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A profile of female graduate students at the University of Northern Iowa in the fall of 1986

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Abstract

Colleges and universities across the country are experiencing a high influx of returning women. These women return to school for many reasons, among them upward mobility in the position they currently hold, a desire for self-improvement, and a desire to enter into a new field. The re-entry female, unlike the typical 18-22 year old college student, confronts unique and special problems which may hinder the successful completion of her graduate program. The re-entry woman experiences the unique position of having to balance ongoing careers, family and primary relationships, all while pursuing a graduate degree. In addition, the re-entry female student faces problems in securing financial aid, counseling, graduate admissions, and scheduling information, as well as information on off-campus housing and child care facilities.

A PROFILE OF FEMALE GRADUATE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY

OF NORTHERN IOWA IN THE FALL OF 1986

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A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration

and Counseling

University of Northern Iowa

———————

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

———————

by

Jacquelyn Yvonne Moore

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1

The Problem

Colleges and universities across the country are experiencing
a high influx of returning women. These women return to school for
many reasons, among them upward mobility in the position they
currently hold, a desire for self-improvement, and a desire to
enter into a new field.

The re-entry female, unlike the typical 18-22 year old college
student, confronts unique and special problems which may hinder
the successful completion of her graduate program. The re-entry
woman experiences the unique position of having to balance ongoing
careers, family and primary relationships, all while pursuing a
graduate degree. In addition, the re-entry female student faces
problems in securing financial aid, counseling, graduate admissions,
and scheduling information, as well as information on off-campus
housing and child care facilities.

Recent articles indicate that the rate of return to school of
female students has been on the increase. During the period from
1975 to 1978, the percentage of women returning to school increased
by 187% (Adelstein, Sedlacek and Martin, 1983). Women now account
for more than two thirds of all adult students; with this in mind,
women re-entering graduate schools will be with us for years to
come (Spreadbury, 1983). Based upon that type of growth in women
returning to school, the need to identify key characteristics of
successful women is real. In light of this information, there is a

need to establish a comprehensive re-entry female student services network that can address the problems and concerns of this unique student population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to discuss the variables which influence reentry/non-traditional students to go to graduate school. Variables which will be considered include: motivational factors for returning to school, choice of certain fields, and barriers which may or may not prevent the person from earning an advanced degree.

Definition of Terms

Reentry/non-traditional female students - This term refers to the reentry/non-traditional student 25 years or older who chooses to return to school to seek an advanced degree.

Barriers - This term refers to any area of student services that has the potential to hinder the successful completion of a graduate/professional program by the limitations of the services delivered.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The term, reentry, as applied in this paper, means returning
to school after a specific choice of a noneducational endeavor.
Fisher-Thompson (1980) offered this definition:

> ...reentry woman is any woman who has interrupted her
>
> education after college and is seeking to enter or
>
> reenter a university for the purpose of earning a
>
> graduate degree. She may never have attended graduate
>
> school before; or she may be starting an additional
>
> graduate degree. She may have interrupted her study
>
> for several reasons, such as: child rearing; starting
>
> work; moving to a different location, perhaps because
>
> of her husband's job; or economic reasons (p. 2).

According to Fisher-Thompson (1980), some of the aforementioned
reasons could still be operating when she does return to school.
For example, many graduate classes are held at night when licensed
day care facilities are closed, making it very difficult to find a
dependable child care facility. As Kaplan (1972) stated, the
hardest part of school is the quest to find a "perfect sitter." It
is one of the most serious problems facing women in graduate school.

The reentry woman may find it difficult to combine school with
work and/or family. Another area that may be stressful for the
reentry woman is having classes with traditional students (Schmidt,
1983).

In the early 1970s, the reasons for returning to school most often cited by women were personal growth and intellectual fulfillment (Bradenburg, 1974; Geisler & Thrush, 1975). Comparatively fewer women at that time cited development of job skills as the most important reason for their return (Anderson, 1974). Adelstein, Sedlacek and Martinez (1983) indicated that economic factors have a lot to do with the high increase of the reentry woman in graduate school. These reentry women are more interested in training for careers and in expanding their options than in upgrading their present employment.

Hite (1986) found that one would also find these women in more challenging majors in graduate school, instead of the traditional majors or feminine fields such as liberal arts, social sciences, education, psychology, sociology, and humanities. The non-traditional majors, which were termed masculine fields, included physical sciences, computer science, geoscience, statistics, chemistry, and physics. Spreadbury (1983) stated that other reasons why reentry women return to school are that their children are grown, and they have time to pursue an activity they find enjoyable and rewarding; some are making midlife career changes, often from teaching into other more lucrative occupations. Still others are ready to move into middle-management positions where they find themselves in competition with the babyboom generation, and the need to return to college to gain a competitive edge. Schmidt (1983) indicated that almost all of the adult students interviewed (95%) returned to the

university to broaden existing careers or expand into new ones.
Adelstein, Sedlacek and Martinez (1983) found that the reasons for
women returning were for personal growth and intellectual fulfillment.
Kaplan (1982) cited the establishing of personal identity as the
motive to return to graduate or professional school. For some
women, development of intellectual abilities was a means to create
a new self-image. For other, acquisition of professional credentials
helped create a new personal identity.

