A PARTIAL ANALYSIS OF ADULT STUDENTS IN THE
PUBLIC FOUR YEAR INSTITUTIONS
IN OKLAHOMA

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Wayne Hatcher, B.A., B.S., M.A.
Denton, Texas
May, 1996
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The primary purpose of this study was to identify and secure perceptions of what personal and institutional factors influenced and attracted adult students to enroll in four year institutions in Oklahoma. The secondary purpose was to compare student responses by institution.

The more notable findings include: (1) dominant personal factors as to why adult students in this study returned to college were reportedly to improve/advance themselves, especially as it relates to their career; (2) flexible class scheduling was reported to be the most important institutional function for recruiting adult students, with academic quality and institutional costs of education next in importance; (3) almost 90% of respondents reported being under 45 years of age; (4) almost 85% reported commuting fewer than 50 miles to class; (5) approximately 90% reported enrolling each fall and spring; (6) approximately twice as many respondents who returned to college reported they did so because it was more important to them to complete an unfinished degree than to begin a degree.
Conclusions drawn from this study are as follows:

(1) adult students appear to be unlikely to enroll in classes meeting more than three times a week; (2) adult students in Oklahoma may no longer be described as part time and/or night students; (3) these students appear to be returning to college as full-time students, absorbing it into their daily lives and continuing their careers; (4) adult students in Oklahoma are homogeneous in that they tend to be relatively young, white, well educated and employed; (5) institutional officials should exercise caution about using the information given by these students as tools for recruiting adult students to their institutions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special contributions to the completion of this work include the Academic Research Support Center of Cameron University, and additional computer support and instruction from Dan Wilson of Southwest Eye Institute. Dr. Dwane Kingery, as usual, gave the time, guidance and support he has given so many of us over the years.

These 10 years have been the hardest of my life. Struggling to get a doctorate while holding down a demanding career, I also tried to be a good husband and a good father. My wife, Martha and our two children, Jennifer and Eric made major contributions to this work, which can never be repaid, but are truly appreciated. The very few of us that stayed through it all know this struggle all too well.

I know this work was completed because of my wife and her Christian faith. I gave up on the paper. I gave up on my family. Because of her faith it is finished.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Given the projected decrease in the number of high school graduates, the 1980s were widely predicted to be a time of a significant decline in enrollment in higher education. However, while high schools graduated 25% fewer seniors, college enrollments incurred an increase of almost 13%. This phenomenon is directly related to adults, defined for the purposes of this study as those persons 25 years and older, going to college in greater numbers than ever before in the nation's history (Aslanian, 1991). Some colleges are realizing that adults can be encouraged back to school, especially with programs geared to adult students (Atkins, 1990; Bianchi, 1991).

Many of these adults are seeking a college education during a period of transition. Some authors use the term crisis; others use transformation; and still others use change to describe this period. In this framework, transition includes all these concepts and is defined broadly as any event or nonevent that results in a change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles within the settings of self, work, family, health, and/or economics (Chickering, Lynch & Schlossberg, 1989). Transitions include not only obvious life changes (such as high school
graduation, job entry, marriage, birth of the first child, bereavement) but also less observable changes (loss of career aspirations and the nonoccurrence of anticipated events, such as an expected job promotion that never comes through). A transition is not necessarily a matter of change but rather the individual's own perception of the change, thus "a transition can be both an event and a nonevent, if it results in change" (Chickering, Lynch & Schlossberg, 1989; Champagne, 1989).

Change in technology and associated areas is now so great and so far reaching that education only during youth can no longer prepare adults to meet the demands that will be made on them. This accelerated rate of change, according to Tifft (1988), should also result in modifications in the way schools and colleges prepare upcoming generations for their future as lifelong learners; and it should also result in the way society thinks about education and learning. The diversity of today's students and their needs is challenging educators and student affairs professionals who are faced with both the tasks of addressing these changing needs and characteristics and their integration into institutional priorities. This integration serves as a great challenge for the student affairs profession.

What causes the adult student to choose to enroll in a college and a formal degree-seeking program? What are some institutional factors that are important in attracting adult students? Of the studies that have been done on adult
college students, only a few have dealt specifically with Oklahoma institutions of higher learning. What personal and/or institutional factors exist that affect the enrollment and recruitment of adults in the public four year colleges and universities in Oklahoma? Little research exists to address these questions.

By revealing these factors coordinated and informed efforts may then be possible to assist in the enrollment and recruitment of these adult students. This study should then also contribute to the literature in this area.

Statement of the Problem

This study is concerned with identifying personal and institutional factors related to the enrollment and recruitment of adult students in four year public institutions in Oklahoma.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study is to identify and secure perceptions of what personal and institutional factors influence and attract adult students to enroll in four year institutions in Oklahoma. The second purpose is to compare student responses by institution.

Research Questions

To carry out the purposes of this study, the following questions are addressed:

1) What personal factors are perceived by adult students to be important in choosing to enroll in the institution they now attend?
2) What institutional factors do adult students perceive to be important in attracting other adult students?

3) How do responses of students enrolled at each Oklahoma institution compare?

**Background and Significance**

Within the last twenty-five years this nation has moved from being a predominantly youth-centered society to one that is primarily an adult-centered one, (Aslanian and Brickell, 1988). During this time the adult student population in the United States has increased over 80%, (Baurer and Young, 1990). Concomitantly, Cross (1981) states that with the accelerating pace of change owing to the knowledge explosion and the technological revolution, an increasing proportion of adults of every age group are seeking to enroll in college to continue learning in order to avoid becoming obsolescent. Knowles (1984a) goes on to state that adult education will continue to be one of our greatest growth industries, not only in North America but around the world. Approximately seven million American adult students will be studying for college credit each year before the year 2000 (Aslanian and Brickell, 1988). This is widespread participation by any standard (Stage and McCafferty, 1992).

However, the need, the opportunity, and even the desire are sometimes not sufficient to cause most adults to enroll at a particular point in time. There are millions of potential adult learners who need, want, and should have the
chance to enroll in college. Decisions to enroll may be pending for a long time says Cross (1976, 1981), but the timing of the entry of these students into the learning arena will be determined by particular events that permit/force them to enter it.

Although adults traditionally enter higher education with a high level of motivation and specific educational and vocational goals, the transition to college is often difficult. Adults exhibit different learning styles, academic and social concerns, and family role obligations (Baurer and Young, 1990).

According to Knowles (1984b), adult learners often have intellectual aspirations that are the least likely to be aroused by the rigid, uncompromising requirements of authoritative conventionalized institutions of learning. A cursory review of student affairs staffing patterns, budgets and services on many campuses demonstrates that few are designed and adequately equipped to deal with the needs of adult students. Although they have long been a part of the campus, adult students have seldom been recognized as a group with special needs (Shriberg, 1980). According to some, these special needs should be addressed so that adult students can successfully make the transition from citizen-in-the-world to an enrolling college student (Steltenpohl and Shipton, 1986). Some institutions may be more interested in meeting their own needs for survival than in serving the learning needs of adults (Cross, 1981). Knowles (1984a,
p. 56) states: "It is a sad commentary that among our social institutions, colleges and universities have been among the slowest to respond to adult learners."

There is ample evidence that well-designed institutional functions can help adult students in this transition (Rose, 1989). By analyzing the research of adult student characteristics and student characteristics specific to a particular college or university campus, Knofla (1989) states one may develop a set of strategic plans that could ease the transition to the college environment, provide information on support services offered or needed and provide social and cocurricular activities of interest for adult students.

Astin believes adult learners are interested in trying to connect their educational experience to the rest of their lives; the more they can do that, the more involved in the educational experience they become (Astin, 1986). This is often difficult as adult students generally have multiple commitments and are not campus-focused, states one authority (Hughes, 1987). They also bring with them different values, learning styles, expectations for careers and lifestyles, educational expectations and motivations, and personal developmental needs (Astin, 1986; Baurer and Young, 1990).

These areas often cause a need for a different support services program. According to Nutter, Kroeber and Kinnick (1991), not enough attention has been directed to the non-instructional needs of adult students. It is this diversity of today's students and their needs that is challenging
institutional traditions and student affairs professionals who must address these changing student types and characteristics and their integration with the institution's priorities (Garland, 1985). Nutter, Kroeger and Kinnick (1991) believe that the core structure of the university needs to change to better accommodate adult students.

In student affairs, state Chickering, Lynch and Schlossberg (1989), it is no longer enough to be merely a good listener; a student affairs professional must also be a broker, an advocate, and a linker. The professional with a broad view should take the initiative to make changes, depending on the enrollment needs of the particular adult or group of adults (Chickering, Lynch & Schlossberg, 1989). Examples that they give include the university's rules on financial aid, on orientation, on overly strict admission requirements, on part-time students, and on curriculum. Particular situations often need particular kinds of help. Therefore, individuals armed with knowledge of these students and possible roles can be more flexible, helpful, and able to put it all together more effectively (Schlossberg, 1984).

The literature on the adult student indicates that the research has been concentrated on learners in a wide range of learning activities, such as noncredit courses, certificate programs and technical school courses. A smaller amount of research has been done strictly on adult students enrolled in degree programs, leaving the implication that the demographic characteristics, motivations to learn, goals, barriers and
triggers are the same regardless of the type of organized learning activity in which these individuals are engaged (Sewall, 1984).

This study focuses upon the identification of personal and institutional factors that influence adult students in one state during their transition into becoming a college student. During this decade, adult students are expected to be a national majority of all students in collegiate programs (Aslanian, 1991). According to Jacoby's research this majority was attained in the fall of 1993 (1993). Such students may or may not be as visible to some university administrators as the typical college student in this state; however their unique student service and program needs are causing them increasingly to be more visible to the front line student affairs professionals in the higher education community.

Since the 1970s, adult students, due primarily to their increasing numbers, have been the target of many books and articles about why they are entering college. Fewer studies have dealt with the transitional problems involved. National surveys of adult college students have largely ignored regional and state variance (Marlow, 1989). Furthermore, less research of this type has been done by professional student development practitioners in Oklahoma to effect the approaches needed to alleviate institutional barriers for the state's adult students. The findings of this study should reveal to the Oklahoma institutions of higher education
included in this project some areas which need to be added or strengthened if these institutions are to properly serve this growing constituency.

This study is also significant in that it does the following:

1. identifies personal factors adult students perceive as important in choosing to enroll in the college they now attend;
2. identifies institutional factors adult students perceive to be important in attracting other adult students;
3. compares responses of students by institution;
4. provides data which will be useful in further research.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will have restricted meaning and are thus defined for this study:

1. Adult students will be defined as new and/or returning students that are 25 years old or older. This definition is used by a number of authors on adult students including Cross (1974, 1976, 1981), Jacoby (1989a, 1989b), Knofla (1989) and Aslanian and Brickell (1980, 1988).

2. Personal factors refer to those items in which the individual respondent perceives as affecting her/his own decision to enroll in college, e.g., to complete an unfinished degree.
3. **Institutional factors** refer to those items in which the individual respondent perceives as affecting the decision of other adult students to attend college, e.g., he may see childcare services as very important to attract adult students, even though he has no children.

4. **Crosstabulation** is a joint frequency distribution of cases as defined by the categories of two or more variables. This is the most commonly used method of analysis in the social sciences.

Limitations of Study

1. This study deals with students from the twelve four year Oklahoma public institutions of higher education which offer at least a bachelor's degree. It does not deal with the community, junior or technical colleges. This group of students is considered to be more homogeneous than the group would be if all adult students were included. Research on the adult learner has focused on a wide range of adult activities such as noncredit courses, certificate programs and technical school courses. A smaller amount of research has been done strictly on adult students enrolled in degree programs.

