Identification of college student dropout characteristics and retention strategies

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Identification of college student dropout characteristics and retention strategies

Abstract
During the 1960s and 1970s there were two primary reasons why an institution had limited concern with the retention of its students: (1) there were more students than its faculty or facilities could handle. If a number of students did not continue to enroll, it was not a problem since many other students were waiting to take their place. (2) This time period involved a philosophical interpretation of equal education opportunity and the maintenance of academic standards. Many felt they fulfilled obligations for equal educational opportunity if students had easy access to institutions. There was also an assumption that academic standards would suffer if special consideration was given to any particular group of students and therefore, all were judged by the same criteria. As a result it was not unusual to have more than 50% dropout rate before graduation (Lenning, Sauer, & Beal, 1980).
IDENTIFICATION OF COLLEGE STUDENT DROPOUT CHARACTERISTICS AND RETENTION STRATEGIES

A Research Paper
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of the Requirements for the Class
Master of Arts in Education

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Debra J. Albrecht
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Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

During the 1960's and 1970's there were two primary reasons why an institution had limited concern with the retention of its students: (1) there were more students than its faculty or facilities could handle. If a number of students did not continue to enroll, it was not a problem since many other students were waiting to take their place. (2) This time period involved a philosophical interpretation of equal education opportunity and the maintenance of academic standards. Many felt they fulfilled obligations for equal educational opportunity if students had easy access to institutions. There was also an assumption that academic standards would suffer if special consideration was given to any particular group of students and therefore, all were judged by the same criteria. As a result it was not unusual to have more than 50% dropout rate before graduation (Lenning, Sauer, & Beal, 1980).

Growth in enrollment has stopped and the 18-24 year old student is predicted to decrease 25% by the mid 1990's (Lenning, Sauer, & Beal, 1980, p. 1). Institutions now have or will have a need to insure a steady student enrollment. There has also been a change in attitude toward what achieving equal educational opportunities actually entails. Institutions are increasingly giving higher priorities to educationally, financially, and physically disadvantaged students. Importance of retention, therefore, is becoming much more obvious.

Lenning (1978) discusses three ways for institutions to maintain enrollments: (1) obtain a larger proportion of the decreasing pool of
traditional prospective students, (2) enroll more students from nontraditional populations, and (3) increase retention. Most institutions are attempting to improve on all three. But, as indicated by Lenning, there are serious philosophical and practical problems with the first two strategies. Therefore, "retention is becoming increasingly attractive--if only we knew how to do it" (p. 73).

The primary goal of an institution in higher education should be to assist the development of the individual to a realization of his/her goals, to find an understanding of self, and the student's place in the world around him/her. The concern for discipline must first take into consideration the concern for people. Institutions of higher education need to be concerned with teaching their students how to make a living and how to survive in today's changing society. The current needs and interests of individual students should be prime factors in developing programs for campus life (Spady, 1970).

Institutions of higher education must continue to explore the problems confronting college withdrawals. "Far too much talent is wasted when students abandon their educational goals and fail to arm themselves with the necessary learning that takes place over a period of time at an institution of higher education. Further, significant research points out that those with college degrees enjoy a better life financially and socially" (National Scholarship Service and Fund for Negro Students, January, 1972, p. 1).

Since retention and enrollment rates are directly related, it is important to consider reasons students remain in college as well as why they drop out (Hershey, 1981). By investigating the characteristics of college persisters, valuable data can be gained which can better orient
and educate students so that they will not withdraw prior to graduation. Another approach to decelerating the number of students withdrawing from college is to study the behavioral characteristics of nonpersisters.

A consideration given to understanding why students drop out is to investigate the opportunity of higher education institutions to get their dropouts enrolled again. Kolstad (1981) feels that the "attention and concern that college administrators, educational researchers, and policy officials currently devote to understanding and reducing dropout rates might be better employed in trying to understand and influence the factors that bring students back into the educational system" (p. 49).

