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The Institutional Experience According to
First Year Students:
Lessons for Research on Attrition

by

Lynn Barr, B.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology/Anthropology

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
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submitted by Lynn Barr, B.A.

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ABSTRACT

The present research is an exploratory study in which qualitative data are gathered from first year students at Carleton University. In this study, I focus on the concepts of institutional experience, academic integration and social integration developed by Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987). Based on information obtained from students, I critically examine the conceptualization and operationalization of Tinto's constructs in past student attrition studies. The findings from twelve in-depth student interviews indicate that the current literature surrounding student attrition, although extensive, provides limited knowledge of the processes underlying students' institutional experiences.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Research into student attrition at Canadian institutions of higher education has expanded in the current decade. The American finding that the first six to eight weeks are formative for a student's academic career (see Gardner and Jewler, 1985; Pantages and Creedon, 1978) has led Canadian researchers to focus their attention on the first year experience of students to explain why students withdraw from or persist in institutions of higher education. One of the best indications of growing interest in Canada is the occurrence in 1988 of the First Canadian-American Conference on the first year experience. Conference participants were invited to present information on Canadian and American first year programs designed to attract first year students, ease their adjustment to higher education and increase their retention rates. One of the main purposes of the conference was to assemble parties interested in improving the first year experience and in maintaining the strength and competitiveness of their institution by reforming the first year (Proceedings, The First Year Experience, 1988). The conference agenda alludes to issues of interest in and of themselves, but the mere occurrence of such a conference is indicative of the

increasing importance of attrition studies and of the important links being made between the first year experience and student retention strategies.

As Pascal and Kanowitch (1979:1) point out, the issue of student withdrawal in Canada was temporarily dormant in the expansionary period of the sixties and early seventies. The perceived need for attrition studies is embedded in societal conditions and is directly linked to the impact of student attrition in changing economic, political and ideological circumstances. The expansion of research into attrition in Canada coincides with a period of decreasing public funding for higher education and increasing concern for efficiency, accountability and quality. Although interest in attrition studies has grown, Canadian data are relatively scarce and the data that are available draw heavily from American research. More information about the institutional experiences of Canadian university students is needed before the relevance of American research for Canada can be assessed.

While student attrition presents a serious drain on institutional resources in a period of fiscal restraint, concern needs to be directed beyond institutional retention. High rates of attrition indicate the need to ask some fundamental questions about the nature of students' experiences within the institution and about the role of higher education more broadly. This work is premised on the

belief that a university education must be empowering for the student and that the student must be able to translate his or her culture into academic success.

Contributions to the Literature

This thesis is an exploratory study in which qualitative data are gathered from first year students at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. The author takes seriously Vincent Tinto's (1987:127) assertion that researchers should not attempt to study attrition without first ascertaining student perceptions of the problem at hand. The purpose of the study is not to explain student attrition, but, rather, to focus on the concepts of institutional experience, academic integration and social integration developed by Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987). I make two contributions to the existing attrition literature. First, I use information obtained from students to examine critically the conceptualization and operationalization of the constructs social integration, academic integration and institutional experience in past attrition studies. The present research attempts to discover and explore: the issues students define as important during their first year experience, students' evaluations of their institutional experiences, students' definitions of social and academic experience, students' assessments of the importance of social and academic experiences to their first year and

students' perceptions of the institutional environment. The purpose is to add to the conceptual rigour of Tinto's constructs.

Second, I approach the most-commonly-used model of student attrition, developed by Tinto (1975, 1987), with a qualitative research design. This approach allows students to provide us with a fuller picture of the institutional experience and the opportunity to look in more detail at the processes at work in the institution. This strategy builds on recent attempts in the literature (see Attinasi, 1989; Benjamin, 1990) to stress the limitations of relying on one technique of analysis, mainly fixed-choice surveys, when conducting attrition or student experience research. To address these limitations, studies must be undertaken, in a variety of institutional settings, that allow students to define the links between their academic and social experiences and their perception of their first year.

The Structure of the Paper

Chapter One has two aims: to introduce the topic of student attrition from institutions of higher education and to explore the economic, political and ideological context surrounding the expansion of interest in attrition studies in Canada and the United States. Particular attention is given to the Canadian political/economic situation, including an examination of such issues as university enrolments, university finances, accountability, efficiency

and accessibility.

In Chapter Two, I review the most-commonly-used theoretical model of attrition developed by Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987) and discuss the issues surrounding that model. I provide an overview of the current status of the university attrition literature in Canada and the United States. Especially important are studies that have emerged from Tinto's model of attrition. The overview of attrition literature is followed by an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of American and Canadian attrition research. Most of my attention is given to the problems of conceptualization that exist in the current literature.

Chapter Three contains a description of the data collection techniques that were used in this study. Results from twelve in-depth student interviews are included in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven. The purpose of Chapter Eight is to provide an analysis of the research and policy implications stemming from the results. I critically examine Tinto's concepts of social/academic integration and examine the measures attrition researchers use to assess these constructs in light of information obtained from students. I compare students' descriptions of their social and academic experiences collected during in-depth interviews with their responses to questionnaire items designed to assess these experiences. Finally, the students' experiences are discussed in light of the broader

issue of equality in Canadian higher education.

I shall begin with a brief outline of the key political/economic issues facing Canadian and American institutions of higher education because of their relevancy for the first year student experience and student attrition in Canada and the United States.

ACCOUNTING FOR THE EXPANSION OF INTEREST IN STUDYING ATTRITION AT CANADIAN AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

There is a danger, when Canadian research draws from American work, that the political/economic environment surrounding student attrition in Canada will be ignored. Canadian universities exist in a complex political, economic and ideological climate that shapes the organizational decisions of the institution and, most importantly, establishes the context for students' institutional experiences. In this section of the paper, I briefly account for the expansion of interest in studying student withdrawal from American and Canadian institutions of higher education. The Canadian situation is of primary concern here. I present an overview of the economic, political and ideological conditions facing Canadian universities and explore the links between university enrolments, university funding, the recent concern with accountability/efficiency, the debate over accessibility/excellence in higher education and increasing concern over student withdrawals from

Canadian universities.

