Minority Students' Perception of the High School-to-College Transition Process and the Views of Selected Informants to the Process: A Qualitative Study

by

Mary Inez Harrison

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION in

COUNSELING AND STUDENT PERSONNEL

APPROVED:

[Signatures]

Richard Paritzky, Co-Chair

Marvin G. Cline, Co-Chair

Libby R. Hoffman

Albert K. Wiswell

Walter J. Moretz

June 1997 Blacksburg, Virginia

Key Words: Minority, Transition, Community College
MINORITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR HIGH SCHOOL-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION PROCESS AND THE VIEWS OF SELECTED INFORMANTS TO THE PROCESS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

Mary Inez Harrison

Committee Co-Chairs:
Dr. Richard Paritzky and Dr. Marvin G. Cline
Counseling and Student Personnel

(ABSTRACT)

The departure of large numbers of students from college before degree completion can have far-reaching consequences for the institution, the students, and ultimately, for society. The retention rate of black and other minority students enrolled in predominantly white institutions is significantly lower than it is for majority race students. Further, many of the students who depart do so within the first year of attendance. Colleges have responded with a variety of measures designed to retain their students and to assist them towards degree completion. The purpose of this study was to get a better understanding of how students who transitioned into a predominantly white, suburban, community college perceived the transition process from high school; i.e., what and/or who facilitated or impeded their transition into college and in what ways.

Five female minority students (four black and one Hispanic student) who had transitioned into the college via a Summer Transition Program (STP) and had persisted at the college participated in the study.
A loosely structured interview format was used to gather data from the students regarding their transition experiences. The interviews were transcribed into the Ethnograph format, coded, and analyzed, using the basic premises of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach. Additionally, five other informants were interviewed or observed for the study. They were either named directly by the students as having an impact on their transition experience, or the informants' positions in the educational system placed them in contact with transitioning students. The informants included a parent of one of the students, a professor who taught the students in the STP, two high school counselors, and a high school teacher. The analysis of their data added depth and knowledge to the investigation.

Using data from the students and the informants, the findings: (a) indicated that the high school-to-college transition process is a highly individualized one involving many complex relationships and interactions; (b) helped the researcher to identify people, processes, and roles that affected the transition process; (c) assisted the researcher in seeing how a mechanism (STP) set up to aid in the students' transition was perceived by the students, and (d) affirmed that the students' desire and decision to enroll and stay in college were the major factors in their persistence.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is no end to the number of people that I need to thank for encouraging me to see this project through to fruition. I thank my parents who were first to instill within me the value of an education, and my extended family for always leading me to believe that I was special.

I thank my husband of 28 years for standing by me and encouraging me to pursue my formal education from the Associate’s through the Doctoral degree.

I thank our three beautiful children, Yvette, Arioth, and Orlander, Jr., who have known me as a student for as long as they have known me as their mother. I love you, and I am grateful to you for all the times that you understood when I went to class rather than with you.

I am grateful to all my colleagues and supporters at the community college. Thank you, Janet. Your encouragement, advice, and, yes, your nagging really did help me to keep at it. Yours too, Helen.

Many thanks to all those who participated in the study. Your time, sincerity, and willingness to participate meant more to me than you probably realized.

To my committee members who started with me, Dr. Charles Humes and especially to Dr. Johnnie Miles, thank you for resurrecting me from the "dead file."
To Dr. Walter Moretz and Dr. Evelyn Kragie, who could ask for two more kind, knowledgeable, and supportive people to serve on a committee?

To Dr. Martin Gerstein, without you, I'd still be stuck somewhere around Chapter III. Thank you for your guidance.

To the two newcomers to my committee, Dr. Libby Hoffman and Dr. Albert Wiswell, thank you for being in my corner.

To Dr. Jerry Cline, you continue to awe me with your knowledge and skill in the field of research. Thank you many times over.

Finally, to my other co-chair, Dr. Richard Paritzky, your boost, encouragement and assistance came at just the right time. Thanks to you and, indeed, to all of you for helping to bring closure to what, at times, seemed like an endless journey.

Finally, I thank God. Miracles still happen.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## I. INTRODUCTION ...................................................................................... 1

- Introduction ....................................................................................... 1
- Background ....................................................................................... 3
- Statement of the Problem ................................................................. 5
- Overview of the Summer Transition Program (STP) ......................... 6
- Purpose of the Study .......................................................................... 8
- Theoretical Basis for Study ............................................................... 9
- Research Issues ............................................................................... 11
- Significance of the Study ................................................................ 12
- Definition of Terms ......................................................................... 14
- Assumptions and Limitations .......................................................... 15

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW ........................................................................ 18

- Introduction ...................................................................................... 18
- Historical Perspective ...................................................................... 18
- Review of Major Retention Models ............................................... 19
- Studies Relevant to Major Retention Models .................................. 24
- Faculty Involvement in Student Retention ...................................... 27
- Pre-College Programs for At-Risk Students .................................... 29
- Calls for An Institutional Response to Student Retention Issues ...... 30
- Call for Studies at the Community College Level ............................ 33

## III. METHODS ......................................................................................... 35

- Introduction ...................................................................................... 35
- Research Design ............................................................................... 35
- Unit of Analysis ............................................................................... 36
- Identifying and Selecting Participants ............................................. 37
- Data Gathering ................................................................................ 40
- Data Analysis ............................................................................... 42
- Validity and Reliability ................................................................... 45
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV. FINDINGS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Categories</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part I</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student # 1 - Maria</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case in Brief</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Class Background</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions of the Interview</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria's Transition Story</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Issues in the Transition Process</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Stage</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant Transition Posture</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student # 2 - Roxanne</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case in Brief</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Class Background</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions of the Interview</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxanne's Transition Story</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Issues in the Transition Process</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Stage</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant Transition Posture</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student # 3 - Jennifer</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case in Brief</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Class Background</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions of the Interview</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer's Transition Story</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Influences</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-College Enrollment Influences</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Interview</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Issues in the Transition Process</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Stage</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predominant Transition Posture</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student # 4 - Denise</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case in Brief</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Class Background</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions of the Interview</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise's Transition Story</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-College Influences</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-College Enrollment Influences</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Issues in the Transition Process</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Stage</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The declining numbers of black students graduating from all levels of higher education in the United States have caused concern in many arenas (Lang, 1988). According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1992), the number of bachelor's degrees earned by black men between 1977 and 1990 declined each year until 1990, and the number earned by black women fluctuated up and down during that period. Further, the number of advanced degrees earned by black men and women declined sharply between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s.

Improved retention rates have become particularly important to colleges in times of shrinking resources, smaller applicant pools, budget cuts, and calls for accountability. At the campus level, college administrators and others interested in stemming the flow of black students from the campus before they reach graduation, have concerned themselves with various retention strategies including special programs and projects, academic improvement services such as tutorials, special funding, additional staffing, and other resources (Francisco, 1983; Solon, 1993; Williamson & Creamer, 1988).

The problem, however, extends beyond the college campus. Consider, for example, these assertions by the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

1. 1990-2005 projections imply that blacks will be one of the fastest growing segments in the labor force; yet, blacks have lower educational attainment at the college level (Silvestri & Lukasiewicz, 1991).
2. Earnings of college graduates have increased dramatically, relative to the earnings of high school graduates (Fechter, 1993).

3. Economic rewards of higher education include enhanced employment opportunities such as higher earnings, higher starting salaries, and larger pay increases (Meisenheimer, 1990).

4. Finally, data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth from 1979-1990 show significant differences in labor market experiences by sex and race, but many of these differences become smaller or disappear with increases in educational attainment (Veum & Weiss, 1993).

These data support the claim of the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (1992) that the ability of colleges and universities to attract and retain black and other minority students is important to the success of the nation in many ways. The question has been and still is, how do colleges and universities do this? What are they doing that contributes to or detracts from attracting and retaining black students? Why aren't their efforts getting better results?

The current study examined the initial phase of the process; i.e., the transition process from high school to college as perceived by black students who entered a predominantly white community college through a program designed to help improve retention rates by helping the students to get a head start in college. The researcher used a qualitative, case study approach, employing a grounded or emergent theory method of analysis to study this
process: Prior to this study, no comprehensive study had been done of the students or the program.

**Background**

Though the odyssey of providing higher education opportunities for blacks in the United States began in advance of the 20th century, three 20th century developments are noteworthy: a) the historic 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown vs. the Board of Education*; b) the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and c) the Higher Education Act of 1965.

The 1954 Supreme court decision declared that "separate but equal" had no place in the field of public education and that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal (Gallagher, 1971). Congress added legal teeth to the Supreme Court decision by passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964, aimed at barring discrimination in the use of public and private facilities, including colleges and universities, that received federal funds. In addition to hiring and certain other practices, the Act also addressed the admission of students to post-secondary institutions. Finally, the door was widened in 1965 with passage of the Higher Education Act, increasing financial aid opportunities for minority and other disadvantaged students.

While these important developments helped to increase black student enrollments, particularly in predominantly white institutions, they did not foretell other significant concerns that would arise such as the lack of preparedness of the institutions to adequately work with students who, in many instances, did not fit the mold of the traditional college student. Other problems that surfaced included the lack of academic preparedness on the part
of some of the students, dissatisfaction with the social life on campus, an unfriendly atmosphere on campus, and higher attrition rates among black and other minority students (Levin & Levin, 1991). In fact, years after those landmark developments, colleges and universities are still grappling with these issues.

Out of concern for the higher attrition rates among black and minority students, and in responding to pressures from various factions such as community groups, black student activists, and the federal government, college administrations and others looked for ways and means to improve their college's persistence rates among these groups of students. Many affected institutions developed high school-to-college transition programs aimed at giving students a head start on college (Francisco, 1983; Levin & Levin, 1991; Sowa, Thompson, & Bennett, 1989). The idea was to improve the odds of students remaining in college by providing them with the tools and resources that researchers and administrators felt were important to help bridge what appeared to be a gap between what the students needed and what the colleges were actually offering.

Much research has been conducted on student persistence (Astin, 1975; Francisco, 1983; Levin & Levin, 1991; Pounds, 1987; Sedlacek, Merritt, & Brooks, 1975; Tinto, 1975, 1987). Levin and Levin (1991), for example, did a comprehensive examination of academic retention efforts reported in the literature. Their purpose was to isolate and define pre-college and at-college predictors of persistence, to identify critical components of effective retention efforts, and to call for methodologically sound empirical research on transition/retention endeavors. Some researchers (Mutter, 1992; Solon, 1993;
Williamson & Creamer, 1988), however, question the applicability of currently used models and theories of student retention to the community college setting. These researchers have argued that even though enrollment and retention concerns are extremely prevalent at the community college level, the community college's philosophy, mission, goal and student body needs may be too different from those of the four-year colleges to have the same tenets apply. Further, they have suggested that more studies need to be conducted at the community college level.

Statement of the Problem

Higgins (1993) suggested that there are three important times in the life of a college student: (a) the time that the decision is made to go to college, (b) the first semester of college life, and (c) the last semester of college life. According to Tinto (1987), a significant number of students leave college within the first two years, and most of that number leave within the first year. Moreover, Lang and Ford (1988) noted that the significantly higher attrition rates of black students in higher education could inevitably lead to less access to diverse opportunities and fewer career choices for black students.

The disparity in retention rates between black and white students at Northern Virginia Community College prompted the Woodbridge Campus to sponsor a transition program aimed at improving the retention rate of black students by helping them to make a smoother, more informed entry into college. Other minority students were accepted into the program on a space available basis. Therefore, each summer from 1989 - 1993, this program attempted to help bridge the perceived gap between high school preparation
and college expectations. It was conjectured that if students were given a head
start academically and socially, they could be expected to make a better
adjustment to the college environment and, thereby, increase their chances of
remaining in college until graduation.

During the five years of the program, no systematic attempt was made
to capture what could be very valuable insights into how the participants
perceived their transition into college. The current study was undertaken to
attempt to uncover and understand who the various players were in the
transition process, what roles they played, what components of the system
facilitated or did not facilitate the students' transition; and what aspects of the
transition program were helpful or unhelpful to them. The insights articulated
by the students and others who were part of the transition process could then
be used to help current and future students reach their academic goals.

Overview of the Summer Transition Program (STP)

Northern Virginia Community College, one of the largest multi-campus
community colleges in the United States, boasts an enrollment of over 35,000
students. Its Woodbridge Campus, the third largest of five, has an enrollment
of approximately 5,200 students, including a black student enrollment of
about 8%. A 1991 Office of Institutional Research (OIR) report noted that the
retention rate of black students at the campus was below that of white
students.

One of the efforts by the Woodbridge Campus to attract and retain
black students was through participation in a summer transition program for
high school graduates and rising seniors. The college-wide program received
the major portion of its funding from the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) and the Xerox Corporation, with in-kind contributions from the college. The program eventually became known as the Xerox Scholars Summer Transition Program.

From the summer of 1989 through the summer of 1993, the Woodbridge Campus hosted 20-35 students in the program, which eventually grew in name recognition among high school students, counselors, and parents. Students were accepted into the program on a first-come, first-served basis. Typically, the program's composition was 80-90% black students, with other minorities rounding out the enrollment. Attractive features of the six-week program included paid tuition and books and the opportunity to earn up to seven semester-hours of college credit during the summer. Other program features included personal and career counseling; cultural enrichment activities; contact with minority professionals in the community; and the development of social, interpersonal, and decision-making skills. Counselors, the Dean of Student Development, faculty, and the provost shared responsibility for developing and implementing the program. End-of-program evaluations and students' comments suggested that their experiences in the summer program were very positive.
Purpose of the Study

Prior to the current study only quantitative, objective measures such as the students' grade point averages, courses taken, program completion statistics, attendance rates, fall semester return rates, and other statistics were computed. These measures were required by the state and the college to continue funding and to give some indication of whether the program was doing what it was designed to do. They did little, however, to assess the breadth and depth of the individual student's experience of transitioning into the college environment. Toward that end, the objectives of the current research were to:

1. gain a clearer understanding of the forces and influences; i.e., inhibitors, barriers, successes, worries (implicit and explicit) that operated upon the transitioning student;

2. better understand, from the student, how a plan created to facilitate his or her entrance into college did or did not accomplish that goal;

3. understand how the student interacted with or reacted to the various components of the system, and

4. assess the capacity of the system to deal with the students' needs, concerns, wishes.
Theoretical Basis for the Study

Theoretical models used in support of this study were: (a) Tinto's (1975, 1987) theory of college departure; (b) Astin's (1975) theory of involvement; and (c) Egan and Cowan's (1987) people-in-systems model.

High school-to-college transition studies are generally grounded in the college student attrition/retention research, particularly as it relates to black and other minority students. According to Williamson and Creamer (1988) and Solon (1993), Vincent Tinto's model of college student departure is the most frequently cited in the retention literature. Tinto's (1975) main premise was that even though students' characteristics such as career goals, socioeconomic status, sex, race, and high school grades play an important role in the initial decision to attend college, these characteristics, in the long run, influence, but do not determine whether a student departs or stays in college. Tinto concluded that the student who was more likely to stay in college was the one who had adequately integrated into the social and academic environment of the college.

Tinto's (1987) later work showed a modification in his thinking. He hypothesized that the student's decision to withdraw from college reflected not just the attributes and actions of the student, but also the dynamic nature of the social and intellectual life of the college community.

Astin (1975) hypothesized that students were more likely to remain in college if they became involved with the various components of the collegiate environment. He suggested avenues such as academic programs, freshman orientation, extra-curricular activities, and housing to get students involved.
Tinto (1975, 1987) and Astin (1975) emphasized the interaction between the student and the college environment. Egan and Cowan (1987) hypothesized a "people-in-systems" theory which, in essence, stated that human development is a function of the interaction between people and the human systems in which they are involved, as well as the interaction of systems with each other. Their theory helped to bring the theories of Tinto (1975, 1987) and Astin (1975) together by suggesting that students who transitioned into the college affected and were affected by the college environment. For example, most of the students in the summer 1993 class did not score high enough on the English Placement Test to automatically enter the College Composition I class. They were asked to write an essay to better determine placement. At some point, the administration decided that the students who felt that they had done well on their writing samples would take a Critical Reading and Study Skills class instead of the writing class. Students from that class who were interviewed for this study were not as positive in their comments about the teacher or the class as they were about their other classes or teachers. Even though they thought that the class was helpful in some ways, they felt that they had been misled.

Another example of how the students and the system impacted each other was seen in how the students viewed their treatment in college as opposed to high school. They reported feeling more adult in college because, as they put it, faculty and staff tended to treat them as adults.
Research Issues

Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted that qualitative research methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies beyond any phenomenon about which little is known or to gain novel and fresh insights into things about which much is already known. Much has been written on retaining black students in college (Fleming, 1984; Kowalski, 1977; Lang & Ford, 1988; Peterson et al., 1978). Tinto (1987), however, maintained that each institution is unique with a unique set of players and resources. Given these uniquenesses, assessment should be sensitive to the broad range of student experiences and should enable the researcher to capture the quality of those experiences as they are understood by the student. The intent of the current study was to get a clearer understanding of black students' experiences and of efforts designed to assist them as they transitioned into a predominantly white community college. This study of the transition process was conducted from the perspective of five students who had transitioned into the college. Additionally, five other "informants" who knew the students or who could contribute to the knowledge of the transition process were interviewed and/or observed for the investigation. They included a parent of one of the students, two high school counselors, a high school teacher, and a college professor who worked with the students. A grounded or emergent theory approach was used to collect, code, conceptualize, analyze and hypothesize from the students' data.

Miles and Huberman (1984) advised that qualitative research should begin with at least a general research question in mind. Gilgun (1992b), however, cautioned that even if one began with a research question in
inductive studies, it was likely to change or need revision as patterns emerged in the data and as previously formed hypotheses were refined.

These assertions, this researcher's experience with transitioning students, and the need to better understand the dynamics involved in keeping students in college, guided the researcher in framing the following general issues for investigation:

1. the identification of the various players in the transition process, including the student, parents, high school personnel, and others;

2. a greater understanding the roles and relationships of the players; and

3. a better understanding of the interactions between the student and the various components of the system, including other students, faculty and staff, curriculum, social activities, services and resources.

Significance of the Study

The first semester and the first year of college mark critical times in a college student's career (Higgins, 1993; Tinto, 1987). According to Tinto (1987), 41 one of every 100 entrants depart the higher education system without earning a college degree. Further, 75 percent of those departing leave within the first two years, with the greatest proportion leaving the first year. Lang and Ford (1988) deemed the situation, with regard to black student attrition in higher education, as one of crisis proportion. They called for more concern, research, strategic programming, and purposeful action to address
this major concern which ultimately translates into fewer economic, social,
and societal opportunities for black citizens. Tinto (1987) noted that even
though an extensive body of literature exists on student retention, there is
much that is still not known about the complex interplay of forces that may
lead to early student departure.

In the years leading up to the current study, a significant difference
existed between the retention rates of black and white students at the
Woodbridge Campus of Northern Virginia Community College. When given
the opportunity to work with students as they begin their college careers, it is
important that counselors, deans, admissions officers, faculty, staff, the
students themselves, and others understand as clearly as possible what is or is
not at work in the transition process. Insights drawn from this study of the
transition process can contribute to improvements in the system and,
ultimately, have the potential to help improve the persistence rates of black
students. For instance, counselors are responsible for contributing to writing
the transition grant proposal, promoting and recruiting for the program,
recommending faculty to teach courses, meeting parents, planning and
teaching the college survival component of the program, counseling, advising
and related duties.

Discovering those elements and experiences that really have meaning
for the students can considerably increase the counselor's knowledge and
ability to include the most effective services and resources in the program.
Early in the study, for example, an interviewee noted her group's skepticism at
meeting their black history teacher - a white male. In-depth interviewing
helped the researcher to reveal a complex, but very positive relationship that
formed between the students and the teacher. Such information can be valuable to those responsible for securing teachers for similar programs and also for teachers who might be interested in teaching in these situations.

Also, insights into how students can be assisted academically, socially, and emotionally as they transition into college could prove helpful to administrators as they make appeals for continued funding for programs and services.

Definition of Terms

The following terms appear frequently in the college attrition/retention literature and are relevant to this study:

1. dropout - to leave school without graduating; one who is not in school and not a graduate (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992)

2. stopout - to temporarily withdraw from higher education; one who drops out of school and later returns (Tinto, 1987; United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992)

3. high-risk student - an individual who possesses one or more attributes which, in the past, have been associated with higher rates of departure (Tinto, 1987)

4. transition program - a program designed to assist individuals in overcoming the social and academic difficulties associated with the transition to college (Tinto, 1987)
5. **persistence** - a measure of continued school enrollment from one year to the next (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992). Williamson and Creamer (1988) modified this measure to better fit the uniqueness of the community college situation.

6. **attrition** - a measure of school departure, voluntarily or involuntarily by dropping out, transferring, or stopping out (Levin & Levin, 1991)

7. **transition** - a period of passage between old and new, before the adoption of new behaviors and norms and after the onset of separation from old ones (Tinto, 1987)

**Assumptions and Limitations**

The researcher acknowledges the following limitations to this study:

1. **Generalizability**

   Participants in the study were not randomly chosen. Therefore, no assumption of generalizability can be made beyond this study. However, working hypotheses (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) generated from the investigation may be useful to or may fit settings that are contextually comparable to that in this study.

2. **Length of time between transition period and study**

   Students in the study transitioned into the college via the STP between summer 1991 and summer 1993. The first student was interviewed in fall 1992, two months after she transitioned into the college. The data from her interview were coded, analyzed, and used to help determine the direction for the study.
The remaining four students were interviewed between fall 1993 and fall 1995. At the time of their interviews, the students were at various points in their college careers, ranging from one to six semesters following the summer program. (The researcher's other duties and responsibilities and the amount of time required to collect, transcribe, code, and analyze a large amount of data accounted, in large part, for the amount of time between interviews).

In some ways, the length of time between the actual college transition and the interviews proved advantageous. It helped the students to take a more reflective approach to putting events, feelings, experiences, etc., into perspective. For those interviewees who were farther into their college careers, the researcher created strategies (explained in Chapter III) to help them get in touch with certain elements of the transition experience.

3. Prior experience with and knowledge of the phenomenon to be studied

This limitation could be a hindrance in a qualitative study if the researcher had many preconceived hypotheses and explanations going into the study (Whitt, 1991). Lincoln and Guba (cited in Whitt, 1991), however, suggested that at the beginning of a study, the researcher is not aware of everything that there is to know about the phenomenon. Inductively approaching the study will lead to gaps in the researcher's understanding. These gaps, in turn, can be used to help direct further research gathering.
The researcher tried to control for this factor, in part, by leaving
the interview open-ended, following the interviewee's lead in the inquiry,
and by following the dictates of grounded theory.

4. Experience with research method

Grounded theory analysis involves many procedures such as data
collection, coding, categorizing, comparing, theoretical sampling, and
memoing (Strauss, 1987). Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that
proficiency comes with continued study and practice.

The initial interviews assisted the researcher in the above
processes. However, it was still very much a "learning while
accomplishing" task. Skills were enhanced by trial and change,
working in a small group led by the research professor, and by engaging
in discussion with two independent readers who were asked to look for
defining views and characteristics in the students' interviews.

Given the nature of grounded or emergent theory research, the
researcher acknowledges that due to time, the volume of material, and the
limited number of cases, no claim can be made that all possible concepts,
themes, and hypotheses were discovered or explained. For example, future
studies of the college transition phenomenon could focus entirely on the role of
peers, parents, or any other aspect of the transition process.
CHAPTER II - LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

When large numbers of black students enrolled in predominantly white institutions of higher education in the late 1960s, the emphasis shifted from fighting for the right to be there to looking for ways to retain black students in college until degree completion. To better understand and to be more aware of the plight and needs of black college students, Pounds (1987) suggested several factors. He theorized that one must consider the historical perspective leading to the current conditions, what services and programs stimulate success, and how the students themselves perceive these efforts.

This literature review addresses some of the major historical events that led to the minority retention movement. It discusses several of the more prominent theories/models for conceptualizing the retention problem, as well as studies which support or refute those models. Other studies included in this review relate to areas such as greater faculty involvement in student retention, pre-college programs for at-risk students, and institutional responses to retention issues. Finally, the need for more studies of retention at the community college level is discussed.

Historical Perspective

The road to providing higher education for blacks in America continues to be a long and arduous one. It took the Supreme Court, for instance, nearly 60 years to reverse its 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson decision which declared the legality of separate, but equal educational institutions for black and white
students (Fleming, 1984; Garraty, 1971). It is to exclude a tremendous chunk of history to make the leap to the more recent state of blacks in America's public colleges and universities. However, the 1954 Supreme Court decision declaring the illegality of separate, but equal educational institutions; the civil rights movement (on and off campus) of the 1960s and 1970s; the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and the Higher Education Act of 1965 were among the events that gave new hope and energy to seekers of the recognition of the equality of the races in the United States (Peterson et al., 1978).

A net result of these events was a significant shift in where black citizens sought to obtain their education. According to Fleming (1984), in the 1950s, approximately 90% of black students were educated at traditionally black colleges. By the 1980s, it was estimated that 66 to 75% of black students in college were attending predominantly white institutions.

With this turn-around in college selection practices also came the realization that while black students were entering white colleges in significant numbers, many were not graduating. This stimulated a flood of research and a continuing debate over the causes of the significant attrition rates of black students from higher education institutions and, particularly, predominantly white institutions (Astin, 1975; Fleming, 1984; Lang, 1988; Stoecker, Pascarella, & Wolfe, 1988; Tinto, 1975, 1987).

**Review of Major Retention Models**

The college transition/retention process and efforts intended to improve the process are generally grounded in research studies that address college retention and persistence. Webb (1988) stated that most studies of college
retention and attrition focus on four-year, residential colleges. Of those that do focus on two-year colleges, most use the four-year models as the basis for their study.

One of the most cited theorists in college student retention is Vincent Tinto (Mutter, 1992; Solon, 1993; Williamson & Creamer, 1988). Tinto's (1975) earlier model posited that integration and commitment were the foundation of successful college retention. He suggested that when students integrate into the academic and social environment of the institution, they achieve a greater level of commitment to their goal to complete college. Further, background characteristics, such as family and personal attitude, combined to influence goal and institutional commitment, which, in turn, had at least an indirect bearing on the students' academic and social integration.

Academic integration, for Tinto, included the extent to which the student developed intellectually and the student's grade performance. Social integration took into account the student's interaction with his peers and college personnel, including faculty, and the student's participation in extracurricular activities which increased social and academic integration. These factors reduced the chances of the student dropping out of college.

Tinto's (1987) revised model of college student retention recognized the longitudinal nature of the college retention process and the extent to which external factors interacted with the student's academic and social integration into the college. These external variables included the formal and informal structure of the campus' academic system and the formal and informal nature of the social system on campus. Consequently, the more positive such
interactions were, the more likely the student was to form a commitment to the institution and to the personal goal of college completion.

In this revised model Tinto (1987) drew, in part, from Van Gennep's (1960) work on the rites of passage in tribal societies; i.e., how individuals move from membership in one group to membership in another. Relationships are transmitted between succeeding groups in three distinct stages: separation, transition, and incorporation, each with its specialized ceremonies and rituals. Tinto applied these premises to the stages of a student's college career. The separation stage entailed the student breaking with past associations such as high school, family, and local area to some degree, and adapting to the behaviors and norms appropriate to college life.

Tinto (1987) conceptualized Van Gennep's second stage, transition, as the passage between high school and college, old and new, between full adoption of new norms and patterns of behavior and separation from old ones. Higgins (1993) deemed this period as probably the most critical in the college student's experience.

The third stage, incorporation, involved students becoming integrated into the college community by "learning the ropes" (formal and informal) of college life.

Tinto (1987) hypothesized that a student's decision to withdraw from college reflects not just the personal attributes and actions of the student, but also the dynamic nature of the social and intellectual life of the college community. He asserted that the lack of student persistence in an institution may serve as a barometer of the social and intellectual health of the institution. Tinto did not see this as a contrast, but as a natural follow up to his earlier
claim that students leave school because they have not integrated into the academic and social network of the college. Pounds (1987) gave credence to this argument by emphasizing that when black students enter college, they experience the same developmental issues; i.e., adapting to college life, separating from family, gaining greater autonomy, and considering college majors, careers, and future plans just as other students do. However, because their political, economic, social, and cultural backgrounds may be different, they may experience these developmental issues differently from the way majority race students experience them. Pounds cautioned that colleges and universities must be aware of and responsive to these needs in order to help move minority students from enrollment to graduation.