The barriers that the reentry woman must face in graduate
school are many. This paper will focus on four important barriers
that the reentry woman will face in graduate school. They are:
admissions, relationships with faculty, financial problems, emotional
strain and family responsibilities.

Admissions

When Kaplan (1982) reported her findings about the barriers
facing mature women in attending graduate and professional school,
she stated that both institutional and personal barriers affect
admissions and retention of mature women students. Although the
literature provides little evidence of sex bias in the selection of
graduate students, research has shown greater self-selection among
women of all ages in application; consequently, female applicants
and admittees tend to have higher GPAs and College Board scores
than do men. It was also mentioned that the reentry woman must
demonstrate that the years out of school have added to her maturity
and world view. She must also make clear why she is applying now,

rather than at the traditional age, and what she would contribute to her field. Fisher-Thompson (1980) found that reentry women often find more difficulty in being admitted to graduate than undergraduate programs. The reasons for this vary from school to school, but the obstacles generally fall into these categories:

1. reentry women are not viewed as serious candidates for graduate school; therefore, little effort is made to recruit them;

2. graduate departments are often more selective than undergraduate departments, and the criteria for selection may inadvertently discriminate against students who have interrupted their education (such as requiring prerequisite courses that have only been offered in the last few years);

3. graduate programs usually accept fewer credits in transfer and may place limits on the "age" of the credits accepted;

4. requirements for graduation from graduate school may have changed over the years, making it difficult for reentry students to pick up where they left off.

Fisher-Thompson (1980) observed that institutions seem to have a tendency to leave unwritten the policies concerning these obstacles. At one time, age of a student was used to restrict entry to graduate school. There was a policy of recruiting only males for certain graduate programs, which made it impossible for qualified women to be accepted. In addition, the reentry woman faced a host of other admission problems related to the time she had been out of school.

Relationships With Faculty

Professional socialization is nurtured by a collegial relationship with professors, which enhances professional self-image and fosters confidence in one's abilities. Research has indicated that when the reentry student could not obtain this relationship with the professors, she looked elsewhere. Some of the women reported that they had mentors. The majority of the women who returned to graduate school felt they were treated as students. Yet, this was very hard for the returning student to do after being in the working field for so long and raising a family (Kaplan, 1982).

Emotional Strain and Family Responsibility

The emotional and family responsibilities of the reentry woman are tremendous, because of conflict between family responsibilities, school work, and lack of time (Kaplan, 1982). With the juggling of school work and family support, the reentry woman would feel an emotional strain. Some findings indicated that younger children cause less strain and older children cause more strain to the reentry woman student (Kaplan, 1982). This finding is puzzling, because younger children usually demand more time than the older children, which can cause emotional strain. The older children seem to have developed the maturity to be responsible for themselves, moreso than the younger children. Older children do not need a babysitter if the reentry woman has to attend class at night. However, older children tend to give the reentry woman more of a guilt complex, because she is no longer around to fix dinner or

help them with their homework. As for the younger children, they need constant supervision.

Another study viewed the family as a system composed of interrelated parts. Spreadbury (1983) reported that each part helps to maintain the system; if one part of the system changes, other parts also change so the system remains in equilibrium. If the wife/mother expands her role, the roles of the husband and of the children must also change (Schmidt, 1983). Also, trying to balance job, family, and school time was a tremendous strain, with the reentry student trying to find blocks of time to study, and to deal with the anxiety of time, tests, and the strain with relationships.

In summary, the personal cost of graduate school, the total exhaustion, things that one must give up in one's life, and no time for friends are but a few factors in the high price of returning to graduate school (Kaplan, 1982).

Spreadbury (1983), commenting on whether husbands support their wife's education, found that 52% of the student wives said their husbands wanted them to get a college degree, 51% reported that their husbands were proud of them, and 50% indicated that they were encouraging. Very few husbands reported that they wanted their wives to quit school.

Women with high interest in establishing a peer advising program, or some type of special program for reentering women, tended to be older (over 33), married, with older school-aged children. They had been out of school longer (mean of 17 years) and

did not have immediate financial concerns (Adelstein, William &
Martinez, 1983).