Attrition Research in the United States

Increasing interest in the issue of university attrition in the United States has been motivated, at least in part, by decreasing financial resources and a declining population of potential university applicants. Tinto (1987:2) argues that institutional concern over high rates of attrition is "... sparked by the belated recognition that the long-predicted decline in the size of the college-going population has finally arrived." Tinto cites a decline in total enrolment in American higher education from 12.37 million in 1981 to 12.2 million in 1984. He further cites a predicted decline to 10.5 million in 1995.

Tinto (1987:2) is careful to point out that the experience of declining enrolments varies among institutions of higher education. The situation is especially disconcerting for small, less prestigious public and private colleges, some of which have "...teetered on the brink of financial collapse" (Tinto, 1987:2). Tinto (1987:2) states that it is not surprising "...that institutions have come to view the retention of students to degree completion as the only reasonable course of action left to ensure their survival...." As a result, much of the American attrition research has as its goal increasing institutional retention. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980:61) for example, are careful

to stress the potential importance of attrition research for "...decision makers concerned with alleviating the potentially wasted resources associated with attrition at their institutions." The issue of high rates of university attrition cannot be divorced from its broader political/economic context.

Attrition Research in Canada

Expanding interest in studying university attrition in Canada coincides with an era of uncertainty over the future supply of students, decreasing federal and provincial government (especially Ontario) financial support for higher education, increasing concern for efficiency, accountability and quality and more limited definitions of university accessibility. In what follows, I briefly look at each of these issues and explore their relationship to recent concern over student attrition.

Student Enrolment in Canadian Universities

Student enrolment is the lifeblood of Canadian universities (Symons and Page, 1984:92). Threats to enrolment pose threats to the financial stability of universities. University fulltime enrolment between 1960-1970 increased from 113, 729 to 309, 469 or 172% (Symons and Page, 1984:87). From 1970-1980 fulltime enrolment increased from 309, 469 to 382, 617 or 24% (Symons and Page, 1984:87).

Enrolment growth was slow, however, in the late 1970's. In fact, from 1976/77 to 1977/78 total fulltime enrolment declined (see Statistics Canada Catalogue 81-229, 1985/86, 1987/88). Enrolment further declined in 1978/79. The current enrolment picture is one of increase (30% from 1980 to 1988, see Potts, 1989) although the growth experienced has not approached the level of growth experienced in the 1960's and the early 1970's.

The levelling off of enrolments in the late 1970's produced a great deal of concern in the literature over problems universities would face in an era of no-growth or shrinkage (see Leslie, 1980; Symons and Page, 1984). Enrolment projections in the early 1980's forecast continued enrolment decline for universities (Leslie, 1980:45). Such forecasts were based on assumptions made about the age composition of the population and the participation rates of the population of normal university age (Leslie, 1980:31). Although forecasts of enrolment decline have not materialized during the 1980's, due largely to the increased participation of young people, particularly women, the threat of enrolment decline remains.¹ One would be naive to argue that the expansion of interest in the problem of

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¹ The increase in fulltime university enrolments throughout the 1980's has been due mainly to the increased participation rates of 18-21 year olds (11% in 1980 to 16% in 1988), 22-24 year olds (7% in 1980 to over 9% in 1988) and increased participation of women (18% of 18-21 year olds in 1988 compared to 11% in 1980) (Potts, 1989:29).

student attrition from Canadian universities was due entirely to the prospect of declining enrolments but the potential impact of high attrition and declining enrolments cannot be ignored. The dilemma posed by increasing or decreasing university enrolments is best understood in the context of university funding.

Canadian Universities and Funding

Pascal and Kanowitch (1979:2) argue that student attrition represents a loss to institutions in real financial terms (due to refunded tuition, for example). Any financial loss to institutions through attrition exacerbates the current financial situation of Canadian universities, a situation that is particularly acute in Ontario.

Since 1977, federal funding of post-secondary education in Canada has been carried out through Established Programs Financing (EPF) arrangements. Because federal transfer payments take the form of a lump sum block grant, they are not publicly visible and therefore are particularly vulnerable to government cuts (Wu, 1985a:20). From 1979/80 to 1982/83 real federal transfers per fulltime equivalent student decreased (in constant dollars, 1971/72=100; Canadian totals) from \$1949 to \$1635 (Wu, 1985a:19). In 1983, post-secondary education funding was limited under the federal government's "six and five" program; annual growth in per capita payments was limited to six percent in 1983/84

and five percent in 1984/85 (Wu, 1985a:14). A recent budget introduced by federal Finance Minister, Michael Wilson, on February 20, 1990, has potentially serious consequences for higher education; federal transfer payments to the provinces have been effectively frozen (the budget announced in February, 1991 extends this freeze). As Wotherspoon (1987) argues, the development of the Canadian education system depends heavily on current economic relations. The instability of the Canadian economy throughout the past decade has been responsible, to a certain degree, for the decrease in federal support for higher education (see Gonick, 1985 for a discussion of the state of the Canadian economy).

In an examination of provincial funding of post-secondary education under the EPF arrangements, Wu (1985b:42) argues that in real terms, total expenditures in all provinces combined from 1977/78 to 1982/83 were constant at \$2 billion, thus suggesting that provincial spending had been frozen since the inception of the EPF arrangements. Decreased provincial funding of post-secondary education is particularly acute in Ontario universities (see Skolnik and Rowen, 1984). Current analysis by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU, 1988) establishes the financial position of universities in Ontario. The data show that the universities' share of total government expenditures has decreased from 5.92% in 1977/78 to 4.6% in 1988/89 (Council

of Ontario Universities, 1988:1). In terms of the growth in the provincial economy, operating grants to universities between 1977/78 and the late 1980's grew by only 77% as much as the economy of Ontario (COU, 1988:2). While hospitals spent 27% more for each day of patient care in 1986/87 than in 1977/78 (accounting for inflation), universities spent 12% less for each fulltime equivalent student enrolled in 1986/87 than was spent in 1977/78 (COU, 1988:2). The Ontario government has allocated fewer and fewer of its financial resources to the overall post-secondary education system. The recent announcement by the Ontario New Democratic government concerning 1991/92 operating grants to post-secondary institutions does not encourage funding optimism among Ontario universities and a corresponding tuition fee increase means even less enthusiasm among students.