Alexander Astin is also frequently cited in the retention literature. The cornerstone of Astin's (1975) research was the belief that involvement was the key to retaining students in college. Additionally, he identified personal and institutional variables, that when assessed at the time of college entry, could aid decision-makers in determining the retention proneness of students. Astin postulated that every positive factor identified was likely to increase student involvement, and thereby retention, and that every negative factor was likely to do the opposite. If Astin's assertion is accepted, colleges and universities must be committed to, not threatened by, the development and implementation of efforts, programs, and services that encourage and promote the academic, social, and personal development of black students.

Webb (1988) outlined retention models by Spady, Pascarella, and Bean. According to Webb, Spady's early 1970s model was one of the first widely accepted models of college student retention. It took into account pre-college
factors such as family background, high school experience, interests, values, goals, and expectations which affected the student's ability to adjust to the pressures of the college environment. Consequently, whether or not a student remained in college depended on the pattern of interaction and adjustment that developed between the student and the pressures of the college environment, as well as, the degree of institutional commitment and the student's grade performance. Therefore, the degree of the student's institutional commitment, in conjunction with grade performance, were direct determinants of the student's decision to drop out. Tinto's (1975) earlier model was influenced by Spady's research.

Pascarella's model, cited in Webb (1988), and formulated in the 1980s, built on Spady's and Tinto's models and emphasized the importance of contact with faculty, along with other personal and institutional factors that influenced the student's decision to persist or drop out.

Bean's meta-model, cited in Webb (1988) attributed less significance to the student's social integration on campus and stressed the importance of environmental variables such as finances, employment, and outside encouragement. Bean's model held particular relevance for non-traditional students and students on commuter campuses. Since these students tended to maintain peer and social relations outside the college campus, social integration was not as critical to their decision to drop out or persist. This prompted Bean to propose a model for non-traditional students wherein environmental factors such as finding outside employment and encouragement, family responsibility, and the opportunity to transfer would exert the greatest influence on the decision to drop out.
An excellent corollary to the work of college persistence theorists such as Tinto and Astin, who recognized the importance of interaction between students and their environment, is the work of Egan and Cowan (1979). They borrowed from Lewinian psychology a model of behavior that basically stated that human development is a function of the interaction between people and the human systems in which they are involved, as well as, the interactions of the systems with each other. Their people-in-systems model emphasized the kinds of life skills needed to work through developmental tasks and to interact with the systems within the individual's environmental context. Accordingly, groups, organizations, institutions, and communities affect the people who comprise them. People, in turn, affect the systems and the systems affect each other in growthful and non-growthful ways. Further, actions that take place can impede or facilitate processes that occur in the system.

Studies Relevant to the Major Retention Models

Some students have successful college experiences. Others do not. Some students remain in college and graduate. Many do not. Tinto (1975, 1987) attempted to study the problem by looking at the academic and social integration of students on campus and later theorizing how the system supported or did not support these variables. Astin (1975) looked at the student's degree of involvement in college affairs as a predictor of persistence.

Research generated by persistence theorists has tended to support, refute, or find limitations in these theories. Stoecker et al., (1988), for instance, supported Tinto's hypothesis of academic and social integration. In a nine-year, national, multi-institutional study to identify the determinants of
persistence and withdrawal, they concluded that persistence-withdrawal behavior was largely the result of a longitudinal process of person-environment fit.

By contrast, Lichtman, Bass, and Ager (1989) cited limitations in Tinto's theory when race was used as an independent variable to examine if there were differences between black and white student attrition patterns at an urban commuter university. They found that black students dropped out at a higher rate than white students, even when they controlled for SAT scores and high school grade performance. Secondly, they found that an even greater difference existed between black and white student attrition rates among students with higher levels of academic achievement, thus calling into question Tinto's assertion of academic integration being a major factor in persistence.

Murguia, Padilla, and Pavel (1991) conducted a qualitative analysis of the effect of ethnicity on Tinto's concept of social integration and its role in institutional departure. Native American and Hispanic students at a large metropolitan, southwestern university were interviewed to assess how they experienced their ethnicity on campus. The researchers found support for Tinto's assertion that the lack of social integration could lead to early college departure. However, the level of socialization that they found important was not necessarily at the institutional level, but involved much smaller sub-units such as fraternities, ethnic clubs, and religious groups which, in turn, left the greater college campus more open to exploration by the members of these groups.

Using data from a College Student Experience questionnaire, Abrahamowicz (1988) found strong support for Astin's theory of involvement.
At a large commuter university, he explored the relationship between membership in student organizations on campus and the students' perceptions of satisfaction, and overall involvement with the college. In almost every instance, he found that significant differences existed between involved and non-involved students. Further, these students' involvements went beyond the traditional modes of clubs, student unions, athletic and student activities participation. Involved students also reported greater incidents of library visitation, and more involvement with faculty, course learning, art, music, writing, technology and other indicators of involvement.

Other studies have identified and researched the role of the various components of the transition/retention process and their effectiveness on student retention. Levin and Levin (1991) offered a review and critical examination of the published literature on academic programs for improving the retention of at-risk minority students. They found that student characteristics and family characteristics had the highest impact among the pre-college predictors of college persistence. The student characteristics found to have the greatest impact were: (a) academic preparedness, (b) adaptability or the ability to adjust to a new environment, (c) commitment to educational goals, (d) perception of progress toward educational goals, (e) willingness to seek academic assistance, (f) self-confidence, and (g) the student's reasons for pursuing a college degree. Family characteristics included parental socio-economic status and level of education, parents' expectations, and parents' influence on their children.

Levin and Levin (1991) found that at-college predictors of persistence were even more crucial. The living environment, the classroom experience,
academic advising, extra-curricular activities, financial support, and faculty involvement were found to be the strongest predictors of persistence in their review. Of these factors, they surmised that the quality of interaction with faculty seemed to be the single most important predictor of persistence among minority college students. Faculty involvement included experiences in and outside of the classroom. Levin and Levin (1991) called for effective, proactive academic support and intervention programs, preferably during the students' first term on campus, or even sooner, as in the case of summer orientation programs.

Faculty Involvement in Student Retention

Many other researchers have studied the role of faculty and faculty involvement on successful experiences for college students. Pounds (1987), for instance, commented on the role of faculty in recognizing and responding to the needs of first- as opposed to second-generation black college students. He theorized that it was important to understand that the transition and adjustment of first-generation college students could be very dissimilar to that of second-generation students. He offered ways that faculty could assist first-generation college students, such as assisting them with interpersonal skills training, helping them to translate beliefs and values into appropriate behavioral expressions, providing role models who could provide them with a frame of reference for future and career aspirations, and helping first-generation college students to see themselves as responsible persons. Pounds cautioned that naive faculty should not fall into the trap of treating all black students the same.
Sedlacek (1983) summarized eight variables that he determined to be common to successful college students: (a) a positive self-concept, (b) the ability to understand and deal with racism, (c) realistic self-appraisal, (d) a preference for long- to short-term goals, (e) a strong support person, (f) having successful leadership experiences, (g) participation in community service, and (h) the ability to demonstrate knowledge in non-traditional ways. He posited that faculty could assist by having high expectations of minority students; interacting with students and helping them to negotiate their way through the system; giving them honest, realistic, and quicker feedback with more frequent exams; encouraging involvement in departmental and school-wide activities; developing links between the students' academic and community interests; and looking for ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge non-traditionally.

Students who are motivated are more likely to persist in college. Weaver and Cottrell (1988) conducted a study, in which they asked junior-level students at a university in Ohio to write down those things in the classroom environment that motivated them, held their attention, and made them want to learn. They found that what students claimed motivated them were primarily factors over which their teachers had the most control. The top six items ranked by students were: (a) interesting subject, (b) instructor's enthusiasm, (c) using exciting approaches, (d) relevance of the subject to student's life, (e) a sense of humor and the ability to laugh in the classroom, and (f) the interaction between teacher and students in the classroom. Weaver and Cottrell noted that these factors seemed to place more responsibility on
the teacher than on the student. When surveyed, the teachers identified the same six factors, with the exception of humor.

Giles-Gee (1989) reported on a grant-funded program conducted at predominantly white Towson State University in Maryland where faculty intervened to serve early at-risk students. Each faculty member worked with eight students and assisted with study skills, the use of services and resources, role modeling, and communication skills between students and faculty. The study found that program participants significantly improved their grades and used services more than their cohorts who did not participate. The author of the study, however, cautioned that college student retention is much more complex than those indicators would suggest and that other important variables, such as residential versus commuter student status and on-campus versus off-campus employment, could inter-correlate with other important variables, such as grade point average and organizational involvement on campus to influence persistence.

Pre-college Programs for At-Risk Students

Other researchers posit that work with at-risk minority students should start far in advance of the college transition. Marin (1995), for instance, conducted a study to determine why Puerto Rican students drop out of high school at a high rate. A qualitative, open-ended interview approach was used in his study of 10 Puerto Rican high school dropouts. He identified large family size, low income, and low educational achievement by parents as relevant out-of-school factors related to dropout rates. In-school predictors that were identified with high dropout rates included age (one or more years
older than classmates), grade retention, school alienation, cutting classes, and suspensions.

Other interveners have reported work with even younger groups. Young (1994) described an intervention program designed for black female adolescents in a secondary public school. Program activities were designed to help the students learn appropriate behavior through guidance, orientation, and group counseling. The results of program evaluations were reflective of Egan and Cowan's (1979) people-in-systems theory in that teachers, administrators, peers, parents, and other family members reported that they reacted more favorably towards the program participants when they noticed changes in their behavior and attitude.

**Calls for An Institutional Response to Student Retention Issues**

Some researchers have taken a more global approach in their views on minority student retention and have called for a greater institutional response to the issue. Francisco (1983) called for institutions to examine their structure and their commitment to determine, during an era of conservatism, recession, and downsizing, why the open doors remained revolving doors in spite of resources, programs, and efforts designed to retain and graduate black and other minority students. He questioned whether the revolving door was intentional, as judged to be the case with some college athletes, or if students were leaving college because the programs set in place for them were not working.

Francisco concluded that colleges and universities were not evaluating their programs, or if they were, they were not publishing their results. He
proposed that administrators should make a firm commitment to the educational well-being of their at-risk students and reorganize existing programs in ways that would encourage minority students to use them, rather than have them be conceived as remedial in nature. He also encouraged the establishment of small support groups of minority students for problem-solving, peer counseling, advising, and outreach by minority professionals.

Kemp (1990) admonished that institutions were placing too much emphasis on retention and not enough on graduation, which were two very different constructs. He cited the example of minority students who might be retained in the system indefinitely if they did not qualify to take classes that were required in their majors. However, if the idea was to graduate students, the focus of programs and services would be on education, progression toward graduation, and social productivity rather than retention. He noted that with the emphasis on retention, the goal was to modify observed behaviors at the expense of intrapsychic factors such as emotions, attitudes, institutional climate, perceptions, aspirations, and expectations. Kemp took issue with the use of the term, minority retention, suggesting that minority progression or minority disposition would have a more positive connotation and would not be automatically associated with under-achievement and under-preparedness.

Kemp's assertion of the importance of intrapsychic factors on attrition rates of minority and at-risk college students was supported by Larose and Roy (1991) who found that high school records were less of a predictor of first semester success than the student's affective, social, and cognitive skills. They recommended that in the case of high-risk college freshmen, the students'
socio-affective welfare should receive special attention from counselors and
other designers of programs intended to help these students adjust to college.

Credle and Dean (1993) also called on institutions to examine their
stance on black student issues and policies. Reminiscent of Egan and Cowan's
(1979) people-in-systems model, Tinto's (1987) theory regarding the
institutional environment, and Astin's (1975) theory of involvement, Credle
and Dean challenged faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education to
make the effort to understand the needs, backgrounds, and environments of
black students in order to help them to succeed in college. Their nine-step,
pyramidal process to recruit and retain black students maintained that
institutions should:

1. examine their philosophy and mission to determine their
   commitment to this issue;
2. assess their ability to work with black students in terms of the social
   and emotional atmosphere on campus;
3. assess the academic and social readiness of black students on
   campus;
4. schedule early visits to the institution that would allow students and
   college personnel to communicate and become more comfortable with
   each other;
5. establish rapport with black students to determine their individual
   differences and to avoid stereotyping;
6. help black students to learn to work within the organizational
   structure so that they could become more proficient at problem-solving;
7. develop on-going mentoring programs that could help students to
link up with cultural, community, and academic experiences;
8. assist black students with career exploration needs to broaden their
awareness of the range of available career choices and
9. help students to prepare for the world of work in terms of
internships, exposure to black professionals, and preparation for job
searches.

Credle and Dean concluded that their model should help colleges and
universities realize that they, too, have a role and that not all of the changing
has to be done by the student.

Call for Studies at the Community College Level

The models and studies discussed above relied primarily on data
gathered from four-year colleges and universities. Solon (1993) and Webb
(1988) found limitations in the works of major retention theorists such as
Tinto (1975, 1987) and Astin (1975) when applied to the community college
setting. Integral to the community college's mission is the opportunity for the
higher education of non-traditional, minority, and underprepared students.
The criticism is that Tinto and Astin obtained their data from traditional four-
year, residential colleges. Studies done in such a setting could obtain findings
different from ones done in the community college setting.

That is not, however, to imply that one should look for consistency in
findings across all community college settings. Williamson and Creamer
(1988) found that when the term, persistence, was defined to better
approximate the characteristics of community college students, the importance
of background variables such as gender, race, socio-economic status, aptitude, self-concept, parental aspirations and educational aspirations appeared more dominant than social and academic integration when explaining long-term persistence patterns of students. Using data from three community colleges in Los Angeles, Webb (1988) found only limited support for the theory that knowledge of the community college student's background and educational plans could assist in predicting whether a student would or would not finish the freshman year. When he added the student's first semester grades to the equation, the likelihood of an accurate prediction of persistence increased.

Yet, Mutter's (1992) study tended to support Tinto's (1987) claim of social and academic integration and commitment. In her study of persisters and non-persisters (including all black students enrolled at the college) at a large mid-western community college, persisters were found to be more academically integrated into the institution, spent more time talking with college personnel formally and informally, were more sure of their career choices, and were more satisfied with the institution as the correct choice for them.

While these researchers differ on the degree to which their findings support those of well-known college retention theorists, the common thread among them (Mutter, 1992; Solon, 1993; Webb, 1988; Williamson & Creamer, 1988) is that they all call for more studies to be conducted at the community college level.
CHAPTER III - METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was for the researcher to gain a better understanding of the high school-to-college transition process as it was perceived by five students (four blacks and one Hispanic) who had transitioned into a suburban community college. The five students involved in the study had entered the college by way of a summer transition program (STP) and had persisted at the college. The researcher was interested in identifying what forces and influences; i.e., barriers, events, people, successes, and worries (implicit or explicit) operated upon the students during the transition process. Further, the researcher was interested in how the transitioning students interacted with and/or reacted to these forces and influences.

The views and opinions of others (referred to in this study as informants) who were knowledgeable about the transition process were also obtained. These individuals were asked to participate in the study because of their positions or the roles they played with regard to the students in the study. The informants had either worked directly with the students and/or, because of their positions, were perceived by the researcher to have knowledge of the transition process that could add to the depth and understanding of the research issue.

Research Design

A multiple case study design was used to conduct this investigation.
Interviews were conducted with five community college students who had transitioned into the college between 1991 and 1993. The students had entered the college by way of a summer transition program (STP) and at the time of the study, were at various points in their college careers. Table 1 provides identifying information for the five students who participated in the study. (The names are not the real names of the students).

A case study format was selected to conduct the study because it gave the researcher the advantage of speaking at length with and observing the participants as they disclosed their transition stories. The researcher could ask follow-up questions, seek clarification of the students' assertions, and in short, gain a more comprehensive view of how the students perceived their college transitions.

By obtaining data from multiple cases, the researcher was not only able to examine and analyze the complex contextual variables as they related to the transition process of each participant, but was also able to make cross comparisons of the similarities and differences that emerged from the students' accounts of their transition experiences (Merriam, 1988).

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study was five individual students. Students who transition into college come replete with backgrounds that have been influenced by many factors, internal and external to the individual. They have certain expectations and anxieties. These variables affect and are affected by the college environment and contribute to determining the nature
(positive or negative, smooth or anxiety-provoking) of the transition experience for the student.

The five students involved in this study had persisted at the college for a period of time ranging from one to several semesters. The researcher believed that the identification and examination of the variables and factors that affected the nature of their experiences could lead to valuable insights as to why some students persist at the college, as well as why others drop out.

Identifying and Selecting Participants

The pool of potential participants or cases for this study was drawn from among students who had participated in a summer transition program (STP) at a small campus of a large, suburban, multi-campus community college between 1989 - 1993. Approximately 130 students had participated in the program during that period. When the pool of potential participants was compiled in the fall of 1993, 12 of the STP students (eight females and four males) remained at the campus. To eliminate the variable of gender from the current study, only the eight female students were considered for participation in the study. Two of the students who participated in the study responded to the researcher's telephone calls. The three remaining students were asked in-person by the researcher if they would be willing to participate in the study.

The Counseling Center at the campus maintained a roster of all students who had participated in the program. Additional information such as which students had remained at the campus, their grade point averages, classes taken, and other information useful to the study was available to the researcher.
The following summarizes the procedures that were used to contact and secure students for participation in the study:

1. compiled a list of approximately eight students, beginning with the summer 1993 group, the most recent to complete the program;
2. made contact with the students from the list by phone or spoke with them on campus;
3. explained that I was a doctoral student at Virginia Tech and that I would like to do a study of the high school-to-college transition process for my dissertation. The students were asked if they would be willing to talk with me about their experience of transitioning into college during one or more taped interview sessions.
4. set an appointment time and meeting place. (Four of the students were interviewed in the researcher's office in the Counseling Center on campus, and the other, in a small, private room in the campus library).
5. met with each student; talked about what was necessary in terms of commitment, such as open and honest sharing about the transition experience; one or two audio-taped sessions, permission to use archival data (if available), and permission to talk with others, such as parents or siblings.
6. gave each student the opportunity to ask any questions or raise any concerns about the study and got some idea of the student's motivation for agreeing to assist in the study, considering that no monetary or other tangible rewards were available. For the most part, students said that they were willing to assist because the STP had been beneficial to them.
and that they did not mind helping "another student" to complete her education.

7. agreed to share the findings of the study with the student; and
8. asked the student to sign the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A).

Cautions alluded to by Stake (1995) were taken into consideration by the researcher during this study. He noted that case study research is not sampling research. Therefore, no claim was made in this study of selecting students representative of all students who had participated in the STP or of all transitioning students in general.

The Students who participated in the study were enrolled in the college at the time of their interviews and they said that they were willing to share their experiences. Table 1 provides identifying information for the students who participated in the study. The names are not the real names of the students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Year Grad.</th>
<th>Year STP</th>
<th>Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxanne</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denise**</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Participated in the program as a rising high school senior
The researcher intended to address the concerns raised in the research issue by first attempting to understand each case as fully as possible, given the constraints of time, schedules, and other resources.

**Data Gathering**

The primary method of data collection in this study was by audio-taped, semi-structured interviews with the participants. The students were interviewed over a period of approximately 30 months. The students' schedules, interviewer's schedule, and the amount of time that it took to transcribe, code, consider, and analyze the data from each student before proceeding to the next largely accounted for the extended periods between interviews.

The following procedures and guidelines provided by Gilgun (1992a) guided the researcher during the data gathering phases of this study:

- entered the interviewing sessions as open-mindedly as possible, being aware that previous experience with transitioning students could create certain biases;
- interviewed and taped the first subject;
- made notes and general comments about the nature of the interview;
- transcribed the interview, using the Ethnograph Computer Program (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988);
- began coding and analyzing the data and forming tentative categories by asking questions about the data;
- contacted the second case and began the process again, this time comparing instances of data in the second against those in the first.
Consequently, categories were added to, modified, or changed to form new ones.

At the same time that data were being gathered from the students and analyzed, the researcher was also gathering and considering data from other informants who were knowledgeable about the transition process. These informants were either named directly by the students or they holding positions in various systems where they frequently came into contact with transitioning students. These informants were believed by the interviewer to be capable of contributing to the understanding of the transition process. In some cases, the informants validated or confirmed the accounts of the students. At other times, their views or opinions of transitioning students differed from those of the students.

The interviews with the students were loosely structured. The interviewer had worked with some of the students in the capacity of counselor/advisor and had begun the study with some knowledge of the transition process. Therefore, the intent of loosely structuring the interviews was to allow the students to talk about those aspects of their transition process that held relevance and importance for them. When the interviewer had a hunch that something was of particular importance to the student or to the understanding of the transition process, the inquiry became more direct.

The informants' interviews were conducted in much the same manner as the students'. However, since the informants were interviewed because of certain assertions made by the students, there were instances when specific areas were investigated. In general, the informant's views and opinions either
countered, supported, or confirmed the assertions made by the students about aspects of the transition process, or otherwise added insights about the transition process.

The students' and informants' interviews were taped, transcribed, and coded in terms of the various coding techniques defined in the data analysis section of this chapter. The coded data were analyzed for emerging themes and patterns by asking questions about the data and using the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990). Theoretical sampling was employed beyond the initial interview to determine which elements, components, or attributes of the student, the system, or the transition process would be explored for further collection and analysis. Given the restraints of time, the volume of data collected, and the resources available, the claim of theoretical saturation can not be made by the researcher.

**Data Analysis**

A grounded or emergent theory approach was used to examine and analyze the phenomenon of black student transition into college. Grounded or emergent theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Strauss (1987) described grounded theory analysis as "a detailed grounding by systematically and intensively analyzing data, often sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase of the field note, interview, or other document; by a constant comparison; data are extensively collected and coded using operations such as identifying properties and dimensions, categorizing, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and memoing to produce a well-constructed theory" (p.
22). The following definitions from Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Strauss (1987) are used in grounded theory research:

**coding** - process of analyzing data. Coding leads to conceptualizing or labeling discrete happenings and events in the data.

**category** - classification arrived at by comparing similar concepts against each other.

**property** - an attribute of a category.

**dimensionalizing** - locating properties of a category along a continuum.

**Constant Comparative Method** - process of adding depth and specificity to concepts by making comparisons for similarities and differences between each incident, event, and instance of a phenomenon.

**theoretical sampling** - sampling directed by emerging theory.

**theoretical saturation** - occurs when additional analysis no longer adds to discovering new knowledge about a category.

**memoing** - keeping written record of researcher's questions, hypotheses; summary of codes and memos can be used to direct further coding and to integrate theory.
**core category -** the central phenomenon around which all other categories are interwoven.

**working hypotheses -** propositions that arise from a particular investigation and are supported by the context that gave rise to them.

The development of categories marks one of the initial phases of the grounded theory process. They are formed by constantly comparing one unit of information against another (Merriam, 1988). In this study, once categories were established, concepts within and across the categories were generated. Tentative hypotheses were then used to link the categories and their properties.

The Ethnograph Computer Program (Seidel et al., 1988) was used to facilitate these processes. The Ethnograph format allowed the researcher to transcribe the audio-taped interviews directly into the computer.

The printed version of each transcript was coded, often line by line, to form categories. These categories were used to conceptualize the data and to look for emerging patterns and themes within and across the data.

As the researcher became more immersed in the data, insights and hunches were formed about the transition process of each student and about the transition process in general. The continued analysis of the data, within and across cases, helped the researcher to compile the transition story of each student and to form some general assumptions about the transition process, as related to the research issue.
Validity and Reliability

In grounded theory research, it is the subjection of the data to rigorous analysis through asking questions, constantly comparing incidents occurring in the data, looking for patterns of action and meanings in the data, reflecting on the data through writing memos, and looking for confirmation or disconfirmation of notions or hypotheses that help to ensure the validity and reliability of a study (Gilgun, 1992a; Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990).

Internal validity, reliability, and external validity are measures that help to give some assurance of the trustworthiness of the findings in qualitative studies. Internal validity was addressed in this study primarily through triangulation and peer examination. Triangulation, involving the concepts of accuracy and establishing alternative hypotheses, good discipline and protocols, was employed in this study by recording and transcribing interview data verbatim, choosing several cases from the available population to study, and by providing considerable, detailed descriptive information on the participants. To assist in determining alternative hypotheses and interpreting the data, two independent parties were asked to study the interviews and ask themselves, "What is going on in the mind of this person?" "What defines this person?" The independent readers' comments were compared to the investigator's and discussed before the student's "transition story" was written. (An example of a reader's comments appears in Appendix D).

Reliability, in the traditional sense, can be difficult to establish in qualitative research, as many can observe an event and draw different conclusions. Citing Guba and Lincoln (1981), Merriam (1988) recommended that rather than demand that outsiders get the same results, the qualitative
researcher should desire that given the data collected, the results should make sense because they are consistent and dependable. Consistency and dependability were enhanced in this study by clarifying the researcher's assumptions and reasons for conducting the study, describing how the data were collected, triangulating data from the students', as well as, the informants' interviews, and by keeping accounts of how categories and decision-making processes were arrived at during the investigation.

External validity, which traditionally refers to the degree to which the findings of a study can be generalized to other situations, must be addressed in research. In this study, no attempt was made to randomize the selection of cases from the small, available population; therefore, no claim can be made as to the generalizability of the findings. However, the researcher sought to present the findings in such a way that those familiar or not familiar with the transition process could find them plausible and accurate from the available data. Also a considerable amount of raw data was included in the findings to allow the reader to arrive at the same or even alternative interpretations.

Other measures that helped to increase the reliability and validity of this study included establishing good rapport with the study's participants, discussing the process with others not involved in the study; i.e., disinterested peers, and by providing as much information as possible about the cases.
CHAPTER IV - FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was for the researcher to gain a better understanding of the high school to college transition process as it was perceived by five minority students who transitioned into a predominantly white suburban community college. A case study design was selected to study the phenomenon because it gave the researcher the opportunity to gain a more holistic and rounded picture of the students' experiences. Further, a grounded or emergent theory approach was used to collect and analyze the data, which were obtained primarily through semi-structured interviews.

Five students, all female, took part in the study. Four of the students were black and one was Hispanic. The Hispanic student was interviewed first. She was included in the study because the examination and analysis of her interview data helped to define the research issue and also helped to determine the direction of subsequent interviews. All five students were at various points in their transition experience. The students, who entered the college via a summer transition program (STP), affected and were affected by others, including the various systems of which they were members, such as their families, high schools, and the college system.

In addition to the students, five other informants were interviewed to obtain their views regarding the students in the study, or in other instances, regarding their views of various transition issues. Those interviewed included a parent of one of the students in the study, two high school counselors (including one from the high school from which three of the students had
graduated), a high school teacher from the school from which one of the subjects had graduated, and a college professor who had taught all five students in the STP. These individuals were selected for interviews because the data, as it emerged, suggested that they were or had been influential in some way in the students' transition and could serve as potential informants to the transition process.

As the study advanced, major categories of information began to emerge from the data. These categories of information (presented in the following section) helped the researcher to manage the considerable amount of data, determine a format for presenting the data, and ultimately, better understand certain aspects of the transition process. The findings from the cases of the five students are presented first. In the latter part of the chapter, the informants and their contributions to the study are introduced.

Major Categories

Transition Class Background - Each student in the study transitioned into college by way of a Summer Transition Program (STP). This experience constituted the student's introduction to the college environment. Theorists have noted the importance of the student's initial college experience (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1975, 1987).

This category provides pertinent information regarding the interviewee's transition class, such as the number of students in the class, the ethnic composition of the class, the courses taken, who taught them, and other factors that may have influenced the student's adjustment to college.
**Conditions of the Interview** - This section takes into account those circumstances surrounding the actual interview, such as how the interview was set up, where it was held, the length of the interview, and the number of pages of transcript generated.

**The Transition Story** - Each student's story was unique. The descriptive narrative in this section summarizes the information gained from interviewing and observing the students. Verbatim excerpts are used often to convey a sense of the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the student before, during and after the transition process.

**Primary Issues in the Transition** - This section identifies those issues and concerns that appeared to be most important to the student at the time of the transition into college and while the student was enrolled at the college. The interviews were conducted at various points during the students' college stays. For instance, two students were interviewed during their second semesters and one each during their fifth, sixth, and seventh semester.