2. The responses come from a specific population of undergraduate students who are 25 years of age or older, who are enrolled in these institutions. The findings of this study are applicable to specific institutions and student populations similar to those in this study.
Research Design

The research method utilized in this study is that of a descriptive survey. This study is designed to determine the current perceptions of adult students as to why they enrolled in their current institutions and what functions of the institution these adult students believe would assist in attracting other adult students.

Summary

This chapter states the problem, the purposes, the research questions, background and significance, the limitations and definitions of the study. Chapter II contains a review of the literature on adult students, concentrating on adult development theory and the barriers that face these students in their attempts to obtain a college education. Chapter III describes the population of the study, the methods for data collection, and treatment of the data. Chapter IV presents the findings of this research. The final chapter includes a summary of the major findings, conclusions, implications of findings and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This second chapter will concentrate on a review of the related literature, emphasizing three major areas: a) adult development theory, b) adult students in transition, and c) addressing the needs of adult students. The initial section will discuss the two major divisions of adult development theory, stage theorists, which emphasize the sequential nature of adult development, and then those that base their theories and research on life events and transitions.

Next, will be the transitions that adult students undergo as they go from citizen in-the-world to student. This section will point out the modifications that these individuals must deal with in such areas as family, work, belief systems and the college environment. Lastly, how some institutions have addressed the barriers and transitions that this ever-growing segment of the college population must manage will be discussed.

Adult Development Theory

Among the adult population, women, older people, and to a lesser extent, blue-collar workers are seeking higher education at a higher rate than ever before. This means
programs are becoming increasingly representative of the total population and as a result, it is Knox's belief that student affairs practitioners should develop a more comprehensive understanding of adult development (1977). In the past, preparation in this field was usually limited to human development during the late adolescent and early young adult periods. The change in student ages has produced a growing literature on adult development that can assist practitioners as they increasingly serve the new majority of adult students (Knox, 1986).

An understanding of adult development, states Marlow (1989), will be useful to student affairs personnel to the extent to which they reflect their understanding in professional decision making. According to Knox (1977), the most fundamental way in which student affairs practitioners can assist adult students is by broadening their own perspective on adult development. As adults better understand the orderly and sequential changes in characteristics and attitudes that have happened to them and to others in the past, they will become more able to predict and understand their subsequent behavior. A developmental perspective, Knox goes on to state, can thus enable adults to grasp essential current and unfolding features of their lives and to recognize similarities and differences between their own lives and those of others (1986).
Stage Theory

Perhaps most familiar to the public in general are theoretical perspectives emphasizing the sequential nature of adult development. Stage theories and researchers of development can be categorized into three types: those based on age (Levinson, 1978); those based on issues that precipitate new development (Erikson, 1950; Vaillant, 1977; Gould, 1978); and those related to the unfolding of ethical and moral development (Kohlberg, 1970; Gilligan, 1982), cognitive development (W. G. Perry, 1970), or ego development (Loevinger, 1976). Stage theories and research findings assume some universality of age-specific experience; that is, that people pass through similar experiences at similar ages.

At one end of the continuum, Levinson (1978) focuses on relatively universal, age-linked developmental periods that unfold in an orderly sequence, with stable (structure-building) periods alternating with transitional (structure-changing) periods. Levinson and his associates have explored in depth six distinct periods, each closely linked to age: the Early Adult Transition, or Leaving the Family, which begins in late adolescence; Entering the Adult World, ages 22 to 28; the Age-30 Transition, ages 28 to 33; Settling Down, ages 33 to 40; the Midlife Transition, ages 40 to 45; and Entering Middle Adulthood, ages 45 to 50. Each period is characterized by its own “developmental tasks” (p. 31). For instance, during the Settling Down period a person is concerned with establishing his place in society, that is,
affirming his own integrity and becoming a full-fledged member of his community, advancing toward the goals he has set (p. 1-42).

Levinson's (1978) findings, which allow individual variation within the overall pattern, emphasize sequence and similarity. His research indicates "relatively low variability in the age at which every period begins and ends" (p. 216).

A different perspective of adult development is embodied in research that asserts human beings pass through an invariable sequence of developmental stages, though these stages are not necessarily linked exactly with chronological age. Some people move through the stages later than others, and according to Schlossberg (1984), some people get to one stage and never move on. Erikson (1950), as an example, found an eight-stage progression in ego development, with each stage being characterized by a crucial issue that must be successfully resolved before the individual can move on. The adult stages involve the issues of identity, versus role diffusion; intimacy, versus isolation; generativity, versus stagnation; and ego integrity, versus despair.

Erikson's work was later applied in Vaillant's (1977) analysis of advantaged men in his longitudinal study of Harvard students. Vaillant found that these men had the potential to progress through the basic stages identified by Erikson, as well as an additional stage which he labeled career consolidation.
Erikson's views also related to those of Gould (1978), another stage theorist and researcher who views adult development as a struggle for freedom from the internal constraints of childhood, as a sequential process defining the posturing of self in relation to its inner and outer worlds. His research indicates that such a process happens over time, but is not necessarily age specific. In addition, Gould (1978), like other researchers, saw the significance of specific events as milestones along the adult life course:

"Certain key events such as buying a first house, a first car, experiencing a first job, getting married, a first baby, the first loss of a parent, first physical injury or first clear sign of aging, force us to see ourselves more as the creators of our lives and less as living out the lives we once thought were our destiny. (Gould 1978, p. 13)."

Another group of researchers, still classified as stage theorists, sees individuals as moving through a sequence of stages. Each of the stages is characterized by a qualitative difference in the way the world is processed or viewed. One of these theorists, W. G. Perry (1970), formulated a model of cognitive development based on empirical work with several cohorts of Harvard undergraduates. Perry defined a set of hierarchical stages which resembled Kohlberg's (1970) research on moral development and Loevinger's (1976) research on ego development in that all three view development as progression from the simple to the complex; from an external
orientation, where the individual is dependent on authority or on the judgment of others, to an inner orientation, where the individual takes responsibility for the consequences of his or her own actions; from absolutism and dogmatism to increasing tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty; from a tendency to perceive those outside one's own immediate group in stereotypical terms to increasing awareness of individual differences and greater empathy with others; and from a strong self-focus to a posture of conformity to the group and then to a mature focus on interdependence with others (Schlossberg, 1984).

Loevinger describes ego development as a "master trait... determining an individual's responses" (Weathersby & Tarule, 1980, p. 26). The earliest stage, labeled self-protective, applies to someone who follows rules and thinks in stereotypes, a conformist. At a higher, self-aware level, an individual "develops an increasing self-awareness and the ability to think in terms of alternatives, exceptions, and multiple possibilities in situations" (Weathersby & Tarule, p. 29). Most mature is the autonomous stage, in which the adult makes commitments, tolerates ambiguities, and incorporates opposites.

These concepts enable us to differentiate among a group facing the same transition. Adults at the same transition will process that experience differently--some in a simplistic either/or way, others in a more complex autonomous manner (Schlossberg, 1984, 1989). Similarly, Kohlberg's
(1970) research has developed stages of moral development comparable to W. G. Perry (1970) and Loevinger (1976):
"Adults move from obeying rules and laws because they are motivated by fear of punishment to conforming to society and, finally, to being principled and autonomous" (Kohlberg, 1970, p. 25).

Life Events and Transition Theories

The next major group on the adult development theory continuum are those perspectives based on life events and transitions, such as the approach taken by Lowenthal, Thurnher, and Chiriboga in *Four in Stages of Life* (1975). These researchers found that it is less important to know that a person is 40 years old than that the person is 40 with adolescent children, recently divorced, about to retire, and so on. They state that life events (transitions) are more important than chronological age in understanding and evaluating an individual's behavior (1975).

Pearlin's (1980) research emphasizes transitions and asserts that change is inevitable. He has developed a framework for analyzing the changes brought about by life events, as well as the mechanisms adults have for coping with these changes. Lazarus (1981) has also studied the routine ups and downs of life and describes various ways of coping.

Neugarten (1976) also took into account specific life events, but like other investigators, seem to find them less important than the inevitable life stages. Thus, Neugarten identified life events as well as life stages and found the
stages set by a biological/social clock. Her work emphasizes variability—which she terms as "individual fanning out" (Neugarten, 1976, p. 97). For example, 10-year olds are more similar to each other than 60-year olds. "As lives grow longer, as the successive choice and commitments accumulate, lives grow different from each other" (Neugarten, 1976, p. 112).

Sheehy's (1976) case studies led her to conclude that "life after adolescence is not one long plateau" (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980, p. 22). Sheehy went on to point out that times of crisis, disruption, and constructive change are not only predictable but desirable and that these transitions—successful and unsuccessful—mean growth for the individual (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980).

Schlossberg (1984) distinguishes between successful and unsuccessful transitions. She found three sets of factors that affect how one adapts to a transition and influences the outcome: first were the characteristics of the transition itself such as role change, source, timing, onset, duration, affect, and degree of stress; second were the characteristics of the pretransition and posttransition environments, such as interpersonal support systems, institutional supports, and the physical environment; and third were the characteristics of the individual going through the transition, such as sex, age, stage of health, race, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, value orientation, psychosocial competence, and previous experience with a transition of a similar nature.
Alan Knox, (1977), examines the life events discussed by Schlossberg, Neugarten, Sheehy, Lowenthal, and others and joins them in pointing out that such events bring about role changes requiring adaptations. According to Knowles (1977), when a change event occurs, the need for some adaptation produces, for some adults a heightened readiness to engage in educative activity. The resulting activity, Knowles goes on to say, may or may not be directly related to the change event.

This research finding is somewhat similar to Houle's (1961) analysis of adult motivations to learn. Three classes of adult learners emerge from his analysis: 1) the goal-oriented, who learn to accomplish specific objectives; 2) the activity-oriented who learn to develop social contacts and relationships with others; and 3) the learning-oriented who learn for the sheer pleasure of acquiring knowledge for its own sake.

Cross (1971, 1972, 1974, and 1981) provides very thorough research and presents a comprehensive review of the literature in her longstanding inquiry into the adult learner in the United States. In Beyond the Open Door (1971), Cross is able to link the "who" and the "why" in a manner that would be instructive to individuals interested in attempting an appropriate campus response.

Cross (1974) describes a national movement to develop nontraditional study programs, such as external degrees, extended university, open university, university without
walls, etc. She believes that the greatest difference in the philosophy of these programs, as compared to traditional ones, is an assumption that "education should be measured by what the student knows rather than how or where he learns it" (Cross, 1974, p. 1). Cross (1974) continues: "Opportunity should be equal for all who wish to learn;...learning is a lifelong process unconfined to one's youth or to campus classrooms." (Cross, 1974, p. 1).

Cross (1981) believes that individuals living in today's world must be prepared to make learning a continuing lifelong activity. To Cross, lifelong learning is not a privilege or a right; it is simply a necessity for anyone. Cross (1985) takes her lifelong learning statement even further, coining the phrase blended life plan. Cross (1985) means to suggest that work, education, and leisure are concurrent, rather than alternating, at all points throughout life. For example, instead of being a full-time worker, a typical 40 year old might spend fewer hours a day or week working, leaving more time for education and leisure; a 20 year old may cease being a full time student to become a part-time student, part-time worker, and part-time vacationer; and a 60 year old might plan for a gradual withdrawal from work rather than full-time retirement. In other words, the blended life plan would consist of a blend of education, work, and leisure throughout most of the years of life (Cross, 1985).
The Adult Student in Transition

An adult's return to school is a highly personal decision and one which is never made lightly, according to the work of Villella & Hu (1991). Several years ago the College Board's Office of Adult Learning Services asked a nationally representative sample of almost 2,000 adult students why they had returned to college during the past year. An impressive 83 percent described a change in their lives as their motivation for that learning—a change that required a new competency to cope in some new life role (Hawes, 1985). Aslanian and Brickell (1980) state that their research indicates that adults who learn because they are in some kind of transition learn in formal educational institutions (particularly postsecondary institutions), at places of employment, and from professional associations more often than adult learners who are not in transition. This finding is in agreement with other researchers such as Knowles (1980), as mentioned earlier.