Accountability and Efficiency

Student attrition from Canadian universities can be perceived of as administrative inefficiency (Pascal and Kanowitch, 1979). In this period of financial restraint, a wealth of literature has appeared on how to manage such restraint. The emphasis is put on accountability, planning and evaluation (Skolnik and Rowen, 1984:36). The onus has been increasingly placed on universities to account for their use of funds (Newson and Buchbinder, 1988:16). This

emphasis on accountability is evident in a report by Skolnik and Rowen (1984) on Canadian universities and financial restraint. In this report, they call on the universities to account for their need for additional funding. The overall impression seems to be that it is the responsibility of universities to establish their accountability and to demonstrate their efficient use of current funds (Skolnik and Rowen, 1984:141). As a result of increased demands for efficiency and spending accountability, better management techniques become important to universities as a whole. In a period when Canadian universities are searching for alternative sources of funding, their need for efficiency is paramount.

University funding is an economic, political and ideological issue. Although economic conditions cannot be ignored as a source of decline in government funding, cutbacks in university funding also reflect a judgement of the social value of the functions performed by universities and the way in which these functions are performed (Skolnik and Rowen, 1984:160). Pascal and Kanowitch (1979:1) argue that student attrition is perceived by future students, the general population and by those who finance universities as an indicator of universities' inability to meet student needs, especially career needs. Universities' ability to produce "marketable manpower" is evaluated (Pascal and Kanowitch, 1979:1). Any source of inefficiency, such as

student attrition, is likely to have a negative impact on the search for funds and on the administration of current funds.

The Accessibility Debate

Both the belief in accessibility and the belief in the value of education for economic growth provided justification for educational expansion in Canada throughout the 1950's and 1960's (Gilbert and Evers, 1989:45). The late 1970's and early 1980's was a period of uncertainty in higher education that led to the current situation of reevaluating the purpose of higher education in Canadian society (Gilbert and Evers, 1989:46). One of those issues being reevaluated is accessibility. Any understanding of the effects of student attrition or the growing interest in explaining student attrition would be incomplete without an examination of the current debate over accessibility, quality and funding.

At the National Forum on Post-secondary Education held in Saskatoon in 1987, Michele Fortin argued that it is time to take stock of the current situation and to question what would be at stake in maintaining or revising accessibility policies. Fortin (1987) claims that the current economic problems have led to policies of accessibility being changed, qualified or maintained depending on the province and the institution but that accessibility has come to be

examined in the context of economic reality. For critics of higher education, student attrition provides a powerful justification for limiting accessibility. Individuals' perceived inability to meet the demands of university attendance or universities' perceived inability to accommodate the needs of a diverse student population brings forth the idea of limiting the number of and types of students admitted to university. As Pascal and Kanowitch (1979:3) suggest, the factors that may contribute to student attrition (such as dissatisfaction with academic programs and concern with teaching quality) can be seen as reflections of institutional weakness. High rates of student attrition are likely to have a negative impact on the image of university in an era in which universities are being called on to demonstrate accountability and quality.

Skolnik and Rowen (1984) examine the growing concern with quality in terms of "the triangle" hypothesis. Those who accept this hypothesis argue that funding, quality and accessibility exist in a relationship in which quality and accessibility compete for funding. Critics of higher education challenge the usefulness of a policy of accessibility and argue that too much accessibility will have a negative impact on quality (see Gilbert and Evers, 1989; Gilbert 1989a; Fortin, 1987; Skolnik and Rowen, 1984 for further elaboration of this issue). Growing attention has been paid in recent years to the need to expand

accessibility for specific target groups (women, natives, disabled people, immigrants) as opposed to previous policies of universal access (Gilbert, 1989a:111). The issues of accessibility and quality are exacerbated by high rates of university attrition. As Gilbert and Evers (1989:48-49) point out, the argument is often made that increasing admission requirements would lead to better allocation of scarce university resources. "Facilities in demand, the reasoning goes, would then not be dedicated to students who are required to withdraw on account of failing grades or who drop-out before completing a degree" (Gilbert and Evers, 1989:48).

Livingstone (1987:131) argues that no dominant ideology is capable of negating the lived experience of individuals; contradictory lived experience provides the basis for popular questioning of current institutional structures. High rates of student attrition reveal the gap between what universities promise on admission (equality of opportunity) and what universities offer in terms of everyday interactions. In a period of restraint, high rates of attrition force universities to deal with the contradictions produced by accessibility. Accessibility policies increase the diversity of the student population. Students come from a range of abilities and backgrounds and some students are better able to deal with the university experience than are others. Open access is insufficient; growing evidence

suggests that what happens to the student after admission is increasingly important (see Tinto, 1975, 1987). There is thus a potential contradiction between equality of access and equality of process, process being, very generally, what happens to the student following enrolment and the interaction of student traits with institutional experiences.

The growth in Canadian studies of student attrition must be seen in light of uncertainty over university enrolments, financial restraint, increased demands for accountability/efficiency and changing conceptions of accessibility. Economic, political and ideological conditions shape the boundaries of students' university experiences and shape the structure of the universities themselves. Resource allocation decisions, admissions policies and the responses of institutions to fiscal restraint set the context for students' experiences. It is necessary to be sensitive to the conditions surrounding the first year experience of university students both in Canada and elsewhere.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW/ THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ²

Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Student Attrition from Institutions of Higher Education

Much of the work on explaining student attrition from North American institutions of higher education has been conducted in the United States. Beginning in the 1970's, researchers have sought to conceptualize the attrition process in a theoretical model. Spady (1970,1971), for example, attempts to build a theoretical model of the undergraduate dropout process using Durkheim's (1951) concept of social integration.