**Transition Stage** - The findings discussed in this heading are based on the works of Tinto (1987) who theorized that the college transition is a stage-wise process consisting of three phases - separation, transition, and incorporation. Defining elements of each stage are found in Chapter II. The "stage" to which each student is assigned constitutes an approximation, since community college students do not always fit Tinto's qualifying characteristics for each stage.
**Predominant Transition Posture** - The students, who were similar in many ways, were different in others. This section addresses the question of what defined or made each student unique from the others? Often, this gave some insight into how the student approached or handled new or challenging situations.

The last three students who were interviewed had been in the system longer than the first two. Therefore, they offered additional insights into the transition process. The categories above pertain to all five students. Two additional categories - Pre-College Influences and Post-Enrollment Influences - were necessary to adequately represent the cases of the three more experienced students.

**Pre-College Influences** - This category identifies those persons, factors, and events that affected the student's transition process such as parents, peers, high school grades, etc., prior to the student's enrollment in college.

**Post-Enrollment Influences** - This category takes into account the student's experiences after entering college. The students frequently mentioned factors such as their relationship with other students, their professors, parents, siblings, and other matters.

Instances occur throughout these categories where comparisons and contrasts are drawn between and within the students' cases that enhance the sense of the complexity of the transition process.
The second part of this chapter presents the data from the informants who participated in the study. These informants provided their perspectives on many areas related to the transition process and their insights added to the depth of the study. The informants included a parent, two high school guidance counselors, a high school teacher, and a college professor.
Part I

Student # 1

Maria*

Case in Brief

Year Graduated: 1992
STP Participation: Summer 1992
Interviewed: Fall 1992
Ethnic Background: Hispanic
Primary Transition Issue(s):
acceptance by classmates
fitting into the group
anxiety of meeting new people
completing coursework in short time period
feeling uninformed from high school
Transition Stage: Transition
Predominant Posture: "Hesitator"
hesitant cautious
reserved
Predominant Needs: acceptance
harmony
inclusion

*Alias used to protect privacy
Transition Class Background

Maria was 1 of 21 students (11 females and 10 males) enrolled in the 1992 Summer Transition Program (STP).

Based on information from their applications to the college, 18 of the students described themselves as black or African-American and one each as Hispanic, Asian, and African. Two students, an African-American female and the African (male) student, withdrew from the summer session, citing family problems.

The remaining students were enrolled in College Composition I, United States History II, and Orientation. The College Composition I class was taught by a young black female professor who related extremely well to the students, according to their evaluations of the class. The History class was taught by a white professor who was in his late forties. He had taught United States History I to the 1990 and 1991 STP classes. He decided to change to U.S. History II for the 1992 program because he felt that the students needed a break from the issues of slavery and would benefit greatly from examining a more positive and expanded view of American History, especially in regard to African-Americans. The students were very pleased with the class, and many described it as the best class they had ever taken.

The Orientation class was led by this researcher, and the services of other counselors were enlisted to facilitate the group in discussions of topics such as leadership skills, study skills, and substance awareness. The counselors and faculty were permanent, full-time members of the college.

Students' evaluations at the end of the summer program indicated that their overall experience was very positive.
Conditions of the Interview

Maria was the only Hispanic student in a class of majority black students. In essence, she was a minority within a minority group. Maria was asked for an interview during fall semester 1992, to assist with a project for a Qualitative Analysis class. She and the other members of her class were aware that this researcher was considering using some aspect of the STP as a topic of dissertative inquiry. Maria, who had stopped by the counseling office on several occasions to chat with the researcher, readily agreed to an interview. A date and time were set, and Maria showed up promptly to grant a tape-recorded session. The session, which took place in the researcher's office, lasted approximately 30 minutes and yielded 10 pages of transcribed interview notes.

Though Maria is Hispanic, her case was included in this study because:
1) of the valuable insights that it yielded about the STP;
2) aspects of her transition experience seemed similar, in many ways, to those of the other interviewees;
3) her interview helped the researcher to begin to narrow down the scope of the study and to begin to formulate issues and lines of inquiry;
4) it afforded the researcher the opportunity to hone interviewing skills and to begin the practice of collecting, coding, and categorizing information.

Maria's directive in the interview was to talk about her experience in the STP. It became clearer, however, after studying her case and subsequent cases, that the direction of inquiry should be towards the students' overall experience of the transition process, with the STP being a part of that...
experience. For example, after Maria's interview, the researcher wondered how and why Maria had decided to do the STP; what her high school experience had been like, and what role her family played in her college transition process. Memos were made to this effect and subsequent interviewees either broached these areas on their own or were asked by the interviewer to talk about them.

Coding Maria's interview, usually line by line, yielded a number of preliminary categories. Coding this first interview yielded the preliminary coding scheme in Appendix B. This scheme was revised and expanded as other interviews were conducted, coded and analyzed, resulting in Appendix C.
Maria's Transition Story

Maria's transition story can be told in large measure by the concerns that she shared regarding her college transition. From the onset, she was not sure if she wanted to do the STP because it meant sacrificing her summer vacation. "When I first heard about it, I thought, well this is going to be strange because it's going to take up my whole summer, and I don't know if I want to spend all that time in class everyday," she remarked. Yet, her thoughts after the program were very similar to those of other students:

But in the end, when it was through, and throughout it, I began to realize that this is well worth it.

It really gave me a good insight to what college would be like. I don't regret it at all.

The courses were... I got a lot out of it. Um, we learned things that, you know, we never were given time to learn.

In school [high school], I can honestly say that I had to miss one day a week (laughter). And I did not miss a day here. I didn't want to. It was too much to get behind in. The people everyday cheered me up. I didn't want to miss anything.

Even though Maria, unlike some of the other students in the study, was not overly anxious about the academic component of the program, she was concerned about the accelerated nature of the six week program. She stated, "It was strenuous getting all that work in because it was so crammed into such a short period." Specifically, of her history class, she stated, "It was crammed. There was so much reading. But we got something out of those readings."
Again, Maria had misgivings initially, but ended up feeling pleased that she had met the challenge and benefited from it.

Maria was very insightful in her views on the STP. When reflecting on the workload and the crammed nature of the program, she noted the importance of faculty in the process.

And like our English paper that was due, everyone was going crazy with it. It [summer program] was hard, but it depended a lot on the professors. And I guess we were lucky to get the ones we got. But they were great. . . . They really knew what they were teaching, and they made us feel comfortable, and that was most important.

She did not express the same strong sentiment about her current (fall semester) teachers. It was clear that she felt that her summer school teachers possessed some special qualities (which she talked about briefly at a later point in the interview).

Maria's major concern upon entering the summer program was whether or not she would fit into the group and be accepted by her classmates. Although there were four other students (one female and three male students) from her high school graduating class in the program, she knew only the female student. They had talked about the program prior to registering for it. "I had known March from high school. . . . I was afraid March wouldn't come. It's kind of hard for me. I'm kind of shy and quiet. I hardly knew anyone at all," she said.

Other students in the study, even some of the more outgoing ones, also expressed anxiety over whether or not they would make friends and fit in with the other students. In spite of their initial concerns, it was apparent from the interviews that some very close bonds were formed between members of the
various classes. Maria, for example, said, "And when it was over, I kind of missed it. . . . But it was like every day being in the same class with everyone for so long, we became really close, and it was like a little family broke apart."

Maria, admittedly, was passive in her efforts to get to know the members of her group. She said, "It's really not that I want it that way. It's just that I'm nervous around new people. But they really made me feel at home, and I felt like I really belonged there and I felt good in there."

At the closing affair for the summer session, students were given a chance to talk about their experience in front of the group. Maria was asked to tell the group about her background. In reflecting on that occasion, she said, "Remember in the end, you asked me the question that I was Hispanic and to tell about my background? And I knew everyone wanted to know. So I felt like, whew, I'm glad you asked me. I didn't want them to think that I was just in there." Maria was concerned that judging from her personal appearance, her classmates might have thought that she was white and wondered why she was in a class for minority students. Again, her experience was more positive than what she had anticipated.

Maria drew some interesting comparisons regarding her transition experience. For instance, she compared her summer school experience to her fall session. Even though she was well aware that the summer program was special, it had a seemingly lasting effect.

Well, I like the summer better. I'll say that. The classes now, they're okay, but you just don't feel as comfortable in the classroom. I'd say it's far different. The teachers [now] will take time and speak with you if you have questions, but it's not so personal like the summer. . . . But it's just that I don't think I'll ever feel that comfortable in a classroom again.
According to Maria, this was an advantage because it made going to school during the summer easier, helped her to get over some of her nervousness, and created some lasting contacts with other students in the program.

Maria and several of the other participants (Roxanne, Jennifer, and Denise) compared their college experience to high school. For example, the emphasis in the history class was on African-Americans in this country. According to Maria, her high school teachers did not do the most thorough job of teaching. She seemed dismayed that much of what she learned in the history class was new to her. She made several comments to that regard:

We learned things that, you know, we've never been given the time to learn.

That information is important information no matter what race you are. And in the public schools, like in high school, they never let us know because, you know, it's mainly white people in school. People just don't take the time.

You know, what they don't teach you is unbelievable. I mean it. It changed my views on a lot of things and I feel it's very important.

I just felt that this is stuff that we should have known because the ignorance about things. . .it's the things that cause racism and hate. And people just don't understand, and if we don't learn these things earlier and just for it to be taught without fear or anything. I think it would change this country.

Maria was critical of her high school teachers, but it seemed characteristic of her to look for the good or at least for an explanation in every situation. She looked for a reason why certain topics were not discussed in
high school. "I feel really bad that it's not taught, you know. Well, maybe I would say the younger students in high school... some of that is very... I guess you have to be mature," she commented.

At another time during the interview, when asked if she felt it was fair to concentrate more heavily on African-American History in the summer class and not on that of some other minorities such as Hispanics or Asians, she said that it was understandable since the class was composed of majority black students, but that it was certainly possible "to work a little bit of everything into the class."

Maria was a very astute respondent with some very valuable insights into the purpose and workings of the summer program as well as into her own feelings, thoughts, and perceptions regarding her transition into college. Her interview helped the researcher to proceed to the next interviews with a greater sense of purpose and focus and with many questions related to the transition process.

**Primary Issues in the Transition Process**

Patton, cited in Merriam (1988), stated that an interview, a conversation with a purpose, is conducted to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. One of the objectives of this study was to try to determine what each respondent was feeling or thinking with regard to the transition process. What was going on with Maria? What were her main issues or concerns? What factors impacted her transition process?

The following issues emerged from an analysis of Maria's interview:
1. She was concerned about fitting in and being accepted by her peers. When Maria assessed her situation, she thought that the odds were not in her favor. She was shy and quiet, nervous and anxious about meeting new people, and not very good at initiating conversation. She also saw herself as "different" and feared that because of her physical features, her classmates would think that she was not a minority student. Maria noted that she tended to become very passive in such situations and customarily waited for others to approach her.

At the end of the summer session, Maria felt comfortable because she had been "accepted" by her peers and according to her, they made her "feel at home." The same sentiment was expressed toward the faculty whom she described as knowledgeable, helpful, patient and accessible.

2. She was concerned about getting all the work done in the STP. Unlike Roxanne, Jennifer, and Melinda, Maria was not concerned about whether she could get good grades in her college courses. In fact, she seemed rather confident in her academic abilities. Her concern was more with getting all the work done in such a short period of time. Apparently, this was quite different from her attitude in high school, where Maria admitted that she missed at least one day a week, but felt that she would miss too much if she took the same liberty during the summer session.
3. She was feeling uninformed in some subject areas from high school. Maria thought that her high school teachers did a disservice to students by not exposing them to a more diverse curriculum and by avoiding certain controversial, but important issues.

Her history class during the summer session, with its emphasis on African-American history, led to this criticism. Such blatant omissions, she thought, perpetuated racism and hatred among the different racial and ethnic groups.

**Transition Stage**

Tinto (1987) hypothesized three stages in the transition process: separation, transition, and incorporation. At the time of the interview, Maria was most likely in the transition stage. She was enrolled at the college for her first regular semester, and she was still in the process of learning the ropes and becoming acclimated to her new environment. She made several references to the differences between high school and college; that is, comparing aspects of her old environment to her new one.

Maria stopped by the Counseling Office more frequently than many of her classmates who remained after the summer program. Her visits were usually to chat and to remain assured that the counselors were still there for her. For instance, when asked if she felt that the personal attention over the summer was an advantage or disadvantage, she replied, "It was an advantage because I can always look back to those people. I can always go back to them. Like you, hopefully."
Maria was astute, observant, insightful, and academically sophisticated. Working with her, one would not anticipate that Maria would have any significant problems progressing through the remaining stages of the college transition process.

Predominant Transition Posture

Initially, Maria was concerned that she would not fit in with and be accepted by her peers and her teachers. She attributed this to her shy, quiet disposition. During her interview, she repeatedly expressed her surprise and satisfaction at being made to feel special and comfortable in her new environment.

Maria was cautious and hesitant. She needed to "test the water" before jumping in. When she felt assured that her peers and others in the summer program were friendly, accepting, and helpful, she plunged in with them and in the end reported that she had enjoyed her experience. Her need for acceptance, harmony, and inclusion, by her account, were met during the course of the summer program.
Student # 2
Roxanne*

Case in Brief

Year Graduated: 1993
STP Participation: Summer 1993
Interviewed: Fall 1993
Ethnic Background: African-American
Primary Transition Issues:
  - fear of failing math class
  - losing military dependent's status
  - living up to family expectations
Transition Stage: transition, with strong ties to separation
Predominant Posture: "Fantasizer"
  - innocence  naivete
Predominant Needs: attention
  - social acceptance
  - inclusion

*Alias used to protect privacy
Transition Class Background

Roxanne was 1 of 21 students who participated in the summer 1993 transition program. The composition of the group was 11 female and 10 male students. On their college applications, 18 of the students described themselves as black and 3 as Asian. The students were enrolled in an orientation or college survival class which was facilitated by a black male counselor in his late twenties; an United States History II class with an emphasis on African-American history which was taught by a middle-aged white professor who had taught in the program for three previous summers; and an English class, Critical Reading and Study Skills, taught by a white female in her mid-thirties. She was about seven months pregnant at the time of the class.

The students expected to take English 111 (College Composition I) but most of them scored below the cut-off score on the placement exam. An English Department decision was made to offer the Critical Reading and Study Skills class, instead, with an emphasis on essay writing. The orientation class teacher, who also served as the program’s coordinator for that summer, reported that the students were dissatisfied with the decision, but went along with it. Jennifer, case study student #3, was also a member of this transition class. After finishing the English class, Roxanne and Jennifer reported that they had found it useful. Roxanne said that she enjoyed working on the computer, and Jennifer reported that it helped with her writing skills. Both said that the teacher was "okay," but described her as "irritable," which they attributed to her pregnancy. It appeared that they found her tolerable, but did not award her the favored status of the other teachers.
Conditions of the Interview

Roxanne participated in the summer 1993 transition program. Like Maria, she was in her first semester following the summer program. Roxanne's interview helped the researcher to further refine the interviewing process and gain more practice in coding the data. Her transition situation was quite different than Maria's. Consequently, her case added more insight, direction, and depth to several areas that had been broached by Maria and also added new areas of interest.

Roxanne was recommended to the researcher by the counselor who had conducted the Orientation class. He suggested her because she had done well in the summer program and appeared to be making a good adjustment to college.

Roxanne was contacted by phone and asked for an interview. Even though the researcher had not worked with the students in Roxanne's class, she had met them briefly a year earlier prior to going on sabbatical leave. At that time, the researcher mentioned the possibility of contacting some of the students at a later date for assistance with her dissertation.

When contacted, Roxanne readily agreed to an interview. Several days before the interview was to take place, the researcher called to confirm the meeting. Roxanne was ill and had not been in school for several days. The interview was rescheduled for the following week.

Roxanne arrived on time. The interview was conducted in a small, but comfortable and private room in the campus library. Roxanne still had the remnants of a cold and sniffed frequently during the interview. The interview lasted approximately 50 minutes and was terminated when the interviewer
sensed that extending it would not generate new information. Roxanne's appearance of becoming fatigued was also a factor in ending the interview. Her interview yielded 22 pages of transcription.

Roxanne's interview was important to the study. It tended to focus on Roxanne, the person. The category of parental influence on the transition process gained prominence during her interview. Her data also added depth to categories that had emerged during Maria's interview, such as the relationship that developed between the students and between the teachers and the students, particularly in the summer class. The effects of external events on internal pressures became more distinct in Roxanne's interview.
Roxanne's Transition Story

When asked to tell the researcher a little bit about herself, Roxanne described herself as an 18-year-old graduate from a local high school. Her plan, she said, was to remain at the community college for one year and transfer to a four-year-college to major in computer science. Roxanne appeared quite sure of her college major.

Maria, case study student #1, had briefly mentioned her family background. Following the dictates of theoretical sensitivity, family and family concerns were added as areas of inquiry in subsequent interviews. Therefore, Roxanne was asked to talk about her family.

She spoke freely of her family background. Roxanne was the youngest of two children born to her mother. She lived with her mother and father. Both parents were employed - her mother as a budget analyst and her father, an Army retiree, as a postal service worker. Her only sibling, a sister, who had a different father, was 18 years older than Roxanne. She lived in Florida with her two adolescent sons.

When asked about her parents' influence on her going to college, Roxanne responded, "My parents never went to college and neither my sister. So I'm like the first one." This external situation was a source of anxiety for Roxanne. "Everyone is looking up to me to make it in college. So I'm trying my best," she said.

This situation led, in part, to a major source of concern for Roxanne at the time of the interview. Just prior to the interview, she had been ill and had
missed at least a week of school. She worried about getting caught up in school, especially in a pre-calculus course.

They [her family] just want me to be good in class and try, you know, get good grades and everything. But, lately, I've been so sick. . . . It's kinda hard when I've missed so many days of being sick. I'm trying to get caught up right now in math. I cannot really get caught up because my math teacher, she gives little pop quizzes and all these pop quizzes add up to a [test]. Then I can not really catch up. It's not that I do not know the material. It's just the pop quizzes that she gave. They're the type that if I was absent, I could not catch up.

Roxanne's interview indicated that she had acquired some of the skills necessary to survive in a college environment. She had sought the advice of a counselor and she was planning to speak with her teacher about her math class dilemma.

Roxanne made other remarks that left the interviewer concerned about her lack of familiarity with the system. For instance, she did not know that free tutoring was available to her in math. When asked how many hours she was carrying, she was not sure, and she was unsure of which English class she was taking.

This line of inquiry led to another source of concern for Roxanne. As a military dependent, she had to remain a full-time student in order to qualify for benefits. Therefore, Roxanne did not see withdrawing from her math class as a viable option. She said, "I have to have full-time because if I don't have full-time, I lose my military benefits." This situation added to the pressures that affected Roxanne.

Roxanne talked about her transition into college. Like Maria, she had concerns about giving up her vacation to begin college in the summer.
Roxanne was reluctant to give up her summer vacation, but like Maria, she seemed pleased that she had. "When I first heard about the summer program, I really didn't want to come. I was like, No, I need my summer time. It was summer vacation. I'm just getting out of school, but I . . . I was glad that I did come to the program."

Maria's friend convinced her to do the summer program. Roxanne's mother was influential in her decision to enroll in college during the summer. In fact, it appeared that she probably would not have done the program if her mother had not insisted. She said, "And I'm glad my mom kicked me. She kept on saying it was free. 'Look at how much a credit is. If you don't go to school this summer. . . .' I was like. . . oh, okay, fine. I'll just go. I really enjoyed it."

Roxanne's assessment of the benefits of the summer program was similar to Maria's. Meeting new people, seeing how college life was, getting to see how college classes were run, and seeing how different college was from high school were some of the advantages that she recalled.

When asked to characterize her college experience so far, Roxanne responded positively in regard to the teachers, classes, and the students.

The teachers talk to you the way they talk to adults, not as children.

The teachers are willing to help you after class. Some of the teachers give you their home phone numbers.

The classes are easier because they give you a time span, and some classes give you a syllabus so you know each day what to expect.
The other students . . . they are adults, not acting like children, like high school students.

Roxanne mentioned two negative experiences. One (probably mentioned in jest), was the nature walk, an activity in the Orientation class. Her complaint was that it was hot, the trail was long, and the male students teased the females with twigs and insects. Her other complaint was about a fall session class in which the teacher assigned numbers to the students and communicated with them by using their number. She did not like the impersonal nature of that type of communication.

Roxanne talked about her relationship with her college peers. She found it very satisfactory that the students in her classes helped each other, exchanged phone numbers, and even met off campus at various restaurants to work and study. She particularly seemed to enjoy the group work. "Like in my class, we have groups and, you know, we have each other's phone numbers and sometimes, when we meet in groups, um, we bring donuts and coffee and have breakfast. It's real fun. I like it."

Roxanne, like Maria, recalled that a very positive relationship developed between the members of her class and the history professor. The difference was, however, that Roxanne and her black classmates were initially struck by the professor's race. She, first, expressed her skepticism and then her satisfaction with the teacher and the class.

When we first started the class, we were like, um, amazed that Dr. Rose was teaching a Black History class and we were like, 'okay...' (laughter). But he was a great teacher. We were reading *Black Boy*. I liked that. I enjoyed that. I never liked reading books, but *Black Boy* was a book
that I... I just couldn't put down even though it was like I had to read it. I enjoyed his class out of all the rest of the classes.

Roxanne talked about how her skepticism of having a white professor teaching Black History was dispelled.

I found out that Dr. Rose knows what he's talking about. He really knows black history, and I really don't care what color he is, you know. He can teach that class. He can teach it good, and he can make you laugh. He can keep you interested in the stuff. We watched movies in the class. That kept us interested and not just going with lectures.

Dr. Rose was not immediately accepted by the class. Their acceptance of him was affected, in part, by his knowledge of the course content, his teaching style, his style of interacting with the class, and the students' willingness to give him a chance. Roxanne gave an account of the change in attitude of her class.

At the beginning we were like, 'he's white, and he's teaching black history.' After that we were like, 'Dr. Rose is cool. We like him,' you know. We even invited him on our picnic 'cause we didn't have anybody. We were like, 'Dr. Rose, you wanna come to the picnic with us and stuff?' And he went.

Roxanne found her English class useful because of the computer work, but the English teacher did not receive the same favorable mention as Dr. Rose. The students concluded that the English teacher was necessarily irritable because she was expecting a baby. Roxanne appeared ambivalent towards her. "We didn't like her too much, but I...I can understand that she was irritated sometimes because she was about to have her little bundle of
joy." Later, Roxanne said, "We did like her. Like sometimes, you know, she was a little irritated." Aside from the teacher's perceived irritability, Roxanne also had some feelings about the class itself.

All we really had to do was work on computers. We did a journal entry everyday. Then she would just give us a break, and then we would come downstairs and work in class and have an article to read. Read the article, get in groups and talk in our groups about what the article was about, how we felt about the article. Then she would give us another paper to do for homework, and that's the process we had almost everyday.

Roxanne implied that the English class was boring and monotonous, and the enthusiasm and excitement shown when talking about the history class were noticeably absent.

Roxanne, like Maria, implied that her group went through some kind of a bonding experience that became more evident as the summer term progressed. She, too, felt that the group had grown closer by the end of the summer.

We were like... gosh. We all are just like, 'okay, we don't know anybody. So we'll just stick with our own little school and stuff.' But as weeks went by, we all, you know, all started talking and stuff, and we'd be like, uh, 'How are you doing?' And all this stuff. And it got... we got really close as the summer went by.

Roxanne found that one benefit of this bonding process was that she felt more comfortable in class and was able to do her work without worrying about whether or not her classmates liked her. Maria expressed similar sentiments.
Both shed some light on how the sense of closeness among the students evolved. Roxanne said that members of her group met and talked a lot on and off campus, and that helped to enhance the relationship between and among the students. Maria attributed the closeness to the amount of time that the group spent together in their three classes.

Roxanne and Maria differed in their accounts of their fall semester experiences. Maria said that she would never feel as comfortable in a class again as she had during the summer. Her level of comfort was influenced by the group's acceptance of her as a member. Roxanne, on the other hand, said that she felt more comfortable in her fall semester classes. She said that it helped to know what was expected of her. Roxanne gave her perception of her summer to fall experience.

... I can be more comfortable because I just sat in class and like I didn't know what to expect. But now that I know what to expect, I'm more relaxed, and I can, you know, know what to expect from the teacher and know how to do things when they say certain things to do. I'm like, Okay. I understand what you're saying, and I know what you expect from me.

Roxanne and Maria shared feelings about their high school teachers. Maria was critical of them because she thought that they omitted important information and avoided controversial issues about which she believed students needed to be informed. Roxanne thought that they told students what they should and should not think, and they did not encourage independent thinking. To be able and even expected to share her thoughts and opinions was new to her.
Overall, Roxanne reported that she was pleased with her transition into college, and by her account, she was making a good adjustment. She said that she had gained a more realistic view of college - one that dispelled her movie-based notion of college. Her movie version was that college was hard, no fun, and a student could goof off and still pass the class in the end. She said she was surprised to find that college could be fun and that college teachers were helpful and friendly, took an interest in their students' success, and treated their students like adults.

Primary Issues in the Transition Process

On the one hand, Roxanne seemed to be making a good adjustment to college. She reported that she felt comfortable and relaxed in her classes, that she was enjoying interacting with her peers in and outside of class, and she thought that she was being treated maturely. Roxanne, however, seemed to be grappling with three major, but related concerns. First, was the situation with her math class, which she feared failing because she had missed quizzes when she was ill. She feared that the teacher was not likely to give her make-ups. Secondly, if she dropped the class, her full-time status would be jeopardized, as well as her benefits as a military dependent. Her third concern was that she was a first generation college student and believed that her family was depending on her to make it in college.

In spite of these pressures, Roxanne seemed to remain confident and positive. She planned to stay at the community college for one year and transfer to a four-year-college. Of her troublesome math class, she said, "I'm
trying to get caught up right now in math. It's not that I do not know the material. It's just the pop quizzes."

**Transition Stage**

Like Maria, Roxanne was interviewed during her first semester following the summer program. Chronologically, she also was in the transition stage.

While Roxanne seemed very enthusiastic and pleased with her college experience, she seemed less sophisticated about certain aspects of the process than Maria had at the same chronological period. For instance, she said that she did not know about certain services that were available to her. She did not know some of her course numbers and was unsure of how many credit hours she was carrying. Generally, students have acquired this basic information by their second enrollment.

The separation or first stage of the college transition process usually involves less contact with high school friends, the community, and in many instances, the family. It is often harder to assess placement in that stage when considering community college students. Many of them remain at home and still have contact with friends who have not left the area. Roxanne gave several indications that she was still very much involved with some of her high school friends and had even returned to her high school to "recruit" for the next year's summer program.

In essence, it appeared that Roxanne was early in the transition stage with regard to college, but still appeared to have enough contact and emotional
closeness to her family and friends to question her progression through the separation stage.

**Predominant Transition Posture**

Roxanne had several positive factors in her favor. She was outgoing, confident, and positive about her future. She had some idea of when and where she wanted to pursue her degree. She was on the lookout for work opportunities. For example, after visiting the Xerox Corporation on a field outing with her transition class, she tried to find out how she could become a part of that operation because she had been impressed with the people and the operation at the facility.

Roxanne was certainly more spontaneous in her approach than Maria. Yet, Roxanne's transition phase seemed to have a fantasy-like aura about it. For instance, when Roxanne talked about being the first in her family to attend college, she said of her family, "Everyone is looking up to me."

Roxanne also remarked that she said she felt offended when one of her teachers referred to the class members by numbers. She said, "I like people to know me by name and like, 'Hi, Roxanne'."

At another point, she talked about meeting her classmates, or "friends" as she called them, to study or to have coffee, donuts, and breakfast together. "It's real fun," she remarked. "I like it." While this might have been a part of Roxanne's experience, it was highly unlikely that it would continue. Many community college students tend to operate quite independently of each other, especially since many of them have outside jobs and other interests and tend to spend little time on campus outside of class.
Roxanne had a sense of innocence and naivete about her and a perception of college that was yet to be tested by reality. However, it seemed to be working for her at that point. If hesitating before stepping in was characteristic of Maria as she transitioned into college, fantasizing about the experience certainly seemed characteristic of Roxanne's reported experience.
Student # 3
Jennifer*

Case in Brief

Year Graduated: 1993
STP Participation: Summer 1993
Interviewed: August 1994 and November 1994
Ethnic Background: African-American
Primary Transition Issue(s):
   - live up to self/parental expectations
   - build confidence in academic abilities
   - anxiety about leaving home/staying home
   - meeting new people
Transition Stage: late Transition - early Incorporation
Predominant Posture: "The Tightrope Walker"
   - cautious    hesitant
   - reserved    excited
Predominant Needs: parental approval
   - self-confidence

*Alias used to protect privacy
Transition Class Background

Jennifer graduated from high school in June 1993. She participated in the 1993 summer transition program, the same group of which Roxanne (case study student #2) was a member.