Statement of the Problem

Although numerous institutions are aware of the importance of retention within their respective schools, few have implemented programs to successfully deal with the complexity of the dropout decisions being made. By failing to promote retention programs, institutions have not only lost that specific student, but also other students influenced by the dropout student's behavior (Tinto, 1982). The neglect involved by not improving retention programs has undoubtedly left a multitude of persons to struggle along in a sense of hopelessness, defeat, and despair and thus has constituted a significant problem to overcome. This study attempted to provide some solutions to the problem by presenting a concise review and analysis of literature along with recommendations which may assist persons in student personnel in developing, improving, or expanding retention programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to conduct a review of the literature which would identify the characteristics of dropout students in
post-secondary institutions and to recommend retention strategies for these students. This review was guided through consideration of the following factors.

(1) Identification of the potential dropout
(2) Possible causes of the dropout situation
(3) Possible solutions to the dropout problem

Emphasis was directed toward the identification of dropouts and possible causes of the dropout situation for the purpose of determining patterns among dropouts. Several recommendations were provided which should enable future program organizers to develop retention strategies which are more effective than what strategies are presently in use. The findings will be made available to student service's personnel in an effort to promote the importance of student retention.

Definition of Terms
Attrition -- Occurs when a student is no longer enrolled in a college or university.
Retention -- Occurs when a student completes, continues, or resumes studies.
Potential Dropout -- One who is contemplating dropping out of school before completing the amount of coursework required for a degree.
Dropout -- One who leaves the institution and does not return for additional study.
Persister -- One who continues enrollment at the same bachelor's degree-granting institution without interruption for the period of study. Persisters are said to achieve on-time graduation (4-5 years).
Non-Persister -- One who does not continue enrollment at the same institution without interruption. Non-persisters do not achieve on-time graduation if they graduate at all.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the resources available through library facilities at the University of Northern Iowa, University of Iowa, and Wartburg College. Furthermore, it was necessary to interpret translated research.

To a degree, the above limiting factors restricted the generalizations that were concluded.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The problem of the college dropout has long been of interest to researchers. Numerous studies have been conducted to ascertain the reasons why students withdraw from college before graduation. Many of the reasons for departure from college prior to earning a degree have been categorized into three factors: (1) college environmental influences as expressed by the student's relationship with other students, advisors, faculty members, and student service's personnel; (2) home influences and background as expressed by family income, relationship with parents, parents' education background, and problems and pressures at home; and (3) the students' personal, emotional, and academic characteristics as expressed by the students' feelings of happiness-unhappiness, encouraged-discouraged, good study habits-poor study habits, self-confident-lacking self confidence, and certain goals-uncertain goals.

An individual student brings certain skills with him/her to the various college environments. The student's educational background is a prerequisite for his/her educational future. In order for the student to be successful in the college environment, the student must have skills to fulfill the requirements of the environment. If the student has the appropriate skills, the environment becomes a source of reward to that student. However, if the student lacks the skills, the environment becomes a source of great dissatisfaction and the probability of withdrawal from that environment is enhanced (Starr, 1972).
College Environmental Issues

Elton (1970) and Stordahl (1968) have found numerous variables to be related to an individual's college choice and attendance. Primary among these variables are ability, goals, self-concept, sex, place of residence and parents' socioeconomic and educational levels. Holland (1958), Pervin (1967), Meyerson (1966), and Machlup (1971) all have reported research concerning college choice and attendance. In essence, they found personality characteristics influencing the desire to attend a particular college, as well as geographic location, strength of dependence, or independence towards parents, commuting distance to college, self-image and the image of the college selected, parental pressures, and personal and cultural factors, and lack of knowledge about available educational alternatives.

The college environment has been studied by Chickering (1966), Centra (1971), Hedley (1968), Kamens (1971), and Pervin (1967). A synthesis of their research indicated that each college had a climate of its own and that this climate attracted a particular type of student. The type of institution selected by a student was a significant factor in determining his/her college graduation, so was his/her socioeconomic and intelligence level. Apparently colleges did not meet the interpersonal needs of students. However, students felt their interpersonal needs were not as important on the college campus as were the academic requirements of the institution. Colleges appeared to have different characteristics and these characteristics produced stress for students and decreased their chances for college graduation. When the college characteristics met the students' needs, the probability of graduation increased.
Pascarella (1981) suggested that pre-enrollment traits are most useful in distinguishing dropouts from persisters. Dropouts, when compared to persisters are more likely to be black and to expect, before enrolling, that they might drop out temporarily. They were less likely to join a social fraternity, sorority, or club during college. Like Pascarella, Everett (1979) saw a positive relationship between retention and extracurricular involvement.