Perhaps the most widely cited model of the attrition process is the longitudinal model developed by Vincent Tinto in 1975 (and expanded in 1987, 1988).³ Building on Spady's research, Tinto (1975:91-92) argues that the college can be viewed as a social system with its own values and structures. By extending Durkheim's analysis of egoistic

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² Some of the issues examined in this paper, particularly in this chapter, are explored in a paper prepared by June Corman, the author and Tullio Caputo entitled "Unpacking Attrition: A Change of Emphasis" which is currently under review.

³ The intention here is not to diminish the importance of other theoretical models that have been developed to explain student attrition from institutions of higher education (see for example, Bean, 1980 who develops a causal model adapted from employee turnover in work organizations) but to focus on the theoretical model that has received the most attention in the current literature.

suicide, Tinto (1975:91-92) argues that those social conditions resulting in suicide, namely two forms of malintegration, are similar to those social conditions affecting dropout behaviour. Specifically, he refers to insufficient interactions with others in the college and insufficient congruency with the prevailing values of the college as those conditions affecting dropout behaviour. Lack of integration into the college social system produces low commitment to the college and leads to an increased likelihood of withdrawal (Tinto, 1975:92).

The thrust of Tinto's (1975, 1987) model is that educational outcomes are the result of the degree of fit between the student and the university environment. The model is summarized as follows (Tinto, 1975:94-97): students enter the university with a variety of pre-entry traits (such as family background, skills, high school performance) which are then related to the students' commitment to their career, educational goals and to the post-secondary institutions. Pre-entry traits and commitments then affect the student's experience within the university. Specifically, the student becomes (or does not become) academically and socially integrated into the university setting. The greater the social and academic integration, *ceteris paribus*, the greater the commitment to post-secondary education and the institution. This commitment, in turn, enhances the student's likelihood of remaining at

the institution.

Tinto (1975:99-116) bases his model on a synthesis of attrition research available at the time. He organizes this research into three categories: 1. individual characteristics that seem to be related to college persistence 2. characteristics that are related to the interaction of the individual and the college environment and 3. institutional characteristics that are associated with attrition. My purpose here is not to describe the complex relationships among variables, as Tinto does, but merely to outline the variables that have been examined within each of his categories.

Among the individual characteristics identified are family background (such as the family's socioeconomic status, the quality of relationships within the family) and characteristics of the individual him/herself (including measured ability, personality dispositions, gender, past educational experiences and goal commitment). Tinto (1987) further refers to differences of sex, age, race and social class as individual characteristics related to dropout decisions. In his later work, Tinto (1987) explores in more detail the roots of individual attrition decisions. He points to two personal dispositions: intention and commitment. Intentions refer to the individual's educational or occupational goals (Tinto, 1987:40). Tinto (1987:40) argues that, in general, "...the higher the level

of one's educational or occupational goals, the greater the likelihood of college completion." Individual commitments are defined as the individual's motivation, drive or effort (Tinto, 1987:44). He (1987:44) suggests that "...a person's willingness to work toward the attainment of his/her goals is an important component of the process of persistence in higher education." According to Tinto (1987:45), commitments are of two forms: goal and institutional. Goal commitment consists of an individual's commitment to his/her educational and occupational goals whereas institutional commitment refers to the individual's commitment to the institution he/she is attending (1987:45). For Tinto, the greater the commitment, the greater the chance of persistence.

The individual's experiences within the college environment make up the interactive aspect of Tinto's model. Tinto (1975:92) suggests that colleges consist of both social and academic systems. One of the most important concepts in Tinto's model is that of the institutional experience. Tinto (1975) defines institutional experiences in terms of academic and social integration. Academic integration, according to Tinto, consists primarily of the student's grade performance and his/her perception of intellectual development (1975:104). He suggests that the former refers to the meeting of certain explicit standards of the academic system while the latter relates to the

individual's identification with the norms of the academic system (1975:104). Social integration is explained as "...the interaction between the individual with given sets of characteristics (backgrounds, values, commitments, etc.) and other persons of varying characteristics within the college..." (Tinto, 1975:107). Social integration results mainly from informal peer group relations, involvement in semi-formal extracurricular activities, interaction with faculty/staff and "...involves notions of both levels of integration and of degrees of congruency between the individual and his social environment" (Tinto, 1975:107). Successful social contacts may lead to important social rewards such as social communication, friendship support, faculty support and collective affiliation (Tinto, 1975:107). These social rewards can then affect the individual's evaluation of his/her college experience.

For Tinto (1975, 1987), however, it is not important that absolute congruence with the social system of the institution exists but rather that there be sufficient congruency with some part of the social setting. The existence of student subcultures makes it possible for students to integrate into specific communities. According to Tinto (1975, 1987), a person may achieve integration into one system and not into the other. He specifies the potential for a reciprocal relationship between the social and academic systems such that excessive integration into

one system may limit integration into the other. Tinto (1987:105-107) further argues that one must separate (although there is some overlap) the formal academic realm (classrooms and laboratories, for example) from the informal academic realm (informal academic cultures, for example). Similarly, he suggests that the formal social realm (extracurricular activities, for example) be considered separately from the informal day-to-day social interactions of college life.

In his more recent work on institutional interactions, Tinto (1987) specifies four types of individual experiences that are associated with institutional departure: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence and isolation. In terms of adjustment, Tinto (1987:47-50) points to the fact that individuals must adjust both socially and intellectually to their new surroundings. He argues that there are two sources of difficulty for students in adjusting to college: the inability of individuals to separate themselves from past forms of association (such as from the family, peer groups) and the new demands of the college (such as higher academic requirements and meeting new people) (1987:48). By difficulty, Tinto (1987:50-53) refers to the need for students to meet the minimum academic standards set by the college. For some students, Tinto argues, the demands of the academic system are too difficult.

Tinto (1987:53-61), in his discussion of academic and social integration, claims that a lack of integration is caused by incongruence and isolation. Incongruence refers, in general, to the mismatch or lack of fit between the needs, interests and preferences of the individual and those of the institution. Reflecting the outcome of interactions with different members of the institution, it springs from individual perceptions of not fitting into or of being at odds with the social and intellectual fabric of institutional life (Tinto, 1987:53-54). Incongruence, according to Tinto, can occur within the formal or informal academic system of the college or within the formal or informal social system of the college. Isolation is defined as the absence of sufficient contact between the individual and members of the social and academic systems of the college (Tinto, 1987:64). Such contact includes, for example, student-faculty and peer relations.