The details of Jennifer's transition class are the same as those presented for Roxanne.

Conditions of the Interview

In mid-August 1994, while assisting walk-in students in the Counseling Office with fall registration, the researcher called Jennifer, the next student on the sign-in sheet, into her office. Jennifer recognized the researcher from a visit that was made to her STP class the previous year. The researcher did not recognize Jennifer, but recognized her name from the 1993 class roster.

Jennifer explained that after spending a year at the community college, she had been accepted at a four-year-university in the Richmond area for the fall, 1994 semester. Upon her arrival at the four-year-university, she was unable to establish a schedule of classes. At that point, Jennifer had decided to return to the community college for the fall semester and transfer in mid-year.

As the conversation proceeded, the researcher explained to Jennifer that she was looking for students from the STP to interview regarding their college transition experience. When asked, Jennifer consented and agreed to be called in several days to set up an interview.

Jennifer was called on the Friday before the start of fall classes. She promised to stop by the counseling office the following Monday after her last
class. When she stopped by the office, the researcher was out of the office, observing the History professor who had taught Jennifer's STP class. (The results of observing and interviewing the professor are presented in Part II of this chapter).

Later that afternoon, Jennifer called to say that she had stopped by the office. An interview was scheduled for Thursday of that week at 4:30 p.m. in the counseling office.

Jennifer arrived on time. The interview began, lasted approximately 45 minutes, and resulted in 18 pages of transcription.

The transcribing and coding process took more time than anticipated. It was completed in mid-November, and Jennifer was contacted for a second interview to follow up on some of the information obtained during the initial meeting. The follow-up interview took place in the Counseling Office, 10 days after the phone contact, lasted about 35 minutes, and resulted in 15 pages of transcription.

At the start of both interviews, Jennifer appeared slightly nervous. However, once each party relaxed, Jennifer proved to be a very articulate, open, and insightful interviewee.
Jennifer's Transition Story

When asked to tell the interviewer a little bit about herself, Jennifer stated briefly that her major was mass communications, her favorite sport was tennis and that she was looking forward to going away to college in the spring. During the course of the interview, Jennifer explained that she chose mass communications as her major because growing up, she had always wanted to be on television. Also, she thought that her communication skills, even though she was working on improving them, were her greatest asset. Her parents, she said, did not discourage her in her choice. In fact, they had told her that she "had a nice presence," probably alluding to her articulateness, as well as to her physical attractiveness.

Jennifer's interview data added another dimension to the study. She alluded to many factors that influenced her prior to enrolling in college. Other factors became more prominent after enrollment. Consequently, Jennifer's transition story is told in terms of those pre- and post-college enrollment influences.

Pre-College Influences

Jennifer's poor performance in some of her high school subjects, she admitted, severely limited her college choices. She talked about her decision to enter the community college.

I couldn't get into any other school, really. Actually, I was offered some money from a college. I wasn't interested in it at all. And the rest of the schools that I wanted to go to weren't interested in me . . . . So I decided to come here.
A follow-up interview revealed that the college that had offered her money was a very conservative Christian college that she had no interest in attending.

Jennifer said that her poor performance in high school was due, in part, to having too many friends and distractions and she "just didn't feel like studying" the subjects that were more difficult for her, such as math and foreign language. Other courses like English and history were easier for her, and she didn't have to put as much time into them.

Jennifer reported that she experienced a change of attitude when she became a senior year in high school. She made a connection between furthering her education, doing something with her life, and being successful.

But when I got to be a senior, I realized, I don't want to not just do anything with my life. I wanted to go to school.

I've always known that I didn't want to just be a deadbeat or whatever, you know. If at all possible, I wanted to be, you know, successful, and I figured the only way to do that would be college.

When asked what precipitated the change in her attitude, Jennifer said that it was probably seeing her friends apply to colleges and make plans to go away.

Jennifer said that her parents were also influential in her decision to attend college. Her father, a teacher and educator had attained a Ph.D in Theology, and her only sibling, a brother, who was 12 years older than Jennifer, had done very well in high school and college. Commenting on her lack of achievement as compared to her brother, Jennifer said, "I was like the bad seed with that one."
Her mother, she explained, had completed high school and had taken some college courses without attaining a degree. Jennifer stated that her parents were very supportive of her, even though at times they had become "fed up" with her poor performance in high school.

Jennifer said that both of her parents were "great," but that she tended to listen to her father more and that he was probably more influential in her school affairs.

My dad has high expectations of me. But he always accepted as long as I tried my hardest.

My mom, she's great; but she just, you know, I listen to my dad a little more than I do her, I guess.

He had more to do with it.

I've always looked up to him because he always seems to do so much.

Because Jennifer's father, Dr. Tanner (alias), seemed to have such an influence on her, he was interviewed for this study. His contribution to the study appears in Part II of this chapter.

Making the decision to take her studies more seriously and to begin to build her future by attending college was important to Jennifer. She seemed even more proud of her decision to enroll in the STP over the summer. Maria and Roxanne were influenced by others to do the STP. Jennifer was quite pleased that she arrived at the decision on her own.
I was real excited when I found out about it. It had nothing to do with counselors, not even really my parents. But I just happened to be in the Guidance Office, and I saw something about transition. And I had done poorly . . . and I tried to start doing better in my, uh, senior year.

Many pre-college enrollment factors influenced Jennifer's decision to enroll in college. They included her lack of attentiveness to her studies, poor high school grades, her family members' educational achievements, her high school peers, her decision to do something with her life, and the chance to get a head start in college.

**Post-College Enrollment Influences**

Once Jennifer enrolled in college, her *raison d'être* became to prove to herself and her parents that she could handle college socially, but especially academically. She said, "I was excited to see what I could do in college." At the end of the summer program, Jennifer's grade point average was 3.57. At the time of the interview, she had accumulated nearly 40 credits in her Liberal Arts program. Her grade point average was 2.9, and she was enrolled in 19 credit hours. Of her accomplishments she said, "They're [her parents] very proud of me, and when I did well in that [STP], that gave me confidence, you know, that I could continue on in college . . . that I could handle that."

The social aspect of college was more difficult for Jennifer. Like Maria, she described herself as quiet and shy. Jennifer said that she was very nervous when she started the summer program because meeting new people was difficult for her. This was different from her high school experience where she had attended for four years, knew many people and had a very active social life.
Like Maria, Jennifer said that she would rarely initiate a conversation with a new person. In fact, Jennifer thought that everyone seemed very quiet in the beginning of the STP. However, her account was in agreement with Maria and Roxanne's. They reported that their respective transition groups had been very reserved initially, but became quite friendly and grew closer as the weeks passed. Maria and Roxanne suggested that their groups became closer because of the amount of time that they spent together in their classes, the time they spent between classes, and the gatherings they had on and off campus. To that, Jennifer added that they didn't just "talk" in their little groups, but they "gossiped about everyone." Jennifer said that she had become better friends with people that she had known from high school and that she had actually become best friends with one of her high school classmates and they still frequently talked by phone.

Not only did Jennifer feel that she had connected well with the students in her group, but like Maria and Roxanne, she experienced a special link with the history professor and his class. Her explanation was similar to theirs.

I enjoyed that class because, um, it really was the first time that we EVER, I mean, it was U.S. history too, but we really focused on African-Americans in that class - what they did, their accomplishments and uh . . . that was what I enjoyed about it. And you know, like Dr. Rose is like the best teacher I ever had.

When asked what contributed to her opinion of the class and the teacher, she said that it was probably the way he related to students. She said that he made it interesting, and he made students get involved and do things in the class. Jennifer said that it was history "presented in a whole new way."
She hinted that peer influence was also a factor in the class and that students did their homework because if called on in class, they didn't want to "look stupid." She said that even though she had done well in history in high school, she had found it boring because, "It was always, you know, about different things that weren't so interesting. It was about other people. It was never focused on, you know, African-Americans - what they did."

Jennifer was asked about meeting Dr. Rose for the first time. She laughed. "I was just thinking about that," she said. Her reaction was similar to Roxanne's.

When he walked in that first day, I was like 'okay.' We were all looking like, 'ummm.' I just knew it would be some black professor. But like, what does this man know? And he turned out to be, uh, he just . . . he strikes me as someone who is very knowledgeable. And you know, it doesn't really matter that he was teaching us, I guess, anything that anybody else would teach us. It didn't make any difference. But at first, it was a little bit shocking.

Dr. Rose's knowledge of the subject area was a major factor for Jennifer in her acceptance of him. Maria, who was Hispanic, felt that Dr. Rose was very knowledgeable also, but she did not express the same surprise that Roxanne and Jennifer had when they discovered that he was teaching the African-American history class. Jennifer added that it took her a relatively short time, maybe several class meetings, to get over her initial impression.

Again, the English teacher did not receive the same favorable approval that the history teacher did. Jennifer said the main thing that she remembered was that they didn't get the English class that they were promised. She admitted that her test scores were close, but didn't make the cut-off. Of the
class, she said, "I didn't like it as much. We had so much reading and the reading wasn't interesting." Of the teacher, she remarked, "She wasn't anybody that really stands out in my mind, to be honest."

Yet, Jennifer thought that the class helped her when she got to the composition class in the fall. Roxanne said that the STP teacher was pregnant and irritable. Jennifer noted that the teacher was pregnant, but seemed to attribute her less-than-enthusiastic endorsement to the monotony of the class.

Jennifer was asked to comment on her overall opinion of her first year of college. Jokingly, she asked if it had been only one year. She said that she was proud of herself and that she wished that she had taken more of the harder classes like foreign language and science during her first year. She said, "Looking back on it, I worked harder, you know, than I did in high school and, I got the grades." Jennifer had proven to herself that she could handle the rigors of college, and this helped to improve her self-confidence.

Like Maria and Roxanne, Jennifer drew some comparisons between her high school and college experiences. One comparison had to do with scheduling classes. Jennifer said that the back-to-back scheduling of high school classes left her feeling tired, exhausted, and inattentive several class periods before the end of the day. Her college classes, the first year, ended early enough for her to go home to rest and relax, and this worked better for her. The downside, however, was that she didn't get to meet many people on campus. During the semester that the interview took place, she was taking more hours and was spending more time on campus during breaks and between classes, and she was meeting more students. However, during the follow-up interview, Jennifer made her position on friends clear. She said,
"Friends can be a distraction. You have to be very mature to handle them."

Jennifer had adjusted her priorities since high school.

Jennifer also compared her college teachers to her high school teachers. Her perception was that college teachers knew a lot more than high school teachers. In an English class where she had earned a grade of "C," she thought that the teacher was very hard, but she liked the class because she was impressed with the teacher's knowledge of the writing process. In her opinion, college teachers were, "People you can look up to. I didn't look up to my teachers too much in high school." When asked why, she answered that they just didn't impress her and she didn't feel like they cared.

Also, Jennifer thought that the disruptive student behavior in high school was absent from college and that the people were more disciplined.

Another comparison that Jennifer made between college and high school was the ability to choose her college teachers as opposed to high school, where the counselors generally did the students' schedules. It was helpful that other students on campus suggested who the "good" teachers were and told her which teachers she should avoid. Having more choices and greater flexibility worked well for Jennifer.

Follow-up Interview

A second interview was requested with Jennifer to clarify some of the issues that she had shared during her initial interview. More was learned about Jennifer, the individual. For instance, when asked to describe herself, Jennifer had done so in terms of her intended college major, her desire to play tennis for her four-year-school, and her desire to go away to school. Jennifer
said she chose those comments to describe herself because she felt more future-oriented. She said that this was not because she was unhappy with her past or present but, "It's just that I'm ready to move on to get to a certain point in my life." She was excited at being ready to leave home. "I've been home with my parents for many years, and I'm just ready to see what I'll be like on my own. You know. I'm excited to see that."

Even though Jennifer believed she was ready to take this new step, she was cautiously excited about it. She was asked what was so appealing to her about leaving home.

Having my own freedom. My parents are really strict. I get to see how I handle myself in situations. See if I can study without, you know, knowing I'm in the dining room studying and my parents are watching me (laughter). Not really watching me, but watching TV in the next room, you know. If I can study without, you know, them, whatever. Just be me. Me, discovering myself.

Jennifer's ambiguity at this new transition point (going away to a four year college) was somewhat reminiscent of her transition into the community college. She needed to prove to herself and her parents that she could make it in college. This done, her next quest was to prove that she could continue to do well away from the present and immediate attention of her parents.

If getting away from home was part of the excitement of going off to a four-year-residential college, it was also part of the intimidation. Jennifer said that she would miss her parents and miss all the things that she was accustomed to having them do for her. She said she was certain that they would be calling each other often.
Jennifer seemed to have a great deal of respect for her parents. She described them as being good people and as being supportive of her. Yet, Jennifer said that she was comfortable discussing school-related, but not personal issues with her parents. When asked why, she said she really wasn't sure, but that her parents were very religious and strict and that she saw them as maybe "passing judgment" on her.

Jennifer did not wish to incur the criticism of her parents, especially her father. She admitted to being very sensitive to what other people said or thought about her. She said, "I think my parents have a lot of influence on me because, uh, I'm the type of person where I take things that people say really seriously. I really think about what they say and just, uh, try to work real hard." She felt that while she was home, she should obey and respect them and try to follow their rules because, she said, "... parents really basically know what they're talking about, unfortunately."

Jennifer thought that her relationship with her parents had changed in some ways since high school. In high school, she wanted more "space" and felt that they weren't letting her grow up. She didn't like to go places with them. The effect of peer pressure was too great. "When they wanted to drive me in high school, it was like I wanted to sneak out of the car." She quickly added, "But now it's like I'm older, and I know I'm a little more secure about that. I don't care. They can drive me anywhere they want to drive me."

Jennifer's attitude had changed about other areas of her life. For instance, she said that she was accustomed to putting things off when she found them difficult to accomplish. Now she said that she was more into
"getting stuff done." She seemed confident and ready to move ahead with her life.

**Primary Issues in the Transition Process**

Jennifer was truthful about her lack of performance in high school. She was distracted by the social aspects of school, including the many friends that she professed to having. Her friends influenced her in other ways, however. When she saw them making preparations to leave home to attend college, she knew that she needed to get busy also. She knew that she wanted to make something of her life, and she thought that the best way to do that was to get a college education. Jennifer began to take school more seriously during her last year in high school.

When Jennifer transitioned into college, her primary concern was to prove to herself and to her parents that she could handle college. Her performance in the summer program gave her the measure of confidence that she needed to continue into the fall semester. Her parents were proud of her progress in college, as opposed to high school where she said that at times they had become "fed up" with her lack of performance. Jennifer realized that her high school performance had been particularly difficult for her parents, especially since her brother had done so well throughout school.

With a taste of success in college from the summer program, Jennifer proceeded cautiously into her first full-time semester. Even though she enrolled in solidly transferable courses, she took ones, such as English, speech, history, and theater, that she knew she could handle. At the time of the interview, which took place at the beginning of Jennifer's second year of
college, she was enrolled in 19 semester hours of credit and was taking courses such as Spanish, biology, and economics, ones that she had avoided previously because they presented a greater challenge to her.

When interviewed, Jennifer was preparing for another transition, which involved leaving her home and her parents and attending a four year residential college. She had proved that she could handle college-level work. Her new concern was whether she could handle living on her own, away from the care and attention of her parents. During the follow-up interview, Jennifer said that she was "ready to move on to get to a certain point" in her life, even though she felt anxious about it.

I've been at home with my parents for many years, and I'm just ready to see what I'll be like on my own. I get to see how I handle myself in situations. See if I can study without, you know, knowing I'm in the dining room studying and my parents are watching me...if I can study without them, whatever.

Jennifer knew that she would miss her parents, but now she needed to prove that she could handle the freedom that came with it.

**Transition Stage**

Jennifer was starting her second year and fifth semester (including two summer terms) when interviewed. Chronologically, this placed her well beyond where Maria and Roxanne were in the transition process when they were interviewed. Considering Tinto's three stages of transition (separation, transition, and incorporation) and considering some of Jennifer's choices and decisions, she was most likely functioning at some point between the latter two stages.
Having lots of friends and an active social life, for instance, had been very important to Jennifer in high school. In college, her attitude changed. Her priority was to do well in school. Retention theorists have found that socialization and involvement on campus help to predict persistence. Jennifer indicated that because she had a heavier class schedule and was spending more time on campus, she was getting to meet and talk to more students than she had in her freshman year.

Another indication that Jennifer’s transition into college was progressing well was that she had declared her major. Jennifer said that deciding what she wanted to do was definitely a motivating factor for her. She had a clearer sense of focus and direction.

. . . Once you get to college, you just have to do what you’re going to do. It’s money, and it’s your life, you know. It’s your career and everything. . . . I really, you know, discovered what I wanted to do. So I just kind of decided to kind of go for that. I just know what I want.

During the interview with Jennifer, there were other signs that she had grown, matured and was well into the transition process. Even though she was still living at home with her parents, her relationship with them had reached a different level. While there were areas that were still off limits to them, such as discussing personal issues, other gaps were bridged. She was more secure and comfortable doing things and going places with them. In fact, Jennifer came to the realization that she held an appreciation for her parents, particularly her father. When asked what type of people tended to motivate her, for instance, she quickly replied, "successful people." When
asked if she could think of anyone who is successful, after some thought, she said her father.

I guess like my dad. He went to school and, you know, instead of staying [on the farm]. He wanted to get out. He was determined to get out of where he was from. He didn't want to work on the farm like his father had and his grandfather had, and he went to school and did well and, you know, just because he was determined to do that. His parents didn't have very much money. So it was a real struggle for him in college.

Throughout the interview, Jennifer left little doubt that her parents, particularly her father, were major influences in her life.

There were many indicators -- choosing her major, taking the right courses, selecting teachers, scheduling classes, and seeking transfer information -- of Jennifer's acclimation to and sophistication regarding the college system. Her case was quite different than Roxanne's, who seemed somewhat stymied by the system.

**Predominant Transition Posture**

Jennifer's recollection of her transition into college was reminiscent of a tightrope walker preparing for the moment when the walk would be made without the aid of the safety rope. Jennifer realized in her senior year in high school that she needed to focus more seriously on her preparation. She worked harder in her classes and began to see progress. When an opportunity came to take the next step in her preparation; i.e., the opportunity to enroll in the community college, she embraced it enthusiastically. As Jennifer transitioned into college, she still had the advantage of her "safety systems"
such as the assistance and support of her parents and the supportive
environment of the summer program.

Gaining a good measure of self-confidence from successfully
completing her initial training (the summer program), Jennifer continued her
"walk." There were still times when she utilized her safety equipment, such as
withdrawing from a four-credit biology class during her first full-time semester
or visiting the counseling office for advice. "I went to see Mr. Hill more than a
couple of times about my schedule, to ask him questions about colleges to
transfer to," she said.

When interviewed, Jennifer was confident, excited, and ready to move
to the next level of training. She had been accepted at a four-year-college and
was planning a mid-year transfer. Moving to the next level meant leaving
some of her familiar and comfortable "safety gear" at a distance, but Jennifer
said she was ready. Like the tightrope walker, Jennifer had started out
cautiously and timidly, but with the belief that she could do it. She seemed
ready to solo.
Student # 4
Denise*
Case in Brief

Year Graduated: 1992
STP Participation: Summer 1991
Began F-T College: Fall 1993
Interviewed: Spring 1995
Ethnic Background: African-American
Primary Transition Issues:
  school/family finances
  emotional well-being of family
  financial well-being of family
  anger over family's situation
  reluctance to leave home
  family security/happiness
Transition Stage: incorporation (academically)
  separation (emotionally)
Predominant Posture: "The Caregiver"
  worried emotionally attached
  determined caring
  religious
Primary Needs: emotional security of self/family
  financial stability of self/family

*Alias used to protect privacy
Transition Class Background

Denise participated in the 1991 Summer Transition Program (STP). Her class, of 34 members (21 females and 13 males), was the largest of the summer classes during the five years of the program and, considering the English Placement Test scores, was probably the most capable.

Denise entered the program as a rising high school senior. Her intent was to return to high school, complete her senior year, and resume college in fall 1992. As it turned out, Denise returned to the community college during summer 1992 to take advantage of an offer extended under the terms of the STP grant to pay for three semester hours. Denise enrolled in the United States History II class, which was a new addition to the STP.

Because of family difficulties and low finances, neither Denise nor her fraternal twin, Melinda, who also participated in this study, was able to enroll in college during fall 1992. Both delayed entry for one year, worked, and returned to the community college in fall 1993 as full-time students.

During her first summer of enrollment, Denise completed College Composition I, United States History I, and the Orientation class. She completed the STP with a 3.8 grade point average.

Conditions of the Interview

At the time of the interview (spring semester, 1995), Denise was nearing the end of her second full year at the community college and was looking forward to a summer or fall 1995 graduation with an Associate's degree in Science. She had maintained over a 3.3 grade point average while
working one, and sometimes two, part-time jobs to earn money for school and living expenses.

Denise was asked for an interview when she visited the Counseling Office to get a tutor for her calculus class. She agreed readily. The interview took place in early March in the Counseling Office. There was one telephone interruption during the interview.

To assist Denise in remembering her transition into college, one of the techniques used was to print a roster of her transition class members. Prior to beginning the taped interview, she and the researcher brought each other up-to-date on what each knew or had heard recently about the members of the class, such as which colleges were being attended, who had graduated, gotten married, etc. Also to aid recall, memorable moments and events from the summer 1991 class were remembered. This was both relaxing and helpful in assisting Denise to get in touch with her transition experience.

Roxanne, student # 2, was the first interviewee to introduce the category of family influence on the transition process. Jennifer's account of her transition experience added more insight into the role of family, especially parents. Denise and her sister, Melinda, added a different perspective and even more insight into how the family and family situation can affect the individual student who is going through the transition process.

Denise and Melinda's interviews were also valuable in that they had gone nearly full circle; that is, they were nearing graduation from the community college and could offer that perspective. By contrast, Maria and Roxanne were near the beginning of the process, and Jennifer was a bit past
the mid-point. Each interviewee shared some similar experiences as well as some unique ones.

Interviewing Denise and Melinda separately added to the verification process of the study. Their mother was asked for an interview and tentatively agreed, but would not set a date and time. Eventually, the researcher determined that the interview was not to be.

The interview with Denise lasted approximately 45 minutes and generated 16 pages of transcript, which were coded, analyzed, and compared to the reports of the other interviewees.
Denise's Transition Story

When asked to tell the interviewer a little bit about herself, Denise chose mostly to talk about work and school. She said that she was working two part-time jobs and that she hoped to have her Associate's degree by the end of summer. Denise said that her goal was to study medicine, but she had not decided if she wanted to be a pediatrician or pursue some other area of the healthcare field.

Each of the interviewees, except Maria, talked about why she had chosen her major. Roxanne chose computer science as her major because she enjoyed working with computers. Jennifer chose mass communications because her strengths were in that area, her parents had encouraged her, and it was her dream to be on television. Denise said that she chose medicine as her major because she loved science. She also loved working with people, and medicine was a way of combining the two. "I wanted a profession that combined sciences, but also dealt with direct contact with people or children," she said. Denise said that regardless of her specialty, the important thing was for her to make a positive contribution to the health field.

Denise, like Maria, expressed little or no concern about maintaining good grades. In fact, she was quite confident of her academic abilities and actually found school to be beneficial in a way that none of the other interviewees had expressed.

Most people wouldn't think of school as an escape, but I did, because I like to study. I like to learn. So every time I walked through those two doors, I was like, whatever happened at home, that's miles down the road. I'm here now.
For Denise, school was a vehicle to get where she wanted to go in life, but it was also a means of escaping from difficulties at home.

**Pre-College Influences**

Denise had attended a local high school and she had done very well there. She reported that she had graduated in the top nine percent of her class, in spite of the troubles that she was experiencing in her family. She said, "Whenever something wasn't right at home, I would start slacking off at school. Things wouldn't be as important."

Denise was not satisfied with taking a passive role in her family's affairs. Melinda, her twin, noted that Denise, in her characteristic way of trying to look out for everyone, make things right, and take care of other people, would plant herself in the middle of arguments between her parents. Melinda said that she would be frightened by this because she was afraid that Denise would get hurt.

At the time of the interview and while she was in high school, there was little doubt that Denise's life, including her college plans, evolved around her family and her family's situation. That was made clear when she was asked to tell the interviewer a little bit about her family.

I have a twin sister. Her name is Melinda, and I love her to death. And I live with my mom, and we're a very close-knit family. And I'm glad that I could start here because of the fact that it is just me, my mom, and my sister. I would never have been able to afford going to a four-year school.
Denise said that she didn't take the necessary steps to try to get grants and scholarships coming out of high school because, "I couldn't focus on stuff like that because we were having family problems." Denise explained that her parents' serious marital problems at the time that she and Melinda graduated from high school, in part, precluded her from getting things done that were necessary for school. Her father claimed them for tax purposes, but they could not get the paperwork done because as she put it, "I knew I would need financial aid, but I also knew the situation with my mom and dad. . . . I would need their tax information and they weren't on that same level."

Denise also thought that the high school counselors were of little help in informing her of possible sources of financing a college education, such as loans and scholarships. When asked if she had tried to seek out that information, she said that she was at fault also and that she just wasn't in the right "frame-of-mind" to do the things she needed to do. Denise's assertion that counseling in high school had been inadequate was part of the justification for interviewing a counselor from her high school. A summary of his interview is included in Part II of this chapter.

Denise was affected financially and emotionally by her family's crisis. She admitted that even if the finances had been available when she finished high school, she probably would still have elected to stay at home and attend the community college. She was very protective of her mother. "At that time, I wasn't prepared to even leave from home because I wanted to stay and make sure my mom was okay. I just couldn't leave her," Denise said. She wanted to help her mother through the rebuilding process.
Denise worked for a year after high school. The year off gave her and her family time to begin the healing process after the breakup of her family. Denise harbored bitter feelings, many of them towards her father, she explained. Denise said she, Melinda, and her older brother, who was in the military, had been "ideal kids." They did well in school, were involved in activities, and never got into trouble. She questioned why, if they had been such good kids and still had their world crumble around them, didn't they just be bad?

Denise credited her mother with getting her turned around. "So my mom really helped me out a lot because she had to talk to me a couple of times when I just thought that I couldn't make it." Denise and her mother seemed very dependent on each other.

At the time of the interview, Denise was sounding optimistic and upbeat about life in general. She said that she had begun focusing on the good things in life.

And I haven't always been able to think like that. You know it's wasted energy to dwell on the past and why'd that happen to me? Looking at how other people are prospering, but they're not really doing the right thing. But I don't even focus on that, because I know that prosperity will come to me, but in a good way.

Denise mentioned several other things that had helped her to turn her life around and change her thinking. Keeping her Bible close, going to church, and seeing her family heal had been helpful to her. "My sister has healed. My mother has, too. So the relationships are being mended, and that's important. That's important to me also," she stated.
Her father had also been included in the healing process. She said that she was no longer bitter or angry at him. "I just want him to be a dad," she said. Quietly, she added, in her optimistic manner, "But that'll come, too."

Post- College Enrollment Influences

Denise's first full-time semester of college was a year after she finished high school. Interviewed near the end of her community college program, Denise reported that her experience had been very positive. Going to the community college gave her the opportunity to continue her education, maintain a job and most importantly, remain at home near her family.

Besides the practical advantages of cost and proximity to her home, Denise noted other advantages of attending the community college. Like the other interviewees, she talked about the value of the STP and beginning college over the summer. She said it prepared her for college because she found out important things like how much reading and homework were required, how to set priorities and manage her time better, and how necessary it was to establish relationships with professors and others on campus.

Denise said that she found the campus to be a "melting pot" of people from different backgrounds and cultures. She felt that this was quite different from her high school, which she perceived to be predominately black. When a counselor from Denise's high school was interviewed, he said that the school did have one of the largest populations of black students in the area, but that it was closer to 30 percent. Nonetheless, Denise said that being in her college classes with other students made her realize that there were other ways of
thinking about things. For instance, she recalled the debate in her orientation class on interracial dating.