Two interrelated areas contributed greatly to the reentry
student's chance of success: encouragement through graduate study
and an appropriate entry-level position after graduation. The
first of these factors, whether it is called encouragement, emotional
support, or academic challenge, is a difficult quality to define.
Comprising a relatively small proportion of graduate students in
some areas, women, minorities, and especially reentry students
often find themselves with these feelings. There is evidence that
returning women students at the graduate level experience more
conflict with their husbands, parents, and friends than do returning
undergraduates (Fisher-Thompson, 1980).

Fisher-Thompson (1980) pointed out that most schools have some
type of placement center to help students obtain employment, but
the majority of graduate students do not find jobs through this
formal process. Rather, the informal network of contacts that
exists among students, faculty, administrators and the business
community accounts for many more placements. Rowlings (1979) stated
that career planning programs which are free of age, gender and racial
biases are critically important to the adult learner. Most adults
pursue postsecondary education for pragmatic reasons, whether it be
preparation to obtain a job or obtaining additional training to
allow for advancement in their career. Adult learners often have
vocational worries which are manifested in the desire for placement

services geared to older students, the fear of being too old to find a job, and the desire for assistance in making career decisions.

Warchal and Southern (1986) identified the counseling needs of the reentry student in five domains: (a) academic survival skills, (b) personal-social development, (c) instructional patterns, (d) administrative policies, and (e) student support services. Academic survival skills rated highest, because all needs in this domain were considered important. The category with the lowest rating was student support services, which included many needs with below average estimates of importance. Warchal and Southern (1986) identified other needs of higher priority to the reentry studfent: (1) having courses that provided specific job skills, (2) taking evening classes, (3) completing speedy registration, (4) having instructors who are personally interested in the student's program, and (5) getting A's and B's in coursework. Most of these needs reflect the pragmatic orientation of adult students.

Fisher-Thompson (1980) stated that, at one institution, the reentry women students in medicine, law and business school, sought guidance and counseling services at a rate close to three times that of graduate men. The women students said that they lacked role models and that male faculty members seemed to be uncomfortable with female students in or out of class.

Nayman and Patten (1980) identified three factors basic to counseling adults: age, psychological maturity, and social role. Age gives the student a time perspective, accumulated experiences,

11

and habituated modes of thinking. Psychological maturity, while variable and difficult to gauge, provides differentiation and potential to clarify preferences derived from experience. Social role shifts, such as changed family makeup or retirement, that occur throughout the lifetime of the adult student pose potential adjustment crises.

Finally, Fisher-Thompson (1980) raised the question as to what the institution could do to eliminate the barriers of the reentry woman in graduate schools in the areas of admissions, financial aid, support systems, and career planning. Stated below are some of the author's suggestions. In the area of admissions:

1. Reexamine departmental and institutiional criteria for admission to graduate school to ensure that irrelevant characteristics (such as age) are not used to determine eligibility.

2. Allow returning students to submit letters of recommendation from persons who have had recent contact with them, even if the references are not in the academic sphere.

3. Allow students to be admitted on a provisional basis if they cannot provide recommendations, or if their GRE scores or previous grades are low.

4. Offer refresher courses for returning students to help them prepare for graduate work and/or the GRE.

5. Determine whether special services are needed to retain these women as students.

6. Develop a specific plan to recruit reentry graduate women.

7. Offer a workshop, designed specifically for adults, on applying to graduate school for adults.

In the area of financial aids:

1. Keep up-to-date records of financial aid awards to students. Periodically examine them to identify trends that might indicate a disproportionate preference being given to students on the basis of age or sex. Maintain data on applications from, and assistance given to, part-time and full-time students.

2. Publicize the fact that age does not disqualify adult students from receiving financial assistance.

3. Simplify financial aid forms to make them more appropriate for adult students (such as not requiring a parent's signature).

4. Assign a particular person in the financial aid office to work with reentry or graduate students.

5. Develop financial aid for part-time students.

6. Allow graduate students to participate in cooperative education, thereby drawing a salary as they take courses and learn on the job.

In the area of support systems:

1. Assign a specific academic counselor to work with reentry graduate women in each department.

2. Encourage professors who were reentry students themselves to share their experiences with returning graduate women.

3. Provide each reentry graduate woman with a "mentor".

4. Assign a "peer advisor" to returning graduate women to help with academic and adjustment problems.

5. Plan an orientation program for reentry graduate women.

6. Encourage the development of women's caucuses or committees within graduate departments.

In the area of career planning:

1. Encourage women students to seek out "mentors" in their own department.

2. Set up internships for students at the graduate level.

3. Collect data about co-authorship to determine if faculty choose women as often as men when selecting student co-authors.

4. Encourage businesses with a good record for advancing women and minorities to attend "career days" at the school.

5. Institute "refresher courses" for reentry students who have already received degrees but who have been out of the work force for a time.