Research suggests that matching the students' interests with the institution's offerings is especially important. Huber (1971), in his study of first-year college students and their perceptions of the college environment, found that those whose perception was substantially different from the realities of the college environment which they did in fact experience, earned lower grades than those who had more accurate perceptions of their environment.

Turner (1970) stated withdrawal was due to a number of reasons related to the personal characteristics of the student, as well as a mismatch between the student and the institution's environmental factors. Turner found that potential withdrawees displayed certain identifiable characteristics such as "disinterest and non-involvement in college affairs, doubtful vocational goals, inadequate adjustment, unrealistic image of college life, unsatisfactory attendance, high level anxiety, fear of change and social introversion" (p. 6-8).

Taylor and Hanson (1971) stated that achievement was significantly better for a group of engineering freshmen living in a homogeneous residence hall when compared with two groups of engineering freshman that were living in various types of environments. The study suggested that the influence of peers with similar interests and similar courses had a
strong and positive effect on achievement. Random assignment of students in a dormitory could place the individual in an uncomfortable living atmosphere and create a hinderance to satisfactory academic performance (DeCoster, 1968).

The students' ability to handle stressful situations is an important predictor of retention. The college environment imposes "varied social and intellectual challenges upon its students" (Dollar, 1970, p. 89). As an individual moves along Havighurst's ladder of developmental tasks, that individual is faced with unique challenges and conflicts. Studies by Pervin (1967) and Blaine (1966) have found that almost all students are exposed to stress upon entering college.

Cope and Hewitt (1969) researched the environmental press (stress) approach and its effect on students and found there were major pressures within the environment of colleges and universities that confronted students. "The two major presses were social and academic; a third may be religious. Since students experienced difficulties in meeting with these presses, whether separately or with a number of them simultaneously, they may be encouraged to withdraw" (p. 14).

Hannah (1969) found that thoughts regarding withdrawal from colleges and universities occurred during periods of anxiety and stress related to college exams and papers. He further stated that the actual decision to depart from college was made while students were away from campus when feelings of adequacy and relief were high and other practical and noncollegiate influences were more strongly felt. According to Hannah, "dropouts had little introspective ability, had considerable anger toward their parents, seemed to have positive attitudes regarding a plan different
from that of college attendance and had strong peer ties while in college" (p. 18).

Rivlin (1965) found that the freshman year in college was disastrous for most students. Even the bright and eager students often found the first year difficult and many of them were faced with a strange new world. Rivlin noted that one of the common problems for most students was that they lacked familiarity with what to expect in a college environment and they lacked the necessary background of preparation and knowledge to make successful adaptation to the new environment.

Chase and Warren (1969) found that by the end of the first semester, typical freshman lost some of their confidence regarding their academic ability; although they still considered themselves capable of handling academic demands in college. They appeared to want to obtain "a marketable skill, while seeking good teachers who would become personally involved with them and who would help them to achieve the skill desired. They wanted some voice in the university's policy-making procedures, wanted advice and counsel when needed and desired autonomy in personal affairs" (p. 1).

Faculty-student relations can also influence a student's decision to drop out of school. Robin and Johnson (1969) stated that in any list of reasons regarding the college dropout was failure of the marginal students to adjust to the impersonal atmosphere of a college or university because of the lack of communication between students and their professors. It was apparent that many promising students left the academic environment forever when they might have survived and even improved if they only had the proper attention and guidance from an understanding and helpful professor. The floundering student usually failed to discuss his/her
problems with professors and complicated difficulties by not attending classes; as a consequence, he/she increased problems and the potential for withdrawal.

According to Landrith (1971), at least half of the students entering junior colleges withdrew prior to completing their two-year studies. The key to the problem was related to the faculty of the specific institution. Both junior college and four-year college faculty failed to understand and empathize with what the student was trying to accomplish in his/her first and second year of college.