Under his third category, institutional characteristics, Tinto (1975:111) argues that:

It is the characteristics of the institution-its resources, facilities, structural arrangements, and composition of its members-that place limits upon the development and integration of individuals within the institution and that lead to the development of academic and social climates, or 'presses,' with which the individual must come to grips.

Due to a lack of research on the effect of institutional characteristics, Tinto is able to point to only certain

large scale characteristics of institutions seen as having effects on dropout behaviour. Among these characteristics are institutional type (public and private, two-year colleges and four-year colleges); college quality and student composition (institutions with a greater percentage of faculty with doctorates, institutions with higher income per student, average ability of the student body, the social status of the educational institution, for example, the existence of student bodies with higher than average social status) and institutional size. His (1987) research includes residential status among the institutional variables. Tinto (1975:116) notes, however, that what is known about the effects of institutional characteristics on persistence decisions is "crude" at best.

Although students' interactions within the college are paramount in his model, Tinto (1975:97-99) recognizes the potential role of events external to the college in students' dropout decisions. He argues, however, that the impacts of such external events "...will be best observed through the person's changing evaluations of his commitments to the goal of college completion and to the institution in which he is registered" (Tinto, 1975:97). Based on the theory of cost-benefit analysis, he proposes that a person may leave college if he/she perceives greater returns, relative to costs, from an alternative form of investment (Tinto, 1975:97-98).

Tinto's most extensive alteration to his 1975 model is the addition of a somewhat temporal dimension. Tinto (1987, 1988) proposes to use Van Gennep's work on the stages of the rites of passage, including the stages of separation, transition and incorporation, to suggest that the process of student persistence consists of distinct stages new students must pass through during their college careers (1988:442). During the stage of separation, individuals must disassociate themselves from interactions with past communities (such as high school) (Tinto, 1988:443). Tinto argues that such a separation may be stressful and for some students, it may be so stressful as to affect persistence in college. Tinto does recognize that the stage of separation may not occur for those students who remain at home during their college career, but believes that such students may be unable to take full advantage of the social and academic college systems.

The stage of transition is the period in which individuals begin to interact with members of their new community while interactions with past communities decline (Tinto, 1988:444). Tinto (1988:444) refers to the transition stage as "...a period of passage between the old and the new...." For some students, this stage proves to be so difficult that they withdraw from college. According to Tinto (1988:445) "...both separation and transition are conditions that, though stressful, need not in themselves

lead to departure. It is the individual's response to those conditions that finally determines staying or leaving."

Finally, the stage of incorporation involves "...the taking on of new patterns of interaction with members of the new group and the establishing of competent membership in that group as a participant member" (Tinto, 1988:441). How students become incorporated or integrated into the college setting is essentially the issue behind Tinto's use of Durkheim's notion of egoistic suicide and the focus of his earlier model of student attrition.

Tinto's model has led to much research designed to assess its validity in accurately identifying first year students who persist in or leave schooling. An overview of such research is the focus of the following sections.

A Review of American Studies of Student Attrition from Institutions of Higher Education

The concern of many early studies of student attrition from institutions of higher education was to document the individual and institutional characteristics that seemed to be, in some way, associated with student withdrawal (Tinto, 1975:90). Pantages and Creedon (1978), Cope and Hannah (1975) and Tinto (1975, 1987) provide detailed reviews of such research. Given the quantity of student attrition studies that have been undertaken in the United States, this literature review is necessarily selective and does not claim to be a complete review of the attrition research

available in that country. As Bean (1982:21) states, Tinto's (1975) model is the most empirically-tested model of student attrition. For this reason, I focus my attention on those studies that have emerged from Tinto's (1975) model.

Early tests of Tinto's model tend to highlight particular elements. Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) explore the relationship between different types of student informal contact with faculty and college persistence. They (1977:550) discover that the frequency of non-classroom interactions with faculty along six dimensions discriminated significantly between voluntary withdrawals and persisters (controlling for sex, academic aptitude and personality needs). Work by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) focuses on the concepts of social and academic integration. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980:70-72) find that the addition of five institutional integration scales to a discriminant analysis (based on pre-college characteristics, freshman year grade performance and extracurricular involvement) increased the correct classification of persisters from 58.2 to 81.4 percent and withdrawals from 34.5 to 75.8 percent in a cross-validation sample.

The validation of Tinto's (1975) model has received a great deal of research attention. Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) for example, find that the total variance explained by the main effects model is modest and ranges from 19-21.7 percent (1983:219). In general, they argue that their

results tend to support the overall expectations of the model and suggest that what happens to the student on arrival at the university may be of particular importance to the dropout process at a residential institution (1983:219). Pascarella et al. (1983) attempt a similar test of the model in a commuter setting with somewhat different results. Of particular interest is their finding that background characteristics were associated with a 9.9 percent increase in R^2 while academic and social integration were associated with a 6.3 percent increase (Pascarella et al., 1983:93). This finding seems to suggest the importance of background characteristics to withdrawal decisions in a commuter institution. Furthermore, path analysis indicates that both academic and social integration had relatively strong direct effects on persistence, academic being a positive effect and social having, surprisingly, a negative effect (Pascarella et al., 1983:94). Pascarella and Chapman (1983) explore interaction effects in a multi-institutional test of Tinto's model. Residential universities and liberal arts colleges produced results most consistent with Tinto's model (Pascarella and Chapman, 1983:42). As a result, the model seems to produce different results across different institutional types.

More recently, Pascarella et al. (1986) use Tinto's model to assess the influence of a precollege orientation program on withdrawal decisions. They (1986:166) find that

levels of social integration and subsequent institutional commitment were significantly higher for the students who attended orientation than for the students who did not attend orientation. They conclude that participation in orientation may have an indirect influence on persistence/withdrawal decisions (1986:166).

