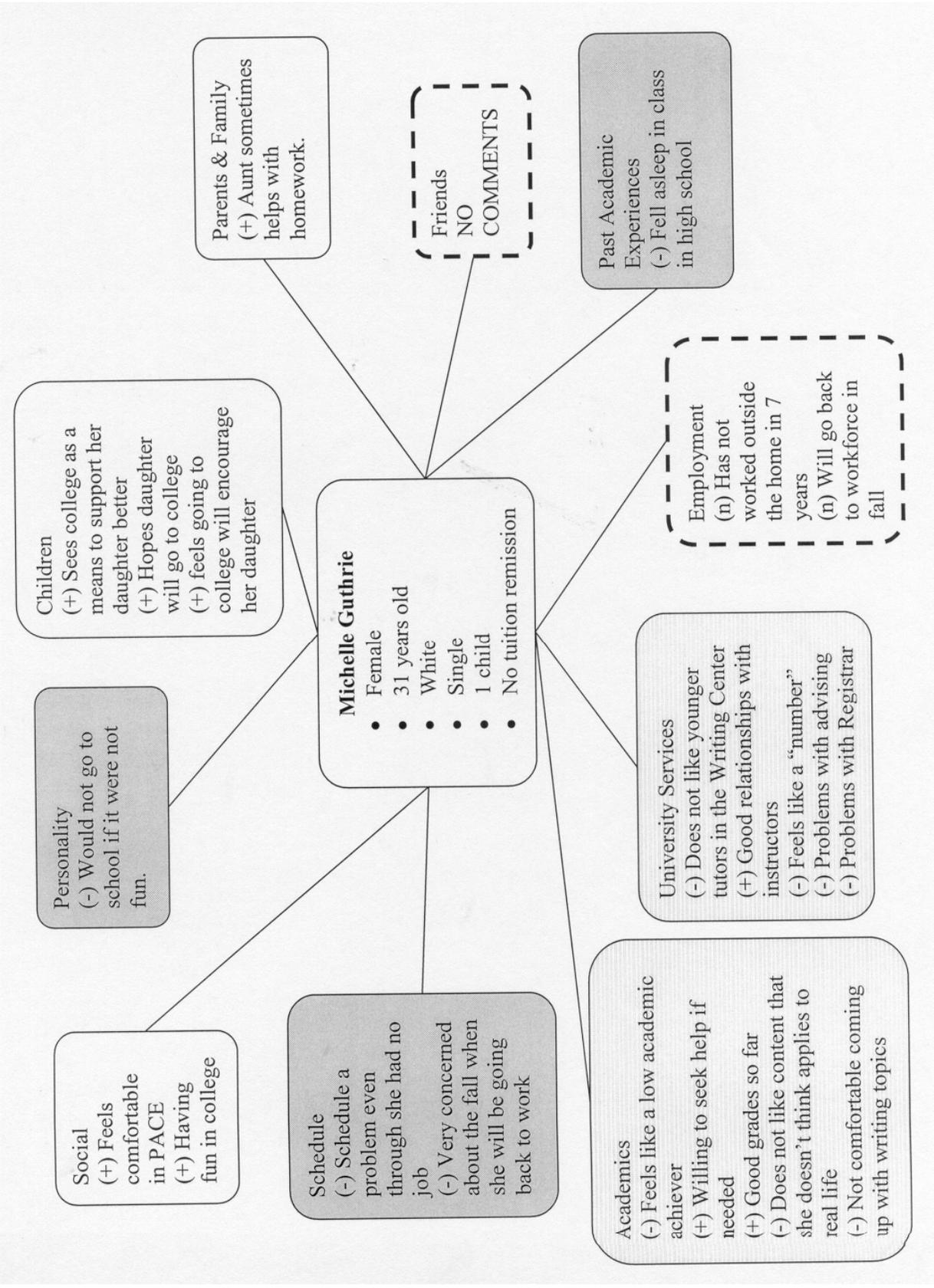
Appendix H.