In conclusion, there are many problems for the reentry woman which are complicated by further time constraints of job and/or family responsibilities, securing financial aid, admissions, relationships with faculty, career placement, and the feeling of isolation. While it is encouraging to note that some graduate schools have recognized these pressures and have instituted practices to alleviate them, many schools have not. Yet the numbers of reentry women in graduate schools is steadily growing.

Educators must be aware of the needs and potential of mature students, adapting the structure of higher education institutions to meet the needs and contributions of these students.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

Participants

The participants in this study were 100 female students who were enrolled at the University of Northern Iowa graduate and professional schools during the Fall of 1986. An enrollment list of full-time graduate female students was obtained from the University of Northern Iowa Registrar's Office. The age group of 25 and over was selected to represent the population of the reentry/non-traditional women students enrolled.

Questionnnaire

A questionnaire of 25 items (Appendix B) was constructed to probe four areas in which the female graduate student may experience barriers: (1) financial aid, (2) admissions, (3) counseling, and (4) support systems. The following demographic data were collected: age group, classification, ethnic/racial group, marital status, and dependents. A Likert-type scale was used which ranged from (1) great barriers (GB), (2) some barriers (SB), (3) moderate barriers (MB), (4) less barriers (LB), and (5) no barriers (NB). In addition, four yes or no questions were used. A section for additional comments solicited open-ended responses.

Procedure

The questionnaire was mailed on August 25, 1986, along with a one-page cover letter (see Appendix A) explaining the nature of the study and the procedures utilized to ensure confidentiality of the

respondents.   A self-addressed, postage paid envelope for returning

the questionnaire was included to facilitate the return of the

questionnaire.   All questionnaires were coded, as were the envelopes.

Chapter 4

Discussion of the Data

This chapter will present the data gathered through the use of the questionnaire. This information was converted to percentages and is presented in tables.

Table 1

Ethnic/Racial Characteristics of Respondents

Category	No.	Percent of Response
Whites	69	93.1%
Blacks	1	1.4%
Asian/Pacific Islanders	2	2.7%
American Indians	1	1.4%
Hispanics	1	1.4%
Total	74	100.0%

Table 2

Financial Aid Issues

n = 74

Question	GB		SB		MB		LB		NB		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Was applying for a graduate of teaching assistantship a barrier to pursuing a graduate degree?	10	13.5	5	6.8	9	12.2	1	1.4	33	44.6	58	78.5
2. Was obtaining financial aid (SEOG, work study, fee exemption) a barrier to your education?	9	12.2	6	8.1	12	16.2	10	13.5	25	33.8	62	83.8
3. Was obtaining financial assistance from spouse, friends, relatives, and/ or parents a barrier in pursuing your graduate degree?	10	13.5	6	8.1	10	13.5	6	8.1	38	51.4	70	94.6
4. Did you find financial aid counselors helpful in applying for financial aid?	10	13.5	9	12.2	9	12.2	6	8.1	18	24.3	52	70.3
5. Did you find other university personnel (professors, advisors, administrators, counselors, helpful in pursuing scholarship opportunities?	3	4.0	7	9.5	13	17.6	16	21.6	19	25.7	58	78.4

Summary Table 2

Question number 1 - Application for a teaching or graduate assistantship.

100.0%

<u>44.6</u> NB (No Barriers)

33.9% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 33.9% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some

Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there

were barriers in applying for graduate assistantship. There was a

21.6% non-response rate to this question.

Question number 2 - Obtaining financial aid

100.0%

<u>33.8</u> NB (No Barriers)

50.0% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 50% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some

Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there

were barriers in obtaining financial aid. There was a 16.2% non-response

rate to this question.

Question number 3 - Obtaining financial assistance from spouse,

friends, relatives and/or parents.

100.0%

<u>51.4</u> NB (No Barriers)

43.2% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 43.2% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some

Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there

were barriers in obtaining financial assistance from spouse, etc.

There was a 5.4% non-response rate to this question.

Question number 4 - Financial Aid Counselors

  100.0%

  24.3 NB (No Barriers)

  46.0% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 46% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some

Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there

were barriers from the financial aid counselors. There was a 29.7%

non-response rate to this question.

Question number 5 - University personnel

  100.0%

  25.7 NB (No Barriers)

  52.7% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 52.7% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some

Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there

were barriers with the university personnel. There was a 21.6%

non-response rate to this question.

In short, the data indicates that non-traditional full-time

graduate female students had experienced barriers more often to some

degree in three areas of financial aid. These are access to financial

aids money, counselors, and help of other university personnel regarding

scholarship opportunities. The percentages of barriers were 50%,

46%, and 52.7% respectively.