There was the black point of view, the white point of view; there were a few Indians, Iranians, you know. And I think that I didn't really have much to contribute 'cause I was really just so fascinated with the way people were interacting with each other. So I think that really helped me. I mean, I'm still young, but I was a rising senior then and that was kind of new to me.

In regard to high school teachers and their unwillingness to broach and discuss controversial topics, Denise's perception was similar to the other interviewees.

High school teachers tend to like . . . they like to stay away from anything like religion or black or white issues. Everything is, you know, from the book, and the teachers taught, hoping you wouldn't ask a question outside of the book. So . . . college is more free or liberal, and the teachers are too, which is what I like about the professors I've had.

When a local high school social studies/psychology teacher was interviewed, he said that he regularly introduced controversial topics in his class, but he did not know if other teachers did the same. He also said that he was rather impressed with the way that his students handled those topics. The teacher, Mr. Byrd, was a teacher at Maria's high school. Maria had expressed the same sentiment that her high school teachers avoided controversial issues in the classroom. A summary of Mr. Byrd's interview is included in Part II of this chapter.
Denise was at the point of getting ready to transition into a four-year college. Jennifer, case study student #3, was at that point, also. However, Denise's concerns were quite different from Jennifer's. For Jennifer, leaving home meant gaining a greater sense of independence from her parents and seeing if she could manage on her own. Denise, on the other hand, wasn't sure if she was ready to leave home because it meant removing herself from the family's situation. Denise was particularly concerned about leaving her mother, of whom she was very protective. After spending almost three years at home after high school, Denise said, "Even now, I still don't really know what my choice would be." Consequently, she was considering a four-year college in the area that would allow her to remain at home and continue to commute to school. When asked if that had more to do with her than with her feelings of protectiveness towards her mother, Denise said, "I don't know. I just... I don't have to be in the dorm and have my own space. I still want to be a full-time student... and I don't think that I could do that and work if I live on campus."

Denise's reluctance to leave home was at least twofold - being able to work and afford school, while being able to keep an eye on her mother. She was less anxious about being separated from Melinda. She thought that it would be fun to go to the same school, but looking at the practical side she said, "It seems that the schools that really concentrate on her major don't concentrate on mine." She added that they would just have to communicate by phone.

Denise said she was confident that the things that she learned at the community college and from her mother would get her through her next
transition, and in her characteristic way of trying to put a positive spin on things, she said, "I have to back myself up and think, calm down because everything is going to be all right. And I know it will be."

**Primary Issues in the Transition Process**

Denise had two primary issues at the time that she transitioned into college, and those issues seemed to remain throughout her stay. One of her issues was money and the cost of attending college. For Denise, attending the community college meant that she could stay at home and save on expenses. For example, she could take advantage of the cheaper tuition cost, share a car with her sister, maintain her jobs, and contribute to the family's income.

Denise's other prominent and perhaps, more important concern was the well-being of her family. Her mother seemed to be the main object of her worry. When her father separated from the family, Denise felt quite responsible for her mother's financial and emotional welfare. In response to a question about transferring to a four-year college, she said that she preferred to go where she could commute to school because she wanted to be able to work as much as she could.

_I know I'm not going to be making millions of dollars. I'm still in school... but work to make enough money to get the little things to support myself because I don't want to keep going back to my mom asking her for everything I need. I know it's not easy for her because she's doing it on her own with me and my sister... My mom and my sister always say, 'You know you don't have to work.' But I feel like I have to. I wouldn't have it any other way._
Denise did not want to be a financial burden to her mother, but she also seemed to feel a personal responsibility for her mother's happiness. She said, "Plus, I mean my mom deserves nice things. So if we have some extra money, you know, we'll take her out to dinner, do something nice for her, you know, which is important to me. I like to see other people happy, as well as myself."

Denise seemed determined to reach her goal of going to medical school, but she seemed equally as determined to do it with as little disruption as possible to her family picture.

**Transition Stage**

In her last full-time semester at the community college, Denise was within a couple classes of graduation. In terms of time, Denise had been in the community college system long enough to successfully negotiate through Tinto's three stages of the transition process. However, Denise's transition represented a prime example of how Tinto's theory falls short for community college students. For example, one measure of whether a student has successfully mastered the separation stage is whether or not the student has put some physical, as well as emotional distance between him or herself and the parents or family. This had not happened for Denise. She had remained at home and was very closely tied to her parents emotionally.

If it is possible to retain remnants of one stage while progressing in another, Denise would probably fit better into Tinto's paradigm. She had made the transition into college quite well. She knew what was expected of her, and she seemed to have little or no trouble meeting those expectations,
especially academically. Yet, the extremely strong emotional ties to her mother prevented her from working entirely through Tinto's separation stage.

Tinto's third stage, incorporation, involved becoming an active participant in the college community. Denise's on-campus activity, like that of many other community college students, was minimal. She did not spend a lot of time on campus because she worked to earn money for school and living expenses. Yet, to her credit, Denise knew what was available to her and where to find resources and services when she needed them. She was motivated, and committed to getting an education, and achieving good grades. It was evident that she had made a good adjustment to college.

**Predominant Transition Posture**

Denise had made a very successful adjustment to the academic rigors of college. She was accustomed to juggling a full-time school schedule, maintaining a couple of jobs, and keeping a competitive stance in a transfer degree program. Her ambition was to become a doctor or to become employed elsewhere in the healthcare field to, as she put it, "give everything that I have to helping people - giving back to society." Denise felt a special obligation to look out for the welfare of other people.

Denise said that she liked to see her family happy. To ensure the happiness of her family and peace of mind for herself, she was accustomed to jumping into the fray. By being so physically and emotionally involved in the lives of her family members, many times she denied herself opportunities. For instance, she was reluctant to leave home to pursue her college education if it
meant leaving her mother. Three years after high school, Denise was still unsure about making a physical move away from home.

Denise's posture was reminiscent of that of the consummate caregiver, totally committed and emotionally tied to those for whom she cared and very reluctant to cause any disruption to her family ties.
Student #5
Melinda*

Case in Brief

Year Graduated: 1992
STP Participation: Summer 1992
Began F-T College: Fall 1993
Interviewed: Spring 1995
Ethnic Background: African-American

Primary Transition Issue(s):
proving self academically
concern for family members
leaving vs. staying home
choosing a college major
rivalrous, but loving sibling relationship
anger over family's situation

Transition Stage: incorporation
Predominant Posture: "The Butterfly"
  indecisive       gutsy
  rivalrous        fearful
  fun loving       religious

Primary Needs:
  emotional security for self/family
  financial stability
  decisiveness

*Alias used to protect privacy
Transition Class Background

Melinda graduated from high school in June 1992 and entered the community college the same summer as a participant in the summer transition program (STP). Her fraternal twin sister, Denise, had participated in the 1991 STP.

Melinda and Maria (student #1), participated in the same STP. Her transition class information is the same as Maria's.

Melinda did well in the program and finished the summer with a 3.14 grade point average.

Conditions of the Interview

Melinda was interviewed in spring 1995. Her interview took place after Denise's, her twin sister. Melinda was asked for an interview for several reasons. She was a program participant, she was available, and willing to talk about her experiences. Also, her information could be used as a source of verification and comparison to her sister's and to Maria's, who was a member of the same transition class.

The same techniques that were used with Denise of reviewing a class roster and talking about some of the events that occurred during Melinda's first summer of enrollment, were used to help her think back to her transition experience.

Melinda's interview added depth and specificity to the nature of the family's role in the transition process. It was also valuable in terms of getting to know Melinda, the individual.
Melinda's interview took place in the counseling office during the morning and was terminated in time for her to attend her biology class. The interview lasted about 50 minutes and generated 19 transcribed pages. Melinda was upbeat during the interview and frequently used the same humor that she did in regular conversation. For instance, Melinda said that one of her interests was to become an anchor woman. She added, "Connie Chung is warming up my chair."
Melinda's Transition Story

When asked to tell a little bit about herself, Melinda gave her name and age and without further prompting, began to talk about a series of issues which included: (a) how high school students tend to glamorize going to college and getting away from home, (b) the "real" realities of college, (c) her uncertainty about when to transfer, (d) her concern for her mother, (e) her uncertainty about a major and career, and (f) her relationship with her sister. These, she considered the "basics" of her background. This was typical of Melinda who tended to talk quite freely and easily.

Melinda was dealing with several uncertainties in her life at the time of the interview. She was pondering a major and which of two, perhaps more, career areas would be best for her. She was also considering whether this would be the best time to transfer, which colleges she should consider, and how far from home she should go. Melinda had done well in her Liberal Arts program, and even though she talked about attending graduate school in the future, she did not share Denise's sense of confidence and direction in regard to her major and a career.

Pre-College Influences

When Melinda and Denise graduated from high school, there was no money in the family for them to go to college. Denise talked about the bitterness that she felt because they had done all the right things and had still come up short. Melinda had some very strong feelings about that period in
her life. She was very angry because she had to delay going to college for a year.

I remember that year. It was like I was angry at the world. I mean, I was really, really upset that I couldn't even come here, 'cause, um, we just didn't have any money at all.

Melinda did not say who her anger was directed towards. Denise said that a great deal of hers was directed towards her father for leaving the family.

Melinda said that she was angry because she could not go to college right away. However, she questioned whether she was ready to go to college anyway after she finished high school. She said, "I only really wanted to go to college because all my friends were talking about going to college." At another point she said, "... that's how I felt in high school. I mean, I remember when I couldn't go to school. I was just so-o-o ticked. It was like. That's not fair. Everybody else is going to school such and such."

Maria and Jennifer also reported that they were influenced by their peers when considering college attendance. Peer pressure was very evident in Melinda's case, even after she had finished high school.

My mother had just separated, and we helped her move, and we didn't have any money at all. And it was just awful, just going to work and then coming home, and everyone else would be in school, or everyone else would be doing something else.

One of the ways that Melinda dealt with seeing her peers go off to college without being able to go herself was to rationalize about it. She made references to how she talked herself through that period.
... and most of them who did go away to college came back after the first semester. They couldn't afford to go to college anymore, or their grades weren't that good so they could go back. They were like on academic suspension... 

But then, I'm like, those people aren't any better off than me if they're not academically ready or even emotionally ready because as great as it may seem, if you've never been away from home, then why are you going all the way to go to school in California if you're from the east coast?

This, in some way, confirmed Melinda's thoughts that perhaps she was not all ready for college when she graduated from high school.

Denise was confident of her academic abilities. Melinda, on the other hand, was less secure. She said that her high school years had been rather shaky. Like Jennifer, she wondered if she could handle college-level work. Melinda said that she had done well in school until the tenth grade. Then, several situations occurred that had a significant impact on her. There was severe marital conflict between her parents. Melinda did not cope well with the turmoil that this caused in her life. At one time, she caused others a great deal of concern by becoming very quiet and withdrawn. "Everybody got so worried about me, 'cause I got so quiet. I wouldn't talk to anybody at all... I didn't really know how to deal with it," she said.

Her parents' marital conflict was not the only issue that affected Melinda during those years. She described herself as very sensitive. In the tenth and eleventh grades, she recalled that her sister was very popular with
the other kids, especially the boys. She gave an account of this less-than-happy period in her life.

I mean like she had some real people trying to pick her, like guy-wise and quality-wise. 'Can I get your phone number?' and all that kind of stuff. So in tenth grade and eleventh grade, I was like really, really sensitive. And I was slightly overweight, too. And so I didn't really do too well [in school]. I didn't do bad, but I didn't do as well as I could have.

Melinda's self-esteem took a real beating. However, it was being compared to her sister that motivated her the most to improve her situation. She recalled that when she was younger and was considered the "bad" one of the two, she had decided to change because she was "always in trouble."

And I think the fact that the reason why I got 'good' was because, um, I was sick of always being, um, like, 'Oh Melinda, you know you shouldn't do this. You don't see Denise doing any of that stuff, do you?' So after a while, it's just like, you know, fed up with it. I said, I think I should be good.

From that point on, she said she would let Denise take the lead, and much of the childhood mischief and trouble that she experienced was a result of her going along with Denise.

Melinda commented on Denise's change from "good" to "bad." She attributed Denise's change in behavior to her popularity and the influence of her peers. "She wanted to see what other people were like and do some of the things that they did," Melinda said. Melinda recounted that whatever Denise did, she always went right along with her because "that was the rule" -
whatever one did, the other went along. Melinda said that as they grew older and more responsible, Denise eventually changed because the sneaking around and "making" her do things she really didn't want to do wore on Denise's conscience.

During the summer that she completed her junior year, Melinda said that she made another major change. She began dieting, and she got a new haircut. "It's amazing what a haircut can do for you sometimes," she said, in her characteristically joking manner. She said she changed her attitude and decided to make the best of her life. Melinda noted that when she looked around her, everyone else was living their lives according to how they wanted, and she decided to do the same. When she got to the twelfth-grade, she said that along with her change of attitude, came a big change in her grades. This helped to build her esteem and her confidence.

While Denise was a source of rivalry for Melinda, she was also a source of strength and companionship for her. Melinda said that Denise often came to her defense when she was upset. This was particularly helpful to her in high school during the family's rough periods.

Although we had problems at home, Denise and I had problems at home, it was still fun. We had a good time. And I think that another reason why I didn't do too bad was because Denise was all right.

Having someone to share the good and the bad times helped Melinda to cope during difficult periods in her life.

Denise apparently took a more active and verbal role in the family's turmoil. This frightened Melinda because she feared for Denise's safety. In
fact, it appeared that the sisters often took opposite or complementary roles. For instance, Melinda appeared more ready to leave the nest and venture out, while Denise seemed determined to stay nearby and look out for things at home. Even though Melinda thought that Denise was more popular, Melinda appeared to be more outgoing and social. For example, she was interested in living on campus when she transferred to another college while Denise preferred off-campus living or even staying at home so that she could commute to school.

There were other very noticeable differences between the two. Melinda said that she was more conservative when it came to hairstyles, clothes, and the opposite sex. Melinda offered her observation of the seemingly curious mix between the two. "It's kind of odd the way we are. Because I told Denise, if we were one person, we'd be the perfect person because what I lack, she makes up for and what she lacks, I make up for." She related a story from their adolescence.

I remember one time, we couldn't sleep. We share a room. We picked out - we were all one person - what parts we would have, what parts we would lose. We worked from top to bottom. It was funny.

Melinda recognized that she and Denise had their weaker areas and their stronger ones. They shared their highs and lows. Melinda said that through it all, "I just go every day - one day at a time. Just take it one day at a time." To sustain her, Melinda said that she had her family, her religion, school, and other things that fell in between.
Post-College Enrollment Influences

Melinda's first taste of college was by way of the summer transition program (STP). Like Maria and Roxanne, she was reluctant to give up her summer vacation, but after the program ended, she was glad that she had taken part in it.

Melinda said that initially she was very nervous about college because her tenth- and eleventh-years in school had gone so badly. Even though she had done better in twelfth-grade, she did not have the self-assurance that she needed to make her feel that college would go well for her. Jennifer, (student # 3) professed to having the same fears when she began college. Melinda said that her confidence increased as she got good grades on her assignments in the STP, and even when she didn't, she said she felt comfortable going to the teacher or getting help from her sister, Denise, who had already completed the courses.

Melinda was in agreement with the other participants that the teachers and students in the summer session had helped to create a comfortable environment for learning.

The teachers were really wonderful . . . and I guess they must have seen the fear on our faces, right? The first thing they did was set the tone for the class. And it wasn't like really lax that you didn't have to do anything, but it was comfortable, but not overly comfortable that you wouldn't do your work at all.

I mean we were all really like one big family because you saw the same people, the same amount of time in all three classes.
Melinda was in the same class with Maria, who also characterized the group as having a "family-like" quality to it. All of the participants in the study commented on the closeness and the positive and supportive atmosphere that developed among the group members.

Starting college during the summer was beneficial to Melinda in other ways. She said that there was just the right number of courses to help her establish a study pattern.

Melinda also felt that the smaller class sizes at the community college were comfortable for her. Because her family was small and close-knit, she believed that she would have felt lost in a larger university environment. Melinda's perception was that she probably would have become "a dropout statistic or a little, old, got-married statistic" with no education past high school. She said that starting at the community college had given her the confidence she needed to go on.

Melinda was looking forward to continuing her education at a four-year college. Leaving home, living on campus, learning to live with others outside her family were ways for her, she felt, to "broaden her horizons." Denise was more reluctant to do that because it meant leaving her family. Melinda, however, said, "I don't really mind venturing out because I know they're going to still be there." She added, "While I'm young, and I don't have a lot of responsibility - take care of myself and make good grades - I might as well have as much fun as I can while learning."

Melinda felt that she had some resources to help her. She had gotten baptized, and that was a particular source of strength for her. She believed that God would, in time, see that her desires would be achieved. Then in her
characteristically humorous manner she added, "... even though you may say, 'Good Lord, you take a long time,' it will still come to pass."

**Primary Issues in the Transition Process**

At the time of the interview, Melinda had spent two years at the community college and was looking forward to graduating and transferring to a four-year college. She and her twin sister, Denise, had begun their full-time college careers together. They lived with their mother, and both described their relationships as close-knit. Another sibling, a brother, was married and lived out of the area. Their father had separated from the family shortly after the twins graduated from high school. This was the state of affairs when Melinda began college.

The sisters were supportive of each other and shared many thoughts, ideas, and experiences. Yet, they were quite different in other ways, such as in their primary issues in the transition process. One of Melinda's main issues was her need to prove to herself that she could make it academically in college. Her high school years had shaken her confidence in her ability to do well. College became a proving ground for her.

Another major issue for Melinda at the time of her transition into college was finding ways to deal with the situation at home. With her father separated from the family, she, her mother, and sister had to begin the rebuilding process, financially and emotionally. The year that Melinda took off from school helped her to begin to settle down. She said that a strong support system at home and her religious faith helped her. She said, "And even though my family isn't together, together, I don't know. I just think that
family is very important. Family and religion is like right up there, and then school."

**Transition Stage**

Melinda had been in school long enough to complete almost two years of study, and she was only several courses from graduation. She felt that she had done well and had benefited from being on a smaller college campus where people, faculty and students, got to know each other. This was important to her.

. . . and that's how most of the professors at the community college are. They're like, really close. They always make time for you.

I mean like there could be a lot of people in your class and you would never get to know anyone or even the professor and the professor wouldn't get to know you. And a lot of people need like one-on-one or like close-knit to one. And I'm one of those people, too, because I didn't come from a big family.

Two years in a relatively comfortable collegiate environment helped Melinda to acclimate well to college. Chronologically, and in terms of her adjustment to college, Melinda had probably progressed to the incorporation stage. Her outgoing nature helped her to form ties with people on campus, and she was active in several areas on campus.

Melinda seemed to have worked fairly well through the separation stage, even though she had very strong ties with her family, and she was still living at home. She was looking forward to living on campus, and she had even specified what she would not appreciate in her roommates when she got
them. "As long as they don't curse excessively, smoke, or like to play loud music or disrespect me, because we do share a room, I don't care," she said.

Predominant Transition Posture

When Melinda and Denise were playing at building a "composite person," using each of their best assets, they would probably have chosen Denise's decisiveness. Melinda's indecisiveness was preventing her from moving ahead with some very important decisions. She was finishing her Liberal Arts degree, but she was not sure what her major or concentration would be. She was proud that she had narrowed her choices down to two - mass communications or perhaps law; i.e., an anchorwoman or a district attorney. "I only have two," she said. "In the past, there's been like a whole, great, big, old list. At night, I'd sit down with the career book and say, Ooh, this sounds good. Let me write this down. But it's only two now."

Melinda was also undecided about where she would like to transfer. She said, "I don't know. I've always wanted to go to school down south, and I'm probably going to go to UNC this summer. So even though it's up here, if I go there and I don't exactly like it, then I'll be like, 'Ooh, scratch that one off the list'." She was also not sure how soon she wanted to make the move, immediately or after building the family's finances.

Melinda did not let her indecisiveness stop her from moving ahead. Perhaps it was her abundance of energy, her rivalry with her sister and her peers, or just learning for the sake of learning that kept Melinda moving forward. She gave part of her rationale for being in school.
And even if you don't want to go to school at all, just take a class. Take a class that you find intriguing, like philosophy or English or something. To me, you should always keep your mind moving, even if it's not for a degree or anything like that - just keep learning because you never know when you have to use it or you just may surprise yourself because you just may have a good time.

I didn't want to, you know, just wake up and go to work and then come home and not do anything. I guess that's where my belief from always being active stems from. Because when I first started off, I didn't take a whole bunch of classes. I kind of took classes I really didn't need. They were interesting to me. So I took them anyways. And I just, I always like to stay busy and, um, school was like one of the ways I could stay busy and help myself and stay closer to being whatever I wanted to be at the same time, too.

Melinda's plight was reminiscent of a butterfly's, appreciating the entire meadow, but not favoring any particular part of it.

Maria (student # 1) seemed hesitant and cautious in new situations. Melinda seemed more willing to jump in whether or not she had a good idea of what would happen. Then, she would decide what good she could make of it. She was indecisive and unsure, but courageous. As she said when she decided to do things a little differently in high school, "And I gave myself the attitude that everyone else is living their life according to how they want to or making the best they can out of it. So I'm going to do my life the same way."
Part II
Informants’ Interviews

These individuals were interviewed because of their potential to contribute to the knowledge of the transition process. They had either worked directly with the students or their positions were such that they were in frequent contact with transitioning students.

The informants interviewed for this study included a history professor who taught the students in the STP, the father of student # 3, a counselor from the high school that students # 4 and 5 attended, a counselor from another high school who had worked in a transition program, and a high school teacher from the high school that student # 1 attended.

This section summarizes how and why interviews were set up with these individuals and their views and opinions about their roles, the students, and the transition process.
Informant # 1
Dr. Rose - Professor of History

Purpose of Interview

Dr. Rose was interviewed for this study because his history class became an integral part of the STP program and because the STP students, in their evaluations of the program, consistently said that the class was one of the most rewarding ones that they had ever taken.

After teaching the United States History I class for two summers, Dr. Rose believed that he could make the experience even more positive for the students by offering U.S. History II, which would give him the opportunity to incorporate more African-American history and more diversity into the course. His efforts apparently worked because the students who were interviewed gave the professor and the class excellent reviews.

Interviewing Dr. Rose helped to identify some of the factors to which the students were responding and reacting.

Observations of Dr. Rose

Dr. Rose was observed twice by the researcher in a regular session United States history class. The intent was to observe him with his students. The first observation occurred during his first meeting with the class. Observations and perceptions were noted as the class proceeded.

Dr. Rose entered the classroom. Most noticeably, his short-sleeved blue shirt was soaked with perspiration in the back and under the arms. This was Dr. Rose's third class for the morning. He handed out copies of the syllabus
and immediately began to interact with students. He shook hands with one student and introduced himself. The student did likewise. Jokingly, Dr. Rose, who is known as an avid sport's fan, asked another student if he was ashamed to wear a Buffalo Bills' cap in public. This brought giggles from some other students while the cap-wearing student and Dr. Rose chatted briefly about football. This was an effort by the professor to begin to establish rapport with his class and to alleviate some of their anxiety. Several of the students in the study commented on how nervous they were during their first class meetings. The observer also noted that as the professor chatted with students on one side of the room, the students on the other side listened attentively.

When all the students had signed the roll, Dr. Rose began to go over the syllabus and explain the class objectives and what students needed to do to be successful in the class. Dr. Rose commented that he believed that education was a cooperative venture and that he would do whatever he could to help them.

The second observation took place during the second class meeting. Dr. Rose began the class by chatting with several students. He gave them instructions for keeping the room which had an outer wall of windows, as cool as possible by keeping the blinds and curtains closed. Again, Dr. Rose's clothes were wet from perspiration.

From the observer's recall, most of the approximately 48 students were sitting in the same seats as during the first class meeting. Roll was called with students being referred to as Ms. or Mr. and their surnames.

During the 50 minute class period, the professor used a number of strategies to focus on various parts of the lecture. He wrote on the board, used
wall maps, distributed typed notes, and used overheads with schematic diagrams on them. He moved about the room often, trying to keep the students on each side of the awkwardly built room involved. Dr. Rose called students by name, used their names in some of his examples, and at several intervals, mentioned important points to jot down.

His students were attentive. Some asked questions. The class ended with Dr. Rose asking, "What's due Friday?" This was an attempt to get them to read the syllabus. He said that they would begin forming small discussion groups at the next class meeting.
Summary of Interview
Dr. Rose

The interview with Dr. Rose took place in his office and lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview was conducted in mid-December 1994, after final exams. The interviewer was particularly interested in what made Dr. Rose and his history class so popular, particularly among the students in the STP.

When asked to tell a little bit about his background, Dr. Rose talked about the people and influences that helped him to grow beyond what he called "the predominant racial and other attitudes" in his small eastern shore community. Dr. Rose disclosed that he had grown up in a segregated community, where as he put it, "I drank deeply from the cup of racial attitudes that my parents possessed." He said that he could not point to one person, time, place, or event that caused his thinking to diverge from that of his home and community, but he recalled a series of people, experiences, and influences that shaped his thinking and his life.

Dr. Rose talked about leaving his childhood home with a vision of a bigger world with a richness that his upbringing did not offer. His college major in Asian Studies, he thought, was a further reflection of his curiosity about the world beyond his small community.

He explained that his interest in the history of blacks began when he was a student in the 1960s. The U. S. History II class that he taught for the STP, he thought, gave him the opportunity to apply some of his knowledge, do
more reading, and to begin to conceptualize and create a framework that would make the course more relevant and meaningful to his minority students.

Dr. Rose explained that his decision to teach the class as an African-American history class did not come without doubt and self-scrutiny. His doubt centered, not around his knowledge, but whether African-American students needed or wanted to hear about their history from a white teacher. As he explained, a barrier always existed initially between the teacher and students in a class, but this would be creating an additional barrier.

However, the students were very positive about their experience. Many commented that it was the first time that they had been taught black history and that it was the best class they had ever taken. When asked how he dealt with the perceived barrier between him and his students, Dr. Rose explained that the barrier had not been eliminated, but that his task was to recognize that it was there and then find ways to deal with it in the context of teaching the course.

It's still there. They have to know... they need to know a lot of personal things about me, and I will reveal those personal things about me as I go along. They have to know that I am going to be demanding; that I expect my students to meet those demands. I try to make the demands in the context of where they are,

They have to get to feel comfortable with me, that I respect them, that what we're doing is important, and we have to do it together. It's a cooperative effort.

Dr. Rose explained that he expected his students to be committed to the course and to themselves. To measure commitment, he considered factors
such as attendance, how much improvement a student had shown, and most important, whether he thought a student was working up to his or her potential and beyond. He commented on how he approached his students.

History becomes my vehicle to teach you about yourself. History is about you and me and about how we grow, how we come to terms with ourselves and the world we live in. It is not about remembering a million names and dates and that kind of thing and giving it back to me, but understanding how they all fit together.

Dr. Rose said that he had met resistance in his regular classes from white students when he introduced more black history in the classes. He commented that many of his white students' racial thinking was probably as deeply embedded as his own had been. However, Dr. Rose said that he chose his course content and materials based primarily on their contribution to history, their intellectual and literary worth, and their universal themes. When his students opened up to all kinds of history, he believed that they and others benefited. He revealed that when a particularly resistant white student came to him after the semester and said, "I'm glad I read that" [Black Boy], he felt a sense of victory at making the world a little better.

Of his own thinking, Dr. Rose commented, "I don't regard myself as out of the woods yet. I've got a lifelong thing in front of me."

**Contribution to the Study**

Students consistently made comments about Dr. Rose's class, such as, "This is the best class I've ever taken" or "We learned a lot in that class" or even, "We had fun in Dr. Rose's class." One of the objectives of this study
was to try to determine to what and to whom the transitional students were or were not responding. The students gave some indication. For instance, at least four of the five students interviewed said that they were nervous when they began their college programs. However, they identified factors that helped them to acclimate to the college environment. These included the teacher setting the tone for the class, the teacher's knowledge of the subject area, sense of humor, the practice of getting the students involved in the class, encouragement to work cooperatively, making the course content relevant to the students' lives, interacting with the students outside of class, and introducing challenging, as well as controversial, topics for discussion and analysis. These perceptions seemed applicable to Dr. Rose and his history class and were consistent with the findings of the Weaver and Cotrell (1988).