Flowchart of Charles Freeman



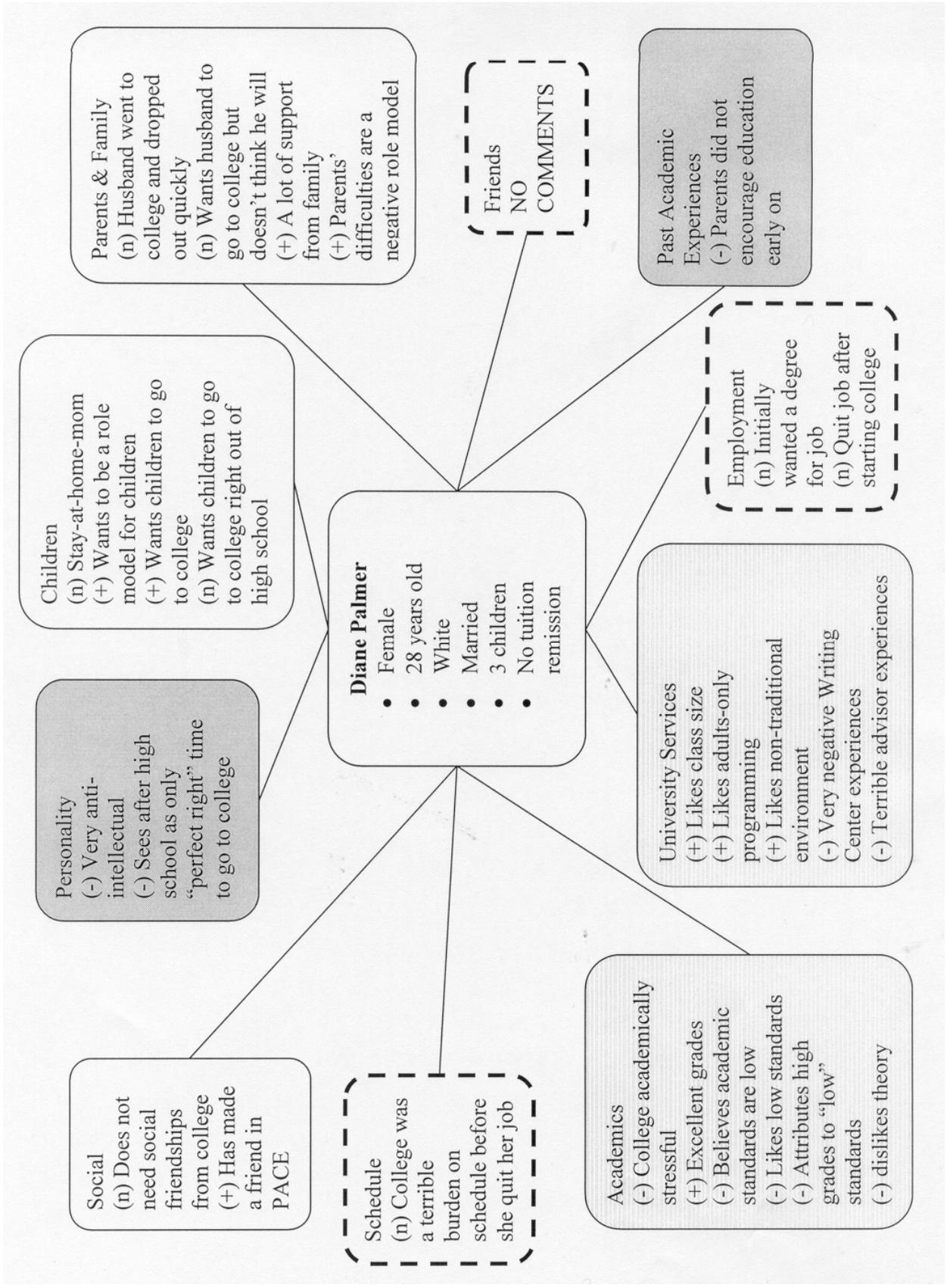
Appendix I

Flowchart of Michelle Guthrie



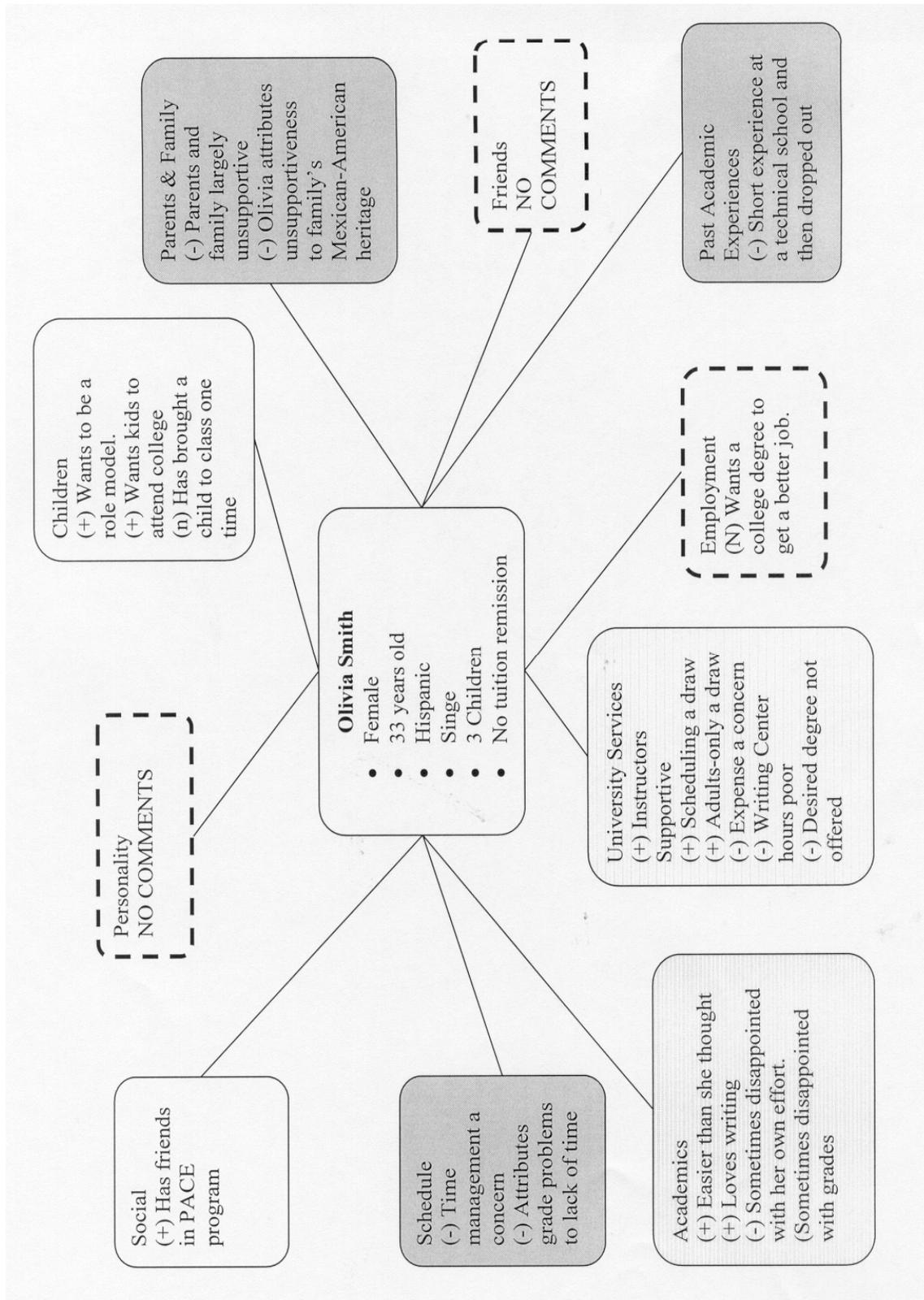
Appendix J.