College entry signals transition in adult lives. In this instance transition means a process of continuing and changing reactions over time—for better or worse—which are linked to the individual's continuous and changing appraisal of self-in-situation, (Schlossberg, 1984). Adults face the transition from citizen in-the-world to student when they enter college. At the same time, they may be negotiating transitions related to self, job, or family. These transitions may be conscious or unconscious, and all are
accompanied by uncertainties and risks as well as opportunities (Chickering, Lynch & Schlossberg, 1989).

Research on transitions and the coping behavior of adults reveals that individuals differ in the way in which they adapt to changes in their lives (Gould, 1980). Most adults, according to Levin (1986), rather than remaining passive during these transitions, actively seek ways to alleviate stress-producing conditions by using their own set of coping strategies. Studies in adult learning indicate that the majority of the adult population is involved in some type of learning activity (Giele, 1980; Cross, 1981), and that much of this learning is prompted by life transitions (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980). A major conclusion of the Aslanian and Brickell (1980) investigation of adult learning is that adults learn not so much because learning is a natural phenomenon, but because transitions, as an inevitable part of life, force changes in the lives of adults and that these changes require and challenge the adult to learn in order to cope with that change.

Almost all adult learners point to changing life circumstances—a transition from one status in life to another—as their reason for seeking new learning. According to Aslanian & Brickell (1980), these transitions occur unevenly at various stages of adult life. These two researchers go on to state that every adult who learns because of a transition can point to a specific event in his or her life that signaled, precipitated, or triggered the
transition and, thus, the learning. These trigger events occur unevenly in adult life and are primarily career or family events (1988). While the subject an adult chooses to study is always related to the life transition requiring that learning, the topic is not always related to the event triggering the learning (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; 1988).

The transition from one life stage to the next can be signaled by these life events, a significant change in the life circumstance of the individual, or by internal changes, an impulse to rearrange attitudes or goals according to Chickering, Lynch, and Schlossberg (1989). This signal to rearrange one's relationships, environment or feelings has been referred to as "marker events" by Levinson (1978, p. 147), "trigger events" by Aslanian and Brickell (1980, p. 62), and "teachable moments" by Havighurst (1972, p. 27).

Knox (1986) indicates that within each of the life stages, the individual is in a state of relative equilibrium; while in the transition from one stage to the next he experiences some discontinuity, not always dramatic, but at least a disruption in which he must make adjustments and respond to new developmental tasks.

Hawes (1985), found that returning students have some very specific reasons for resuming the campus experience. These reasons, he found, do not usually include a major desire for gains in such areas as self-awareness, self-concept, and maturation even though many returning students have these needs. Aslanian and Brickell (1980, 1988) point
out that students have three basic reasons for returning or resuming their college education: 1) career changes or implementations; 2) transitions in their family lives; 3) transitions in their leisure patterns.

As stated earlier, each adult who learns because of a transition can point to a specific event in his or her life that signaled, precipitated, or triggered the transition and thus the learning. Marlow's work indicates that getting hired or fired, getting married, divorced, getting sick, getting elected, or moving to a new city are the kinds of events that tell adults it is time to learn (1989). For adults in transition, "specific life events set the time on the learning clock: to know their life schedules is to know their learning schedules" (Champagne & Petitpas, 1989, p. 268). Schlossberg (1984) found that what prompts most adult Americans to learn are changes in their work, be it for the purposes of getting, holding, or advancing in their jobs before retirement or moving out of their jobs and into retirement. She also found that whereas career-related events trigger learning most often for single and married adults, the divorced/separated, not surprisingly, are influenced equally by career and family triggers, and the widowed most often by family triggers. There are fewer differences in the types of events that trigger learning for the various groups (Schlossberg, 1984). Chickering, Lynch & Schlossberg seem to enforce this finding with the example that while career triggers rank first and family triggers
rank second for all groups, a clear pattern exists: as one acquires more and more education, learning is more and more likely to be triggered by career events (1989).

Regardless of their demographic characteristics, state Villella & Hu, almost all adult learners point to their own changing circumstances as their reasons for learning (1991). Further, adults who learn because of one kind of transition differ from those who learn because of another (Cross, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984). Brookfield's study asserts that adults learn what they need to know in order to be successful in their new status (1986). Adults enter a learning experience in one status and expect to leave it in another, and they will be disappointed if they go out exactly as they came in (Brookfield, 1986). The test of the learning is the success of the transition (Aslanian & Brickell, 1988).

The timing of these transitions has quickened over the last century, as social and economic change has become more turbulent (Fredenburgh, 1971). Changes in population, mobility, technology, occupations, housing, income, inflation, government, family life, politics, minority affairs and leisure will mean an even faster rate of change in adult life than ever before (Gould, 1978; Aslanian & Brickell, 1988). These two authors state that the value of knowing what kinds of transitions cause adult learning lies in being able to predict what they will learn. And, Aslanian
and Brickell go on to add, the value of knowing what kinds of events trigger adult learning lies in being able to predict when they will learn (1988a).

Adulthood is often erroneously assumed to be a time of stability and little change, when in fact, according to some research it is a time filled with transitions (Goldberg & Griefieg, 1986; Levin, 1986). Those institutions that can successfully address the needs of adult students in their transition, according to Rose, will benefit from both increased recruitment and retention of this population (1989). An outcome will be a program that not only addresses adult student needs, but also results in more effective and efficient delivery of services (Rose, 1989; Terrell, 1990).

**Addressing the Needs of Adult Students**

Similar to Cross, Knowles (1970) believes that adult education provides for the continuous development of individuals toward their full potential through their lifespan. As with Cross, Schlossberg and others, Knowles states that many of today's lockstep college curriculums need to be replaced with competency-based flexible learning systems to accommodate the growing number of adult students (1970, 1980). Other areas in higher education that need to be addressed, according to Knowles, include emphasizing the significance of processes over products, qualitative changes over quantitative change, and stressing the role of experience in facilitating the course of development rather than the role of training as the source of development.
(Knowles, 1980; 1984a). Although more graduate degree programs are being tailored to the needs of adults, Apps believes that these efforts seem to be more concerned with logistics and cosmetics than with the presentation and complexity of the content (1981). Jacoby (1989) seems to reiterate this stance:

The dominance of the residential tradition of higher education continues to shape the development of policies and practices....maintaining essentially the same curricular and programmatic formats....the theories and models of student development have been building largely on work with traditional, residential college students (p.7).

Community colleges, however, have made major efforts to meet the educational needs of adults (Hodgkinson, 1983). Using her research, Cross constructed the following profile of a college for adult students, based upon a composite of preferences revealed in questionnaire data:

"It is a friendly place where good teaching is emphasized and where faculty members take an interest in students. It offers low cost courses clearly relevant to career preparation, stressing the development of skills over the manipulation of abstract concepts (p. 176, 1976)."

To get around what some believe are higher education's barriers for adult students and the industries that need them, Hodgkinson reveals that an alternate system of
postsecondary education has been created that goes around many of these impediments—in the amount of approximately 50 billion dollars (1983). Even further reduction in the influence of formal higher education on many of these industries seems certain, as corporate education programs are now offering their own degrees (Aslanian, 1991). If higher education institutions want to become more active in the adult education area, there are at least some that believe that these institutions will have to modify their existing practices considerably (Hodgkinson, 1983; Cross, 1985; N. Perry, 1991).

With this in mind, the andragogical approach espoused by Knowles and supported by his research (1970, 1980, 1984a, 1984b), in teaching adults is one that may need to be taken seriously. Using this approach the classroom climate is such that in formulating objectives students often share in diagnosing needs and objectives. Instruction is usually based upon the readiness and the needs of participants. Problem units serve as the basis for design. The activities are inclined to be experimental or based upon inquiry. Evaluation is often a mutual process involving teacher and participants. The entire instructional program involves mutuality, respect for each other and a collaborative effort (Knowles, 1980, 1984).

Knowles' description of andragogy indicates that adults can and will learn if certain conditions exist, including the following: when they have a strong desire to learn; the
skills and technology are closely related to their individual objectives; when they receive satisfaction from what they learn (1980). Indeed, being able to name their limitation or the skill to be acquired seems to generate strong motivation and even enthusiasm for getting on with the task (Knowles, 1984; Champagne, 1989).

According to Jacoby, most adults do not learn for the sheer pleasure of learning (1989a). She goes on to state that for most, learning is not its own reward; many enjoy the process of learning, some do not (Jacoby, 1989b). Additional research indicates that neither the process nor the possession is the reason most adults learn and neither, in itself, is enough to make most of them learn (Steltenpohl and Shipton, 1986). Pirnot states that most adult students learn because they want to use the knowledge as the means to some other ends (1987). The value of the learning lies in its utility, according to Sewall (1984), and he states educators will have to deal with this fact if they want to deal with adults. Tifft (1988) believes that it is inevitable that the new adult students will change the schools and colleges. Sooner or later, eagerly or reluctantly, forced by circumstance or excited by opportunity, many people associated with higher education believe that schools and colleges will have to accommodate this new clientele (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980; Knowles, 1970; Knox, 1986; Rhatigan, 1988).
Many colleges and universities, according to Rose (1989), have begun to make such accommodations and to actively recruit adult students for their classes and programs. Many institutions have begun extended timetable programs, an approach that means offering regular college courses late in the afternoon and in the evening. Several institutions have taken regular courses and offered them in a weekend format, again to encourage the attendance of older, returning students. Many colleges and universities have taken courses into more convenient locations within the communities, often many miles from the main campus, in an attempt to encourage participation by returning students (Apps, 1981).

Many articles have described the increase of adult participation in higher education and its potential for further growth. Yet, states Brodzinski (1984), many members of the university community tend to ignore the implications of these two trends and to hold on to what some refer to as old myths. According to Brodzinski (1984), these myths are: 1) the decline in eighteen to twenty-one-year-old college students is due totally to a decrease in that age group in the population; 2) despite talk about adult students, freshmen are still basically the same; 3) there may be an increase in adult students, but their numbers are not significant; 4) adult students mostly enroll as part-time students and that group does not really have a substantial impact on the campus; 5) continuing education programs for
adults are nice sources of income for the institution, but they are not really that important or widespread.

The facts are that since the 1960s, the population of students 25 and older on college campuses has grown by phenomenal percentages. During a ten year span, from 1973 to 1983, students 35 or older increased their enrollment in higher education by 90% (Nutter, Kroeger, & Kinnick, 1991). By the turn of the century there will be over 20 million students who meet the criteria to be considered adult students (Stage & McCafferty, 1992). The importance of this statistic is magnified when one examines the demographics of people who might attend college that are in the traditional age (18-24) bracket. It is projected that in the mid-1990s, approximately one-third fewer people will be graduating from high school compared to graduates in 1985 (Shriberg, 1984). When one comprehends the implications of such statistics, Terrell notes (1990), it seems all the more important for colleges and universities to develop successful means of attracting and retaining adult students.

Today, adult learners are a majority of the college student population, as well as the most important source of growth for many colleges; however, the significant presence of adult students on college campuses is not a recent phenomenon (Jacoby, 1994). In round figures, adults, age 25 or older constituted 30% of the students enrolled in college credit courses in 1972 (Hawes, 1985). They constituted
almost 45% of the college population by 1987, and increased to 50% by the mid-1990s (Jacoby, 1993).

Some projections indicate that by the end of the 1990s less than 25% of the nation's population will be of traditional college age, while over 63% will be 25 years of age or older (Jacoby, 1989b). Further research shows that the 18-24 year olds will decrease by 22%, the 25-34 age group will only increase by 2%, but the 35-44 year old age group will be expanding by almost 50% (Jacoby, 1989b; Rhatigan, 1988). Other researchers also believe that the amount of part-time students will continue to increase, that demands for alternate learning environments will cause them to become more flexible, and that the blended life plan will replace the linear one (Knowles, 1984; Jacoby, 1989b; Cross, 1981 & 1985).