When observed in class, Dr. Rose's style and manner were consistent with what his students reported. He visited students at their seats before class began and during lecture. By the second class meeting, he knew many of the students by name. To emphasize a point or teach a particular part of the lecture, he used several different mediums, such as maps, overheads, writing on the board, and handouts. Students also reported that he used videotapes and invited guests.

When interviewed, Dr. Rose shared some of his personal and professional background. His primary quests, it seemed, were to satisfy his vast intellectual curiosity and to satisfy a seemingly insatiable desire to be stimulated and stimulate others intellectually. He explained that his curiosity led him to interact with many people, including ones whose backgrounds were quite different than his own.
Dr. Rose described himself as a rebel who argued with people because he liked to challenge accepted thought. For example, he expected a fight with his academic division when he announced that he was going to teach his American history class with an emphasis on African-American history. Dr. Rose said he kept his goals in mind when he decided to teach the class. These goals were for his class to serve as a source of self-knowledge for his students, to help dispel stereotypes, and for his students to be able to think through problems by tearing them apart, examining them, and putting them together again. Further, teaching the class gave him the opportunity to put over 20 years of reading and studying African Americans in history into a structural and instructional framework. His ultimate goal in teaching any students, he said, was to try to make the world a better place, even if just one student at a time. Dr. Rose said that he had high expectations of his students and that he worked best with students who were committed to themselves, the class, and to learning.

Dr. Rose said that he tried to set the tone in his classes by being fair, setting expectations for a certain quality of work, and by letting his students know that he expected hard work, mutual respect, and cooperation. He also said that he was aware that, initially, barriers, whether racial, cultural, social, or otherwise existed between him and his students and that a part of his task was to recognize, define, and help his students and himself to deal with them as quickly as possible.

Observing and interviewing Dr. Rose was important to the study in several ways. First, to include him in the study was to include an extra
measure of validation and triangulation of the students' accounts of part of their initial college experience.

Second, Dr. Rose provided an account of how his thinking evolved, especially in regard to issues that were relevant to this study such as his approach to building the relationship between him and his student; how he approached overcoming barriers between him and his students; how he acquired his knowledge in the area of African-American history; and why he, a white professor, wanted to take the risk of offering the course to black students.

Third, Dr. Rose gave some insight into the various teaching techniques and strategies that he used to reach his students and get them excited about learning and also some insight into what he was hoping to accomplish as a person and as a teacher.
Informant # 2

Dr. Tanner - Parent of Student # 3

Setting Up the Interview

The interview with Dr. Tanner took place in his home in early March 1995. Dr. Tanner, Jennifer's father, was asked for an interview because Jennifer had noted that her parents (especially her father) were very influential in her life, including her decision to attend college.

Dr. Tanner reluctantly agreed to an interview. He made it known that he was a very private person, but agreed to the interview to assist the researcher in the pursuit of her degree.

The initial arrangement was to conduct the interview on campus in the counseling office. However, when Dr. Tanner was called to confirm the date and time, he asked that the site be changed to his home. Therefore, the interview was conducted at his house.

Upon arriving at the Tanner home, the interviewer was pleasantly greeted by Dr. Tanner. Mrs. Tanner arrived later, was introduced, and proceeded to another part of the house. She did not participate in the interview.
Summary of Interview

Dr. Tanner

When asked to tell the interviewer a little bit about himself, Dr. Tanner answered that he grew up in a segregated community in North Carolina. His formal education included a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and a Master's degree in Education. This, he said, "rounded out his secular education." He disclosed later in the interview that he had also earned a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies. Jennifer had made reference to her father's achievements in her interview and had said that he was one of the people whom she admired most.

Dr. Tanner had taught school for many years in several states and, therefore, offered his views on several issues both as a parent and as an educator. In fact, when asked what the most difficult part of raising his two children had been, he commented that it probably had to do with the pressure of dealing with children at school all day and then having to deal with them at home.

Raising his own children had been a particular source of pride and frustration for Dr. Tanner. His thirty-one-year-old son had been an outstanding student and tennis player and had graduated from college 10 years prior. On the other hand, Dr. Tanner had the opposite recall of Jennifer's school years. He described Jennifer's school performance from fourth- or fifth-grade onward as frustrating and disappointing. Part of his
disappointment, he stated, came from being a teacher and then having to deal with his daughter's lack of performance in school.

The type of person I am, I expected her, my expectation was that you do quite well. And it was a big disappointment being in public education myself and seeing my daughter not really having an attitude that . . . I didn't care for it a whole bit.

Dr. Tanner said that he and his wife had tried to be good examples for their children. "And she [Jennifer] has seen me study, you know, hours at a time. And for her not to really do that, that she didn't do that so much, uh, I wasn't too pleased with it," he said.

Dr. Tanner was pleased that Jennifer had experienced a change of attitude about school once she entered college.

But that [Jennifer's attitude] changed. After having finished high school, there was a noticeable change in attitude or she didn't like high school. She didn't like middle school too much, I don't think. But she loved going to college. So we have not really had to be on her case about studying in college.

Dr. Tanner's account of Jennifer's pre- and post-college enrollment experience was consistent with hers.

When asked if he felt that high school adequately prepared students for making the transition into college, Dr. Tanner noted that being a public school teacher, his response was different from a parent's with no connection to the teaching process. His opinion was similar to the two high school counselors who believed that students who wanted a good education could definitely get it. Even though Dr. Tanner felt that adequate preparation was a shared
responsibility, he felt that the major portion of that responsibility rested with
the student.

I think students should prepare themselves. I believe that teachers here
are putting the information out for students to get, and you don't always
reach the students. You have to want to see things yourself. You can't
overbalance and say the public schools are not doing their job or the
students not necessarily doing their jobs. It's a balance. The teachers
have to teach, but teachers can not make students learn. The student
has to study.

Once the student had acquired an attitude for success, he thought that
the best preparation for college and for life was through reading. "... but to
be well prepared," he said, "I think students need to read. And that's where
many of our black students, in particular, fall down on is that they don't read."
In fact, Dr. Tanner's view was that the biggest difference between his son's
success and Jennifer's performance in school was his son's love of reading and
Jennifer's lack of reading and poor study habits. He noted that one of the roles
of parents was to set the tone at home by engaging in reading themselves, and
another role was to require their children to do the same. He did
acknowledge, however, that regardless of how demanding the parents were, it
had to be the child's decision to follow through. For those children who were
"cooperative," like his son, Dr. Tanner felt that you could almost "demand"
that they read. With others and apparently in Jennifer's case, he remarked,
"But you really can't pull it off unless the child is willing to submit to your
authority and listen to you."

Dr. Tanner believed that another important role of parents was to instill
certain values in their children. For him, instilling a sense of responsibility
was very important. One way to do this was to give kids more things to do; i.e., chores at home and even jobs outside of the home. Students, he thought, needed to see more of a connection between what they wanted and what they were able to earn for themselves.

He also thought that parents should concentrate more effort on providing a strong spiritual and moral foundation for their children, with less emphasis on material things. Instilling these values, he believed, would help children to internalize the desire to do well and to achieve.

When asked his opinion about the need for programs such as the STP, Dr. Tanner had several views. He believed that such programs were helpful to students. In addition, he thought that the earlier students were involved in these programs, the better. Finally, he thought that the downside of such programs was that they either did not or could not accommodate more students. He said, "I don't understand these programs. You know you select 10, 15 people. So if you don't get in there, buddy, forget you."

**Contribution to the Study**

Despite his reluctance to grant an interview, Dr. Tanner proved to be a very articulate informant who offered his opinions and ideas on several issues as a parent and as an educator. His views and opinions were consistent with the profile of a high achieving, well-educated, no-nonsense, strict, stern, but caring person that Jennifer had drawn of him.

Dr. Tanner, undoubtedly, was actively involved in the process of raising his two children. He commented, "... with the boy, the rearing process was
very easy. It took more, I guess, energy and effort to try to get the girl on track than the fellow because there was such a difference."

An objective of this study was to determine who and what influenced the students' transition process into college and in what ways. Jennifer was very clear in her assertion that her parents (particularly her father), had been very influential in her life and in her transition process. Dr. Tanner had high expectations of his children. Jennifer's lack of performance in school had been the source of much friction between her and her father. Yet, when asked to name someone she admired, she named her father.

Dr. Tanner's close involvement in Jennifer's education continued into college, but apparently did not require the same degree of intensity as it had in high school. Dr. Tanner commented that Jennifer had changed her attitude when she entered college and that she seemed to enjoy college more than high school. He proudly commented that he "did not have to be in her case as much." Jennifer stated during her interview, however, that her parents were still close at hand or "right in the next room" when she was studying and frequently inquired about her studies.

Dr. Tanner's close, intense involvement with Jennifer added another dimension to the concept of parental involvement in the transition process. Roxanne said that her mother insisted that she start college over the summer to get a head start and take advantage of the free tuition. She did not mention her father's position on the matter. Melinda and Denise, on the other hand, were not very complimentary of their father's involvement in their lives. In fact, they blamed their delayed entry into college on his lack of involvement, especially financially, in their lives. Maria said that she did not even know her
father until she was 13 years old. To the contrary, Dr. Tanner provided parental advice, discipline, financial, and emotional support for Jennifer. Education figured prominently in the lives of each of the students, but the amount and type of family involvement in the process differed with each one.

Dr. Tanner believed that the task for parents was to provide the foundation and set the tone and the example for their children at home. Through his own experience of trying to do that and being less successful with Jennifer than he had been with his son, Dr. Tanner concluded that it was ultimately up to the student to want to learn, to want to find things out, and to internalize the desire to be successful.

Dr. Tanner believed that the most important key to student success was reading. According to him, students who shared a love of reading and learning acquired a "foundational knowledge" that opened many doors for them. These students, he concluded, could generally test, write and think better and could talk more intelligently about issues.

Dr. Rose (Jennifer's history professor in the STP) also noted the value of reading for students. He said that he tried to choose reading materials for his students based on the literary, historical, and intellectual value of the material, but also tried to choose materials to which his students could relate and identify.

As a parent, Dr. Tanner was also concerned that students did not seem to have a very realistic perception of the connection between the materialistic things that they wanted in life and the path to earning those materials. Students, he felt, should be given more responsibility in the home by way of chores and should even seek employment outside of the home.
They need to really experience the world of work, and they need to have more of an understanding of the economic system. . . . They need to see the connection between paying rent, buying a house, owning a car, having clothes. When you deal with the totality of it as opposed to when you go down to McDonald's, perhaps, and work 10 hours a week, and I take my money, and I do what I want to with it. So I'm able to have fine clothes and money to spend, but I really don't experience the real connection for when I have to do this totally on my own. And, you know, it's a rude awakening for many of the students, and I think that it is one thing that keeps students from being as motivated as they could.

He believed that in many instances, parents did their children a disservice by not insisting that they take more responsibility.

Dr. Tanner's interview was important to the study. In addition to offering his views on several topics such as the role of parents in the process of rearing and educating their children, he noted improvements that could be made in the college system towards attracting and accommodating more students. He also shared some of his personal experiences in raising and overseeing the education of his two children. His disclosures were consistent with Jennifer's perception of him.
Informant # 3

Mr. Maris
High School Guidance Counselor # 1

Setting Up the Interview

The interview with Mr. Maris was set up by telephone and took place the latter part of March 1995. Mr. Maris, whom the researcher had met in his capacity as a high school counselor, was very willing to grant an interview. He was asked for an interview for several reasons: (a) he was an African-American counselor from a local high school where many of the students in the STP were recruited, (b) high school counselors played a major role in promoting the community college to their students, (c) at least one student in the study felt that the counseling or advising she received from her high school counselor was inadequate, and (d) Mr. Maris had many years of experience in the public school system and could talk about his experiences working with transitioning students.

It was agreed that the interview would take place the last Monday morning in March in Mr. Maris' office at the high school.

Observations with Students

Mr. Maris extended a warm and cordial greeting to the researcher. The researcher and Mr. Maris had known each other for approximately eight years.
Although the interviewer had a short list of areas to address with Mr. Maris, the intent was to follow his lead, as much as possible, and ask follow-up questions based on his responses.

Two students visited Mr. Maris during the interview. Mr. Maris interacted with the students in a calm and reassuring, but very professional manner. It was from observing him with his students that the interviewer realized that the jobs of high school and community college counselors were very different. As a high school counselor, he was very involved with his students' parents and also more likely to be involved with the courts or legal system.

The first student who visited Mr. Maris was a black male who wanted to drop a Life Studies class in order to become an office aide. When the student left the office, a discussion ensued on how many students did not work up to their potential. The student was not encouraged to drop the class. Mr. Maris believed that students should remain in their classes, study, and learn, to the extent possible.

The second student was a white female who wanted to drop all of her classes and attend a local adult high school. She said she hated the high school, didn't get along with anyone, and had all "F" grades in her classes. The student wanted Mr. Maris to call her mother and convince her that there was no way that she could pass for the year.

Mr. Maris agreed to call the student's mother and talk with her. (Mr. Maris allowed me to remain in his office, explaining to the student that I was a counselor, also). He did not, however, concur with the student that she could not pass her classes for the year. He was very patient and frank in explaining
the situation to the student and her mother, but was also very adamant in his assertion that the student could salvage the year. He offered to get a statement from each of her teachers showing what she needed to do to pass her classes. In talking with the mother, Mr. Maris, in response to the mother's statement that her daughter felt that no one cared for her, Mr. Maris responded, "We do love 'Jane,' and she knows that. But I will not sit here and tell her that she can't pass those classes. That's what she wants to hear, but it's not true."

He was calm and informative with the mother on the phone and with the student throughout the conversation. The student eventually stomped out of the office when Mr. Maris did not change his position on the situation.
Summary of Interview

Mr. Maris

When asked to tell a little bit about himself, Mr. Maris responded that he had 38 years of experience in the school system, with 25 of those years as a guidance counselor at his present school. Mr. Maris was looking forward to retiring at the end of the academic year.

Mr. Maris stated that his job as a high school counselor consisted of dealing with students and their curricula on an individualized basis, helping them with problems, assisting them with their long- and short-range goals, helping them to explore careers, and trying to motivate them to achieve. Mr. Maris felt that his job had changed over the years, primarily in response to the changing nature of the student body. "The clientele has changed, and the job has changed with the clientele. We get more students, it seems, from the inner city. They're moving out, and their values are different," he said.

Consequently, he suspected that students' performance in school had changed because their values were constantly being influenced. He said that so much school time was spent reaching out to students, trying to challenge them to keep their test scores up, and trying to keep them motivated and interested that special counselors had been hired to address only those needs.

When asked to give an example of how he thought students' values had changed, Mr. Maris said he thought that most students were doing a good job in high school, but the changing times had brought many undesirable role models before the students. These role models, whom he referred to as "street
people," did not emphasize the value of studying and learning, were often violent and, many times very physically aggressive. He believed that many students, unfortunately, were attracted to these negative models and, in turn, reflected that attraction in their dress, language, and disdain for books, homework, and study habits. Mr. Maris said that in his observations, black males were the most likely to fall victim to the "popular culture" and in his opinion, were doing so at a disproportionate rate. He felt that even though he enjoyed working with all students, he felt a special challenge to work with students who had special needs. Since black males were prevalent in this group, he felt a special challenge to work with them.

And so while I work with all students and enjoy working with all of them equally, I just feel a special challenge when I see, whether black or white, students who are faltering. And percentage wise, I see many more black males faltering. So I feel a special challenge to help them and try to build them up and boost their egos and their self-respect.

In spite of all the negative influences, Mr. Maris said that there were still many strong students in his school who continued to do what they needed to do to succeed. In fact, he said, many of the black female students did "stick to their guns" and tended to make more progress than the black male students.

Mr. Maris was asked to address the perception that high school counselors were the biggest help to those who were already college-bound. He was very fervent in his response that the majority of the students did not need a four-year-degree and that one of his quests was to try to interest more students in the trades, a technical education, or in a community college education. He felt that the students were not interested and motivated and that
a special challenge for counselors was to try to influence more students in that direction.

Mr. Maris thought that many black students were not adequately prepared for higher education, particularly those who fell into the so-called middle group and who could benefit from going to a community college or attending a trade school. He believed that a number of the students who fell into this group, unfortunately, did not want to study and did not appreciate an education and getting ahead, even though they had the potential. In his opinion, too many of these students were unfocused, in spite of the counselors' and career counselors' efforts to help direct them.

Mr. Maris was asked about one of the case study student's assertion that in spite of her success in high school, the counselors had not provided her with enough guidance to know that there were other alternatives in her situation. Mr. Maris gave an extensive explanation of his school's system of accountability. He said that students were required to sign in and out and to sign that they had received certain services each time they visited the Counseling or Career Guidance Office. He said that students were required to begin seeing their counselors in ninth grade for career counseling, scheduling, an explanation of all standardized test scores, and other services. He had a practice of taking notes on what was talked about during each visit. He said that signing for the receipt of services was set up specifically because students were constantly saying on their evaluations at graduation that they had never been told certain things. Even though they had an elaborate system in place, Mr. Maris lamented that students still said in their evaluations that they had little or no contact with their counselor.
The chief reason, Mr. Maris thought, why students reported that they received no services or inadequate services was that they tended to reflect what they saw and heard about educators in the media and that when students heard that education was not producing and that counseling was inadequate, "this is what they reflect in their evaluations, regardless to the level of service that they received." He said they took the evaluation to mean that "someone upstairs wants to hear bad things about the system." Mr. Maris likened the counselors' predicament to that of a police person's who was affected by negative publicity, regardless to the quality of his or her job performance.

Since it appeared that black students in many instances seemed to feel isolated in the various systems, Mr. Maris was asked his opinion of the effect of integration on black student achievement. He did not feel that black student failure rates in white schools resulted from factors such as the lack of black faculty and administrators. Mr. Maris referred to the "problems of the nineties" and his belief that those problems, and not necessarily the racial composition of the system, have led to the lack of minority achievement in many cases. Mr. Maris said that he believed there should be less blaming the system and more responsibility taken by those who would benefit from an education.

A brief conversation ensued on whether or not black students have needs different from other students. Mr. Maris stressed that if they felt different, that made them different. However, he insinuated that counselors needed to remain professional in their jobs and that putting themselves on the
students' level by trying to "speak their language" or by trying to appear "cool" was not necessary or productive.

The interview with Mr. Maris ended when another student stopped by to see him.

**Contribution to the Study**

It was interesting to compare Mr. Maris' views and opinions on the high school and high school students to the views and opinions of the students. Maria, Roxanne, Jennifer, and Denise talked about their high school experiences. For example, Maria was concerned about the lack of content in some of her high school courses. Her college history course contained so much information that was new to her that she felt slighted by her high school teachers. Roxanne and Jennifer also thought that high school teachers did not venture far beyond what was in the text books. Jennifer's comments were very penetrating. She said that she was not impressed with high school teachers, and she thought that her college teachers knew a lot more.

Denise targeted counseling services. She reported that she had not found her high school counselors particularly useful in helping her to define her options for choosing colleges or finding sources of financial assistance.

Roxanne and Jennifer talked about the immature, disruptive, and distracting behavior of high school students.

Mr. Maris offered his perspective on the students. He commented that many of the same problems which he saw in society were reflected to some degree in the student body. He thought that many of these problems resulted from changes in the student population. Students were moving from the city.
in greater numbers, and some of them brought a very different set of values which were not conducive to learning and to the learning environment. Physical aggressiveness, lack of good study habits, use of offensive language and harmful substances, and lack of attention to school and homework were among the non-productive influences that were becoming more pervasive in the school system according to Mr. Maris. These behaviors could be seen by the more serious students as evidence of immature, disruptive behavior.

Mr. Maris' perception of the adequacy of counseling services was quite different from Denise's. He explained his office's very elaborate system of accounting for services received by students from ninth- through twelfth-grade. A part of his frustration was the feeling that for whatever reasons, students were just not finding the services meaningful.

Mr. Maris' interview was important to the study. From his perspective, he identified obstacles and influences that impinged upon the high school students' attainment of a solid education. These included: (a) the lack of motivation to do well, (b) the lack of interest in services and resources, (c) the identification with undesirable and unproductive behaviors of some students, and (d) the influence of the media and the lack of thinking for themselves on behalf of some of the students. Mr. Maris was clear that this did not apply to the majority of the students in his school, but certainly to enough to cause major concern.

Mr. Maris was pleased with the service that he had rendered to students over the years, but he also said that he was ready for his retirement.
Informant # 4

Mr. Milner
High School Counselor # 2

Setting Up the Interview

Mr. Milner was interviewed in April 1995, approximately one month after Mr. Maris, who was also a high school guidance counselor. Mr. Milner was asked for an interview for several reasons. First, he was new to the high school guidance system. Mr. Maris, on the other hand, had been in the public school system for nearly 30 years and was retiring. Several issues were raised in Mr. Maris' interview that the researcher thought might be seen differently from another counselor's perspective. Mr. Milner, a young black counselor, was completing his first year in a new rural high school, as opposed to Mr. Maris who was in a suburban high school that had been in the community more than 25 years. Mr. Milner was also asked for an interview because he had worked in a summer transition program (STP) while he was a graduate student.

Beyond that, Mr. Milner, who had been out of high school for only eight years was closer in age to his high school students. His perspective was similar to Mr. Maris' on several issues, but very different on others.

Mr. Milner granted the interview willingly. It took place in his office at the high school, lasted approximately one hour, and generated 27 pages of transcription. The interview was relaxed and uninterrupted.
Summary of Interview

Mr. Milner

Mr. Milner's interview was informative and offered insight into several aspects of the transition process, including his own transition into college. He talked about his perception of the roles of various components of the transition process including the student, parents, high school, college, and special programs such as the STP and Upward Bound.

Mr. Milner was quite frank about his entry into college. "I went to college to play football," he said. "I didn't go to college to get the degree. I didn't go to college to get that life experience. I went to college to play football in hopes that I'd go pro."

Mr. Milner reached his goal to play professional football, but an ankle injury, in part, brought him to the realization that there was "life beyond football."

Entering college as a student athlete was a plus for Mr. Milner, but it also had some drawbacks. It was a plus because when he arrived at college, the resources that he needed to succeed as a student were already in place. Tutorial services, academic advising, counseling, meal plans, paid tuition and books were taken care of. Some of the same services were available to the STP students at his university.

Mr. Milner thought that the biggest drawback to entering college as an athlete was the amount of work and time required to get in and stay in shape to play college football. He related an incident during his first year when he
had gotten so fed up that he called his mother to come for him. His mother, he said, responded that she would be happy to pick him up if he could tell her the address where he'd like to stay. Mr. Milner said that he elected to stay in school.

Mr. Milner described himself as an athlete, an average student, and a first-generation college student. As such, he identified closely with some of his students, and he said he often used his experience to try to reach some of his less motivated students.

"I'm a lot like a lot of my students," he said. "I was not the top kid in my class by any stretch. I went to college to play football. I went to play pro. But along the way, I broke my ankle and that kind of went. So I went back to school, got a Master's degree. If you had asked me eight years ago or six or five years ago would I have graduated and gotten a Master's. No, probably not. But I use some of those experiences now, and I find that I can relate to some of our students... I can relate to some of our students... I can relate to them in counseling and say, 'This is my story. I was where you are.'"

Mr. Milner was asked if he thought that high school adequately prepared students for the transition into college. His response was similar to Mr. Maris' and Dr. Tanner's. He thought that the opportunity was there for a good education for those students who were motivated and whose parents took an active role in their education. Mr. Milner characterized motivated students as ones who wanted to improve themselves, really wanted to go to college, knew what they wanted, knew where and how to seek help when needed, listened, and learned from their failures. Like Mr. Maris, he felt that only a small percentage of the students at his high school were "bad." He
distinguished them from the unmotivated students whom, he felt, had been "beaten down by the system" by being told they were dumb or stupid and that they shouldn't take some of the more difficult courses. Consequently, they had become very unsure of themselves academically.

Both Mr. Maris and Mr. Milner felt a special challenge to help unmotivated and underachieving students. Mr. Milner's solution, however, was different. He felt that when it came to black students particularly, the school system was ineffective in many ways. His perspective was that you can't teach students if you can't get their attention. To get the attention of a diverse student body, he thought that the curriculum must reflect that diversity. His solution for engaging more minority students, keeping more students out of fights and in school, and having students take ownership of their education included measures such as to provide more instructional and learning opportunities about cultures other than the white Anglo-Saxon culture; hire more minority teachers and counselors at all levels of education; encourage students, especially black students, to work more cooperatively; and help parents to become more active in their students' education.

Mr. Milner gave an example from his college experience. He said that attendance always went up in his classes during Black History Month, and participation and attendance at activities increased. A renown black author and poetess was employed at his university. He recalled the experience of being in her class.

They had . . . . teaching a class. It was called Black Studies. It was so incredible to go in there and sit down. I really enjoyed that class. I did the papers. I was there for every class. I was excited about it. I wanted
to go out and tell somebody else. So I can understand how that would help students here.

In regard to hiring more minority professionals in the school system, Mr. Milner thought there was a definite need. When asked if the students, particularly the black students, tended to gravitate to him, he responded with a resounding "yes." He said that when black students see blacks; i.e., people in the system who look like them, they want to know how they did it.

There are a lot of black students, a lot of black males who don't see any other black males. I can relate to them in counseling and say, I was a high school athlete. Thought I was destined for whatever. Let me tell you, I've been there and don't like it. Been there, done that, didn't like it. So you might want to think about that education.

Mr. Maris and Mr. Milner were also different in how they related to their students. Mr. Milner felt comfortable "getting down on the students' level." He offered his rationale for doing so.

I'll call students in, and you know, 'Don't give me that.' I'll be real with them. I'll try to get down on their level because I think I'm close to all their ages. There is a respect factor, and I try to abide by that, but I think that at the same time, it's important for kids to get an opportunity to talk, to talk openly and honestly and say what they have to say. A lot of times they can't talk to their parents.

Whereas Mr. Milner saw his approach as being "real" with students for the purpose of encouraging them to open up and talk, Mr. Maris viewed it as trying to appear "cool" to the students. He said that he had no interest in being a "wannabe." Both men appeared comfortable with their styles and
seemed effective in their jobs, even though their approach to reaching and working with students was quite different.

Mr. Milner and Mr. Maris had similar views with regard to the role of parents in the educational process. Mr. Maris said that some parents expressed their frustration with the school system and vice versa. This frustration, he concluded, many times led each party to blame the other when students performed poorly. Mr. Milner noted that parents could be the most important component in the educational process if they pushed both their children and the school system for a good education. Parental involvement, he thought, was key, whether it meant keeping students productively engaged over the summer, interested in reading, or encouraged to play sports.

However, Mr. Milner believed that one instance in which parents tended to become overly involved was with grades. He cited the example of parents who withdrew their students, often prematurely, from classes in which they were not doing well just so that they could get a better grade in an easier class. Other parents, he said, withdrew their students from classes because they said that they could not get along with the teacher. Mr. Milner believed that students who elected to remain in difficult classes often surprised themselves and did better than they expected. Another benefit was that they gained valuable exposure to the material that would benefit them later in college. Students who did not "get along with the teacher," he said, needed to realize that in real life they would not always be working with or for people whom they liked. He related an experience with a high school football coach who was extremely hard on him and very critical of him. When he left for college,
the high school coach kept in touch with him and eventually became his mentor.

Mr. Milner discussed other influences in the community and the school setting that interfered with students' learning and learning potential, present and future. Specifically, he talked about distractions such as sex, drugs, fear of guns, auto thefts, and thefts of personal items such as clothing and jewelry. Mr. Maris had alluded to the same types of behavior in his school. Mr. Milner expressed amazement at how common these types of incidents had become in the eight years since he completed high school. He said, however, that he had not heard of as many incidents at his present high school as he had at some of the others.

Mr. Milner's past and current experience put him in a unique position to share his views on several aspects of college and the college transition process. Like Dr. Tanner, Jennifer's father, he believed that one of the ways to interest students in college and to aid them in the transition process was to expose them to college as early in the educational process as possible.

Take some of those students. Put them in a college classroom. Let them see what actually goes on. There is no mystery to it. Let them walk around campus. Let them see what a dorm looks like. Let them eat the cafeteria food, no matter how bad it is. Put them on the college campus, and let them decide.

Mr. Milner thought that college was such an important proposition that students should be informed enough to make their own decision about attending. "Parents can decide to send them," he said, "but parents can not make them study enough to stay if they don't want to be there."
Further, he believed that programs such as Upward Bound and STP were definitely needed and served very useful purposes. It was his feeling, however, that most, if not all, incoming freshmen could benefit from similar programs and experiences. Mr. Milner admitted that after working in and helping to develop the program at his university, his initial perception of the program's worth and function had changed. No longer did he believe that it was a program that brought students in, sent them to class, and gave them a little tutoring.