Research indicates that potential dropouts do not employ the use of college facilities and counselors. Results of a study done by Churchill and Iwai (1981) show that at least for students with low GPA's, the use of campus facilities is correlated with continuance in school. The group of students making the least use of available facilities was the dropout student. Lucas (1982) found that 43.5% of students who withdrew from college never consulted a counselor (p. 47). Research done by Hedlund and Jones (1970) found that colleges with less students per counselor tended to report higher completion rates than did colleges with a higher student per counselor ratio.

Kamens (1974) found that Stanford University students who used academic counseling support services persisted better than those who did not use them. He also reported that those who used psychiatric counseling services had a greater attrition rate than those who received academic counseling. In her survey of one hundred deans across the country, Kesselman (1976) found that although 95% of students consider dropping out at some point in their undergraduate education, only one out of three seeks
advice from professors, and only one out of ten seeks advice from counselors (p. 14).

Home Influences and Background

In research done by Vener (1965) it was found that:

The model graduates of June, 1961, were more likely to be men than women, were in their early twenties, came from families where they were neither the youngest nor the oldest, or the only child, were unmarried, and were white, native-born Americans from cities of over 100,000. They were members of the middle and upper middle class whose fathers and mothers had at least graduated from high school and whose income was over $7,500. Their fathers were managers or professionals. The graduates had at least a part-time job during their final year of college and were still members of the Protestant religion in which they had been raised (p. 108-109).

Much research dealt with the effects parents have on the decision to remain in school. Brown (1970) found personality and motivation related to perceptions of the collegiate environment. He reported that the parents' portrayal of the campus environment ranked better than did student portrayal. Consensus between parents and students focused on factors of the environment related to campus rules and regulations. Brown reported that students perceived the campus as less academic and more restrictive than did their parents.
Greenshields' (1957) study suggested that parental influence on children either directly or indirectly was probably as great a factor on nonpersisting students as any other single source. Ridlon (1966) reported parents frequently imposed psychological pressures on their children by their own images and attitudes toward college.

Turner (1970) stated that "parents' social status exerted an important influence on the educational plans of their children" (p. 23). Parents' occupational status also exerted an influence upon college-going behavior. Research by Bailey (1971) found that of those students who entered college, 62.7% had parents who were white collar workers. His research also indicated that of those students who entered college, 27% had parents with agricultural occupations (p. 82-83). Goetsch (1940) found that when comparing students from different socioeconomic levels, only 20% of the lower income families had children who attended college while 90% of the students from high income backgrounds attended institutions of higher education (p. 88-89).

According to Sandell and Rossman (1971), persisting students generally described their parents favorably and with enthusiasm. Approximately half the persisting students they studied indicated they usually discussed vital concerns with their parents, although they felt they differed from their parents in values, beliefs, goals and life styles. These students claimed to be more liberal, less materialistic and desired an easier way of living.

Persisting students seem to be overly concerned with satisfying parental expectations, however (Marks, 1967). They seem to suffer anxiety and guilt feelings at the prospect of displeasing their parents and found difficulty in resolving conflicts between self and environment.
Parents of dropouts had "histories of serious disappointment in their careers, scholastic interruption, mental disorders and other discordant experiences such as divorce, desertion, and death" (Levenson, 1967, P. 99-100). Kooker and Bellamy (1969) concluded that graduation as opposed to nongraduation was related to the attitudes toward coming to college and the educational level of both parents as well as students' anticipated grades, ability estimation, campus organizational membership, and vocational goals.

According to Smith (1972), desire to maintain a high academic record appeared to be the main difference between persisting and non-persisting students. Family social status and family independence were important motivational factors virtually in every case when differences between persisting and nonpersisting students were viewed.