Table 3

Admissions Issues

n = 74

Question	GB		SB		MB		LB		NB		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Was the Admissions Office helpful in providing information on graduate admission standards?	6	8.1	9	12.1	11	14.9	17	22.9	20	27.0	63	85.0
2. Was the Admissions Office helpful in providing information on graduate programs?	5	6.8	13	17.6	12	16.2	15	20.3	18	24.3	63	85.1
3. Was the Graduate College helpful in advising you on graduate admission standards?	6	8.1	4	5.4	16	21.6	16	21.6	20	27.0	62	83.8
4. Was the Graduate College helpful in advising you on UNI programs?	4	5.4	12	16.2	13	17.6	26	35.1	15	20.3	70	94.6
5. Was the Graduate College helpful in advising you on financial aid opportunities?	9	12.2	16	21.6	13	17.6	5	6.8	14	18.9	57	77.0

Summary Table 3

Question number 1 - Admissions Office helpful in providing information
on graduate standards.

100.0%

<u>27.0</u> NB (No Barriers)

58.0% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 58.0% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some

Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there were

barriers in Admissions providing information on graduate standards.

There was a 14.9% non-response rate to this question.

Question number 2 - Admissions providing information on graduate programs.

100.0%

<u>24.3</u> NB (No Barriers)

60.8% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 60.8% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some

Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there were

barriers in Admissions providing information on graduate programs.

There was a 14.9% non-response rate to this question.

Question number 3 - Graduate College helpful in advising on graduate
standards.

100.0%

<u>27.0</u> NB (No Barriers)

56.8% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 56.8% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some
Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there were
barriers in the Graduate College advising on graduate standards.
There was a 16.2% non-response rate to this question.

Question number 4 - Graduate College helpful in advising on UNI programs.

100.0%

20.3   NB (No Barriers)

74.3% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 74.3% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some
Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there were
barriers in the Graduate College advising on UNI programs.   There
was a 5.4% non-response rate to this question.

Question number 5 - Graduate College helpful in advising on financial
aid opportunities.

100.0%

18.9   NB (No Barriers)

58.1% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 58.1% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some
Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there were
barriers in the Graducate College advising on financial aid.   There
was a 23.0% non-response rate to this question.

Table 4

Counseling Center Issues

n = 74

Question	GB		SB		MB		LB		NB		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
A. Did you find the UNI Counseling Center personnel helpful and supportive in providing personal counseling and direction in pursuing graduate programs?	0	0	2	2.7	1	1.4	5	6.8	47	63.5	55	74.3
B. Did you find the UNI Counseling Center helpful in providing means of peer support?	0	0	5	6.8	0	0	3	4.0	7	9.5	15	20.3
C. Was the UNI Counseling Center helpful in providing suggestions on career opportunities?	1	1.4	3	4.0	2	2.7	1	1.4	5	6.8	12	16.2
D. Was the Counseling Center helpful in helping you resolve personal issues (i.e., pressures from parents, spouse, conflict with children and money concerns?	0	0	3	4.0	4	5.4	4	5.4	4	5.4	15	20.2

Summary Table 4

Question A - Counseling Center personnel helpful in providing

personal counseling and direction for graduate programs.

100.0%

_63.5_ NB (No Barriers)

10.9% SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 10.9% in the categories of Some Barriers, Moderate

Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate that there were barriers in the

Counseling Center personnel. There was a 25.6% non-response rate to

this question.

Question B - Counseling Center providing means of support.

100.0%

_9.5_ NB (No Barriers)

10.8% SB, or LB

A response rate of 10.8% in the categories of Some Barriers, or

Less Barriers indicates a low response rate in these areas. There

was a 79.7% non-response rate to this question.

Question C - Counseling Center helpful on career opportunities.

100.0%

_6.8_ NB (No Barriers)

9.5% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 9.5% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some

Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicates a low response

rate in these areas. There was a 83.8% non-response rate to this

question.

Question D - Counseling Center helpfulness in resolving personal issues.

$$100.0\%$$

$$\underline{\quad 5.4\quad}\ \text{NB (No Barriers)}$$

$$14.8\%\ \text{SB, MB, or LB}$$

A response rate of 14.8% in the categories of Some Barriers, Moderate

Barriers, or Less Barriers indicates a low response rate in these areas.

There was a 79.8% non-response rate to this question.

Table 5

Support System Issues

Question	On-Campus		Off-Campus	
	n	%	n	%
2. Was your family support system on or off campus?	12	17.4%	57	75.3%

Questions	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
3. Did your peers/classmates provide a system of support?	67	90.5	7	9.5
4. Were your friends a means of support?	67	90.5	7	9.5
5. Was the Housing Department helpful in assisting you in finding an apartment?	12	16.2	62	83.8
7. Are University services helpful in providing avenues for relaxation?	59	79.7	15	20.3

Summary Table 5

Question number 2 - Family support system on or off campus.

100.0%

_17.4_ on campus

75.3% off campus

A response rate of 75.3% of the respondents lived off campus. There

was a 6.7% non-response rate to this question.