... It was a lot different. ... It prepared them as minority students to come back to a predominantly white school. ... I saw that it was an opportunity for some students to be the determining factor in, 'Am I going to be successful here?'

Mr. Milner, whose experience was with a four-year-residential college, maintained that students benefited from obvious ways such as tutoring, attending classes, and receiving assistance with tuition and book costs, but there were many other ways in which they were helped. For instance, students had the opportunity to work on personal and developmental issues such as homesickness, cultivating friendships and building support systems in a safe, non-threatening environment "where there is someone there to catch you in that initial period of time."

It was Mr. Milner's contention that even though college presented a totally "different world" for students, the college was rarely to be blamed when students failed; i.e., if the institution had in place those resources such as counseling, tutoring, mentoring, and advising that would help students if they took advantage of them. Students needed to seek out those services. As a
counselor, he said he tried, first, to make himself approachable so that students would seek out his services. Secondly, he said he tried to equip students to be advocates for themselves.

During the latter part of the interview, Mr. Milner talked briefly about his transition into the high school guidance counseling system. He said that he experienced some surprises. For instance, he said that he had not expected to deal with parents (and many of them unpleasant) to the extent that he did. "I expected it to be totally into counseling with students, period," he exclaimed. This was not the case. Just as this researcher found when visiting Mr. Maris' office for an interview, parents are very actively involved with the school personnel on behalf of their high-school-aged children.

Mr. Milner said that his other big surprise was in how politicized some aspects of the system were, such as the assignment of duties and the development of the curricula. Mr. Milner explained that he had quickly learned to choose his battles carefully and was not "running myself ragged from one brush fire to another." Overall, he deemed his experience so far in the high school system to be a very positive and informative one. "I've learned more in these last eight months or nine months than I learned in two years of graduate school because it's on-the-job training," he added.

**Contribution to the Study**

Mr. Milner's interview added depth to the study and to the researcher's knowledge of the transition process. He elaborated on some of the factors and processes which influence the transition process at the high school, as well as the college level, such as the roles and behaviors of parents, teachers, students,
and the educational system and on how these entities impact on and interact with each other. He addressed his experiences with some of the parents with whom he had dealt and his own experiences as he transitioned into college and later into the school system as a guidance counselor. Mr. Milner seemed to enjoy the opportunity to express some of his views, and admitted that at the same time that he was responding to the questions, he was developing some of his ideas on how he thought things might be improved.

To assess the information gained from Mr. Milner’s interview, it was compared and contrasted to that of the other informants, especially Mr. Maris’. Mr. Milner and Mr. Maris shared the following points of view in regard to factors that could affect the transition process:

1. The opportunity does exist at the high school level for students to obtain a good education, and serious students worked with their teachers and parents to ensure that it happened.

2. As much as possible, students should be encouraged to take and to remain in some of the more challenging classes. Too often, either the students, the parents or both decided that the student should bail out of such classes.

3. Many students wanted to attend colleges or universities. Others did not and should be encouraged to consider the community college or trade/technical schools.
4. Students who were considered non- or low-achievers were salvageable, and counselors could be role models to these students. Each felt a special obligation to try to reach these students, especially young black males.

Aside from the obvious differences in their ages and experience, the location and age of their respective high schools, and the composition of the student body (Mr. Maris' school was 30% minority; Mr. Milner's, 10%), the two counselors also differed in some of their perspectives. For instance, Mr. Milner felt that hiring more minorities to reflect the different groups represented in the student body would benefit the entire student body, as the students learned from and interacted with teachers and other professionals of other cultures, backgrounds, and ethnic groups. As Mr. Milner put it, "... European, white history, Roman Catholic -- that's not our whole world. We come from a mix of everywhere."

Mr. Milner thought that another way in which the system could be more responsive to the needs of minority groups in the system was by offering a more diverse curriculum. "You need multi-cultural classes, not just in Black History, but in all types of history . . . especially with the students we have here," he said. Offering such classes, he believed, would get the students' attention, keep them more interested in school, and help them "to move along a lot more smoother, even into college." This influenced Mr. Milner's own aspirations. One of his long-range goals was to return to graduate school to prepare for entering school administration where he thought he had a better chance to influence change in areas such as curriculum development.
Mr. Milner's views on the value of a diverse and relevant curriculum were similar to Dr. Rose's views. Dr. Rose had made the decision to offer the United States History II course with an emphasis on African-American history. He wanted his students to delve into the history of blacks in this country so that they could, in turn, learn more about themselves. His hunch proved to be correct. Students' evaluations of his classes were overwhelmingly favorable. They missed very few classes, and reported that they enjoyed participating in the class, interacting with their peers, learning more about themselves, and successfully meeting the challenge of a very demanding course.

Mr. Milner made a couple of other assertions which, he believed, would enhance the educational opportunities of minority students, especially African American students. For instance, he noticed that many African-American parents seemed concerned about their children's education. Yet, they either could not help their children, or they were not aware of resources that were available to them.

Another observation made by Mr. Milner was that many times the more capable African-American students did not associate with some of the other African-American students. They tended to "hang with" the white students. He noted that one of his ambitions was to look for ways of getting the higher-achieving black students to help and encourage those who were not.

Mr. Milner, a new counselor and a new employee of the school system, talked frankly and easily during the interview and was quite willing to share not only what he saw as good about the various components of his job, but also what he perceived as areas that needed improvement to make the system work more effectively for students.
Informant # 5
Mr. Byrd
High School Teacher
(Social Studies, Psychology)

Setting Up the Interview

The interview with Mr. Byrd took place in April 1996. It was conducted on a Friday evening at the researcher's home. Mr. Byrd, citing his very busy schedule, said that was the only time that he could be available.

Mr. Byrd, who was approximately 31 years old, taught social studies and advance placement psychology at a high school in the college's service area.

Mr. Byrd was asked for an interview for several reasons. The students in the study had not been very complimentary of their high school teachers. One complaint was that high school teachers tended to stick to the book, stay away from issues of controversy and diversity, and, in some instances, avoid teaching things that the students thought they should. Another complaint was that high school teachers did not seem to really care about their students, and, finally, one student in the study commented that her high school teachers just did not impress her as being as knowledgeable in their subject areas as college teachers. These issues, the students claimed, contributed to their lack of interest in some of their high school classes. One of the students who complained about the lack of exposure to certain topics was a graduate of Mr. Byrd's school. Mr. Byrd offered his perspective and talked about his experiences as a high school teacher.
A second area that Mr. Byrd was asked about was his observations on the main academic and social problems facing high school students. Finally, the researcher wondered how Mr. Byrd's age, youthful appearance and minority group status affected his relationship with his students; i.e., whether these factors were advantages or disadvantages when working with students.

Mr. Byrd conversed easily about his job and his observations as a teacher, especially as a teacher who was very involved in his school community in and outside of the classroom. He talked about strategies which he employed in the classroom to stimulate student learning and interaction and the role which outside activities played in his teaching career and in his relationships with his students. He had received several awards at his school.

The interview with Mr. Byrd lasted more than an hour and generated nearly 40 pages of transcription.
Summary of Interview

Mr. Byrd

When asked to tell the interviewer a little bit about himself, Mr. Byrd said that he had been teaching for eight years, which included time spent in two counties at the middle and high school levels. Mr. Byrd's education included community college attendance and transfer into a large state university where he majored in history and minored in psychology. Mr. Byrd said that he had chosen his university, an urban school, in part, because of the diversity of the student body. He said he had enjoyed his alma mater and, many times, shared information about his college experiences with his students.

Mr. Byrd's teaching assignment at the time of the interview included ninth- through twelfth-grade in history and psychology. The addition of advance placement psychology to his teaching load meant having more students who were working at the higher levels. Mr. Byrd commented that this broadened his horizons and gave him the opportunity to work with some of the top students in the school.

Aside from his teaching duties, Mr. Byrd said that he was very involved with students outside of the classroom. He coached football and soccer, and sponsored a major club at his high school. Mr. Byrd took a great deal of pride in his roles. He believed that not only did they help to strengthen the relationship between him and the students who participated in them, but that the benefits often carried over into the classroom.

I have noticed in the past that students that I coach tend to try to impress me in the classroom . . . . I noticed that students that I have from a coaching aspect, you know, they're having problems in one

168
person's class, they're fine in my class because they know that I don't tolerate that.

Mr. Byrd said that in addition to coaching students and working with them as a club sponsor, he also tried to support their efforts in other ways. He said that students often invited him to attend their various activities and that he would go whenever his schedule allowed. He also tried to attend as many community functions as possible. Mr. Byrd noted that he encouraged his students to become involved and he tried to do so as well.

Even though the outside activities were very important and contributed to strengthening the relationship between him and his students, Mr. Byrd noted that students needed first, to respect him as their teacher. He said he gained that respect through good classroom management. Mr. Byrd said his strategies for classroom management included: (a) setting rules and guidelines at the beginning of the year; (b) referring to students as Mr. and Miss; (c) teaching the importance of mutual respect and tolerance for others' opinions and beliefs; (d) giving students choices whenever possible; (e) working with parents, as well as other teachers, on students' behalf; and (f) letting students know that he was "running the ship."

The classroom environments described by the students in this study were very different from how Mr. Byrd described his classes. However, Mr. Byrd also stated that other teachers might have different approaches in their classrooms.

As a teacher, Mr. Byrd said that it was his job to prepare students for the next level (whether it was tenth-grade or college); teach them good study habits and listening skills; promote early involvement in school affairs; and
encourage responsibility, interaction, and respect for each other. To enhance his teaching and maintain student interest, Mr. Byrd said that he used the following ploys: (a) age- and grade-appropriate materials; (b) issues that were current, relevant, and applicable to the students' lives; (c) a question (often controversial) of the week for discussion; and (d) strategies such as videos, informative documentaries, and guest speakers.

When observed in his classroom, Dr. Rose also used a variety of strategies and teaching methods to work with his students.

Mr. Byrd said that he tried to stay abreast of what other teachers were doing in their classes, and this gave him added assurance that his students were on or above target. When principals and other administrators visited his classes, Mr. Byrd said that they often complimented him on encouraging his classes to discuss pertinent issues and on his students' behavior in class. When students misbehaved, he said that he did not hesitate to give them referrals to the principal's office.

When asked if he felt that other teachers were as successful as he was in the classroom, Mr. Byrd said that was not easy to answer, in that different teachers probably defined success differently. For instance, he said some teachers felt successful if they could keep their students quiet. For him, getting students to participate, interact with, and learn from each other were ways in which he measured success in the classroom. Mr. Byrd said that he would often walk around the school and observe other classrooms and teachers during his planning period.

...some of the classrooms, there is really no interaction and the students are just like robots. The teacher's at the overhead projector and
they are busily writing, and I don't think, personally, I don't think that's good because of the fact that, I think you need interaction. To that individual teacher, that's success because no one is talking.

Even though Mr. Byrd did not say that the majority of teachers conducted their classes that way, his observations were consistent with what the students in the study reported as what they had disliked about their high school classes.

Mr. Byrd was asked to comment on what he considered were the major academic and social problems facing his students. Among the academic problems that he named were a poor scholastic foundation, poor writing and language skills, procrastination on assignments, and complaints about the amount of school work. Social problems that he noted included too much socializing in class, smoking, alcohol, and drugs. Of the latter, Mr. Byrd thought that only a small percentage of the students were actually drug users.

He believed that parents played a major role in their students' school lives, and depending on the students' home life, they could be severely hampered or greatly motivated to succeed in school. These views were consistent with those of the other high school personnel who were interviewed.

Mr. Byrd was very sympathetic towards those who had difficult home situations. He said that it had become easier to understand why some students behaved so inappropriately when more was learned about the students' home life. Like the high school counselors in the study and Dr. Tanner, he believed that parental involvement in a child's education was crucial. He said he could tell the difference with students whose parents communicated their expectations to them, stressed the importance of good values, and gave them some leeway, but also set some parameters for them. He said that they tended to be more successful as students, had greater self-esteem, planned their time
well, were involved in activities, set goals, and spent less time slacking off in class.

Mr. Byrd was asked to comment about his observations of the African-American students whom he said comprised approximately 25% of the student body. He commented that the African-American students in his school ran the gamut from "top to lowest." He agreed with Mr. Maris (whose school had a similar percentage of African-American students) that black males seemed to be more influenced by the popular culture than other groups and seemed to want to pattern their behavior after rappers and others. Like Mr. Milner and Mr. Maris, he shared a special concern for this group, in that he felt that they had the potential to achieve academically, but they were certainly not living up to it.

Mr. Byrd seemed pleased that with the addition of upper level classes, he had the opportunity to work with more of the "top" black and minority students who were "into planning their futures, carrying on a decent conversation, and engaging in stimulating thought," rather than, as he put it, "running around trying to have babies and doing as little work as possible."

Mr. Byrd was asked if he thought that his young age, youthful appearance, and race were advantages or disadvantages in his teaching career and whether black students were more likely to gravitate towards him. He definitely believed that his age and youthful appearance were advantageous in regard to many students, but not necessarily black students. He said that many times students, especially athletes, would seek him out if they had problems or issues to discuss. He thought this was because they felt they could relate to him, sometimes better than to the guidance counselors, who
tended to be older. With regard to race, he said it really depended on the student. He said that because of his standards, which included no pants hanging below the waistline, and no use of unintelligible language, other students tended not to approach him in the sense of a confidant or advisor.

Finally, Mr. Byrd was asked to comment on the student's assertion that college teachers seemed to know more than their high school counterparts and that they also tended to shy away from any issues that were of a controversial nature. He offered his rationale for why a student would feel that a college teacher was more knowledgeable. He said that he understood that perception and thought that several things contributed to it. First, college teachers had to have a Master's degree and therefore, should logically be more knowledgeable. Further, he thought that they tended to spend more time teaching in a single discipline, had more time for reading and research, and did not have to perform peripheral jobs, such as lunch and bus duty. He thought that high school teachers were competent in their subjects, and even though they had fewer opportunities to explore their areas and could not spend a whole year on a single topic, many of them could "go toe to toe" with college faculty and in fact, it could be that high school teachers enjoyed an advantage because they were required to have a broader base and have knowledge in several disciplines.

The students in the study said that high school teachers tended to stay away from controversial topics. To a degree, he agreed with the students. Time constraints and the amount of material that needed to be covered were possible reasons, he said. None-the-less, Mr. Byrd was proud of his record of incorporating current and controversial topics and issues into his classes. He
said he enjoyed observing how students' ideas and arguments showed greater development and awareness over time. Examples of his questions included:

Should the Confederate flag be flown on public buildings?
Should there be a Black History Month?
Should smoking be outlawed?
What is love? Hate?

Mr. Byrd said that students were eager to discuss these issues, and he used them as a way to get students to become involved in their classes, form opinions on issues that affected their lives, assure students that each ones opinion was valued, teach tolerance, and encourage student interaction.

Contribution to the Study

Mr. Byrd talked about his style and approach to working with his students. He offered his perceptions of others involved in the educational system. His observations added to the awareness of what the high schools, parents, teachers and others were or were not adding or could add to the students' experience with regard to the transition process.

Students in the study had negative views of parts of their high school experiences. In some instances, Mr. Byrd agreed with their assertions. In others, he disagreed or at least offered a rationale. For instance, two of the students, Roxanne and Jennifer, said that their high school peers were disruptive and immature. Mr. Byrd and the two high school counselors said this was true of some, but not the majority of their students.
Another student commented that the high school teachers did not seem to care about the students. Mr. Byrd, on the contrary, cited instances of his involvement with his students at school and in community activities.

Maria, Roxanne, Jennifer, and Denise said that their teachers avoided certain areas and topics in high school. They felt surprised, shocked, and uninformed when some of those topics were introduced in college. Mr. Byrd, on the other hand, said that he regularly introduced current topics in his classes, and in many instances, saw his students' perspectives change, grow, and develop as he had them from year-to-year. Mr. Byrd's approach to working with his students was similar to those aspects of the STP which students reported they had enjoyed the most; i.e., stimulating, relevant discussion led by a teacher who respected their opinions, listened to them, and helped them to listen to each other.

Mr. Byrd's high school was similar in population, location and demographics to Mr. Maris' high school. They shared the perception that it was disheartening to see students who were very capable, but who were not living up to their potential. Both talked about black male students who seemed to be more influenced by some of the less savory elements of the popular culture. Mr. Byrd and Mr. Maris disagreed with Mr. Milner on what they called, "getting down on the student's level." For instance, Mr. Byrd said that students could not enter his class with their pants below their waists and toothpicks in their mouths. Mr. Milner, however, said that there were times when he felt that he could best reach a student by "getting on the student's level" and that he felt comfortable doing that.
Mr. Byrd was very adamant in his assertion that the student's home life and environment were most important in the student's academic and social adjustment to school. The students who seemed most well-adjusted were the ones whose parents took an active interest in their schooling and who set certain values for them at home. In this, he, Mr. Milner, and Dr. Tanner were in agreement.

Finally, Mr. Byrd thought of himself as a very successful teacher and had received feedback from students, parents, and colleagues to that effect. He provided information about aspects of his work, such as his classroom management techniques, teaching tools and strategies, and his personal beliefs of what he thought was important when working with "young adults." His views and observations triangulated well with other study participants, and he added insight into ways that the various components of the system may work to enhance the chances that students will have a smoother transition into college.
Chapter V - Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the high school-to-college transition process as perceived by minority students who had transitioned into a predominantly white, suburban community college. The five students who participated in the study entered the college by way of a summer transition bridge program aimed at improving the minority recruitment and retention rate at the campus.

The students who participated in the study identified people, events, happenings, and other factors in their lives that impacted on their transitional experiences. Others who knew the students or who otherwise had knowledge of the transition process were also interviewed for the study. These individuals, or informants, added depth to the study by confirming, contrasting, or adding to certain assertions made by the students. The informants included a college professor who had taught the students in the summer program, a parent, two high school counselors, and a high school teacher.

Summary of the Chapters

Chapter I of this study introduced the college transition process. It was introduced in the context of a bigger issue: minority student retention in predominantly white institutions of higher learning. The purpose and significance of the study were also discussed.
A review of the literature relevant to the historical and theoretical background of college student retention was presented in Chapter II. Studies were cited that supported or challenged the major college retention theories.

The participants of the study were introduced in Chapter III, along with an elaboration of the methods used to conduct the study.

Chapter IV presented findings from the data obtained from the students. Also included were findings from informants who knew the students or who were knowledgeable of the transition process.

Finally, Chapter V offers a discussion of the findings and some implications of those findings, and suggests directions for future research.
Discussion of the Findings

This study was guided by an effort to gain greater insight into the high school-to-college transition process, particularly as it was experienced by minority students who had transitioned into a predominantly white, suburban community college. The researcher was interested in those factors and influences that the transitioning students perceived as helpful to them in that process, as well as the factors and influences that impeded or served as barriers to the process.

A case study approach was used to study the phenomena. This approach allowed the students not only to identify, but also to discuss those elements of their transition processes that were significant to them. While the findings of the study apply only to the participants and conditions of this study, they are, in part, consistent with findings generated by theorists (Abrahamowicz, 1988; Astin, 1975; Levin & Levin, 1991; Pounds, 1987; Sedlacek, 1983; Tinto, 1975, 1987; Weaver & Cottrell, 1988) who have studied the college student retention process.

Levin and Levin (1991) conducted a critical examination of the published studies on academic retention programs for at-risk minority college students. Their intent was to identify predictors of college student retention. The factors which they identified generally fell into two major categories: pre-college and at-college factors. That approach proved useful in analyzing the data from the current study as well.

As the current study progressed, it became increasingly clear that the process of transitioning into college involved many people and factors which
had come to bear on the students well in advance of their actual entrance into college. Other factors and influences occurred within the context of the college environment. These pre- and post-enrollment factors helped to determine the nature of the students' college experience and tended to revolve around their family members, college professors, other students, and their feelings and beliefs.

**Pre-Enrollment Factors Affecting the High School-to-College Transition**

**Student Characteristics**

Levin and Levin's (1991) critique of published studies on minority student retention identified two sets of pre-enrollment factors impacting on retention -- student characteristics and family characteristics. Six student characteristics were identified: (a) academic preparation, (b) ability to adapt to a new environment, (c) commitment to individual goals, (d) perceived progress toward educational goals, (e) willingness to seek assistance, (f) self-confidence, and (g) reasons for pursuing a college degree.

The purpose of the current study was not to support, refute, or disprove the Levin and Levin (1991) study of the factors effecting student retention. Its purpose was to identify those factors and elements that the students in the study perceived as being influential in their transition processes. However, many of the factors that were discussed in the Levin and Levin (1991) study were named or alluded to by the students in the current study. This provided a useful framework for presenting and discussing the elements of this study. In regard to academic preparation, for example, the students in the current
study claimed different degrees of qualifications. For at least two of the students, the ability to succeed academically was never in question. Conversely, at least two others had not done well in high school. They had entered college with very little confidence in their academic abilities. With a support system in place that included their college peers, teachers, counselors, tutoring, advising, encouragement from parents, and other support services, each was able to prove to herself that she could perform at the college level.

Levin and Levin (1991) defined adaptability as the ability to adjust to a new environment and a different value system, as might be the case of minority students enrolling in a predominantly white college system. In this study, this predictor seemed to have less to do with the racial composition of the college than it did with other demands of the system, such as getting used to the opportunity for greater self-expression in the college environment, working in groups, being able to discuss controversial topics that were avoided in high school, and coping with unpopular decisions made by the college administrators. One student, who was the only Hispanic student in her class, reported that she adjusted well because everyone was supportive.

The students also commented that college students acted more maturely and were, in turn, treated that way. The students reported that they felt comfortable in their classes, and this contributed to their adjustment to college.

The commitment to educational goals was a bigger factor for some than for others. For instance, one student said that college had more meaning for her after she declared her major. At the other end of the continuum, one of the students who was close to completing her Associate's degree was still uncertain about her major. Yet, she was doing well academically and making
plans for transferring to a four-year college. Her commitment, she said, was to learning and keeping her mind active. At least four of the five students expressed a commitment to some kind of goal related to their education. However, that goal might have been to achieve a degree in a certain field, learn for the sake of learning, acquire the skills necessary to contribute to society in a meaningful way, or just to prove that college was academically survivable.

The willingness to seek academic assistance was evident in this study. The interviewees seemed fairly comfortable with asking for assistance in several areas. These areas ran the gamut from the student who made regular visits to the counseling office just to chat and to receive reassurance that the counselors were there for her, to the student who was experiencing difficulty in her math class after a period of absence due to illness and needed the counselor's advice on how to approach her teacher and on how to secure a tutor. Other students in the study reported that they had visited the counselors to get a tutor or to get information on transferring to another college. At any rate, it was apparent that these students had "connected" with members of the system whom they believed could assist them in various ways.

As mentioned previously, those students who said that they were uncertain of whether they could succeed academically reported that their self-confidence escalated when they did well, especially in the supportive environment of the summer program. Upon entering college, a couple of students were anxious about their ability to fit in and feel comfortable with the other students. Their personalities were such that they found it difficult to initiate conversations and contacts with others. Others had doubts about their academic abilities because they had performed poorly in high school. When
these students received good grades on tests and assignments, received positive feedback when they voiced their opinions, and allowed themselves to feel comfortable in their groups, they reported that their sense of confidence and self-esteem increased. It appeared that the summer program, in particular, gave students the opportunity to begin to work on those areas, social or academic, which were most troublesome to them.

The final student characteristic, reason for pursuing a college degree, was expressed in various ways by the subjects. This indicator was introduced to the study by a student who was a first-generation college student. The pressure of doing well had a negative and a positive impact on her. She was proud to be the first in her family to attend college, but the pressure of trying to succeed created a great deal of anxiety.

Another student said that she was attending college because she knew that she wanted to make something of her life. Further, she was expected to do so by her parents. Her brother had done very well in high school and in college. Part of her pursuit seemed to be to prove to herself and her parents that she could be successful in college, also.

The interviewee who seemed most self-assured and focused in her reasons for pursuing a college degree was altruistic in her motivation. Her goal in life was to help others through practicing medicine.

One interviewee was not as clearly focused on her reasons for attending college. Yet, her twin sister's influence, the influence of her peers, and her desire to keep an active mind seemed to motivate her in the pursuit of a college degree.
Even though each of the participants seemed to feel that a college degree was important, each had her own reason(s) for being there.

One pre-enrollment factor that figured prominently in the current study but was not discussed in the Levin and Levin (1991) report was the effect of peer influence, particularly in the pre-college enrollment phase. Three of the students reported that they were motivated into action, in part, by their peers. For instance, one of the students said that she did not get serious about her studies in high school until she saw her peers making plans to attend college. Another participant said she did the summer program only after a friend agreed to do it with her. The fifth was upset when her peers were making plans to go away to college and her family could not even afford to send her to the community college. Seeing her friends go to college and do other things while she had to go to work everyday was an incentive for her to continue to work for a year in order to afford school.

The effect of peer influence served as a major motivating force, particularly at the high school level, to encourage students to take action toward attending college.

Family Characteristics

Three family characteristics, socio-economic status, level of education, and parents' expectations and influence, were found in the Levin and Levin (1991) study to be highly correlated with college student retention. These factors were found in this study as well, and in some instances, may have
played a bigger role in some of the students' college plans than the student characteristics discussed previously.

Parents' socio-economic status figured most prominently in the college pursuits of the twins, whose parents had separated. Their family's situation was such that the twins had to delay their entry into college, even though they were willing and ready to continue their education. However, the family's emotional and, particularly, financial status, precluded them from attending college immediately after high school. Still, their determination to attend college seemed as great as the two students whose families seemed more financially stable, and they eventually found a way around their financial obstacles.

The educational backgrounds of the students' families varied also. Of the five students interviewed, three indicated that they were first-generation college students. At the other end of the continuum, one student's father had attained a doctoral degree, and her brother, a bachelor's degree. Her mother had also completed some college courses. Pounds (1987) noted that second-generation students may experience fewer adjustment and transition problems than their first-generation peers.

Some of the adjustment problems described by students in this study seemed to stem as much from their individual personalities and educational backgrounds as from their status as first- or second-generation college students. Those students who described themselves as shy or reserved, for instance, reported feeling more anxious at the beginning of their college career and those who were concerned about their academic abilities, even if they
were second-generation students, also reported feeling very anxious until they proved that they could survive college. Other adjustment problems named by the students seemed common among many college students. These included factors such as time management, exposure to new subject matter, choosing classes and teachers, and coping with the amount of work required in college classes.

The participants also talked about their parents' expectations of and influences on them, and this seemed to affect them in many ways. Instances of this included the pressure of being "looked up to" by family members who had never attended college, or being expected to perform as well as a high achieving sibling.

The students in the study, whether or not they were in in-tact families, tended to name one parent who seemed to have more influence on them. In the case of the twins, for instance, their mother's situation played a major role in when and where they attended college or planned to attend in the future. Another student said that both her parents were great, but that she tended to listen to her father more because he seemed to know so much.

**Post-Enrollment Factors Affecting the High School-to-College Transition**

Levin and Levin's (1991) analysis of published college retention studies concluded that the students' at-college experience was even more important than the pre-college experience. Their analysis identified the following factors as being highly correlated with college student persistence: (a) the living environment, (b) the classroom experience, (c) academic advising, (d) extra-
curricular activities, (e) financial support, and (f) faculty involvement. Again, in the current study all of these factors, to some degree, were identified as having a role in the students' transition and acclimation to the college environment. However, it was not within the purview of the current study to determine which of these or other factors were most influential to the students in the transition process.

Of the six measures identified by the Levins, faculty involvement was determined to be the most significant post-enrollment factor contributing to college student persistence and satisfaction with college. While it could not be determined whether or not it was the most important factor for the students in this study, the students left little doubt that faculty involvement was important to them, particularly during the summer program where faculty contact and involvement was an integral part of the program.

With few exceptions, the students gave overwhelmingly positive assessments of their contact with faculty. According to Astin (1975), the more positive experiences the student had, the more likely were the chances that the student would persist, with the opposite being true for negative experiences. The students in this study named a number of faculty-related factors which impacted positively on their transition into college. They said that faculty: (a) set the tone for their classes; (b) made students feel comfortable in their classes; (c) were helpful; (d) introduced new, interesting, and even controversial topics in the classroom; (e) made learning relevant and fun; (f) used a variety of teaching methods and strategies such as small groups, videos, guest speakers, computers, classroom discussion, interesting reading assignments; (g) used humor in teaching, and (h) participated in extra-
curricular activities with them. These factors affected the academic, as well as the students' social integration into college and they were consistent with Weaver and Cottrell's (1988) findings of what students identified as factors which motivated them in the classroom.