Flowchart of Diane Palmer



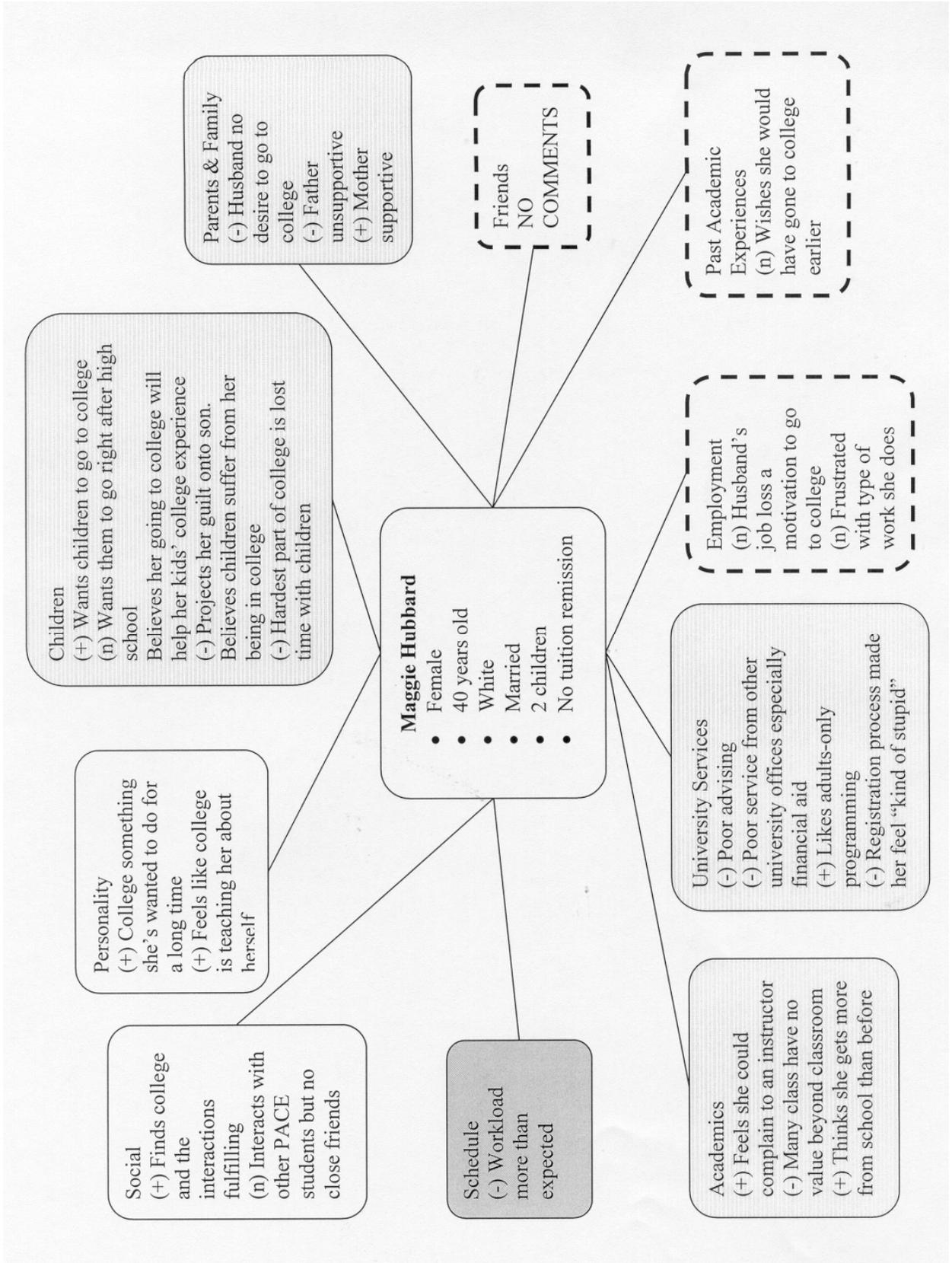
Appendix K.

Flowchart of Olivia Smith



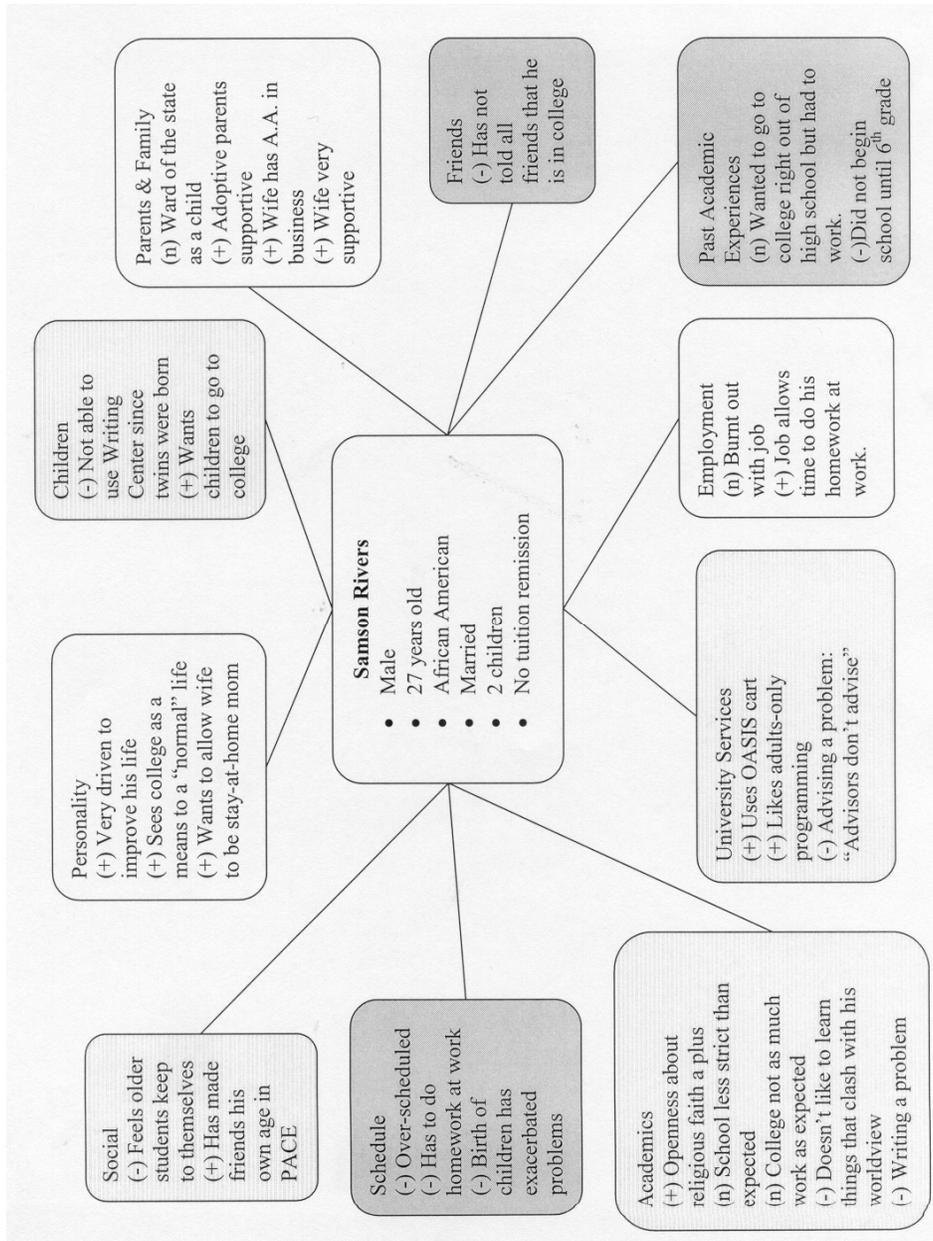
Appendix L.