Question number 3 - Peers/classmate provide system of support.

Ninety percent of the respondents got support from their peers/classmate.

Question number 4 - Were friends a means of support. Ninety percent

of the respondents got support from their friends.

Question number 5* - Housing Department helpful in assisting in

finding an apartment. Eighty-four percent of the respondents did not

get or seek assistance in finding housing.

Question number 7 - University services helpful in providing means

of relaxation. Eighty percent of the respondents indicated that the

services were provided.

The data indicate that the support systems were very helpful

to the non-traditional students.

* This tends to occur because non-traditional students perceive

University housing as dormitories. Because of this perception, the

majority of non-traditional students tend to secure housing other

than University housing.

Table 6

Support System Issues

Question	GB		SB		MB		LB		NB		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Was the Northern Iowa Non-Traditional Student Association (NINTSA) helpful in providing an external support system?	17	22.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	22.9%*
6. Was the Registrar's Office helpful in answering any questions that you may have had about registering for graduate classes?	4	5.8	5	7.2	12	17.4	11	15.9	37	53.6	69	93.2%

Only seventeen respondents, which constitute 22.9% of the sample, responded to this question concerning the Northern Iowa Non-traditional Students Association (NINTSA). This occurred primarily because the students in the study were unaware of the existence of NINTSA.

* Respondents indicate a lack of knowledge about the organization.

Summary Table 6

Question number 1 - Was the Northern Iowa Non-Traditional Student

Association (NINTSA) helpful in providing support?

100.0%

0.0 NB (No Barriers)

22.9% GB

A response rate of 22.9% in the category of Great Barrier indicates

that this was the only barrier in the area of NINTSA. There was a

77.1% non-response rate to this question.

Question number 6 - Registrar's office helpful in answering questions

about graduate classes.

100.0%

53.6 NB (No Barriers)

46.3% GB, SB, MB, or LB

A response rate of 46.3% in the categories of Great Barriers, Some

Barriers, Moderate Barriers, or Less Barriers indicate a low response

rate in these areas. There was a 1.2% non-response rate to this question.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

The following is the summarization of the study:

1) About 93% of the respondents were white; the remaining respondents were from ethnic minority groups.

2) The data on financial aid issues indicated that non-traditional full-time graduate female students had experienced barriers in the areas of money, counseling, and other university personnel regarding scholarship opportunities.

3) The data on admissions issues indicated that non-traditional female students experienced barriers in the admissions process.

4) The data on counseling center issues are only reflecting 25.7% of the sample. The percentages for individual questions in this section varied from a 63.5% no barrier (NB) to a low of 5.4% no barrier (NB). However, three questions were grouped having a no barrier response of 9.5%, 6.8%, and 5.4%. These questions were B, C, and D respectively.

5) The data on support system issues were divided into two categories, (a) the Northern Iowa Non-Traditional Student Association (NINTSA), and (b) support system. The catagories of NINTSA only had 22.9% responses. This occurred primarily because the students in the study were unaware of the existence. Three out of the four questions had a positive response of 80% or better in this area. Those questions were 3, 4, and 7.

Conclusions

The study was conducted to determine if non-traditional female students at the University of Northern Iowa experienced any barriers in the area of financial aid, admissions, counseling, and support system. The population included non-traditional female students enrolled full-time at the university during the Fall semester of 1986. For this study a non-traditional student is defined as a 25 year or older female who chooses to return to school to seek an advanced degree. The population size was 100 female students. The number of responses was 74.

About 93% of the respondents were white female non-traditional students.

Based upon the responses the following conclusions can be drawn:

A) Financial aid was a major barrier for the students in this study. On the average, 49.5% experienced some difficulty with financial aid. This tends to indicate that the non-traditional female student should be made aware of the financial impact upon entering into graduate school. Also, recruiters of students of this nature must consider financial aid when considering making offers to these students.

B) Admissions was also a major barrier for the female students in this study. On the average 64.4% or greater had experienced some difficulty in admissions. The most difficult barrier was that of the Graduate College. This tends to indicate the non-traditional female

student needs special orientation towards the graduate school process. This is especially true because the population of this study was graduate students. And if the Graduate College confers graduate degrees, these students should be aware of the process of graduate school admissions. The Graduate College must take the initiative to make the non-traditional female student aware of its requirements.

C) The Counseling Center only had a response rate of 25.7%. This was due in part to the number of respondents who had a need to interact with the counseling center. Based upon the small response, nothing can be generalized back to the population of the study.