The concepts social and academic integration are central to the models of attrition and therefore are a primary concern of this paper. Although the operationalization of the constructs varies from study to study (an issue I shall examine further in subsequent discussion), work by Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) provides an example of measures typically used. They (1983) include five variable sets for analysis as suggested by Tinto's model: background characteristics (including family background, individual characteristics, precollege schooling); initial commitments; academic and social integration; subsequent goal and institutional commitments and withdrawal decisions. Academic integration is operationally defined as the sum of six scales including: 1. freshman year cumulative grade point average 2. a seven item scale measuring students' perceived level of intellectual development 3. a five item scale measuring students' perceptions of faculty concern for quality classroom teaching and student development 4-6. frequency of freshman year nonclassroom contacts of ten minutes or more

to: 4. get basic information and advice about an academic program 5. to discuss intellectual or course-related matters 6. to discuss matters related to future career (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983:217). Social integration is operationally defined as the sum of six scales including: 1. extent of involvement in extracurricular activities during the freshman year averaging two hours or more per week 2. a seven item scale measuring the extent and quality of a student's relationships with student peers 3. a five item scale measuring the quality and impact of students' non-classroom contact with faculty 4-6 frequency of freshman year non-classroom contacts with faculty of ten minutes or more to: 4. socialize informally 5. to discuss a campus issue or problem 6. to help resolve a personal problem (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983:217-218). While individual measures vary according to study, grade performance, peer interactions and faculty-student contacts are dimensions typically included for examination.

It is important to note that Tinto's model is used to examine college outcomes apart from student attrition. Pascarella (1985) uses Tinto's model to investigate the effects of structural/organizational characteristics of institutions on educational outcomes. Terenzini et al.'s (1982) study of students' perceptions of growth is placed within Tinto's framework. Tinto's model is used by Terenzini et al. (1984) to explore the influences on

students' perception of their academic skill development during college. Given the range of research based on Tinto's model, it is important to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of both Tinto's model and related research.

A Critique of American Attrition Research

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Tinto's Model

Tinto, through his model, has made substantial contributions to the existing attrition research. Among these contributions are: the importance of institutional experiences in the dropout process is specified, legitimacy is provided for institutional intervention in the attrition process and the attrition process is seen as a longitudinal one in need of theoretical explanation (see Pascarella and Chapman, 1983; Gilbert and Auger, 1987; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983). One of the strengths of Tinto's (1975, 1987) work is the attention paid to the individual's perceptions of his/her experiences. Arguably, Tinto's most significant contribution is the emphasis he puts on the institutional experiences of students following enrolment. Students' interactions within the institutional environment can be linked to the broader issue of equality in higher education. Providing students equal access to the system of higher education does not guarantee that students are able to benefit equally from their experiences. Richer (1988:265) defines educational equality in terms of equality

to benefit: "...equality to benefit exists when salient subgroups in a society can convert their own cultural heritage into educational success." What happens to the student after entry into the school system is emphasized. For Richer (1988:264), pedagogical and curriculum issues become central. Richer (1988:271) claims that inequality can result from the exposure of different students to the same educational experience. By directing our attention to institutional experiences, Tinto (1975, 1987) provides an avenue for the exploration of the broader issues facing higher education, namely issues of equality.

Tinto's model, however, suffers from several weaknesses most of which are identified by attrition researchers (see for example Gilbert and Auger, 1987; Gilbert et al., 1989) and by Tinto himself (1982). Among the problems Tinto (1982:689) refers to are: insufficient emphasis is given to the role of finances in student attrition; the model fails to identify those behaviours that lead to institutional transfer or those behaviours that lead to permanent withdrawal from higher education; insufficient attention is given to the different experiences of students of different gender, race or social characteristics; the model fails to examine forms of student withdrawal in the two-year sector and the model may not be applicable to studying student

withdrawal in commuter institutions.⁴ In addition, tests of Tinto's model have produced somewhat different results for males and females.⁵ Furthermore, the model does not adequately define the links between structure and agency. Tinto (1982:692) recognizes the need to do so. Tinto's model does not, surprisingly, specify how institutional attributes may impinge on or assist students in becoming integrated into the university setting. Although he describes those institutional characteristics associated with attrition, Tinto does not place this explanation within the context of his theoretical model. Several weaknesses exist among studies that attempt to validate Tinto's model.

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⁴ Bean and Metzner (1985) distinguish between what they call untraditional and traditional students. They (1985:489) argue that older, part time and commuter students "...experience an environmental press...while attending college that differs from that of traditional age, full-time, residential students." For this reason, they attempt to create a model of non-traditional undergraduate student attrition. The problem, as they recognize, is in the definition of the non-traditional student. They state (1985:489): "...A nontraditional student is older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence...or is a part-time student, or some combination of these three factors; is not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution; and is chiefly concerned with the institution's academic offerings...." The difficulty it seems is that the latter two dimensions of the definition require that the researcher have in-depth knowledge of the institutional experience of the sample prior to the application of the model.

⁵ Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) found that when their sample was disaggregated by sex, notable differences in the path model were apparent.

American Studies of Attrition from Institutions of Higher Education

Many of the concerns that exist in American studies, that stem from Tinto's model, are recognized by the attrition researchers themselves (see Pascarella and Chapman, 1983; Gilbert and Auger, 1987; Attinasi, 1989). Three weaknesses are especially important for this research and can be summarized as follows: 1. problems of conceptualization that include the failure to clearly delineate the categories of attrition, the failure to adequately conceptualize key concepts (academic integration, for example) and the failure to provide a detailed critique of the links between the operational and conceptual definitions of key concepts in the model; 2. problems associated with the institutional environment such that analyses of the effect of institutional characteristics (environmental characteristics) on students' institutional experiences have been, for the most part, absent from studies of student attrition; inadequate attention is paid to classroom experiences and to the broader political/economic context surrounding the institution; 3. student attrition research tends to be overwhelmingly quantitative in nature thus limiting our knowledge of the actual experiences of first year students.