As indicated, American society has undergone drastic change. In 1950 the typical American family unit consisted of a working father, a housewife mother, and two or more children. This model fit over 65% of the nation's households in 1950, but in 1983 it fit only about 15% (Hodgkinson, 1983). How drastic has this change been reflected in education? According to Morgan, Holmes & Bundy (1976), the increasing number of adults to be educated and the mounting demand for adult education indicate that the number of adult learners will eventually be over twice the number of youth enrolled in institutions of higher education.
One of the best ways to help adults achieve, increase or maintain a capacity to love, work, and play is to connect the knowledge of adult development to the helping skills (Upcraft, 1984). The more counselors and other practitioners know about normal adult development, explains Apps (1981), the more effective will be their responses and programs. By connecting the knowledge base to the skills, we can be more creative, more tuned in, more connected to these adults we try to help (Schlossberg, 1984; Champagne, 1989).

A study on emerging student populations also identified several counseling needs for adult students: adult career development, life span/life cycle role management, reentry in an institution of higher education, and family and business role (Garland, 1985). In addition, adult students often express different practical needs in financial aid, class scheduling, counseling and advising services, and access to learning services (Garland, 1985; Jacoby, 1989a).

Any program that proposes to retain adult students must be relevant (Knox, 1977; 1986). Gordon Allport stated, "We learn most from ego-involved experiences; they have more personal relevance and therefore more staying power...Whatever is ego-relevant is absorbed and retained" (Allport, 1961, p. 107). When adults are in educational programs that are meaningful to them, Noel (1978) states, two significant conditions have been met: 1) a good education and 2) an education that is attractive and satisfying. Noel
goes on to say that satisfaction is of central importance in retaining the older student (1978).

There are many obstacles to this satisfaction that confront adult students in their attempts to continue their education at the college level (Brookfield, 1986). Whatever the reason, says Rose, it is time for colleges to provide services for adult students (1989). There is ample evidence that well-designed instruction can help adult students excel (Rose, 1989). Adult students are interested in trying to connect their educational experience to the rest of their lives, and the more they can do that, the more involved they become (Astin, 1986). This is often difficult as adult students generally have multiple commitments and are not campus-focused (Hughes, 1983). They also bring with them different values, learning styles, support services, expectations for career and lifestyle, educational expectations and motivations, and personal developmental needs (Astin, 1986). It is this diversity of today's students and their needs that is challenging institutional traditions and student affairs professionals, who must address these changing student types and characteristics and their integration with the institutions' priorities (Garland, 1985; Leach, 1985).

A growing number of institutions, while maintaining their traditional programs, have according to Apps, made some major adjustments for adult students. They offer courses on weekends, in the late afternoon, and in the evening, often at
satellite locations; rather than three times a week, many of the courses are offered once a week for a longer time; they have worked out special registration approaches and have worked with support facilities such as libraries to make materials available at nontraditional times; these institutions are more open to accepting transfer credits from other institutions; they have also established special counseling centers for adult students that provide assistance with career planning, study-skills development, and a broad range of problems related to adjusting to academic work (Apps, 1981).

A smaller group of institutions, Apps goes on to say, are doing all the things the above group does, in addition to offering special curricular materials design for adult students (1981). Some of these institutions designed entire degree programs, such as a master of liberal studies program, with the adult student in mind. Adult students are found in traditional degree programs as well, but even in these programs considerable adjustment has been made in the curriculum. To a considerable extent these institutions have even initiated faculty development programs aimed at helping the faculty to better understand the adult student and the teaching-learning approaches that may be more applicable for the adult student than for the traditional student. Finally, a pioneering group of institutions, a much smaller group, is developing degree programs for adult students only. These programs are planned entirely with the adult student in mind.
and are innovative both in terms of content and the teaching and administrative approaches used (Apps, 1981).

Knowledge about adult students and the barriers they face in obtaining a degree in higher education has increased tremendously within the last twenty-five years. Encouragingly, many institutions of higher education have begun to address these needs.

Summary

Chapter II reviews the literature associated with adult students. Specific areas of review are adult development theory, including stage, life events and transition theories. The last part of this chapter deals with addressing the needs of adult students in higher education. This latter section also indicates that progress is being made in some institutions to meet various needs of their adult students.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This study was conducted to identify personal and institutional factors related to the enrollment and recruitment of undergraduate adult students in public four year institutions in Oklahoma. The primary purpose of the study is to identify and secure perceptions of what personal and institutional factors influence and attract adult students to enroll in public four year institutions in Oklahoma. The second purpose is to compare student responses by institution. A survey was constructed to gather data from the 12 public four year institutions in Oklahoma. Included in this chapter are (a) a description of the survey instrument, (b) description of the population and its sample, (c) data collection techniques, and (d) treatment of the data.

Instrument

adult students and their needs, a questionnaire was developed through content analysis of these authors' publications. The questionnaire is designed to elicit information related to undergraduate adult students and their needs (see Appendix A).

Part one of the survey instrument, items 1-34 focuses on: (a) personal factors that affected adult students in selecting the college in which they are now enrolled; and (b) institutional factors adult students perceive to be important in attracting adult students.

Part two (items 35-55) concentrates on demographic information related to developing a profile of these adult students. Questions ask about such things as their age, income and family as well as questions that deal with their efforts in obtaining an education, classification, class schedule and commuting distance. The questionnaire, which was coded to indicate the respective university, was mailed to all of the respondents with stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

A mailed survey was selected for this study because of the broad geographical distribution and time restrictions, although mailed instruments often have a low return rate. An average return rate to a mailed survey is approximately 30% (Forcese and Richer, 1973; Grosof and Sardy, 1985). Fundamentally, the participant's cooperation is often a function of the individual's interest in the subject. In conjunction, a participant's willingness to respond usually
depends on how important he perceives both the research topic to be and his participation in it (Forcese and Richer, 1973, p. 168). The following recommendations for optimizing the return rate of the mailed instruments as outlined by Forcese and Richer (1973) were used: (a) a stamped, self-addressed envelope was included with the survey instrument to minimize respondent inconvenience to the participant, (Appendix A), (b) a cover letter was included, which detailed the importance of the research and asking cooperation was used to generate interest, (Appendix A), and (c) a follow-up campaign, which used follow-up postcards, and letters was initiated periodically following the first mailing (Appendices B and C). Enough instruments were returned from each institution to be statistically sound (50% of the qualified participants responded).

The content validity of the questionnaire, as defined by Borg and Gall (1989, p. 212) was judged by a panel of six authorities in Oklahoma higher education and adult education. These authorities consisted of professors of higher education and professional student affairs practioners. They were requested to examine each item of the questionnaire as to relevance to the study, comprehensibility by the respondents and general construct validity. Each of the items identified by the majority of the panel as successfully meeting these criteria were retained. The few items that did not meet criteria were revised or eliminated from the instrument.
Reliability of the validated instrument was assessed by means of a pilot study. This pilot test consisted of 50 adult student respondents, randomly selected, enrolled at Cameron University, which is the home institution of the researcher. The test-retest method was used in validating the instrument. Pilot study responses are not included in the analyses of data.

Two weeks after receipt of the initial questionnaires, the respondents were requested to complete the same instruments again to ascertain whether any significant differences existed between the first and second responses to the items in the questionnaire. The Equal Length Spearman-Brown procedure was used to estimate the reliability of the total instrument, which had a score of .9275.

PROCEDURES FOR COLLECTION OF DATA

Population

The population under study consisted of all adult undergraduate students over 25 years of age who were enrolled in the public four year institutions in Oklahoma, at the undergraduate level. These Oklahoma universities are as follows:

Cameron                Oklahoma State
Panhandle State        Univ. of Central Oklahoma
East Central          Southeastern State
Langston               Southwestern State
Northeastern State     University of Oklahoma
Northwestern State     University of Sciences & Arts
Sample

The sample was taken from a list of all undergraduate students, 25 years and over, available from the Registrar's Office (or its equivalent) of each of the twelve universities. This list included the students' birthdates, addresses and telephone numbers. Students were selected from the list using a table of randomized numbers. Ten percent of each institution's listings were used for the sample. Therefore each institution was represented in proportion to their adult student enrollment. A majority of returns from each school were sought.

Of the 2016 participants in this study who were assured complete anonymity, 1065 returned the questionnaire. Thirty-six of the respondents stated that they did not believe they met the definition of adult student. Another 26 did not adequately complete the survey and 20 returned the instrument after the deadline, leaving a valid sample of 983.

Collection of Data

From these listings a randomly selected sample was processed and data collected via the questionnaire (Appendix A). The initial mailing included a cover letter (Appendix A) explaining the purpose of the survey, the survey instrument, and a stamped return envelope addressed to the researcher. The second mailing, ten (10) days later, included a follow-up postcard (Appendix B). The second follow-up, if needed, included a letter (Appendix C), another copy of the survey
instrument and another stamped envelope addressed to the researcher to be sent ten (10) days after the postcard.

**Treatment of Data**

The SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to analyze data obtained from the respondents. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentage distributions) were used to summarize questionnaire responses. Additional statistical analysis (crosstabulation) was used to compare subgroups within the population. Figures are used to illustrate the treatment of the data. In many instances the very and significantly important options are combined. With the respondents having eight degrees of importance/no opinion to select it is believed that this combination would give a better overall picture of student opinions. There are also instances where there are none or an extremely low number of responses on one or more of these two options, especially on some of the data that are crosstabulated. By combining the percentages of the two most important responses a more accurate picture of the students in the aggregate is believed to be the result.

1. For research question one data were grouped by frequency and percentage. These data were the personal factors respondents felt were important in selecting their current institution.
2. For research question two, the frequency and percentage of institutional factors these students believed were important in attracting adult students were utilized.

3. The data for research question three were compared by institution.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the research methods and procedures used in this descriptive study. Adult students at 12 public four year institutions in Oklahoma were randomly selected as participants. Each individual was asked to respond to a survey instrument which sought information about why they selected their current institution, what they believed would attract adult students to a particular campus, and demographic information about the respondents. The instrument was validated by a panel of experts in higher education in Oklahoma. Summary statistics such as frequencies and percentages, were calculated and reported.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the data collected from the survey instruments returned by the adult students attending the 12 public four year institutions of higher education in Oklahoma. The findings are a result of the research questions identified in Chapter I which were designed to determine and describe what the students perceived to be the personal factors and institutional functions affecting them in their decision to enroll in these institutions. Personal demographic data were gathered as well.

Respondents

The respondents were identified via random selection from the rolls of the registrar in each respective institution for the spring semester. The questionnaire was returned by 1065 respondents. Thirty-six of the respondents stated that they did not feel they met the definition of adult student. Another 26 did not adequately complete the survey and 20 returned the instrument after the deadline, leaving a valid sample of 983.

Demographic Data

Based on demographic results a typical respondent might be described as a married white woman between 25-44 years of
age with children at home who attends both day and evening classes. This typical respondent also has previous college credits, receives financial assistance, works at least 20 hours per week outside the home and is currently classified as a full-time student who enrolls every fall and spring semester. More specific data regarding the respondents can be found in Appendix F.

Personal Factors Influencing Choice of College

The first research question seeks to determine what personal factors were important to respondents in choosing to enroll in the colleges they now attend. Sixteen factors were selected for which a response was solicited. Each respondent used eight evaluative statements to rate each factor separately. They were not asked to rank the factors in order of importance; therefore a respondent could rate more than one factor in the same manner. In order to report these data more meaningfully, rating categories were collapsed in some cases.