D) The Northern Iowa Non-Traditional Student Association (NINTSA), which is a support organization for non-traditional students, was not deemed important by the respondents. Only 22.9% responded to the NINTSA question because they did not know of its existence. The other support groups were very helpful to the female students. But note the types of support groups included friends, peers, and classmates, which are normally supportive to any group. The University Housing Department was not supportive to the respondents. This tends to indicate the housing department at the university has an excellent opportunity to expand its horizon and be of help to this group, especially since the study was female students who should be made to feel safe and secure while attending school. Seventy-five percent of the respondents lived off campus. Regarding the Registrar's Office being helpful in answering questions about registering, fifty-three

percent indicated barriers in getting questions answered about registering for graduate classes.

In conclusion, the major barriers to the non-traditional female student attempting to earn an advanced degree at UNI, based upon this study, were admissions and financial aid issues.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Based upon this study, the following recommendations are made:

a) a study explicitly addressing admissions for non-traditional female students should be conducted;

b) a study addressing financial aid issues of non-traditional female students should be conducted.

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Appendix A

Dear Graduate Student:

My name is Jacquelyn Moore. I am a candidate for the Masters of Arts Degree in Education at the University of Northern Iowa. My major is College Student Personnel. I am conducting research concerning the barriers non-traditional female students encounter in pursuing an advanced degree. This questionnaire would only take about five minutes of your time to read. Please read and send the questionnaire back in the return envelope to help me finish my research. I hope my research and the information you help provide will assist university personnel in becoming more sensitive to the concerns of non-traditional female students. By completing the enclosed questionnaire accurately you will assist me in this endeavor.

I assure you that the information you provide will remain in the strictest confidence.

If you have ay concerns about the questionnaire or my research, pleaser feel free to contact me at home after 6:00 p.m. at (319) 277-8645.

Sincerely,

Jacquelyn Y. Moore

423 W. 2nd Street, Apt. 2

Cedar Falls, IA 50613

Appendix B

Questionnaire on Non-traditional Female Students at U.N.I.

Circle the response that applies to you.

A. Age Group: 1. 25-30   2. 31-36   3. 37-42   4. 43-over

B. Classification: 1. 1st Year Graduate   2. 2nd Year Graduate
                     3. Doctorate   4. Other (Explain)

C. Ethnic Racial Group:

    1. White Non-Hispanic   2. Black Non-Hispanic
    3. Hispanic   4. American Indian or Alaskan
    5. Non-Resident Alien   6. Asian or Pacific Islander
        (J-1 or F-1 visa)

D. Marital Status: 1. Married   2. Single
                     3. Single with dependents 4. Divorced

    What are the ages of your dependents? Please list them:_____

E. Do you live: 1. On campus   2. Off campus

* *

Please respond to the following questions as they relate to the difficulty
you might have had in pursuing your graduate education.

                    1 - great barrirs
                    2 - some barriers
                    3 - moderate barriers
                    4 - less barriers
                    5 - no barriers

Financial Aid

1. Was applying for a graduate or teaching assistantship a barrier
    to pursuing your graduate degree?

                    1 2 3 4 5

2. Was obtaining financial aid (SEOG, work study, fee exemption) a
    barrier to your education?

                    1 2 3 4 5

3. Was obtaining financial assistance from spouse, friends, relatives,
    and/or parents a barrier in pursuing your graduate degree?

                    1 2 3 4 5

4. Did you find financial aid counselors helpful in applying for financial aid?

                    1   2   3   4   5

5. Did you find other university personnel (professors, advisors, administrators, counselors) helpful in pursuing scholarship opportunities?

                    1   2   3   4   5

Admissions

1. Was the admissions office helpful in providing information on graduate admission standards?

                    1   2   3   4   5

2. Was the admissions office helpful in providing information on graduate programs?

                    1   2   3   4   5

3. Was the Graduate College helpful in advising you on graduate admission standards?

                    1   2   3   4   5

4. Was the Graduate College helpful in advising you on U.N.I. programs?

                    1   2   3   4   5

5. Was the Graduate College helpful in advising you on financial aid opportunities?

                    1   2   3   4   5

Counseling

1. Have you had some or any contact with the U.N.I. Counseling Center? Yes or No. If yes, please continue on.
    If no, please skip to questions on support systems.

    A. Did you find the U.N.I. Counseling Center personnel helpful and supportive in providing personal counseling and direction in pursuing graduate programs?

                    1   2   3   4   5

B. Did you find the U.N.I. Counseling Center helpful in providing means of peer support?

1 2 3 4 5

C. Was the U.N.I. Counseling Center helpful in providing suggestions on career opportunities?

1 2 3 4 5

D. Was the Counseling Center helpful in helping you resolve personal issues (i.e., pressures from parents, spouse, conflict with children and money concerns)?