American attrition researchers tend to distinguish only between persisters and voluntary withdrawals, a limitation that has been recognized since the 1970's (see Tinto, 1975;

Cope and Hannah, 1975; Pantages and Creedon, 1978; Gilbert and Auger, 1987 for elaboration). Academic dismissals are typically not included in the research sample or are not considered as a separate group (see, for example, Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980; Pascarella and Chapman, 1983; Pascarella et al., 1983; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983). The fact that Tinto's model explains only a modest amount of variance may be due to the failure to fully disaggregate the concept of attrition. Arguably transfer, academic dismissal, temporary withdrawal and voluntary withdrawal may stem from varying experiences within or outside of the institution (Gilbert and Auger, 1987).

Pascarella and Chapman (1983:26) claim that there is "...little cross-sample consistency in the operational definitions of the variables in the model." This inconsistency is due to inadequate attention by American researchers to the conceptualization of key elements in Tinto's model, namely academic and social integration. While American researchers have expanded the operational definitions of academic and social integration, they provide little theoretical rationale to link such measures to conceptual definitions. Attrition researchers themselves express concern that the results of their studies may reflect the particular ways in which they have operationalized Tinto's concepts (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983; Pascarella and Chapman, 1983).

Tinto (1975:111; 1987:89-90) argues that the effects of institutional characteristics on withdrawal decisions have not been as extensively researched as the effects of individual characteristics. Insufficient attempts are made to explore the environmental context of the student's institutional experience (Cope and Hannah, 1975:9). Many attrition studies do not contain detailed information on the institution from which their sample is drawn which makes it impossible to assess the potential impact of the institutional setting on the student's experience.⁶ It must also be recognized that institutional decisions cannot be divorced from the broader political/economic context in which they are made. Changing economic, political and ideological circumstances shape the boundaries of the individual's experience and shape institutional structures.

The measures used to assess academic and social integration focus on the non-classroom experience of students. Many existing studies do not attempt to account for students' formal classroom experiences (Pascarella, 1980:565-566). Pascarella (1980:565-566) argues that

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⁶ This is not to say that the institution is ignored in post-secondary student attrition research (see studies by Pascarella and Chapman (1983) and Anderson (1981)). However, only measures of institutional type are normally included. It is conceivable that variation in results among institutional types may be due to other unmeasured environmental variables (such as administrative procedures). See work by Pascarella (1984, 1985) for examples of how structural/organizational characteristics may impact on student development.

informal faculty contact may be essentially a proxy variable for the quality of classroom experiences. Any examination of students' academic and social experiences must include measures of classroom dynamics such as the structural setting of classrooms, the students' evaluation of the classroom experience and the factors that make academic work and class attendance a positive or negative experience.

Research based on Tinto's model tells us very little about the students' experiences within the institution, a gap that stems, in part, from its epistemological foundations. Attrition research tends to be overwhelmingly quantitative and uses large scale survey methods that impose definitions of experience on the student (Attinasi, 1989). Researchers have been cautioned against relying solely on quantitative methods of analysis (Cope and Hannah, 1975; Tinto, 1988), but the failure to consider the student's definition of situation has only recently been dealt with in the attrition literature. Attinasi (1989) points out the importance of exploring the context surrounding students' withdrawal decisions in his qualitative study of Mexican American students' perceptions of their decision to persist in or leave college. One of Attinasi's (1989:267) most interesting findings, for example, directly relates to Tinto's concept of social integration:

A student's interaction with others is important for his or her persistence in college not simply or primarily because it leads to the sharing of general values and

orientations, but because it assists the student in developing specific strategies for negotiating the physical, social, and cognitive/academic geographies.

Attinasi's (1989) qualitative data allow for a greater understanding of the institutional experience.¹

Although much of the research on student withdrawals from higher education in North America has been produced in the United States, recent Canadian studies attempt to address many of the weaknesses in the American literature. I shall now turn to a select review of Canadian attrition studies.

Canadian Studies of Student Attrition from Institutions of Higher Education

Pascal and Kanowitch (1979) in a review of studies of student withdrawals from Canadian universities, note the paucity of published Canadian data. As a result, they attempt to locate and analyze unpublished studies of student attrition. Their review of reports received from 49 Canadian universities reveals (1979:17-27): that several studies conducted in the period 1973-74 to 1979 indicated that student withdrawal in Canada was on the increase; that

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¹ Attinasi's (1989) results will be examined more closely in the following chapters. Other qualitative attrition research has been and is currently being conducted in the United States. Tinto (1988) points out that he is presently involved in a range of ethnographic projects on student attrition and he cites an ethnographic study by Neumann (1985). The existence of such data, however, continues to be very limited, especially in published format.

student withdrawal was highest in the first year of university; that the rate of student withdrawal seemed to be highest prior to November 1; that withdrawal was highest in the faculty of Arts and Science and particularly so in Arts and that students seemed to withdraw, in very general terms, for vocational reasons, because of dissatisfaction with their academic program, because of a lack of interest in university, and for financial reasons.

Pascal and Kanowitch (1979:28-35) point out the key weaknesses that exist in the institutional research. They cite the complete lack of uniformity used by institutional researchers in studying student withdrawal as the largest obstacle to their own study. They further point to an abundance of serious methodological flaws in virtually all the withdrawal studies they examined. Many statistical works did not pay adequate attention to the dependent variable, that is withdrawal, and many causal studies did not allow students to choose from a sufficient list of reasons for withdrawal. Serious design flaws, the non-uniformity of research approaches and the sometimes conflicting evidence found by Pascal and Kanowitch (1979) point to the inadequacy of Canadian attrition literature prior to 1979.

More recent Canadian attrition research takes its departure from the American literature. Gomme and Gilbert (1984) provide a review of American attrition studies and

the retention strategies that emerge from them. Attrition research that is currently being conducted at the University of Guelph, under the direction of Sid Gilbert, is a direct response to many of the weaknesses in the American context. Specifically, Gilbert and Auger (1987:11) define their objectives as follows: to provide more precise measurements of the variables in Tinto's model, particularly the dependent variable, withdrawal; to gather more information from students concerning their intentions and reasons for university attendance and attendance changes; to incorporate reasons and financial aspects into the model and to explore in more detail, interactions among variables.