The percentages of respondents rating each factor as very important and significantly important are presented in Figure 1. The factors are presented in descending order of selection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal Growth</td>
<td>77.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve Earnings</td>
<td>69.1</td>
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<td>Complete Degree</td>
<td>65.2</td>
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<td>Major Offered</td>
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<td>Geographic Location</td>
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<td>Academic quality</td>
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<td>Tuition Costs</td>
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<td>Begin Degree</td>
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<td>Pre-enrollment Seminar</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Figure 1. Percentages of respondents selecting each personal factor as very/significantly important.

Responses to these factors were based on the personal needs of the respondents. Some of the factors included may appear to be institutional factors but were responded to in terms of the personal needs of those respondents. The five factors receiving the highest percentages of very important combined with significantly important ratings are discussed in this section, along with the four factors receiving the lowest ratings. The percentages of respondents rating each factor on the scale of importance may be found in Appendix D.
Five Factors With the Highest Percentages

As shown in Figure 1 Career Goals was rated the highest of the sixteen choices that were available for selection. These choices are those factors the respondents rated most important in their choosing to return to college. Personal Growth and Development, received the second-highest rating. Improving Earnings Potential was third. Completing Degree was rated fourth. The fifth highest personal factor was Major Offered. These five appear to be much more personally oriented than some others.

Four Factors With the Lowest Percentages

Pre-enrollment Seminars, Childcare, Change in Marital Status, or Role Models were of least importance to the respondents. These appear to be a mixture of personal and institutional factors.

Crosstabulation of the Five Highest Personal Factors

In order to determine whether these ratings can be further explained, each of the factors receiving the five highest ratings were crosstabulated with gender, age, ethnic status, and average family income. These four characteristics seem to appear most often in the literature.
Figure 2. Five highest personal factors affecting respondents return to college crosstabulated with gender, in percentages.

Gender. Major Offered is the item which had the largest difference in gender response, as displayed in Figure 2. This is a difference of 15%. Complete Degree was the item that had the least difference in gender response. On this item there was only a difference of 1.6%. Overall there appears to be little difference in the responses of male vs female on this item.

Age. The percentage rankings of the first two age categories, 25-34 and 35-44, compared favorably with the order of the five highest factors in the overall survey, as shown in Figure 3.
Figure 3. Five highest personal factors affecting respondents return to college crosstabulated with age, in percentages.

Other items of interest are as follows: (a) in the 55-64 category a higher percentage of respondents ranked **Personal Growth**, **Major Offered** and **Improve Earnings** higher than Career Goals which received the highest ranking in the overall survey; (b) the oldest age category, 65 and over, gave a higher percentage to the four other highest factors; (c) these last two categories seem to indicate that the older respondents valued personal growth and development over job promotions and raises.
Ethnic. Hispanic-Americans and Asian-Americans deviated in their responses more than the other ethnic groups on the following factors: Improving Earnings, Complete Degree and Major Offered as shown in Figure 4. Of the five ethnic groups the African-Americans had the highest percentages of responses on three of the five highest factors which were Personal Growth, Improve Earnings and Complete Degree. Asian-Americans had the highest percentage of responses on Career Goals, with African-Americans second.

Figure 4. Five highest personal factors affecting respondents return to college crosstabulated with ethnic group, in percentages.
Other items of interest related to the crosstabulation by ethnic group include the following: (a) Asian Americans had the highest percentage of responses on Career Goals, but the lowest percentages of responses on three of the remaining four factors; (b) Hispanic-Americans had the highest percentage of responses among the ethnic groups on Major Offered; (c) Whites had the lowest percentage of responses of the ethnic groups on Career Goals; (d) Native-Americans had the second highest percentages of responses on Personal Growth and Improve Earnings.

Annual Family Income. As shown in Figure 5, respondents in the Under $10,000 income category had higher percentages of responses than other respondents on only one factor, Improve Earnings.

![Figure 5](chart.png)

**Figure 5.** Five highest personal factors affecting respondents return to college crosstabulated with annual family income, in percentages.
Other items of interest related to this crosstabulation are as follows: (a) respondents in this $10,000-$19,999 category had the lowest percentages of responses among the income categories on two factors, Personal Growth and Complete Degree, (b) respondents in the $20,000-$29,999 category had the highest percentage of responses on Career Goals; (c) two factors, Personal Growth and Complete Degree received higher percentages of responses than the respondents in the $30,000-$39,000 category than these factors received from the other income categories. Level of annual family income did not appear to be a major differentiating factor.

Crosstabulation of the Four Lowest Personal Factors

The four factors selected as least important by the respondents were also crosstabulated by gender, age, ethnic status and annual family income. Note that in many cases the percentages are small because of the number of respondents.

Gender. Pre-enrollment Seminars, which received the lowest average response percentage of these four factors, also had the least amount of gender response differential as shown in Figure 6.
Figure 6. Four lowest personal factors affecting respondents return to college crosstabulated with gender, in percentages.

Other items of interest includes the following: (a) Childcare received the lowest percentage of response by men of these four factors. Although both percentages on childcare are low, the percentage of responses by women is three times more than that of the men; (b) Marital Change was the factor with the largest percentage of gender response differential. Women responded more positively toward this factor.

Age. Of the two oldest age categories, the 55-64 age group had a sufficient number of responses to have percentage rating on only two factors and the 65+ age category had no one to respond on any of the four factors, as shown in Figure 7.
Figure 7. Four lowest personal factors affecting respondents return to college crosstabulated with age, in percentages.

Items of interest related to this crosstabulation include the following: (a) in the 55-64 year old category the percentage of respondents selecting marital change as most important was almost three times more than any other age group; (b) on the Role Model factor, the highest percentage of responses was the 45-54 age group.

Ethnic. Regarding Pre-enrollment Seminars, the African-American respondents selected this item as most important far more than the other ethnic groups, as shown in Figure 8.
Figure 8. Four lowest personal factors affecting respondents return to college crosstabulated with ethnic group, in percentages.

Other items of interest include the following: (a) Hispanic-American respondents gave Childcare the highest percentage; (b) African-Americans had the highest percentage of responses on three of the four lowest factors (Pre-enrollment Seminars,
Marital Change and Role Models); (c) Asian-American had no respondents selecting the two lowest factor rankings (Pre-enrollment Seminars and Childcare).

Annual Family Income. Pre-enrollment Seminars and Childcare were consistently the two least important factors on this item as seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Four lowest personal factors affecting respondents return to college crosstabulated with annual family income, in percentages.
Other items of interest include the following: (a) respondents in the $30,000-$39,999 income category had the lowest percentage of responses on the Childcare and Role Model factors; (b) respondents in the $40,000 and over income category had the lowest percentage of responses on Pre-enrollment Seminars and Marital Change factors; (c) there seems to be an overall tendency for respondents in the lower income categories to perceive these four lowest factors as more important.

Institutional Factors in Recruiting

The second research question seeks to determine what institutional factors the respondents perceived as important in the recruitment of other adult students. Eighteen factors were selected for which a response was solicited. Each respondent used the same eight evaluative statements as in the first research question to rate each factor separately. They were not asked to rank the factors in order of importance; therefore a respondent could rate more than one factor in the same manner. In order to report these data more meaningfully, rating categories were collapsed in some cases.

The percentages of respondents rating each factor as very important and significantly important are presented in Figure 10. The factors are presented in descending order of selection.
Figure 10. Institutional factors selected as very and significantly important in adult student recruitment by percentage of respondents.

Responses to these factors were based on the perceptions of the respondents. The five factors affecting adult student recruitment that received the highest percentages of very important combined with significantly important ratings are presented in this section, along with the three factors receiving the lowest ratings. The percentages of respondents rating each factor on the scale of importance are found in Appendix E.
The Five Highest Institutional Recruiting Factors

Convenient Scheduling including evenings and weekends, was perceived as the most important institutional factor necessary in the recruitment of adult students. Academic Quality of the institution had the second highest rating. Maintaining Costs of tuition and fees was third. These top three factors all received ratings within six percentage points of each other. The fourth highest factor concerned Financial Aid Counseling by advisors who are aware of the special needs of adult students. The factor perceived to be fifth in importance in recruiting adult students was Experiential Credit; i.e., the awarding of academic credit for previous learning/working experiences (See Figure 10).

The Three Lowest Institutional Recruiting Factors

Lockers available for books and personal possessions was considered least important. Campus Support Group for adult students had the second lowest rating. Pre-enrollment Seminars for adult students considering college had the third lowest rating.

Crosstabulations of the Five Highest Institutional Factors

Similar to the crosstabulations for the highest personal factors, each of these institutional factors affecting adult student recruitment were cross-tabulated with gender, age, ethnic status and average family income. These are the four characteristics seeming to appear most often in the literature.
Gender. Academic Quality had the largest difference in gender response as displayed in Figure 11. The difference was 13.8%.

![Figure 11. Five highest institutional factors affecting adult student recruitment crosstabulated with gender, in percentages.](image-url)

Convenient Scheduling had the least amount of response difference, at 10.0%. There was an average difference in gender response of 12% on these five factors. Overall, gender differences do not seem to be apparent.
Figure 12. Five highest institutional factors affecting adult student recruitment crosstabulated with age, in percentages.
Age. Among the more interesting findings displayed in Figure 12 are the following: (a) the highest percentages of responses on four of the five factors was given by the 45-54 year old respondents (Convenient Scheduling, Academic Quality, Maintaining Costs and Experiential Credit); (b) the 25-34 age category had the highest percentage of responses on the other factor (Financial Aid Counseling); (c) Respondents who were 65 years and over had the lowest percentage of responses on three factors (Convenient Scheduling, Financial Aid Counseling and Experiential Credit); (d) these respondents in the 55-64 category had the lowest percentage of responses on the other two factors (Academic Quality and Maintaining Costs); (e) except for Financial Aid Counseling the percentages of responses on each factor tended to increase with age, for the first three age categories.

Ethnicity. African-Americans have the highest percentages of responses than the other ethnic groups on two factors (Convenient Scheduling and Academic Quality), and the next highest on the remaining three factors, as shown in Figure 13.
Figure 13. Five highest institutional factors affecting adult student recruitment crosstabulated with ethnicity, in percentages.

Hispanic-Americans had the highest percentage of responses on two factors (Maintaining Costs and Experiential Credit) and the Native Americans had the highest percentage of responses on Financial Aid Counseling.
Annual family income. Of the five income categories respondents in the $20,000-$29,999 had the highest percentage of responses in three of the five highest ranked institutional factors. These factors were Convenient Scheduling, Maintaining Costs and Experiential Credit. Academic Quality received the highest percentage of responses from those with incomes of $30,000-$39,999 and Financial Aid Counseling received the highest percentage of responses among those respondents with an annual family income of Under $10,000, as shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Five highest institutional factors, in percentages, affecting adult student recruitment crosstabulated with annual family income.
Other items of interest include the following: (a) Respondents in the Under $10,000 category gave the lowest percentage of responses on Convenient Scheduling and Experiential Credit; (b) those respondents in the $20,000-$29,999 had the lowest percentage of responses to Academic Quality; (c) Respondents in the $40,000 and over category gave the lowest percentages of responses to Maintaining Costs and Financial Aid Counseling; (d) As the income increased the percentage of respondents rating Financial Aid Counseling as important decreased.

Crosstabulations of the Three Lowest Institutional Factors

The three institutional factors that these respondents believed would affect adult student recruitment that received the lowest percentage of responses were crosstabulated with gender, age, ethnicity and annual family income. In many cases the percentages on individual items are small because of the number of respondents.

Gender. Support Groups was the factor which had the largest difference in gender response among the three lowest institutional factors. The factor having the least difference in gender response was Lockers, as shown in Figure 15.
Figure 15. Three lowest institutional factors affecting adult student recruitment crosstabulated with gender, in percentages.