Students' Personal, Emotional, and Academic Characteristics

Ryle (1971) stated that the "individual brings to the university environment a set of personal and academic characteristics and goals, as well as specific capacities and weaknesses. The university in turn provides conditions and tasks which are more or less compatible with these student characteristics, goals, capacities and weaknesses. When incompatibility exists, or where certain types of other factors intervene, such as family stress, illness or financial difficulties, the student may fail in terms of meeting the demands of the institution and then will exhibit various symptoms or behaviors, suggesting significant difficulty" (p. 162). At this point, Ryle suggested the university may offer various resources with the aim of helping the student to become reestablished or it may be content to label him a failure and assist him to withdraw from the institution.
According to Clark (1972) students bring with them intellectual equipment, emotional dispositions, interest, motivations, values, attitudes, and goals. These characteristics were labeled by Clark and his colleagues as "input variables" (p. 142-143). These variables are generally ways of viewing experiences, valuing modes of perception, methods of seeking meaning and methods of projecting to the future. Clark stated that input variables are not static, rather they are modified by the environment. Clark added that student characteristics at entrance to college provided a baseline for assessing the ways in which the student will change.

Wagner and Sewell (1970) determined that the probability of graduating from college substantially increased with the presence of the following characteristics in students: "high intelligence, high ranking in high school classes, high occupational aspirations and high socioeconomic background" (p. 63).

Bucklin and Bucklin (1970) examined the personality of the persisting student as compared with the nonpersisting student and found that the "persisting student tended to have the ability to attack a problem and stick with it, had a strong drive for success and achievement, had a sense of responsibility, was rather contented with the college routine, was conscientious, systematic and diligent in his work habits, was autonomous in thinking and perception, was objective and had a certain strong resemblance to his environment" (p. 1).

Commitment to goals was seen as important to student retention by several researchers. Heywood (1971) determined that the differences between success and failure concerning college revolved around uncertain
goals: entering a college other than one's own choice, lack of interest in studies and difficulty in studying. Appel and Witzke's (1972) research found freshmen entering college at varying degrees of maturity and some were, therefore, more certain of their future career plans than were others. It was seen by Munro (1981) that commitment of students to the goal of college completion had the strongest positive effect on the decision to remain in school. Spady (1970) stated that students who aspired to finish college were more likely to see themselves through to graduation than those with more modest goals or those who did not have these aspirations. He pointed out that high goals helped one to graduate only when they were clear and realistic.

Heath (1968) reported that part of the college environment involved its interpersonal environment. The personality of one's peers had a significant effect, both directly and indirectly, upon the maturing of an individual on a college campus. The changing atmosphere and expectations within a college also showed effects on students. Students themselves indicated that the type of person with whom they interacted was one of the most important determinants of their personality development. According to Heath, maturation involved the ability of an individual to shape an acceptable degree of adaptation to the demands of both the environment and his/her own structure needs.

Rose and Elton (1966) investigated factors related to persisting and nonpersisting freshmen at the University of Kentucky. Those who withdrew, but remained in good academic standing, were more maladjusted, more hostile, and less interested in academic affairs than were persisters. Persisting students tended to be more submissive to authority and convention than were nonpersisting students.
Astin (1972) stated that nearly one half of all students entering four-year colleges and universities could be classified as persisting students. The dropout rates, according to Astin, at two-year schools were somewhat higher than those of the four-year colleges. The major predictors of success and endurance in college were a student's grades in high school and scores on tests of academic achievement. Other important indicators included being male and a non-smoker, having a high degree of aspiration at the time of college entrance, financial ability particularly on the part of helping parents, scholarships, personal savings and not being employed during the school year (p. 1 and 49).

Kooker and Bellamy (1969) stated that baccalaureate recipients were superior to non-holders of the degree in general intelligence, quantitative ability, verbal ability and clerical perceptions. They were found to be more restrained, understanding of others and more thoughtful. They possessed a higher level of reading comprehension, had improved study habits, and were more positive in their attitudes toward academic goals.

Savicki (1970), in researching the effects of various factors on withdrawal and achievement of college students, reported that students who withdrew from college for various reasons were psychologically different from those students who continued in college--nonpersisters did not feel they had good relationships with family or friends, nonpersisters had less interest in personal goals, had attitudes of indifference, disinterest, and apathy. Hannah (1969) also reported that college dropouts were "more complex, more impulsive, more anxious, less altruistic, less personally integrated and less willing to exert an effort to make a good impression on either peers or their instructors. They were anxious about their environment and about themselves. They had a high need for
independence and apparently sought ways to test that need. These students withdrew from college probably because of their uncertain feelings and because of lack of direction about themselves and their environment" (p. 19).