Flowchart of Maggie Hubbard



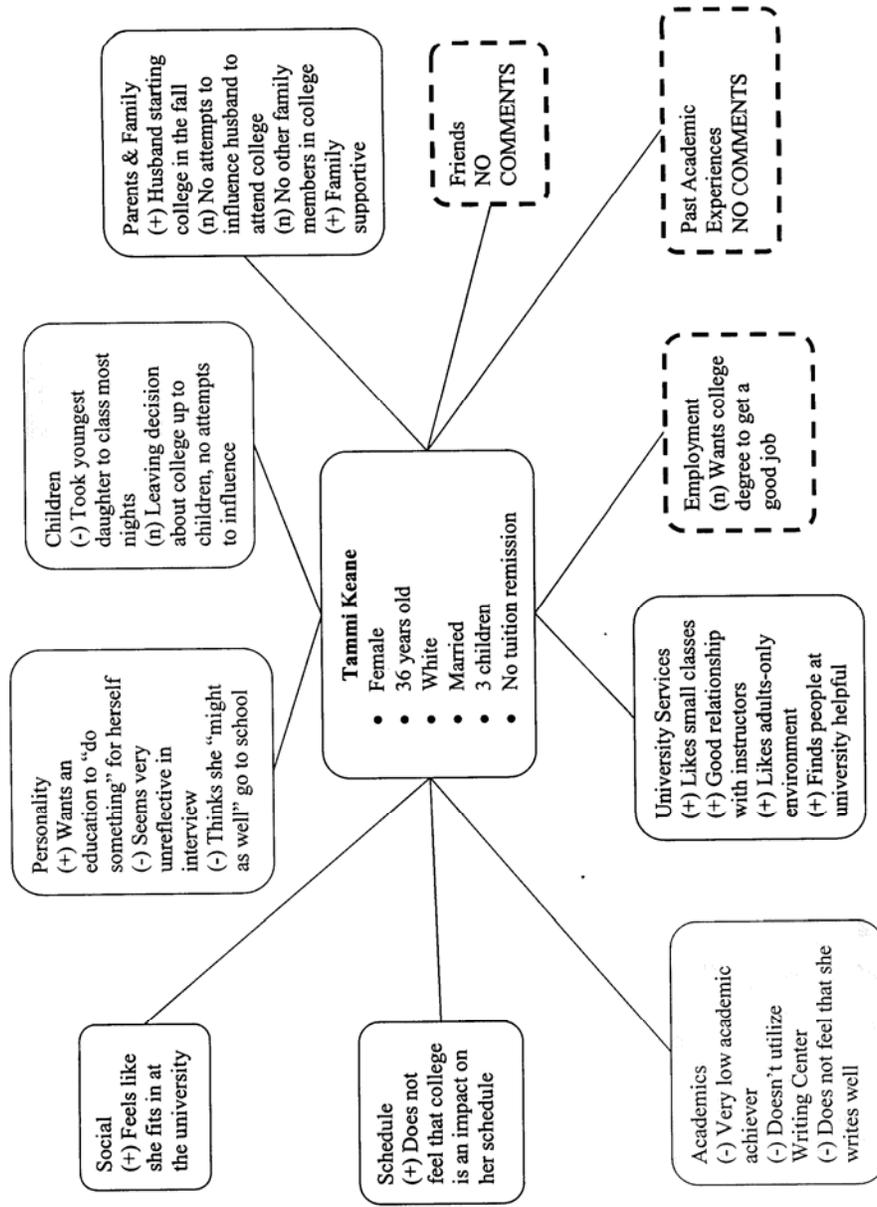
Appendix M.

Flowchart of Samson Rivers



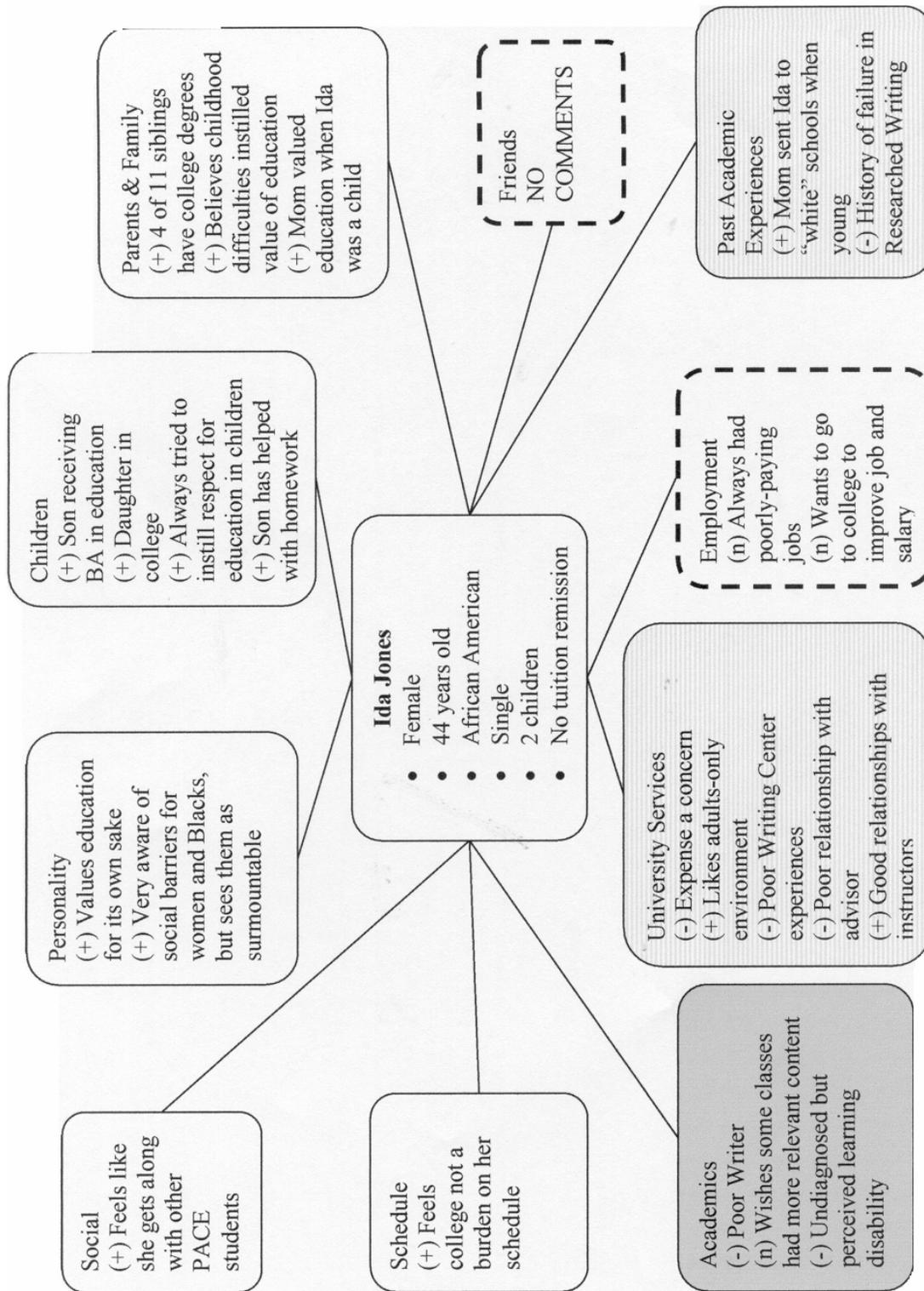
Appendix N.