Age. Items of interest related to this crosstabulation are displayed in Figure 16 and include the following: (a) respondents in the 55-64 age category gave the lowest percentage of responses on the Lockers factor, and both the 55-64 age category and the 25-34 age category had the lowest percentage of respondents on the Support Group factor.
Figure 16. Three lowest institutional factors affecting adult student recruitment crosstabulated with age in percentages.

(b) Pre-enrollment Seminars received the lowest percentage of responses from the 35-44 category; (c) there appeared to be a slight tendency for the importance of Pre-enrollment Seminars for adult students to increase with age; (d) respondents in the oldest age category, 65 and over, gave the highest percentage of responses on all three of the factors.

Ethnicity. Asian-Americans had the lowest percentage on all three of these factors as displayed in Figure 17.
Figure 17. Three lowest factors affecting adult student recruitment crosstabulated with ethnicity, in percentages.

Other items of interest: (a) Hispanic-American respondents had the highest percentage of response on Lockers; (b) Native Americans had the highest percentage of responses on Support Groups; (c) African-Americans gave the highest percentage of response to Pre-enrollment Seminars.

Annual family income. Those respondents with an annual income of $40,000 and over had the lowest percentages of responses on all three factors, as shown in Figure 18.
Figure 18. Three lowest institutional factors affecting adult student recruitment crosstabulated with annual family income, in percentages.

The Under $10,000 income category had the highest percentage of respondents stating that having lockers available was a positive recruitment factor for adult students. This
percentage was three times more than the respondents in the $40,000 and over income category. On Pre-enrollment Seminars respondents in the Under $10,000 income category gave almost twice the percentage of responses than those respondents in the $40,000 and over income category. Support Groups had the highest percentage of respondents among the Under $10,000 and $10,000 - $19,999 categories, both of which were more than twice that of the respondents in the $40,000 and over category. There seems to be an overall tendency on the Lockers and Pre-enrollment Seminars factors for their importance to lessen as annual family income increases.

Institutional Comparisons

Demographic Data

In order to determine if there were institutional differences with the items on the survey the variables were then compared by respondents from the respective institutions. The demographic items will be discussed first, then the first and second research questions.

Gender. The overall number of women respondents to that of men was almost 2 to 1: 628 vs. 343 or 64.6% to 35.3%, as shown in Figure 19. This proportion was greater at Langston, Northeastern and Panhandle State University (PSU). The University of Oklahoma (OU) had the most evenly balanced responses by gender.
Figure 19. Gender of respondents by institution, in percentages.

Age. Although 54.2% of respondents were 34 years old or under, almost 90% were 44 or under. A higher percentage of younger adult respondents attend Oklahoma State University (OSU) and Langston, as shown in Figure 20. The highest percentage of older respondents attend Northeastern State University, University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (USAO) and Panhandle.
Figure 20. Age of respondents by institution in percentages.

Marital Status. Two-thirds of all of the respondents were married. All of the respondents (100%) from Panhandle were married. Langston, with the lowest percentage of married respondents, had the highest percentage in the single category. East Central had the highest percentage of divorced respondents, as shown in Figure 21.
Figure 21. Marital status of respondents by institution in percentages.

Number of children living with you. Two-thirds of the respondents surveyed had children living with them (see Figure 22). OU and OSU had the lowest percentages of respondents reporting children at home. Panhandle and Southwestern respondents had the highest percentages with children at home.
Figure 22. Number of children living with respondents by institution, in percentages.

Family income level. On the average 45.9% of all respondents had an annual family income under $20,000. Langston had the highest percentage of respondents in this income category, followed by respondents at OSU and OU. Over half of the respondents from University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) reported an annual family income of $30,000 or
more. This compared to just over 10% of Langston's respondents who had a family income level of $30,000 or more, as shown in Figure 23.

Figure 23. Annual family income of respondents by institution, in percentages.
Financial assistance. OSU, East Central and USAO had more than 70% of their respondents receiving financial assistance as shown in Figure 24.

Figure 24. Percentage of respondents who receive financial assistance by institution.

UCO respondents reported the lowest percentage receiving financial assistance. Langston's respondents reported one of the lowest income levels, yet only 50% of its respondents reported receiving financial assistance.

Ethnic background. Five major ethnic groups were identified in the questionnaire. Whites had the highest percentage of respondents, with Langston having the lowest percentage of White respondents and Northwestern the highest, as shown in Figure 25. Langston, due to its history, is
traditionally considered a predominantly African-American institution of higher education. Its adult student respondents however were reportedly 50% White, 44.4% African-American and 5.6% Native American. Northwestern, Southwestern, and East Central respondents were at least 90% White. Of the twelve institutions, only Langston, Cameron, and Northeastern had under 80% of its respondent's report that they were White.

Figure 25. Percentage of respondent's ethnic background by institution.
Oklahoma was designated officially as Indian Territory before it became a state in 1908. The historical significance of that can still be seen today. Native Americans are the largest ethnic group in the state, excluding Whites, with 7.2% (n=70) of the respondents reporting they were Native American. The largest percentage of Native American respondents were from Northeastern and USAO.

African-Americans, with 4.4% (n=43), were the third largest ethnic group reported at these Oklahoma institutions. Langston had 44.4% African-American respondents followed by Cameron, with 10.5%, and UCO with 5.1%. No African-Americans responded from five institutions. Asians were the fourth largest cultural group reported in the survey, with 2.6% (n=25); however two universities, OSU, and OU, had 5% or more Asian respondents. Hispanics were fifth with an overall percentage of respondents at 1.7% (n=16). Panhandle, had 16.7% Hispanic respondents and was the only institution reporting a Hispanic population of more than 5%.

Cameron University was the most ethnically diverse institution of adult students reported in the survey. Cameron and UCO were the only institutions with a measurable reporting of all the ethnic groups. This compares to USAO and Panhandle which reported only one other ethnic group other than White.
Highest level of education completed. In the twelve public four year institutions of higher education in the survey there is a wide range of educational levels completed by each institution's respondents prior to initial enrollment at the institution, as displayed in Figure 26.

Figure 26. Percentage of respondents by highest level of education completed prior to enrollment in current university by institution.
Overall 3.7% (n=36) of the respondents had their G.E.D., but the differences between the respondents at state institutions, as shown in Figure 26, ranged from no respondent at Langston to 16.7% of respondents at USAO. The highest percentage of respondents who had obtained their high school degree prior to enrollment were from Cameron, whereas Langston's respondents, had the lowest percentage who had a high school degree.

The highest percentage of respondents who enrolled with some college credits already completed prior to coming to that institution were from Langston. Northwestern and Northeastern respondents reported the lowest percentages. Almost half of all respondents in the study completed some college credits prior to enrolling at their present institution were from Langston.

The highest percentage of respondents who already had an associate degree were from Northeastern, with the lowest percentage of respondents having an associate degree being from USAO. The percentage of respondents returning to college who had already completed a bachelor's degree was generally low, with an overall average of 5.4% (n=53). More than 10% of the respondents from three institutions reported having a bachelor's degree.

Employment. Almost one-third of the respondents reported working fulltime. As Figure 27 shows, three of the institutions had more than 40% of their respondents who work fulltime: Northwestern, UCO, and Cameron.
Figure 27. Number of hours per week respondents normally work by institution, in percentages.

The state's two largest universities, OSU & OU, reported the highest percentages of unemployed respondents. Northwestern reported the highest percentage of respondents employed fulltime. The highest percentage of respondents classifying themselves as homemakers were from Panhandle, and the third lowest percentage of unemployed respondents were enrolled at Panhandle.

Community population. As shown in Figure 28 respondents where more than 50% lived in a community of fewer than 10,000 attended Panhandle, Northeastern, Southwestern, Southeastern.
Figure 28. Size of community reported by respondents in each institution, in percentages.

Respondents where more than 50% report living in communities which exceeded 25,000 in population attend: OU, UCO, Cameron, OSU.

One way distance to campus. It was reported previously that relatively few adult students (15%, n=148) commuted more than 50 miles to class. Commuting farther than the other respondents in the study, with over half of its respondents
traveling 50 miles or more to class, were those attending Northwestern as shown in Figure 29.

![Distance to Campus by Institution](image)

**Figure 29.** One way distance to campus by institution, in percentages.

**Class frequency.** Over 40% of the respondents from Northeastern and Northwestern reported they scheduled classes that met once a week. Almost 85% of all the respondents scheduled classes that met at least twice a week, as displayed in Figure 30.
Figure 30. Percentages of respondents by the frequency they attend class per week by institution.
The most common frequency of scheduled classes reported by all respondents was three times a week. The highest percentages of respondents who scheduled classes that met three times a week attend the following institutions: Southwestern, East Central, and OSU. The lowest percentage of respondents was reported to be at Langston. Almost 75% of all the respondents schedule classes that met either two or three times a week. Combined with those who scheduled class once a week the total percentage increased to over 90%.

Day classes. More than three-fourths of the respondents scheduled day classes, as shown in Figure 31.

Figure 31. Percentages of respondents who scheduled day, evening, and/or weekend classes by institution.
At four institutions the percentage of respondents who reported scheduling day classes exceeded 90%: Panhandle State, Southwestern, Oklahoma State, and East Central. Northeastern's respondents had the lowest percentage of respondents who reported scheduling day classes.

**Evening classes.** Over 60% of the respondents reported scheduling evening classes. Institutions that had highest percentages of respondents who reported scheduling evening classes were Northwestern and Northeastern. Panhandle State had the lowest percentage of respondents who reported scheduling evening classes.

**Weekend classes.** Only 7.5% (n=73) of the respondents reported scheduling weekend classes. The highest percentage of respondents who reported scheduling weekend classes attended Northeastern, followed by respondents at Cameron University. Langston and Panhandle State, did not have any of their respondents report that they scheduled weekend classes.

**Full-time and part-time students.** The majority of adult students in Oklahoma who participated in this study identified themselves as full-time students. Panhandle State and East Central had the most respondents stating they attended full time, as shown in Figure 32.
Figure 32. Percentages of full and part-time students by institution.

Cameron University's respondents reported the lowest percentage of full-time adult students. UCO was the only institution, besides Cameron, where their respondents stated that the percentage of full-time students was under 50%.

Continuous enrollment. Almost 90% of all respondents reported re-enrolling every fall and spring, as displayed in Figure 33. All of the respondents at Langston reported enrolling every fall and spring. Only respondents from USAO had a continuous re-enrollment percentage under 80%.
Figure 33. Percentages of respondents enrolling every fall and spring by institution.

The perseverance of many of these respondents to enroll every semester may be symbolized by these statements written in the margins of the surveys: "I have enrolled every semester -- fall, spring and summer except one, when I had a baby."

Another comment: "Except the semester I had open heart surgery."

**Personal Factors Influencing Choice of College**

Responses to the eight highest rated personal factors, which influenced their decision to enroll in their current institution, were compared by the individual institution of each respondent. These eight were selected because they are
believed to be of more significance, overall, than the remaining factors, which received lower importance ratings.

**To complete degree.** To complete an unfinished degree was reported as very important or significantly important by 65% of all respondents. Respondents at UCO reported that 76% of its adult students returning to complete an unfinished degree viewed this item as very and/or significantly important to them. This contrasts with 33.4% of the students at USAO on the same factor, as shown in Figure 34.

![Figure 34](image)

**Figure 34.** Percentages of respondents who returned to school to begin or complete degree by institution.

**To begin degree.** Whereas fewer than a third of all respondents (32.2% n=302), selected to begin degree as very and/or significantly important in enrolling in their current institution, 58.3% of respondents at Panhandle State
University (PSU) selected it as very and/or significantly important, with the respondents at the University of Oklahoma (OU), at 23.1%, reporting the lowest.