Reik (1966) explained dropping out of college in terms of the conflict of what is expected from the individual by society and what the individual expected in return from life and society. He also stated that generally society and parents alike viewed a student's withdrawing from college as failure or waste of talent. Levenson (1967), from a different perspective, described withdrawal from college or a university as a "psychosocial manifestation of the individual's identity crisis that may be looked at as a way of resolving the crisis and searching for a more meaningful life" (p. 134). He added that such behavior created stress and threat to the dropout's parents, peers, and teachers since his/her behavior reflected on their lives.

Rigidity in thought and action were found to be among the contributing factors leading to college withdrawal. In addition, students who had social and academic difficulties before entering college had a greater tendency to withdraw from college (Gibson, 1967). Rose and Elton (1966) observed that anxiety, hostility, maladjustment, nonconformity, low interest in literature, dislike for abstract thought, and diverse values were significantly related to leaving college. Nicholi (1968), at Harvard University, determined psychiatric consultation was four times as frequent among Harvard dropout students as it was among the student population in general. According to Nicholi, depression seemed to play a significant role in a student's decision to leave the academic environment. Thirty-nine percent of the students withdrew because of emotional disorders.
Bucklin and Bucklin (1970) found that the nonpersisting student tended not to have the ability to stick with a given task, appeared to be less satisfied with a college routine, was less sure of the role the college would play in his future, seemed to be less able to distinguish the important from the unimportant, and was less effective and diligent in carrying out his/her daily activities. The college dropout tended to be a careless test-taker, often was lacking in the ability to adapt to the college environment, had a serious deficit of self discipline, and had a family that did not support his/her educational endeavors. The nonpersister tended to be rigid, opinionated, inflexible, non-academically oriented and distrustful of adult authority. The student preferred social activity to studying, he/she had ill-defined goals and was uncertain of occupational choice and college major. Bucklin and Bucklin reported that students who had definite goals tended to have higher S.A.T. verbal scores, had a higher grade point average in high school and finished in the upper ranks of their high school class.

Zaccaria and Creaser's (1971) research supported the hypothesis that personality characteristics of students withdrawing from a university or college were not necessarily indicative of emotional disturbance or maladjustment but could be an expression of developmental needs which could not be fulfilled within the university environment. An unsatisfactory academic record was the major factor which contributed to voluntary as well as involuntary withdrawal.

Chickering and Hannah (1969) discovered that the most important determinants of withdrawal were academic underachievement, academic difficulty, discrepancy between the college's proposed beliefs and the actual behavior found there, dislike of the general college atmosphere, a
strong feeling of discomfort and a more positive impression regarding another school. McGauvran (1955) supported this as he reported that a positive attitude toward the school specifically and toward education in general resulted in better scholastic performance.

Landis (1954) researched the problems related to college withdrawal by reviewing the problems 238 students mentioned in their autobiographies. He concluded that it was possible to predict fairly closely the specific problems that would be disturbing freshman students on college campuses as well as in the future. Specific problems included: inferiority complex, daydreaming, compensating for inferiority feelings, disillusionment in changing from the small local group to the larger group, sex problems, feelings of insecurity, undesirable traits of temperament, introversion, religious problems, death in family, personal fear, emancipating oneself from home, disillusionment with friends and adults, financial difficulties, family conflicts, shifting from rural to city living, superiority complex, conflict over college rules and regulations, moral disillusionment, hero or idol worship, revolt against authority, sensitiveness, homesickness, parents forcing their wishes or ambitions on me, inability to take responsibility and make decisions, conflict with previous and new attitudes and beliefs, rivalry with brothers and sisters, not being accepted by fraternity or sorority, divorce of parents, and foster home problems (p. 10 and 11).