1 2 3 4 5

Support Systems

1. Was the Northern Iowa Non-Traditional Student Association (NINTSA) helpful in providing an external support system?

1 2 3 4 5

2. Was your family support system on or off campus?

1 2 3 4 5

3. Did your peers/classmates provide a system of support?   Yes or No

4. Were your friends a means of support?   Yes or No

5. Was the Housing Department helpful in assisting you in finding an apartment?   Yes or No

6. Was the Registrar's Office helpful in answering any questions that you may have had about registering for graduate classes?

1 2 3 4 5

7. Are University services helpful in providing avenues for relaxation? Yes or No
If yes, which services do you utilize (plays, Physical Education Center, movies, and/or speakers?)
If no, how do you relax?

Any additional comments are welcome.

Appendix C

Comments of Questionnaire Summarized

The following represents selected comments provided by the research participants. They address issues of child care, housing, support systems, and financial aid in addition to others.

"It would be nice if graduate students were contacted personally by an on-campus organization (if there is one) which might seek to meet needs of said graduate students."

"The Financial Aids Office is totally incompetent as far as I'm concerned. They have not helped me other than processing my forms. They haven't given me any other ideas on what might be available to me. Assistantships are hard to come by. They are quite competitive. No other university personnel helped me to find financial aid but one did fill out a reference for me. The Graduate College hasn't done anything good or bad for me. I'm just getting started at this so I don't know all the resources available. They did tell me that when it was all official to come back and talk to them."

"I have found the Counseling Center and Career Counseling Center to be very helpful to me. My support system is largely friends and off-campus events. Some of my friends are also students though, so the school and its programs do get involved. I haven't been involved in NINTSA primarily because I haven't felt I've had the time and I haven't needed them for a support system."

"I have received full support from the Library Science Department, consequently I had need for few services outside of their counseling.

I'm not sure the Graduate College knows I exist outside of the
letter of acceptance."

"I have been very well accepted and pleasantly surprised at
the helpfulness and hospitality given to me. I have not encountered
any barriers in pursuing my Ed.D."

"I have had no difficulty with the graduate program so far. I
have had excellent support from faculty and family. The financial
aids office has been the biggest hassle, but that was always true."

"The fact that I am a nontraditional female student has not
been a barrier at all. My barriers came from being a single parent.
I have found that most graduate classes are held in the evenings
and as a full-time graduate student with my days unscheduled and my
nights in class it proves to be a great barrier in trying to maintain
any "normal" family and/or social life. My day care is subsidized,
my night care is not and at times proves to be very stressful in
terms of finances."

"Who are nontraditional students – who get together to bitch
about classes and professors – who needs that kind of support group!"

"UNI dumbfounded me when the Scheduling Office was closed two
days before classes. I drove two hours to get on campus to rearrange
my schedule for the 3rd time, due to the fact tha the classes I was
signed up for was dropped. To sum my general experience with
universities, I find a lot of frustration."

"I am not particularly pleased with the Financial Aids Office
at UNI. Because one of their staff forgot to give me one form when

applying for a GSL, my student loan will be delayed for about 6-8
weeks, which will make things quite difficult for us. I was also
rejected for an emergency loan when I desperately needed it.
Luckily, we have survived and I have been able to continue my
studies, in spite of this."

"University Housing isn't very sensitive to needs of married
student housing residents. I feel we should be able to have a
landlord-tenant relationship with responsibilities and rights
accorded to the residents - lack of yard upkeep, cleanliness, change
machines in laundromat, bus transportation, adequate sidewalk or
bike paths out of Jennings Drive apartments to campus."

"My biggest frustration has been with Financial Aids. I went
to the Counseling Center the very first thing - they were very
supportive of me returning to school but of little help on careers -
said in effect 'There are no jobs but come on back for personal growth.'"

"I find it extremely irritating to constantly be asked on
forms all kinds for my parents' name and address and phone number.
My father is deceased - I have little contact with my stepmother.
I have two grandchildren and two married daughters. I would
appreciate being treated like the mature, independent person I am,
not like a student still tied to a parental structure no longer
relevant. There should be different forms for students over 25 or
30 years old."

"A lot of the information I have gotten has been obtained by
my own efforts and a lot of leg work. I had a hard time even locating

classes - I graduated in 1959 and had not attended classes since

1967. Everything is different - new buildings - new systems. No

one gave me a map or even attempted to help me find my way around.

An orientation for returning students conducted in a very mature

way would have been very helpful."

Question #7 Comments by Some Respondents Relative to Relaxation

Service

"Physical Education Center, movies, plays, and speakers at the

University."

"I spend time with my family (golf, biking, etc.) between

working two part-time jobs."

"I spend time with my husband watching T.V. and also taking walks."

"I believe University services provide many avenues, however,

I prefer to relax using avenues off campus since I spend so much

time at UNI during the week."

"Movies, sports events (basketball, football games). I teach

aerobics 7 times a week, love to bike ride - especially on the bike

trails by the river. Shopping in the malls is also relaxing to me."