To increase earnings. Enrolling to improve their earnings potential was selected by 69.1% (n=662) of the respondents, as either very or significantly important. PSU had 100% of its respondents reporting this factor as very or significantly important. USAO respondents, with 58.3% had the lowest average, as shown in Figure 35.

![Figure 35](image)

**Figure 35.** Percentages of respondents selecting to improve their earnings potential and the geographic location of classes by institution.

Geographic location. Geographic Location was selected by 54% of these respondents as either very or significantly
important. Three-fourths of PSU respondents and 70.8% of respondents at USAO reported this was an important issue, compared with 34.1% at Oklahoma State University (OSU).

Desire for personal growth. The Desire for Personal Growth and Development was reported by 77.9% (n=751) of the respondents as very or significantly important. The highest percentage of respondents on this item was from USAO with 91.7%, and the lowest percentage reported was 66.7% by PSU as shown in Figure 36.

![Figure 36](image)

Figure 36. Percentages of respondents selecting Desire for Personal Growth and To Further Career Goals by institution.

Further career goals. This factor had more than 80% of those surveyed reporting it as either very important or significantly important. Three-fourths of the respondents at
the institutions in the study reported an individual average which exceeded 80%. Respondents at Southwestern, reporting 76%, had the lowest percentage on this issue.

Offers academic major. Whether the college offers the program/major wanted is an item which 62.4% of respondents reported to be very or significantly important, as shown in Figure 37.

Figure 37. Percentages of respondents by institution according to: (a) College offers the program/major wanted; (b) Academic quality of institution.
East Central had the highest percentage of respondents, and Langston had the next highest percentage of respondents. Only two institution's respondents reported a percentage of 50% or less: Cameron and USAO.

**Academic quality.** Offering the right college major, according to the respondents, appeared to be more important than academic quality, was shown in Figure 37. East Central's respondents had the highest percentage rating on academic quality, with Langston's respondents next highest. Panhandle had the lowest percentage of respondents with Northwestern respondents the next lowest.

**Institutional Factors Important in Recruiting Adult Students**

Responses to the eight highest rated institutional factors, which the respondents believed to be important in recruiting other adult students, were compared by the individual institution of each respondent. These eight were selected because they are believed to be of more significance, overall, than the remaining factors, which received lower importance ratings.

**Courses offered off campus.** Regarding factors which respondents reported as important in recruiting adult students, 59.8% of respondents selected *Courses Offered Off Campus* to be very important. As displayed in Figure 38, three institutions had over 70% of their respondents reporting this item as very important: Northeastern, Northwestern, and Langston.
Figure 38. Percentages of respondents who selected courses offered at off-campus locations closer to home/work and courses offered at more convenient times (days, evenings, weekends), by institution.

More convenient scheduling. Over 80% of respondents selected this factor as either very important (65%) or significantly important (15.6%) in recruiting adult students. Respondents from Panhandle and Langston reported especially high percentages on this factor, as shown in Figure 38.

Financial aid counseling. Financial Aid Counseling by advisors aware of adult student needs was rated by 55.7% (n=625) of the participants as either very or significantly important. USAO was the only institution in which fewer than 50% of the respondents reported this item to be very or significantly important as shown in Figure 39.
Figure 39. Comparison of responses in percentages, concerning Financial aid counseling, Career counseling, and Academic counseling by advisors trained to work with adult students, by institution.

**Career counseling.** Career counseling for adult students was also important, according to 60.3% (n=514) of respondents who were surveyed. Langston and OSU respondents reported the highest percentages, as displayed above in Figure 39. USAO reported the lowest percentage of respondents.

**Academic counseling.** Academic counseling oriented toward adult students was selected by 59.2% (n=561) as either very or significantly important. Langston respondents reported this to be more important than the other
institutions, as displayed above in Figure 39. Southwestern respondents were the only ones with a percentage of responses under 50%.

**Experiential credit.** Receiving academic credit for previous learning and/or working experience was reported by 63.9% (n=606) of the respondents as an attractive recruiting item for adult students. Respondents from Panhandle, Langston, and Cameron reported much higher percentages than the rest. The lowest percentages were respondents from USAO and Southwestern, as displayed in Figure 40.

![Figure 40](image)

**Figure 40.** Comparison of responses in percentages concerning crosstabulation of (a) Academic credit for previous learning/working experience; (b) Maintaining current cost of tuition and fees; (c) Academic quality, all by institution.
Maintaining cost of tuition/fees. The overall percentage of respondents who reported that this was a very important item was 57.5% (n=544). Respondents from Langston reported the highest percentage of responses and those from Southwestern reported the lowest percentage, as displayed in Figure 40.

Academic quality. Respondents at UCO reported the highest percentage of responses on the importance of academic quality, as displayed in Figure 40. The lowest percentage of respondents was from USAO.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study of 983 adult students in the twelve public four year institutions in the state of Oklahoma, who attended classes at the time of the survey. A summary of the major findings follows:

1. The dominant personal factors as to why the respondents in this study returned to college were to improve/advance themselves, especially as it relates to their career.

2. Flexible class scheduling was reported to be the most important institutional function for recruiting adult students.

3. Almost 90% (88.4%) of these respondents reported being under 45 years of age.

4. Approximately 85% commuted fewer than 50 miles to class.
5. Almost 90% (88.9%) reported they enrolled each fall and spring.

6. Approximately twice as many respondents who returned to college reported they did so because it was more important to them to complete an unfinished degree than to begin a degree.
Chapter V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to identify and secure perceptions of what personal and institutional factors influence and attract adult students to enroll in public four year institutions in Oklahoma. A secondary purpose was to compare student responses by institution. Two major research questions were explored to accomplish these purposes: of the study: (1) the personal factors that are perceived by adult students to be important in choosing to enroll into their current institution; (2) the institutional functions these respondents perceive to be important in attracting other adult students. Data were collected from survey instruments returned by adult students from the 12 public four year institutions in Oklahoma. The data were treated to produce frequencies and percentages.

Summary Profile

The majority of the respondents going to college were female, full-time students married and between 25-44 years of age, with children at home, attending both day and night classes, having previous college credits, receiving financial...
assistance, working at least 20 hours a week outside the home, and enrolling every fall and spring semester.

Summary of Major Findings

The findings of this study regarding the 983 adult undergraduate students enrolled in the twelve public four year institutions in the state of Oklahoma during the fall semester of the study are as follows:

1. The dominant personal factors as to why the adult students in this study returned to college were reportedly to improve/advance themselves, especially as it relates to their career.

2. Flexible class scheduling was reported to be the most important institutional function for recruiting adult students (80.6%), with academic quality (77.6%) and institutional costs of education (74.8%) next in importance.

3. Almost 90% of these respondents reported being under 45 years of age.

4. Almost 85% reported commuting fewer than 50 miles to class.

5. Approximately 90% reported enrolling each fall and spring.

6. Approximately twice as many respondents who returned to college reported they did so because it was more important to them to complete an unfinished degree than to begin a degree.
Conclusions

1. Adult students appear to be unlikely to enroll in classes meeting more than three times a week.
2. Flexible class scheduling appears to be more likely to attract adult students.
3. Distance from the institution does not appear to be a major factor in returning to college.
4. Adult students in Oklahoma may no longer be described as part time and/or night students.
5. Adult students in Oklahoma appear to be returning to college to complete a degree for career purposes, and many do so as full-time students absorbing it into their daily lives and continuing their careers.
6. Adult students in Oklahoma are homogeneous in that they tend to be under 45 years of age, white, well educated and employed.
7. Students with previous college experience seem to be more likely to return to college to complete degree.

Implications of Findings

Oklahoma adult students are ambitious, tenacious and persevering. Being married, having children at home, working (almost one-third work full-time), taking a full academic load and having to juggle all this between day and night classes indicates that obtaining a college degree is very important to them. Indications are that institutions offering flexible class schedules and counseling services for adult students, while containing educational costs and
maintaining their academic quality will be perceived as more attractive to adult students in Oklahoma than other institutions. More adult students may enroll in the former institutions as a result.

Flexible class scheduling was the factor selected as most important in recruiting adult students, with academic quality and maintaining costs of tuition and fees next in importance. However, of the 12 institutions represented less than half offer weekend classes of three hours credit or more. The same is true for three hour classes that meet only once a week. In addition few institutions offer evening and/or weekend classes that enable a student complete a degree of any major without having to take a substantial amount of day classes. Such impediments make it difficult for many working students, especially those with families. Institutions should consider reviewing their student data and surveying their constituencies to evaluate the preferences for such scheduling options, as evening and weekend classes, including three hour credit classes that only meet once a week. Special attention should be placed on such academic areas as Business, Education, and the Social Sciences, which are the areas almost 75% of these respondents majored (Business 43.5%, Education 19.8%, Social Sciences 10.5%).

A majority of the respondents reported being full-time students. However, fewer than 10% reported scheduling classes more than three days a week. As already indicated most of these respondents have very busy lives. This limits
the time and energy available for academic pursuits, and may be another indicator that adult students need more flexible class scheduling. Classes that meet four or more times a week, including those with labs offered on their nonclass days will probably have few adult students enrolled.

Of the classes that were available, 38.4% scheduled only day classes, 22% scheduled only evening classes and 39.5% scheduled both. This is further evidence that adult students in Oklahoma do not fit the common myth that older students go to class part time and only in the evening.

Although only 7.5% of the respondents attended weekend classes, 12.7% indicated that they would prefer to go to weekend sessions. Less than half of the institutions in the study offered weekend classes.

Almost two-thirds of the respondents (65.2%) stated that they had enrolled in their last institution to complete a degree. This is an implication that various impediments initially prevented many of these respondents from completing their degree. As these impediments are identified it then becomes possible to take actions to alleviate them, at least within the institutions. With such a high percentage returning to complete their degree institutions need to consider making accommodations to allow these older students to better acclimate themselves to the college environment.

Approximately half of the respondents (45.9%) had an annual family income under $20,000. This large percentage may help to explain why almost 60% of the respondents (58.7%)
received some type of financial assistance. Another contributing factor may also be that the combination of educational financial assistance and social welfare programs makes it feasible for some to have none or part-time employment while they attempt to get a college degree.

Only 2.8% of the respondents indicated that having childcare available on campus affected their decision to enroll in their current institution. This same pool of respondents also reported that almost 35% of them perceived campus childcare as very or significantly important. One reason for the low percentage (2.8%) may be that only three of the 12 institutions offered campus daycare facilities. As more adult students on the other campuses become more educated and assertive about their student activity fees, these other institutions may be forced to consider offering campus childcare.

Counseling services oriented toward adult students were perceived to be areas that would assist in the recruitment of adult students, especially in the areas of financial assistance, career counseling and academic advisement. Having faculty and staff that are aware and genuinely care about adult student needs and concerns, especially in these three areas would seem to be a practical response for institutions wanting to assist a growing percentage of their student body. Responsive actions might include having academic/administrative positions such as Director of Adult Student Services, similar to Director of Multicultural
Hosting sessions for institutional faculty and staff to learn more about adult students is another option to consider. Retention studies continue to indicate that students having a "connection" with at least one caring faculty or staff person is often the most important factor in that student completing their course of study.

Adult students in Oklahoma tend to be responsive to questionnaires electing information about their current college experience. The response rate to the survey instrument for this study was 50%.

Suggestions for Future Study

The following suggestions for further study are based upon the findings and conclusions of this study:

1. Similar studies should be conducted for various other states to determine if similarities or differences exist and if so why.

2. A request for copies of the college catalog and the individual institutional self-study of each institution could assist in the analysis and interpretation of at least part of the data (such as services and classes offered, their accessibility, effectiveness, comprehensibility and comparison between institutions).

3. More research needs to be done to confirm which universities in this study offer campus childcare and to compare responses.
4. Additional study should be given to confirm which institutions offer weekend classes, and the scope of courses offered in this time frame and to compare their responses on the items pertaining to this topic.