Flowchart of Tammi Keane



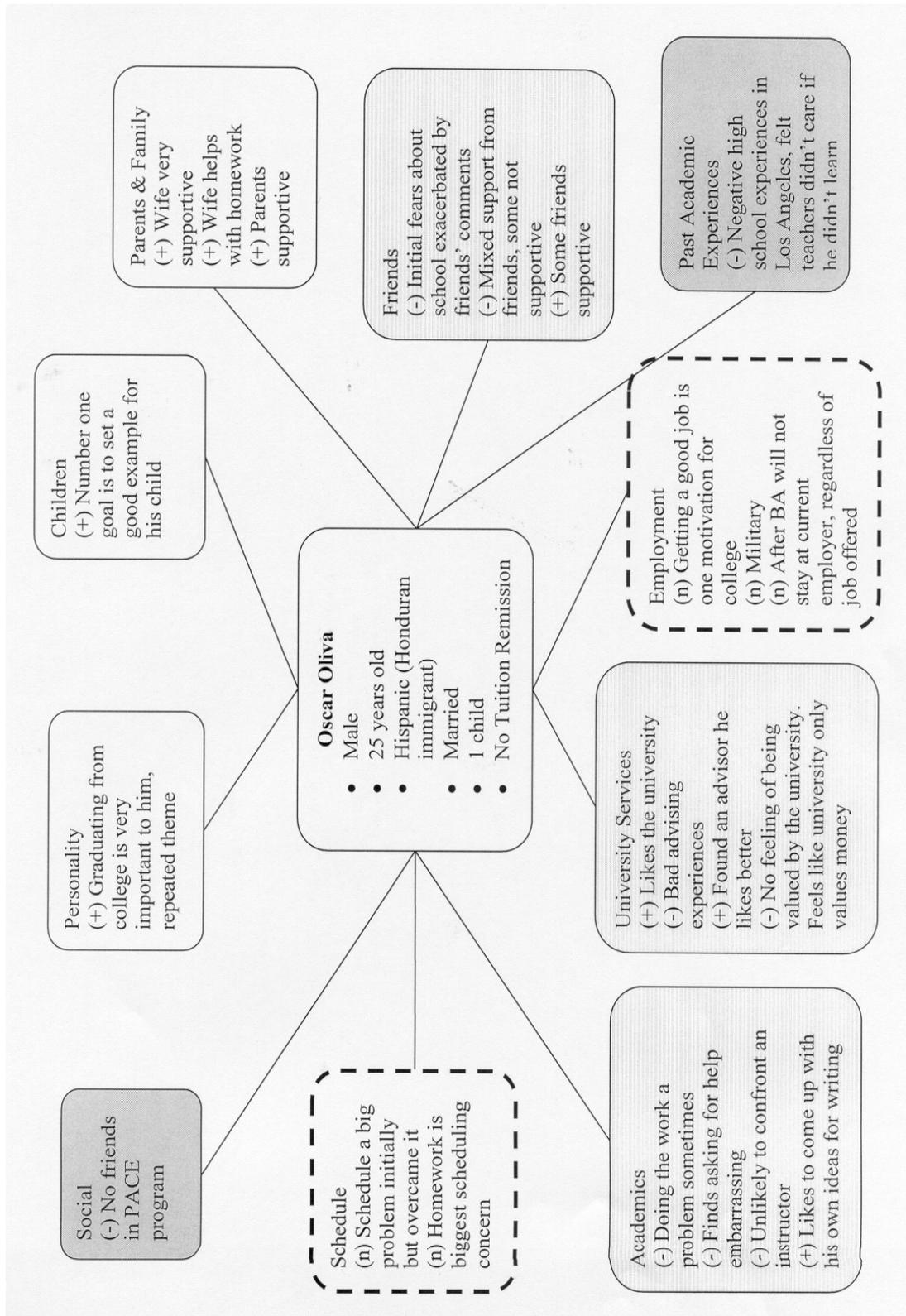
Appendix O.

Flowchart of Ida Jones



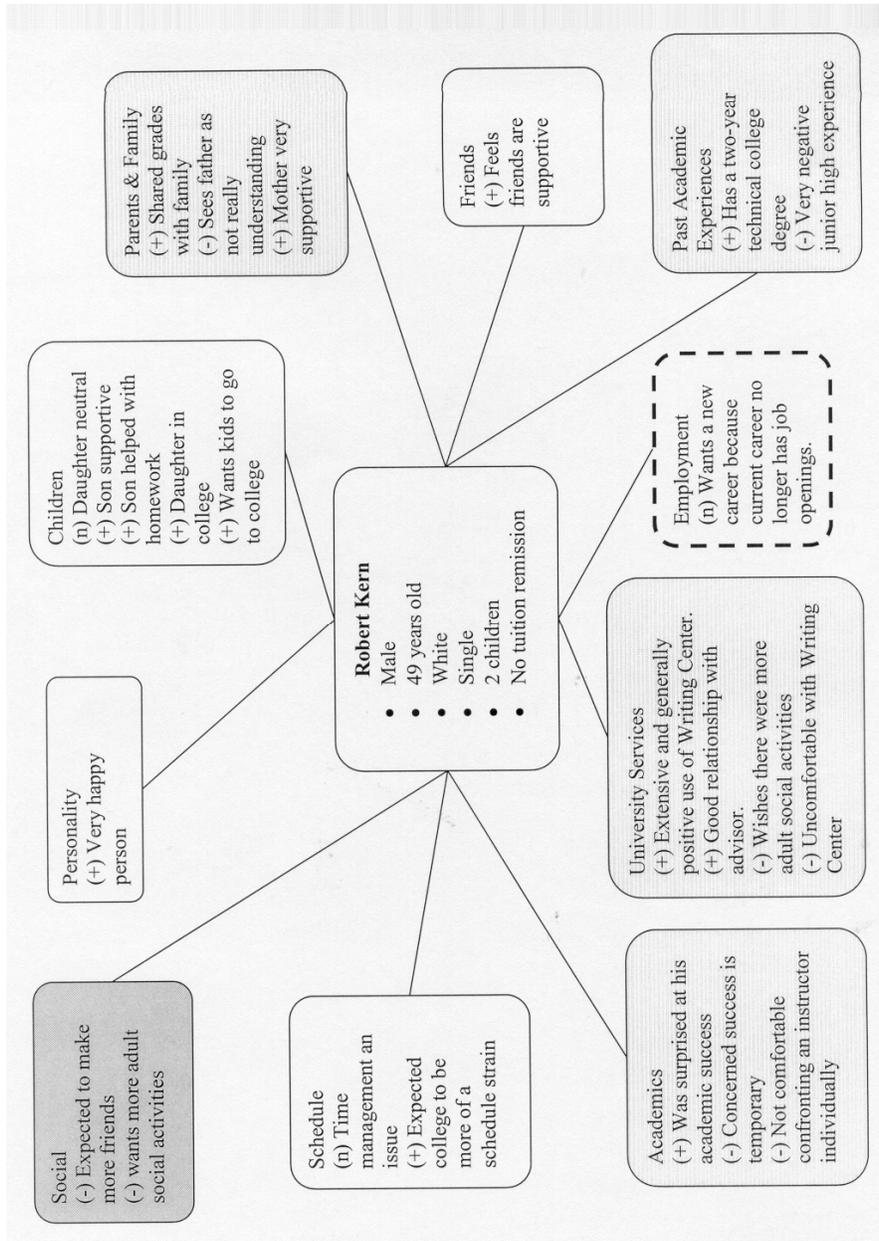
Appendix P.