Several researchers saw the problem of attrition to be a result of several contributing factors. Tinto (1972) reported that financial burdens are used as excuses when students' experience with the institution is not satisfactory. If experience with the institution is satisfactory, the student will usually withstand the financial burden.
According to Tinto, "the end product, rather than the origin of the decision to dropout is often given as the reason for leaving" (p. 690). Boyd (1981) found attrition to be "multidimensional and highly complex" (p. 214). Boyd suggested that interventions that may reduce the attrition rate among one group of students may be ineffective when applied to a different group of students. Kapur (1972) also found that the dropout and the phenomenon of failure in college was multidimensional. According to Kapur, dropping out of college involved a number of intellectual, educational, motivational, social and psychological characteristics interacting with characteristics of universities and colleges.

Pantages and Creedon (1978) have criticized attrition studies because they only examine one or two variables at a time instead of examining many variables together. They refer to attrition as a "complex and multifaceted phenomenon" (p. 92).
Chapter 3
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, and RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Although student retention has become a fairly popular concept within recent years, there are many potential settings where retention programs have not been implemented. The lack of such programs leaves thousands of students to struggle through a short-lived college experience which results in a vast waste of human potential.

In an effort to overcome that problem, this review of literature will be made available to current and future members of student service's personnel. The review provided an analysis of the characteristics of persisting and non-persisting students. Hopefully readers will perceive the review as a significant source of information and will be encouraged to help sponsor programs in support of the identification and retention of potential dropout students.

The literature revealed three areas of concern that contribute to the decision to withdraw from college (1) college and environmental issues, (2) home influences and background and (3) the students' personal, emotional, and academic characteristics.

Literature concerning college environmental issues and their effect on the student's decision to drop out of school included many facets, i.e. the use of campus facilities, place of residence, and match between the student and the institution. Chickering (1966), Centra (1971), Hedley (1968), Kamens (1971), and Pervin (1967) felt that the institution selected
by the student was a significant factor in determining college graduation. Accurate perceptions of the college environment by the student, therefore, are especially important to the students' achievement of established goals (Huber, 1971 and Turner, 1970).

Taylor and Hanson (1971) found that students are more positively affected when they share residence with other students with similar interests and similar courses rather than when they are housed by random assignment.

Guidance and understanding by faculty members was seen as being important to students in research done by Robin and Johnson (1969) and Landrith (1971). Landrith also found that at least half of the students entering junior colleges withdrew prior to completing their two-year studies; he suggested a lack of understanding and empathy by the faculty toward the students was a key to the problem.

The lack of use of campus facilities by potential withdrawees is seen as a problem by Churchill and Iwai (1981) and Lucas (1982). According to Lucas, almost half of the students who decide to withdraw from college never consult a counselor.

Research regarding the students' home influences and background focused primarily on the relationship between parental educational attitude and the students' decision to remain in school. Parents' social status exerted an important influence on the educational plans of their children (Turner, 1970). Goetsch (1940) reported that students of lower socioeconomic families were less likely to attend college than were those students of higher socioeconomic background. Persisting students were said to be highly concerned with satisfying parental expectation (Marks, 1967). Parents of dropout students, according to Levenson (1967), had
histories of divorce, desertion, and death as well as other discordant experiences. Kooker and Bellamy (1969) concluded that graduation as opposed to nongraduation was related to the educational level of both parents. Smith reported that family social status and family independence were important motivational factors to student persistence.

Ryle (1971) and Clark (1972) saw the student bringing into college a set of personal and academic expectations, interests, and goals. The ability of the institution to meet these student expectations, interests and goals was seen as a predictor of students' comfort and success in college. Wagner and Sewell (1970) found some characteristics that substantially increased the students' chances of graduating: high intelligence, high ranking in school classes, high occupational aspirations, and high socioeconomic background. Bucklin and Bucklin (1970) added some personality factors of persisting students: ability to attack a problem and stick with it, a strong drive for success and achievement, a sense of responsibility, systematic and diligent in work habits, and an autonomous manner in thinking and perception.

Goals played an important part in determining graduation. Spady (1970) stated that students who aspired to finish college were more likely to see themselves through to graduation than those with more modest goals. Commitment to educational goals was also seen as being important to student persistence by Heywood (1971), Munro (1981), and Appel and Witzkes (1972).