5. To research and discover which institutions offer the various services listed and the response of those students specific to those items, and to compare them with the other universities in the study that do not offer such services.

6. More intensive research into the phenomenon of Langston University and why its respondents' percentages were so high on over 40 of the 55 items.

7. To better compare with more national studies, include graduate students in future research efforts.
Dear Adult Student,

I am currently engaged in research designed to identify perceptions of what personal and institutional factors influence adult students to enroll in four year institutions in Oklahoma. In this survey, an "adult student" is defined as a currently enrolled undergraduate student who is 25 years old or older. According to your institution's records, you were enrolled as an adult student for the fall semester. Your experience and perceptions as a student are valuable.

I am requesting that you spend a few minutes of your time to answer this brief survey and return it to me in the enclosed post-paid envelope. The survey is structured around the following three research questions:

a) What personal factors are perceived by adult students to be important in choosing to enroll in the college they now attend?

b) What institutional factors do adult students perceive to be most important in attracting other adult students?

c) How do responses of student enrolled at each Oklahoma institution compare?

It is my goal that this survey will offer insight as to how services for adult students can be improved, and to provide information that is useful to Oklahoma institutions of higher education in responding to needs of adult students. You will be able to assist in this process by your response. This is a confidential survey. The number on the survey is for mail follow-up purposes only. I would appreciate receiving your response within ten days.

Thank you,

Wayne Hatcher, Doctoral Candidate
College of Education, The University of North Texas
ADULT STUDENT SURVEY
OF
FOUR YEAR PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS IN OKLAHOMA

Using the scale below, record your reaction to each of the following statements by placing the appropriate numbers, from 1 to 8, in the blank to the left of each statement. It is important that each blank has a response.

Question One

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<td>FOR</td>
<td>NO OPINION</td>
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1) Which of the following personal factors were important in choosing to enroll in the college you now attend?

   (1) To complete an unfinished degree/program
   (2) To begin a college degree
   (3) To improve my earnings potential
   (4) My financial situation has changed
   (5) Geographic location of college classes is closer to home/work
   (6) My desire for personal growth and development
   (7) To further my career goals
   (8) My change in marital status
   (9) I know other adults who have successfully returned to college
   (10) This college offers the program/major I want
   (11) The cost of tuition and fees of this institution
   (12) The academic quality of this institution
   (13) A major event in my life such as change in family situation (other than marital), job promotion, missed promotion, "empty-nest," career change, etc.
   (14) Class scheduling of this institution (less conflict with job and/or family responsibilities)
   (15) Childcare available on campus
   (16) Attending a preenrollment seminar held by this institution for adult students
Using the scale below, record your reaction to each of the following statements by placing the appropriate numbers, from 1 to 8, in the blank to the left of each statement. It is important that each blank has a response.

**Question Two**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOT IMPORTANT</td>
<td>MODERATELY IMPORTANT</td>
<td>VERY IMPORTANT</td>
<td>OR</td>
<td>FOR</td>
<td>NO OPINION</td>
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</table>

II) What institutional factors do you perceive as important in recruiting adult students?

___(17) Courses offered at off campus locations which are closer to home/work
___(18) Courses offered at more convenient times (days, evenings, weekends)
___(19) Simplified application/registration process
___(20) An Adult Services Center that specializes in helping adult students
___(21) Childcare services on campus
___(22) Lockers for books and personal possessions
___(23) Campus administrative services during evenings/weekends
___(24) Financial aid counseling by advisors aware of the needs of adult students
___(25) Career counseling that is oriented toward adult student needs
___(26) Academic counseling by advisors trained to work with adult students
___(27) Tutoring labs and similar services
___(28) Preenrollment seminars for adults considering college
___(29) Academic credit for previous learning/working experiences
___(30) Special course or courses for enrolling/returning adult students (such as test-taking skills, time and stress management, college reading and writing skills, job strategies, etc.)
___(31) A campus support group for adult students
___(32) Seminars/workshops for professors to improve instruction for adult students based on theories of adult learning
___(33) Maintaining current cost of tuition and fees
___(34) Academic quality of the institution
Place a check mark to the left of the appropriate response. [Note that #38 requires a specific number]

35. Gender (1) Male, (2) Female

36. Age
   (1) 25-34   (4) 55-64
   (2) 35-44   (5) 65 or over
   (3) 45-54   (6) Prefer not to respond

37. Current Marital Status:
   (1) Married, (2) Single, (3) Divorced, (4) Widowed
   (5) Prefer not to respond

   *Put appropriate number in blanks for number 38 only.

38. (1) Number of children
   (2) Number of children living with you

39. Combined family income level:
   (1) Under 10,000   (4) 30,000-39,999
   (2) 10,000-19,999   (5) 40,000 or over
   (3) 20,000-29,999

40. Do you receive any financial assistance? (1) Yes (2) No

41. Do you receive any financial assistance from your employer?
   (1) Yes (2) No (3) No Employer

42. Do you receive state financial assistance? (1) Yes (2) No

43. Do you receive federal financial assistance?
   (1) Yes (2) No

44. Do you receive other assistance, such as scholarships?
   (1) Yes (2) No

45. I am: (1) White, (2) African-American, (3) Native American,
   (4) Hispanic, (5) Asian, (6) Other __________

46. Prior to enrolling at this institution, the highest level of education I had completed:
   (1) GED/equivalent certificate
   (2) High school diploma
   (3) Some college credit hours (but not degree)
   (4) Associate degree
   (5) Bachelor degree
   (6) Graduate
47. I am employed and normally work (check only one):
   (1) 40 or more hours per week
   (2) 30-39 hours per week
   (3) 20-29 hours per week
   (4) Less than 20 hours per week
   (5) Homemaker (Full time)
   (6) Unemployed (Do not work)

48. I live in a community that has a population of:
   (1) Less than 5,000
   (2) 5,000 - 9,999
   (3) 10,000 - 14,999
   (4) 15,000 - 19,999
   (5) 20,000 - 25,000
   (6) Over 25,000
   (7) Do not live in a community

49. The one way distance to this campus that I normally take from home or work is:
   (1) Less than 25 miles
   (2) 25-49 miles
   (3) 50-74 miles
   (4) 75-99 miles
   (5) 100 miles or more

50. On the average I enroll for classes that meet:
   (1) Once a week
   (2) Twice a week
   (3) Three times a week
   (4) Four times a week
   (5) More than four times a week

51. (a) When do you take classes? (Check all that apply)
   (1) Day
   (2) Evening
   (3) Weekend

52. When do you prefer to take classes? (Check all that apply)
   (1) Day  (2) Evening  (3) Weekend

53. Are you a full-time or part-time student this semester?
   (1) I am a full time student (12 or more credit hours)
   (2) I am a part-time student this semester (less than 12 credit hours)

54. Do you enroll every fall and spring semester? (1) Yes  (2) No

55. My major or intended major is: ________________________________
BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
FIRST CLASS MAIL    PERMIT NO. 56    LAWTON, OK.

Postage will be paid by addressee:

WAYNE HATCHER
PO BOX 3164
LAWTON OK 73502-9905
APPENDIX B

FOLLOW-UP POSTCARD
Dear Adult Student,

Several days ago I mailed you a questionnaire about adult students, requesting that you complete and return it at your earliest convenience. Knowing that your time is limited, I am especially grateful for your response. If you have already returned the questionnaire, thank you. If not, I would like to ask you to please do so.

Sincerely,

Wayne Hatcher, Doctoral Candidate
College of Education, University of North Texas
APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP LETTER
Dear Adult Student,

Approximately three weeks ago I sent you a questionnaire requesting that you complete and return it at your earliest convenience. The questionnaire is part of an effort to improve college services and opportunities of adult students in Oklahoma.

Knowing that your time is both limited and of value to yourself, I am especially grateful to you for your response. If you have already returned the questionnaire, I appreciate it. If not, I ask you to please do so.

Enclosed is a duplicate questionnaire and self-addressed, stamped envelope. Your thoughts and perceptions of how adult students are serviced is valuable and your cooperation is urgently requested; therefore, please return the questionnaire as soon as possible.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Wayne Hatcher, Doctoral Candidate
College of Education, University of North Texas
APPENDIX D

PERSONAL FACTORS
Figure D-1. (1) To complete an unfinished degree/program.

Figure D-2. (2) To begin a college degree.
Figure D-3. (3) To improve my earnings potential.

Figure D-4. (4) My financial situation has changed.
Figure D-5. (5) Geographic location of college classes is closer to home/work.

Figure D-6. (6) My desire for personal growth and development.
Figure D-7. (7) To further my career goals.

Figure D-8. (8) My change in marital status.
Figure D-9. (9) I know other adults who have successfully returned to college.

Figure D-10. (10) This college offers the program/major I want.
Figure D-11. (11) The cost of tuition and fees of this institution.

Figure D-12. (12) The academic quality of this institution.
Figure D-13. (13) A major event in my life such as change in family situation (other than marital), job promotion, missed promotion, "empty-nest," career change, etc.

Figure D-14. (14) Class scheduling of this institution (less conflict with job and/or family responsibilities.)
Figure D-15. (15) Childcare available on campus.

Figure D-16. (16) Attending a preenrollment seminar held by this institution for adult students.
APPENDIX E

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS
Figure E-1. (17) Courses offered at off campus locations which are closer to home/work.

Figure E-2. (18) Courses offered at more convenient times (days, evenings, weekends).
Figure E-3. (19) Simplified application/registration process.

Figure E-4. (20) An Adult Services Center that specializes in helping adult students.
Figure E-5. (21) Childcare services on campus.

Figure E-6. (22) Lockers for books and personal possessions.
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Figure E-8. (24) Financial aid counseling by advisors aware of the needs of adult students.
Figure E-9. (25) Career counseling that is oriented toward adult student needs.

Figure E-10. (26) Academic counseling by advisors trained to work with adult students.
Figure E-11. (27) Tutoring labs and similar services.

Figure E-12. (28) Preenrollment seminars for adults considering college.
Figure E-13. (29) Academic credit for previous learning/working experiences.

Figure E-14. (30) Special course or courses for enrolling/returning adults students (such as test-taking skills, time and stress management, college reading and writing skills, job strategies, etc.)
Figure E-15. (31) A campus support group for adult students.

Figure E-16. (32) Seminars/workshops for professors to improve instruction for adult students based on theories of adult learning.
Figure E-17. (33) Maintaining current cost of tuition and fees.

Figure E-18. (34) Academic quality of the institution.
APPENDIX F

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS
Figure F-1.  (35) Gender.

Figure F-2.  (36) Age.
Figure F-3. (37) Current Marital Status.

Figure F-4. (38a) Number of children.
**Figure F-4.** (38b) Number of children living with you.

**Figure F-5.** (39) Combined family income.
Figure F-6. Do you receive financial assistance?

Figure F-7. Do you receive any financial assistance for your employer?
Figure F-8. (42) Do you receive state financial assistance?

Figure F-9. (43) Do you receive federal financial assistance?
Figure F-10. (44) Do you receive other assistance, such as scholarships?

Figure F-11. (45) Ethnic breakdown.
Figure F-12. (46) Highest level of education prior to this institution.

Figure F-13. (47) Employment statistics.
Figure F-14. (48) Population according to community size.

Figure F-15. (49) One way distance to campus taken from home or work.
Figure F-16. (50) Enrollment for classes that meet per week.

Figure F-17. (51a) Day Classes.
Figure F-18. (51b) Evening classes.

Figure F-19. (51c) Weekend classes.
Figure F20. (52a) Prefer day classes.

Figure F21. (52b) Prefer evening classes.

Figure F22 (52c) Prefer weekend classes.
Figure F-23. (53) Full time or part-time student.

Figure F-24. (54) Enroll every fall and spring.
REFERENCE LIST