Flowchart of Oscar Oliva



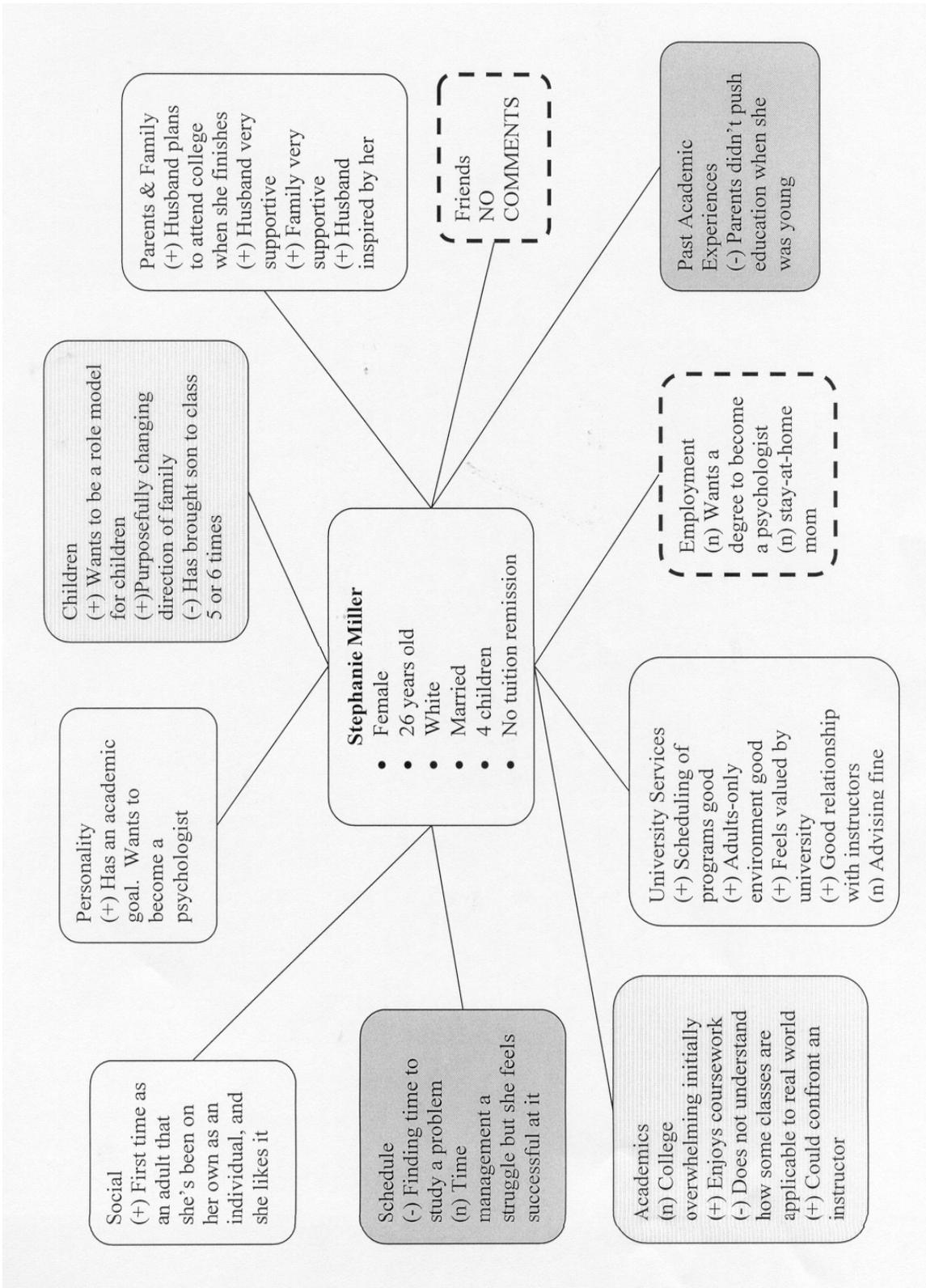
Appendix Q.

Flowchart of Robert Kern



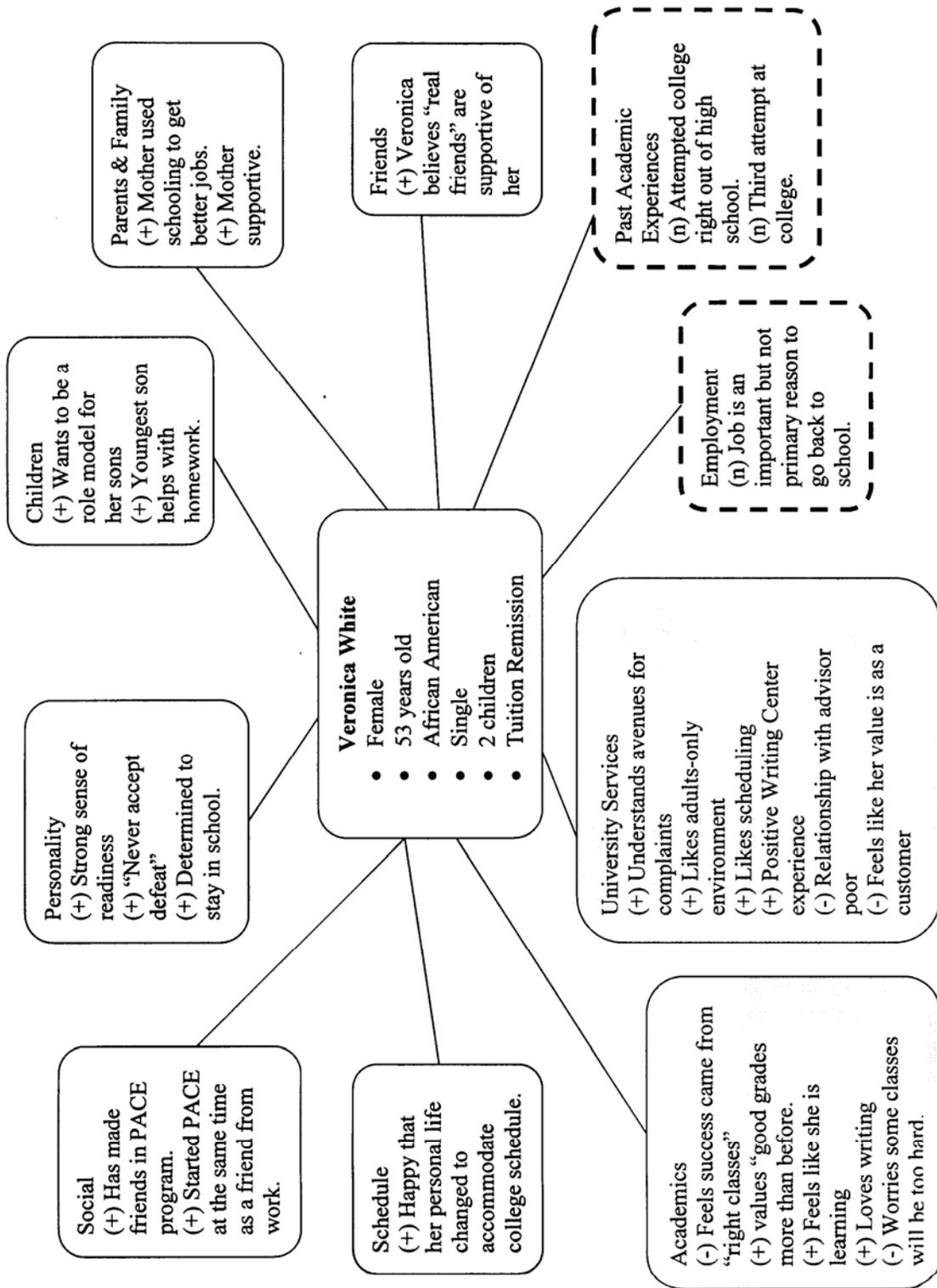
Appendix R.