The students named several negative factors with regard to their experience with their teachers. Lack of interest in the reading requirements in some classes, monotonous classroom activities, irritability on the part of the teacher, and being assigned a number rather than using names were among those factors.

Students in this study also commented on their living arrangements. Even though the community college is non-residential, students must live somewhere. All of the students in this study lived at home. Three were in single parent homes and two in intact families. The living environment was important in many ways, some of them conflicting. For instance, living at home for one student meant realizing the security of being under the care and supervision of her parents. At the same time, she was anxious to leave to see how well she could do at a four-year residential college away from the watchful eyes of her parents. She had yet to fully experience Tinto's (1987) transition stage of separation.

Another student had conflicting feelings about whether she should remain at home with her mother or transfer to a residential college. Living at home offered her a measure of emotional security, but she was looking forward to having "the college experience." These feelings were prevalent at the time that the student finished high school. They resurfaced when she was ready to transfer to a residential college.
All of the students reported that they had enjoyed positive classroom experiences. In addition to the interactions with faculty reported earlier, making new friends and forming strong bonds with the members of their groups also contributed to the positive nature of their classroom experiences. This was particularly true during the STP phase of their transition process.

Two of the students likened the end of the summer program to the break up of a family. This sentiment was voiced often in regard to the STP classes where the students took classes as an intact group and spent many hours together during the six weeks of the program.

Academic advising and visits to the counseling office seemed important to all of the students in the study at some point, whether it was to seek encouragement and reassurance, talk about the fear of failing a class, seek transfer information or tutorial assistance. What seemed most important to the students was that they knew someone to whom they could go if they needed assistance.

Opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities do exist at the community college. However, factors such as the non-residential nature of the campus, student demographics, and students' financial status often serve as barriers to participation. Other factors such as the student's class schedule and the student's personality characteristics; i.e., shy, reserved, and outgoing were also identified. These factors affected whether or not the student sought or would be likely to seek participation in extra-curricular activities.
Tinto (1975, 1987) and Astin (1975) theorized that active involvement in school and school activities was a major factor in college student retention. This assertion was not true for all the students in this study. Two of the students in the study were in their first semesters following the STP. The more outgoing of the two said that she was enjoying her study groups and meetings with students on and off campus. The student who described herself as shy and reserved did not indicate that she was involved in any activities beyond her classes.

The experiences of other students in the study were also counter to the Tinto and Astin theories. One student was a prime example. She was very successful as a student and was committed to her educational and career goals. However, her campus involvement was minimal because her free time was spent working two jobs to earn money for school and family expenses. Another student did not have financial concerns, but her on-campus activity was minimal by choice. Doing well in her classes was her priority, and she did not wish to be distracted by too many friends as she had been in high school. This measure was not a strong indicator of college persistence for the students in this study.

The last factor, financial support, figured very prominently in the current study. It probably had the greatest bearing on the college transition of the twins. Financial support or the lack thereof, served as a motivating factor for them and even though it meant delaying their college aspirations, it did not mean forgetting about them.
One student was at the opposite end of the continuum. Money to attend college was no obstacle for her. In fact, she reported that she had turned down a scholarship to a small private Christian college because she did not care for the very vocal president of the institution. While finances constitute an important part of the college persistence mosaic, in the current study having low finances did not appear to deter to college persistence. Neither did having stable finances appear to lessen the concern for other factors, such as academic achievement and feeling comfortable in the college.

*An Observation on Pre- and At-college Transition Factors*

All of the students interviewed, appeared to be committed to the pursuit of their college education. Many factors, internal and external to the students, that have already been discussed in this study impacted on their experiences. One factor, however, seemed to be present for all the students. That factor was that each student appeared to have decided for herself that she would pursue a college education. The father who was interviewed for the study alluded to this. According to him, his daughter had everything that she needed to do well in school. Yet, she performed poorly. At some point, her attitude about school changed. The student said the change came in twelfth grade when she saw all her friends getting ready for college and when she realized that she wanted to make something of her life. The difference was that she, not her parents or anyone else, had decided that she was going to do something about her educational future.

One of the high school guidance counselors also talked about the importance of students deciding for themselves to take advantage of the
opportunities around them. Even though he and the parent who was interviewed noted that teachers, parents, and others were important to student success, both believed that it was ultimately up to the student to decide whether or not to succeed at school or whatever the endeavor. For instance, one of the participants, while in high school, decided that she needed to make a change to improve herself and her situation. She lost weight, cut her hair, and began to do better in school. Whether her decision was due to sibling rivalry or something else, she made the decision and it worked for her. For these students, making and putting their decisions into action represented major turning points for them.

Other students also made decisions which proved important to their college careers, but they apparently needed more urging and goading before taking action. One student decided to begin school in the summer because her friend had talked her into it, and another said that it was her mother who nagged her into deciding to do the summer program. From their accounts, neither would have decided to do the program on her own. At any rate, the decisions were made and followed through on. An interesting follow-up to the current study would be to investigate the decision-making skills and processes of persisters and non-persisters.
Relationship of Findings to Major College Retention Theories

Few studies related to college retention neglect to reference the theories of Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987) and Alexander Astin (1975). Tinto's (1975) earlier work suggested that background and family issues were important to student retention, but the student's academic and social integration into the campus/college community took precedence. In a later work, Tinto (1987) added that the decision to remain in college was influenced by the dynamics of the social and intellectual environment of the campus, acknowledging that college student retention is a shared responsibility involving the student and the institution.

The current study, in part, supported Tinto's earlier assertions of academic and social integration. When interviewed, each student was making satisfactory academic progress. Each had completed the summer program and passed all courses taken. Even the students who had entered college with serious reservations about their academic abilities were feeling that they could succeed. Their grade point averages were at a respectable level, and they reported that they were aware of and used available services such as tutoring and academic advising.

Social integration into the campus community did not appear to be a major concern for the students in this study, particularly after they had completed the summer program. Researchers such as William and Creamer (1988) and Solon (1993) have theorized that the findings of studies of college student retention conducted at four-year-colleges may not always apply to community college students. In regard to social integration, many community college students find few reasons to remain on campus after classes are over.
Therefore, the amount and kind of social interaction reported by the students in this study varied. Only one student reported much enthusiasm for socializing with other students on campus. The students were, however, united in one aspect of their socialization. That aspect was the friendships and bonds established during the summer program. The closeness of the summer groups contributed to creating a positive first experience of college for the students.

Even though several of the students had been attending the college for a period of several semesters, they were engaged in campus and other social type activities only on a limited basis. Neither of the students indicated that it was because she did not feel welcome or comfortable doing so. They had other reasons such as work, having academics as a number one priority, going home to rest between classes, or just describing themselves as shy or reserved.

Tinto (1987) also theorized that college students go through a stage-wise transitional process that is similar to the "rites of passage" surrounding certain important events in many cultures. He applied this theory to the entrance of students into college. Parts of this theory seemed more relevant to the students in this study than others. For example, the first stage, separation, involved students leaving home, their community, their high school friends, and many of the other facets of life that were familiar to them. All of the students in the current study lived at home, making it difficult for them to meet the requirements of that stage, even though some of them were certainly looking forward to venturing out by way of transferring to a four year college away from the home community.
All of the students, however, seemed to be making satisfactory progress in the transition stage. They were learning how to maneuver and negotiate their way through the community college system and how to take advantage of and utilize its resources. They seemed comfortable in and out of their classes.

Tinto's last stage, incorporation, was more evident in terms of the students' commitment to getting an education and achieving whatever goals they had set for themselves, such as getting good grades, preparing to transfer to a four-year-college, or graduating from college to enter a chosen profession.

Summary

One of the high school guidance counselors noted that preparation for the high school-to-college transition began well in advance of the actual transition. Support for that assertion was found in the current study. The study helped to identify some of those people, events, and processes that had an impact or played instrumental roles in the students' overall transition process. These are summarized below.

People who had impact:

1. Teachers who
   - taught classes that were interesting to the students
   - presented course content relevant to the students' lives
   - empathized with their students
   - respected their students' opinions and abilities
   - presented and discussed controversial topics
   - spent time outside of the classroom with their students
- used humor in their classes
- indicated to their students that they cared about them
- gave the impression that they knew a lot about their subjects

2. Counselors who
- were perceived as helpful in regard to advising students
- were perceived as unhelpful, in general
- provided an open door and a listening ear for their students
- related well to their students

3. Parents who
- had certain expectations of their children
- set good examples for their children
- did not set a good example for their children
- supported their students financially
- did not support their students financially
- took an active role in their children's education
- had strong emotional ties to their children and vice versa
- did and parents who did not have a college education

4. Siblings who
- did or did not attend college
- were supportive of each other
- competed with each other at home and outside of their homes
- were much older than the students
- were successful

5. Peers who
- were preparing to attend college near home and away from home
- were friendly, supportive, accepting, and encouraging of each other
- shared their feelings and anxieties
- shared their diverse views and opinions
- were distracting

Events named by the students that had impact:
- participating in the STP
- being first in the family to attend college
- performing poorly in high school
- being rejected by the college(s) of choice
- experiencing family breakups and separations
- working to afford to attend college
- becoming active in religious community

Processes that had impact:
- arriving at and making decisions
- being unable to focus on school-related issues
- making friends on campus
- overcoming various anxieties (in and outside of school)
- dealing with real and impending separations
- coping with involved and uninvolved parents
- coping with disappointments/resentment

**Implications for College and Other Personnel**

Society has a vested interest in whether or not students succeed in college. Students who persist and who are successful in college feel better about themselves and, in the long run, do better economically (Fechter, 1993; Meisenheimer, 1990). The idea, therefore, is to identify those factors, internal and external to students, that will help to increase their chances of remaining in college until degree completion. Once factors have been identified, appropriate parties may plan and implement measures that will strengthen, modify, or maintain effective retention efforts and eliminate those that are not.

Findings from this study suggested that the high school-to-college transition process is complex, individualistic, and cumulative in nature. Individuals, events, processes, and other factors were identified that impacted on the students' decision to enter and remain in college.

Although the students' motivations and desires were the ultimate determinants of their decisions to remain in college, the people in their lives, on and off campus, were major influences. The students involved in the study, for instance, were consistent in their perceptions that the people with whom they worked during their summer transition experience were knowledgeable, caring, approachable, challenging, and enthusiastic about their duties. Colleges that are interested in retaining students, particularly those students who are capable, but who may enter the college lacking in some requisite social, academic, or personal development skills, may want to be certain that their best, most qualified, student-oriented counselors, teachers, and other
personnel are assigned to work with those students. The students' responses regarding their high school experiences indicated that the same practice would be beneficial to students at that level.

A serendipitous finding of the study was that the students' high school peers were a powerful force in helping them to focus on and prepare for college. When the students saw their peers being admitted to college and preparing to leave home, they began to think more seriously about their futures and the role that education would play in them. The task for counselors, teachers, and parents would be to create many opportunities for students at all grade levels to gain exposure to the college setting. This could be accomplished through campus visits and tours and through such efforts as adopt-a-school, concurrent admissions, upward bound, and other programs. Then, when high-risk students reach college entrance age and are influenced by their peers who are getting ready for college, college would be less of a mystery to them, and they might be more likely and better equipped to accept the college challenge.

The students also reported that their parents had a major impact on their transition experiences. Parents' expectations, support (financial and emotional), and encouragement were named as factors by the students. One of the high school counselors in the study noted that the parents of his black students seemed concerned about them, but did not always seem to know how to help them. One possible solution might be parent support groups led by counselors and teachers who could help parents to build skills and plan strategies that would help them to better assist their children. For instance, parents might recognize that their child is struggling academically.
Counselors and teachers could acquaint the parents with sources of affordable tutoring or other aids such as computer software programs which might help the child. Another instance might involve parents who cannot communicate with a troubled child. Counselors could assist with relationship-building and communication skills. Parents might feel more secure, less intimidated, and more likely to participate in such groups if, initially, they were held in places more familiar to them, such as community halls, churches, or local establishments that the parents frequent.

The students in this study named their high school and college counselors and teachers and their peers, parents, and siblings as being instrumental in their college transition processes. Another implication from the findings of this study was the need for these groups of individuals to begin to talk to each other and to exchange information with each other that would help students to make a better adjustment to school and college.

According to Egan and Cowan (1979), people who are members of systems effect and are effected by each other. The students in this study were members of various systems, including their families, high schools, and the college. Members of these systems possessed knowledge about the students and/or about the transition process that may have been beneficial to helping them to make an easier, more informed transition to college. For example, the students in the study reported that they were awed and challenged by the opportunity to express and substantiate their views on diverse issues in their college classes. Teachers who have found this to be a successful way of engaging students in meaningful discussion in their classes could share their approaches with other teachers.
The parent who was interviewed talked about his expectations of his children and about the approach that he and his wife had employed in raising their children. Other parents might find aspects their parenting approach to be useful. The high school teacher noted that he made a special effort to support his students outside of the classroom by attending their activities, such as sports and other events. This helped him to gain their attention and respect in the classroom. This strategy and others that he employed might prove beneficial to other teachers.

Other individuals noted issues, concerns, ideas, and strategies that positively or negatively affected transitioning students. Yet, no conduit or medium was available through which they could share their knowledge and experiences. A possible solution would be to establish a means whereby these individuals could come together on a periodic basis to discuss and exchange information on what seemed to work or not work for them. Students at all levels, elementary to high school, could participate in or be a part of such a forum.

These efforts could be spearheaded and organized by counselors. Counselors serve as advocates for their students, and they are in a unique position to work with all members of their school communities, including students, parents, teachers, and administrators. They possess good communication skills, as well as the skills necessary to helping others to communicate within and between groups. Counselors at the different levels of the educational system could begin the process by talking with each other and exploring ways to include other individuals and groups in their dialogue.
Finally, the students in the study were the real determiners of whether or not they would succeed in school. According to Munn, Fernald, and Fernald (1974), as people grow and develop, they acquire certain interests, aspirations, and life goals, some of which they persistently pursue, in spite of distractions and frustrations. The students in the study had experienced obstacles which ranged from poor grades, low self-esteem, and low self-confidence, to receiving little or no help with college finances. In spite of these obstacles, each had determined that she wanted a college education, and at the time of the study, was engaged in working toward that goal. The goal of achieving a college education, though influenced by many external factors, had taken on an intrinsic value for the students. For example, one student who had done poorly in high school said that she had decided to attend college when she realized that she wanted to make something of her life. Another reported that her interest in helping others was part of her motivation for attending college. With many members of the community working together to improve the educational process, the likelihood of these and other students reaching their goals might be increased.

**Implications for Counselors**

The students who participated in this study entered the community college by way of a summer transition program (STP) for minority students. Counselor involvement was the "glue" that held the program together during its five years of existence at the campus.

Counselors were involved in all aspects of the program. Pre-program activities included writing the grant to secure funding, planning program
activities, interviewing and recommending faculty to teach in the program, developing a curriculum for the college survival course, marketing the program, and recruiting students. Counselors were also responsible for meeting with parents and explaining the mission of the program to them; arranging for the students to be tested in reading, writing, and mathematical skills; interpreting test results; registering students; and devising voucher systems for tuition and book payments.

Once students were enrolled in the program, the counselors' duties shifted to tasks such as academic advising, facilitating the college survival course, serving in an advisory capacity to faculty, securing and providing tutorial services, providing career exploration and development activities, providing counseling appropriate to the students' personal concerns and developmental level, and other services intended to help students adjust to the college environment.

After the conclusion of the program, counselors were responsible for securing feedback from the students, providing evaluative information to the state for continued funding, and continuing to provide advising and counseling services to students who persisted at the campus.

While these duties and responsibilities were part of the STP, they, for the most part, constitute what is generally expected of counselors at the community college in this study. The implications for counselors are many and varied. Some are discussed below:

1. Programs are formally organized ways of helping people to achieve their goals (Posavac & Carey, 1989). Counselors are often responsible for planning, establishing, coordinating, and evaluating programs, such
as the STP, tutorial, mentoring, volunteer, career development, and other programs which relate to the development of students. Many counselors have very little training and/or experience in program development. Important program elements such as assessing needs, planning program objectives, delivery systems, methods of intervention, and program evaluations should not be left to trial, error, and chance. Counselors who are already in the field should impel their organizations to provide opportunities and funding for professional development in this area. New counselors who are currently in training programs should include course work in program development in their program of study.

2. The students in the study said that they felt comfortable in their classes and on the campus. Researchers (Fleming, 1984; Giles-Gee, 1989; Kemp, 1990; Levin & Levin, 1991) noted that minority students attending predominantly white institutions, frequently report feelings of alienation rather than a sense of belonging.

The students in this study consistently said that their teachers and counselors set the tone and in general, contributed to their sense of belonging and well-being. Students would no doubt benefit from this kind of support and encouragement far beyond the summer program. This could be accomplished, in part, through regularly scheduled counselor-led group sessions where students could discuss their concerns, problem solve troublesome issues, and find mutual support among their peers. Counselors could also be instrumental in the
planning and implementation of campus-wide programs aimed at creating certain sensitivities and awarenesses that will assist all campus personnel in working with students of diverse needs, cultures, and backgrounds.

3. Counselors in the field should press for greater collaboration and corroboration with faculty and administrators who make decisions that effect students. For instance, the decision to offer the students in the program a less challenging English course based on their test scores was done in spite of the counselors' objections. The decision did little to enhance the students' esteem and confidence in their abilities.

Had the test been used as an instrument for the teacher to provide an appropriate starting place for instruction, determine course content, and establish effective teaching strategies, the feelings of betrayal and lack of trust of the administration and the teacher which the students reported might have been eliminated. The students did not have the opportunity to prove that they could master the course, and the teacher, who was not involved in the decision, was possibly robbed of the chance to exhibit her superior teaching ability.

4. When students "connect" with persons on campus, their chances of remaining in school are enhanced. While counselors might have played an integral role in the students' entrance and adjustment to college, it cannot be claimed that the student-counselor relationship was the strongest or the most influential bond formed in any given student's
adjustment. In some instances, the students "connected" with the faculty person. Over a period of several weeks, the students in the summer programs bonded strongly with each other.

These bonds helped the students to take ownership of the program, develop as a cohesive group, and build a competitive, but cooperative spirit among themselves. The counselors contributed to the positive tone and atmosphere which evolved during the course of the program by spending time with the students in and outside of the classroom, observing students to see which ones needed more assistance in acclimating to the college environment, and devising activities intended to build cohesiveness. The counselors served a facilitative role in the students' adjustment.

The students who remained in the system following the summer program were encouraged to become involved in clubs and other activities at the campus which could contribute to their sense of fitting in at the campus and taking charge of their educational interests. However, the students would have benefited from counselor-led support groups or even informal "rap" sessions after the summer program.

5. After the summer program, the students joined the larger student body, and the counselor assigned to the program resumed regular duties. This created an unfair situation for the students and the counselor. Wherein, the students still had access to the counselor and counseling services, they had to wait their turn just as other students
did. In essence, the students went from a period of showered attention to being thrown into the fray with everyone else.

A more equitable institutional response would have been to provide the resources necessary for the counselor to continue a structured program for the students, at least through their first year. This would have provided the means for comprehensive follow-up services and activities, thorough evaluation procedures, and better feedback for improving future programs. The lack of this provision as a part of the grant constituted a major omission.

6. The summer program provided a positive and worthwhile experience for the students who participated in it. It is likely that similar programs would benefit other students (irrespective of race or cultural background) with similar academic, personal, and social concerns upon entering college. Counselors are in a unique position to identify and work with these students. Further, a more inclusive program might have a broader support base at the campus level, since programs that target resources for specific groups tend to be more successful if they enjoy the support of administrators and other campus personnel.

Limitations to the Study

The researcher acknowledges the following limitations to this study:

1. Only students who had persisted after the summer program were included in the study. The researcher was interested in who and what
influenced their transition process. This was accomplished to a certain degree. However, the inclusion of non-persisters could have added other important dimensions to the study. For instance, counselors, faculty, and future program coordinators would want to know which elements of the program, classes, or overall operation did or did not work for students who did not return to college.

2. The participants in this study constituted a sample of convenience. They had persisted at the campus, and they were willing to share their experiences. Only females were interviewed. Just as adding non-persisters to the study would have added another perspective, adding male students would have broadened the potential for knowledge regarding the transition process.

3. Case study research involves getting to know the case well. This study was conducted from the perspective of the student. Interviewing others such as parents, siblings, friends, and former teachers who had direct, sustained contact with each of the participants could have added to the knowledge about each student or case and thereby, about the transition process.

**Implications for Future Study**

Should a researcher devise a tool, measurement, or instrument that would allow colleges to determine if students who were admitted would persist to graduation, the tool would be priceless. However, if the current study
provided any indication, the tool, at best, could probably only identify some of the important factors which could effect the process. One of the difficulties would lie in determining how an event or factor would influence individual students. The twins in the study provided an illustration. Each reacted differently to the turmoil in their home. One jumped into the middle of the fray, while the other cowered in fear.

To be privy to the kinds of information which would be of potential benefit in assisting students, counselors must secure the students' trust and respect. Helping professionals must combine their counseling skills and their knowledge of the education field to form relationships with students which will allow them to get to know the students and their needs. Students could then be the beneficiaries of the kind of assistance and support needed to help them to make a better adjustment to school and college. In this study, students noted that when they thought that others did not care, they often did not perform at their best. They defined care as receiving personal attention from teachers and others who knew what interested and challenged them.

This study was an investigation to identify important factors and influences in the high school-to-college transition process. Future studies might concentrate in depth on any one of the areas identified in the study. Such a study could further clarify and assess how a particular person or entity could better serve the college transition needs of students. For instance, some the students in the study felt that their teachers in high school had shied away from anything that was controversial in nature and that much of the course content in high school was not relevant to their lives. They voiced the opposite opinion about some of their college classes. If the introduction of such content
into the classroom would help students to become more aware of the world around them, accept more responsibility, and gain an edge on planning their futures, appropriate entities at all levels of the education system should be interested in studying this issue.

Finally, the students in this study reported that they benefited from the measures provided by the STP. Whether or not they persisted to graduation, their initial experiences in the college environment were viewed positively and favorably, and at the time of their interviews, they were progressing well. No formal attempt has been made to follow up with these and other students who completed the summer program. A follow-up study by the college that included locating and gathering information from the students who participated over the five-year duration of the program might provide insight into the college transition process which could benefit all students.
References


APPENDIX A

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University

Participant Informed Consent

Research Objective: To study the high school to college transition process of black students in a predominantly white community college

Purpose: Students who make a smoother, more informed transition into college may be more likely to stay until degree completion. Sharing your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and actions about how you made the transition can help others to understand the process better and therefore, offer more effective assistance to students.

Investigators: Mary Harrison is conducting this research as part of her doctoral dissertation in Counselor Education. She is working under the supervision of Dr. Martin Gerstein, Dr. Johnnie Miles, and Dr. Marvin Cline of Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University in Falls Church, Virginia while pursuing this investigation. Mary Harrison is located at (703) 878-5760.

Procedures: As a participant in this study, you are requested to agree to:

* meet with the interviewer for one and not more than three interviews of approximately one hour each;

* share openly and honestly about your transition experience;

* have interviews audio-taped for later analysis;

* share information such as papers, poems, or other archives related to your experience;

* give the researcher permission to speak with others who played a role in your transition. This may include parents, high school teachers, or other students.
Your assistance in conducting this research is appreciated. If you have questions or concerns at any time, you are encouraged to share them with the researcher.

The researcher further agrees to share her findings with you.

**Confidentiality:** Wherein you are requested to give the researcher permission to interview others who know you, the researcher pledges the confidentiality of information deemed by you or the researcher to be confidential.

I agree to participate in this study.

______________________________  ________________
Signature of Participant        Date

______________________________  ________________
Signature of Researcher         Date
APPENDIX B

Preliminary Coding Scheme

Student # 1 - Maria

DESCRIBING
Self
- anxieties
- personality

Summer Experience
- classes
- teachers
- other students

CONTRASTING
Feelings about STP
- before
- during
- after

Regular to STP classes
- teachers
- class size

High school to college classes
- teachers
- content

VALUING
Persons
- teachers
- other students
- counselors

Experiences
- classroom

ACKNOWLEDGING
Shortcomings
- self
- program

QUESTIONING
Dropouts

ASSESSING
Course content
- Program positives
- Program negatives
DISCLOSING
Personal information
    self
    family
Opinions

RATIONALIZING
Course content
    high school

220
APPENDIX C

Revised Coding Scheme

Major categories of influence affecting the high school to college transition process

1) Pre-College Influences
2) Post-Enrollment Influences

Pre-College Influences

Self
- perception of self
- confidence
- abilities
- plans
- aspirations
- strengths
- weaknesses
- activities

Academic History
- study habits
- grades
- rationale for college admissions/denials
- courses
- easy
- difficult

Parents
- academic history
- mother
- father
- perception of relationship with
- expectations
- achievements
- marital problems
- finances
- attitude towards

Peers
- perception of behavior
- influence on college decisions
- social life
- learning
- grades
Teachers
perception of
  positive
  negative
teaching style

Siblings
perception of
  ages
relationship with
  rivalrous
  admiring

Counselors
perception of
  positive
  negative

Processes
decision-making
  college attendance
  college choices
  college majors
influence of others

Post-Enrollment Influences

Self-Perception
changes in
  confidence level
  future outlook
assessing strengths
assessing weaknesses

Teachers
relationship with
  STP
  regular semester
classroom strategies
contrasted to H.S.
  knowledge
outside involvement
contrasted to each other

Academic History
changes in
  grades
  attitude towards school
  study habits
  transfer planning

Peers
relationships
  new
  continuing
contrasted to H.S.
  maturity level
  behavior
exchange information
Parents
attitudes
changes in
relationship with
changes in
marital problems
finances
attitude towards

Classes
contrasted to high school
content
controversial topics
teaching strategies
workload
size

Processes
future transitions
leaving home
gaining independence
acquiring new friends
dispelling self-doubt
choosing a major

Administration
keeping word
APPENDIX D

Independent Reader's Comments

Interviewee's Name: Maria

Please respond to the following questions regarding the interview that you have just read.

What is this person thinking?

How would you define this person?

What's going on in this person's mind?

At first she wasn't sure if she wanted to do the program. She seems young and like most people her age, she wanted her summer vacation. In the beginning of the program, it seems like she was a little hesitant. Did she really want to be there? As the program went on, she became more comfortable and really enjoyed herself.

She seems like a nice, smart person who wants to work hard.

She was worried that she wouldn't know anyone or fit in. Maybe she was a little overwhelmed by the work, which is probably usual for a student coming from high school to college.
Mary I. Harrison  
56 Mourning Dove Drive  
Stafford, Virginia 22554  
(540) 659-8432 (H)  
(703) 878-5760 (W)

EDUCATION

Ed.D.  Student Personnel Services, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1997

CAGS  Student Personnel Services, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1994

M.A.  Counseling Psychology, George Mason University, 1979

B.A.  Psychology, George Mason University, 1977

A.A.  Liberal Arts, Northern Virginia Community College, 1975

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Counselor, Northern Virginia Community College, Woodbridge, Virginia  
1984 - present

Provide academic, career, and personal counseling to diverse student body

Teach college survival courses

Co-ordinate campus tutorial program

Serve as counselor liaison to Quantico Marine Base

Assist transition program students remaining in the system

Serve on various college and campus committees

Counselor, Extended Studies, George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia  
July 1982 - April 1983

Counseled and advised Extended Studies students on coursework related to a
variety of educational, career, and personal interests

Assisted students with decision-making and goal clarification processes

SUMMARY OF OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

Instructional Assistant, Northern Virginia Community College, Woodbridge Virginia, 1981 - 1984

Co-ordinated Testing Center operation

Administered 700 - 1200 placement, make-up, and class exams per week

Psychology Intern, Arlington County Public Schools, 1979

Provided supervised group and individual counseling for middle and high school students and their parents


Personnel Specialist, United States Air Force, 1966 - 1969

MEMBERSHIPS

Virginia Counselors Association
Vocational Education Advisory Council, Stafford County Public Schools
Stafford County Branch, NAACP, past chair, Education Committee
American Association of University Women

Signature

Date June, 1997