Persisting students were seen to be more programmatically oriented than non-persisting students (Rose and Elton, 1966), were better readers, studiers, and positive toward school (Kooker and Bellamy, 1969), ranked higher in high school class standing and had higher test scores (Astin, 1972).
Nonpersisting students, on the other hand were described as complex, impulsive and anxious (Hannah, 1969), were unsatisfied with the college routine, less sure of the role college would play in his/her future, less able to distinguish the important from the unimportant (Bucklin and Bucklin, 1970), possessed inferiority complexes, and had feelings of insecurity (Landis, 1954).

Several researchers saw the problem of attrition as being a result of several contributing factors. Tinto (1972) found that students often use the excuse of having a financial burden when, in fact, the real reason for dropping out may be very different than financial problems. Boyd (1981) suggested that because the reasons for dropping out are so complex, interventions that may reduce the attrition rate among one group of students may be ineffective when applied to a different group of students. Kapur (1972) also found the dropout problem to be multidimensional.

Conclusions

The results of the study appear to warrant the following conclusions based on the analysis of data relative to the characteristics of persisting and nonpersisting students:

(1) The evidence suggests that it is unlikely that a student with academic disabilities and personal pressures will continue his/her education.

(2) Realistic perceptions of the college or university enhances persistence in college.

(3) Students with academic and personal problems can be identified as potential dropouts.
(4) A positive personal relationship with a student's advisor and/or faculty member influences his/her decision to remain in school.

(5) Parents' educational attitudes are indicative of whether the student will persist or withdraw.

(6) The research suggests that students in need of student personnel services either (a) do not want to use the services, (b) do not know where to find the services or (c) do not know they exist.

(7) One can speculate that having a definite educational goal in mind enhances persistence in college.

(8) The dropout problem suggests that current educational practices are treating a symptom and not the real cause of the problem.

(9) The university needs to continue to explore ways of not only keeping students in college until they complete their degrees, but also of giving them a useful and meaningful education.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations have been developed with the expressed purpose of suggesting programmatic guidelines for colleges and universities in order to help curtail the college dropout problem.

(1) The university should seek improved procedures to help students who come to college with academic, personal, and home problems since such problems are often the underlying cause of students' decisions to withdraw prematurely from college. The university must provide more effective personal counseling along with other student personnel services.

(2) A careful evaluation of students' background characteristics and level of study skills by related student personnel services should be made with an emphasis on identifying potential dropouts before they become dropouts. This information should be shared with related faculty members.
(3) Since a greater percentage of persisting students was found to have concrete educational goals, improved and innovative career and vocational counseling should become a priority of the university. Students will then be afforded a more meaningful educational experience if they are assisted in making an intelligent choice of a career which is compatible with their interests, strengths, goals, and personality.

(4) Presenting a misleading picture of the institution to prospective students can have serious negative effects on retention. Furthermore, dropouts will share their disillusionment with relatives or friends in high school, and this, in turn, can negatively affect future recruitment. Therefore, it is essential to present a meaningful, and accurate picture of the institution.

(5) Exit interviews can accomplish a potential and important task—demonstrating the college's concern for dropouts and their needs as individuals. Exit interviews provide a better interpretation of stated reasons which questionnaires do not allow.

(6) Improved academic guidance for students on the part of university personnel appears to be warranted. A suggested approach could be the use of competent upperclassmen to act as tutors and advisors for students who are experiencing difficulty in academic areas. The university could take the responsibility to coordinate interclass peer tutoring programs.

(7) University faculty should be selected not only for their ability to teach but also for the capability to act as effective student advisors. Of the existing faculty members, only those who are capable and want to work with students as advisors would be appointed to do so.
(8) An improved and expanded orientation program should be developed for faculty and advisors concerning the psychodynamics of student behavior and its relationship to persistence in college. Too few college and university personnel are aware of the seriousness of their roles in assisting students to stay and graduate from college.

(9) Students identified as potential dropouts should be involved in special orientation activities. For example, special group counseling should be initiated for students identified as potential nonpersisters.

(10) A continuous evaluation of student personnel services is extremely necessary in order to ensure that the services provided are meeting the needs of the students as well as the objectives of the institution.
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