Flowchart of Stephanie Miller



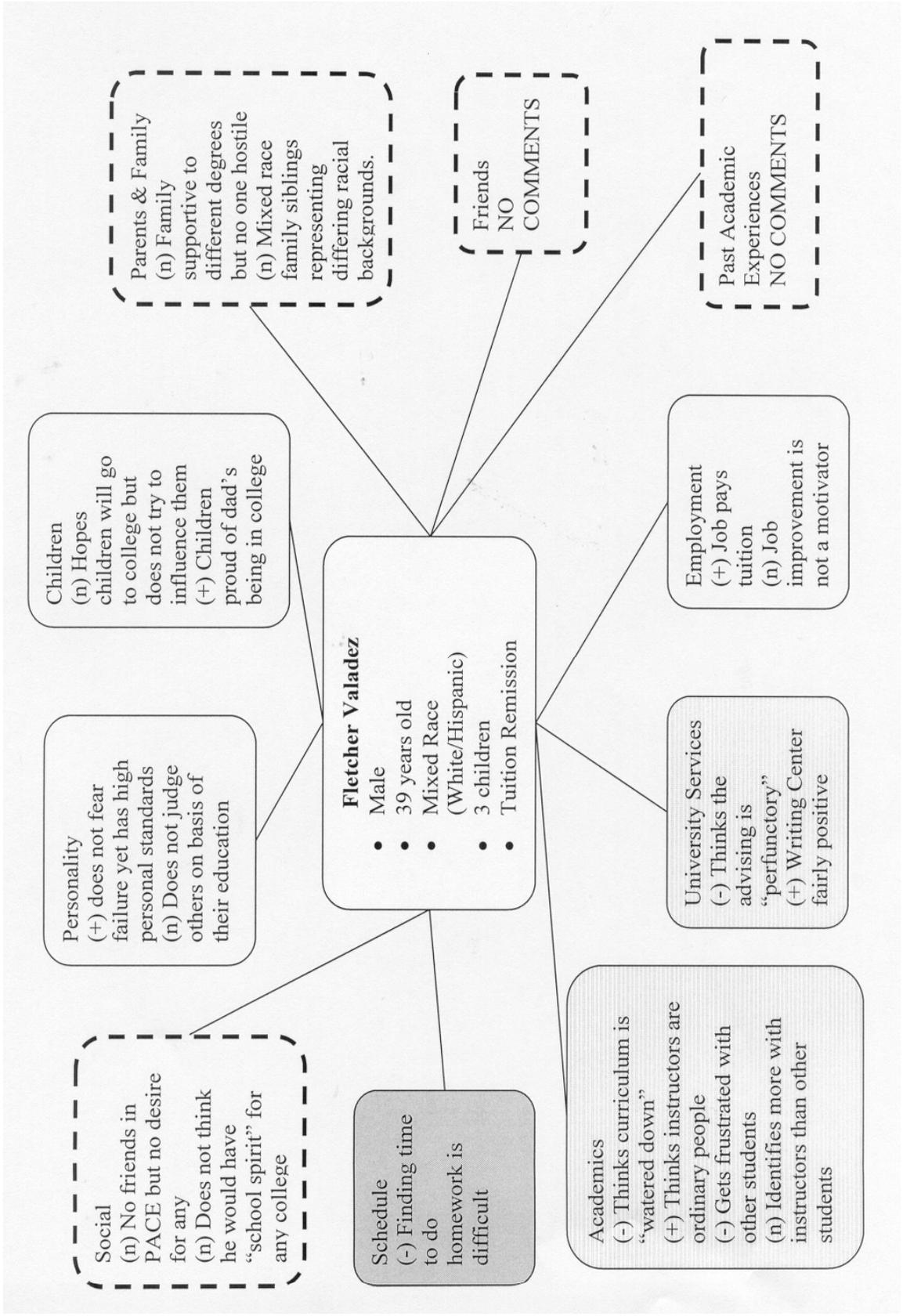
Appendix S.

Flowchart of Veronica White



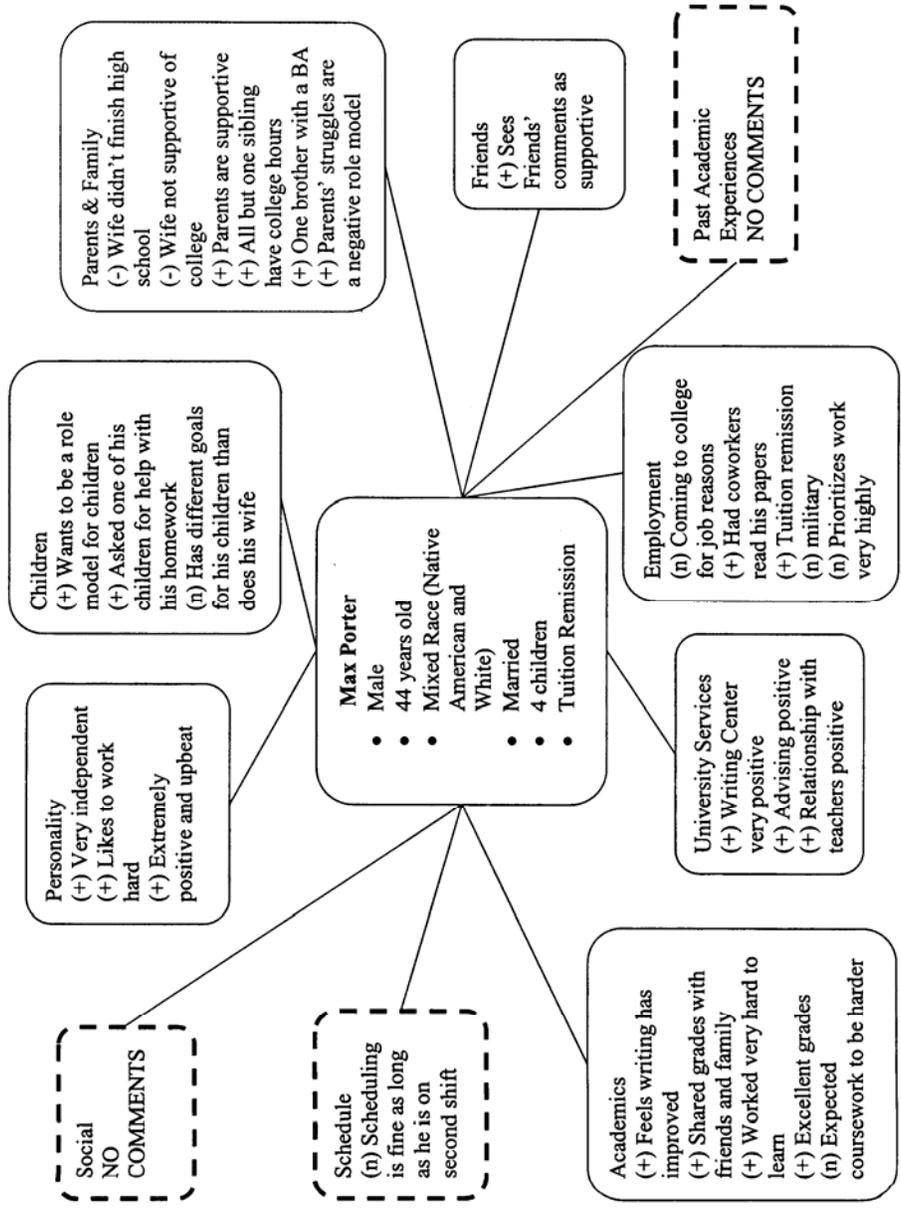
Appendix T.

Flowchart of Fletcher Valadez



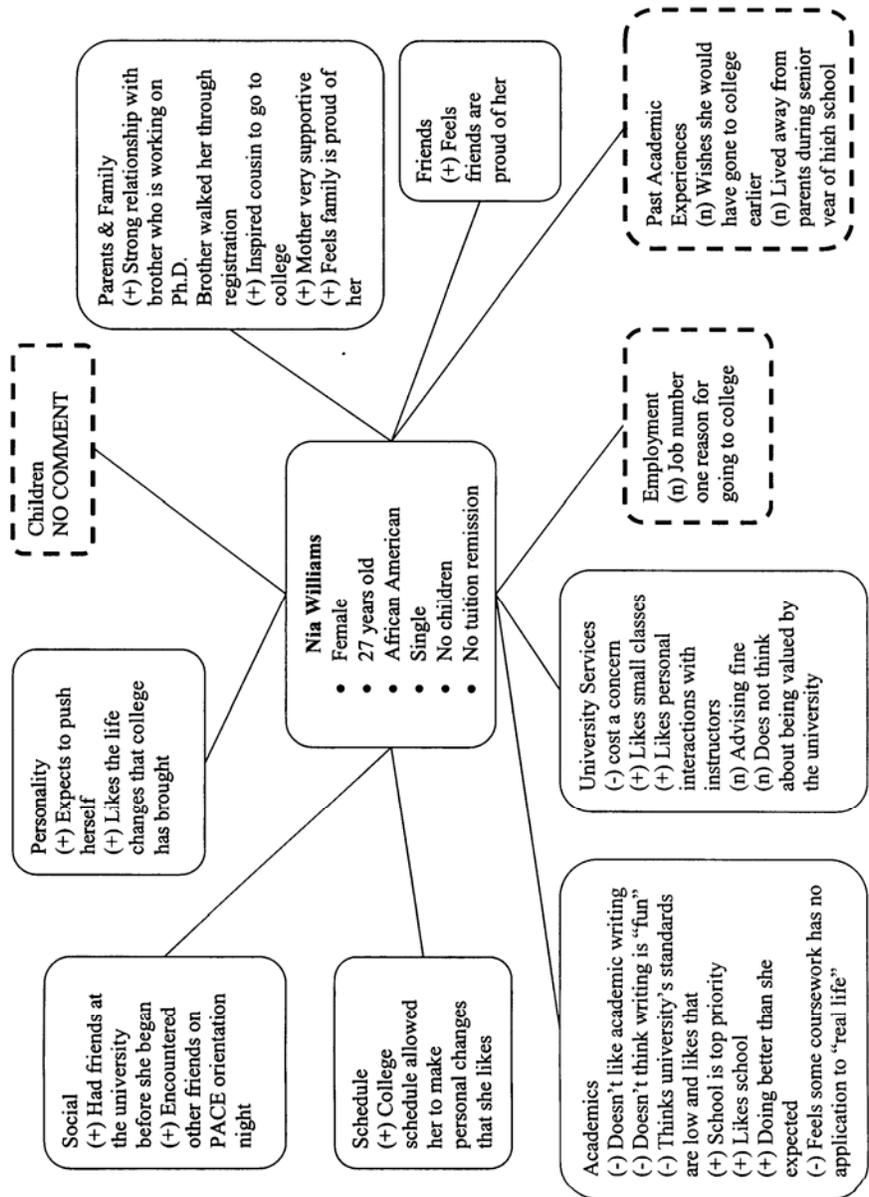
Appendix U.

Flowchart of Max Porter



Appendix V.

Flowchart of Nia Williams



Appendix W.

List of Interviewees by Adaptation

## List of Interviewees by Adaptation

### Poorest Adaptors:

1. Todd Farmer
2. Charles Freeman
3. Michelle Guthrie
4. Diane Palmer
5. Olivia Smith
6. Maggie Hubbard
7. Samson Rivers

### Adaptors in the Middle

1. Tammi Keane
2. Ida Jones
3. Oscar Oliva

### Best Adaptors:

1. Robert Kern
2. Stephanie Miller
3. Veronica White
4. Fletcher Valadez
5. Max Porter
6. Nia Williams

Appendix X.

Volunteer Request Form

Thank you for your interest in being interviewed as part of my dissertation research. Please check the statement that best describes you:

- **First Generation Student:** None of my parents (as I define the word parent) attended a two-year or four-year college or university.
  
- **Continuing Generation Student:** One or more of my parents attended a two-year or four-year college or university.

Contact information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Times for contacting: \_\_\_\_\_