In a preliminary analysis, Gilbert and Auger (1987:14) find that 320 new semester one students withdrew from the University of Guelph between the first and second semesters and of these leavers, 133 responded to a first phase questionnaire. They compare the 320 leavers to the stayers across a variety of dimensions obtained from registrar records and further compare the 133 leavers to the stayers using questionnaire data. The comparison based on registrar data shows, among other things, that more of the dropouts had lower grade 13 averages than the stayers (1987:15). Comparisons from the questionnaire data establish that more of the leavers had lower degree plans than the stayers; that leavers tended not to receive as much parental encouragement to attend university as did the stayers; that leavers

expected to have less contact with faculty members for the purposes of getting basic information about their academic program, to discuss campus issues or to discuss future occupational plans; that leavers expected to spend less time on their studies per week than stayers expected to spend (12.4% of the leavers expected to spend less than 10 hours per week compared to 1.5% of the stayers) and that leavers tended to be disproportionally from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds (Gilbert and Auger, 1987:15-17).

In subsequent work, Gilbert (1989a) distinguishes between types of student departure and uses longitudinal data collected at the University of Guelph to calculate rates for the specific departure types. Gilbert et al. (1989) provide similar data. Their results show that of the 2875 students who entered in the fall 1986, 62% were continuing with their studies, 13.2% were academic failures, 9.0% were stopouts (temporary withdrawals), 10.7% were transfers to other institutions and 5.2% were system departures (1989:10).

In addition, Gilbert et al. (1989) use discriminant analysis to investigate those factors which could help to predict various departure categories. First, an analysis is performed using data obtained from registrar records only. Three categories of departure are identified for this analysis: leavers, academic failures and persisters. The independent variables available in the registrar files

include high school grades, age, gender, home province and nationality. The analysis correctly classifies 52.1% of the cases overall (chance rate set at 33.3%); 69.6% of those students who were academic failures are correctly classified whereas only 26.2% of the leavers are correctly classified (1989:11-13).

Gilbert et al. (1989:12-13) then supplement the registrar data with data obtained from student questionnaires, in which major aspects of Tinto's model are operationalized. The subsequent analysis is more successful at predicting the leavers than the previous analysis (48.5% compared to 26.2%). They (1989:13) further proceed to alter the dependent variable using information from a follow-up survey of withdrawals; stopouts are treated as persisters while all the other types of departure remain in the leaver category. Prediction of the leaver category increases to 56.9%. When the departure categories are further refined (transfers to other universities, transfers to community colleges and post-secondary system departures) and are subjected to discriminant analysis (based on similar but not identical predictor variables as in the above analyses) the system departures are predicted fairly well at 68.0%, the community college transfers are predicted at 35.5% and the university transfers are predicted only at 27.1% (1989:14). As a result, the refinement of departure categories shows that system leaving is better predicted than transfer

behaviour (1989:15).

The key contributions of Gilbert and his colleagues, to date, are the addition of Canadian data to a predominantly American literature and the specification of types of student departure such as those required to withdraw, those who intend to return to university (stopouts), system transfers and system leavers.

Work by Holdaway and Kelloway (1987) is a response to the need to provide Canadian data on the first year experience of university students. Although their results are primarily descriptive, they do provide valuable insight into students' first year experiences. Based on data obtained from a six page questionnaire (that was sent to all new students, directly out of high school, in the Faculties of Arts, Business, Education, Engineering and Science at the University of Alberta in the fall of 1984) their findings indicate, among others: that the greatest influence on the students' reasons for attending the university were family members; that the most important goal of the students was to prepare for an interesting career; that students saw themselves as being best prepared for university in terms of reading skills, listening skills and note taking; that a substantial proportion of the respondents believed themselves to be performing at levels less well than expected; that close to 72% of the respondents felt they were working harder than at high school and that students

had little involvement in extracurricular physical education activities, academic and cultural events and student clubs (1987:51-58). Students identified five areas where they needed to adjust most to university: amount of work, registration procedures, stress, difficulty of work and methods of instruction (1987:58-59).

Written comments gathered from the students are perhaps the most informative data that Holdaway and Kelloway (1987) obtained because these comments allow the students to express their concerns. A variety of comments, in which students compared their expectations prior to attending the university with their experiences at the university, were directed at the workload of the university courses (either more difficult or in some cases less), grades and exams, methods of instruction and teaching quality (often expressing conflicting messages) and the unexpectedly large size of the campus and classes (1987:55-56).

A recent Canadian study by Michael Benjamin (1990), at the University of Guelph, provides a detailed examination of the daily experience of first year students. Benjamin (1990:i) criticises researchers of the first year experience for their "adultocentric" perspective and for only rarely consulting with first year students about their concerns. During the period from September to December 1988, twenty-four students (twenty females and four males) completed a daily diary, bi-monthly unstructured interviews with a

student services "buddy" and four standardized questionnaires. The data were subjected to thematic analysis that produced 36 themes divided into three domains: personal, interpersonal and environmental. The data also underwent metathematic analysis which resulted in the identification of ten metathemes. The ten metathemes identified by Benjamin (1990:150-163) include: Getting Connected 1: New Friends; Getting Connected 2: Secondary Others; Staying Connected: Family, Friends and Lovers; Transitional Stress: Coping and Adjustment; Academic Transition; Self-esteem and Identity; Gender Differences; Sources of Variation; Place; and Cross-Linkage.

The metatheme Getting Connected 1 generally refers to the process of students developing a network of friends while Getting Connected 2 relates to students' interactions with secondary others such as professors, resident assistants and teaching assistants. Staying Connected involves new friends and family, old friends and romantic others who are in daily contact with students and who provide a source of both support and demand in the daily lives of students. Transitional stress is the fourth metatheme and refers to the dislocation in the daily lives of students both in the academic and social realms. Academic transition points to the differences in academic work experienced by first year students such as large classes and an impersonal relationship between the student

and professors. The sixth metatheme, self-esteem and identity is fairly self explanatory and refers to the shifts students made in their interpretation of their self (Benjamin, 1990:150-160).

Variation in experiences according to gender are noted by Benjamin (1990:161). The females, for example, tended to interact in one-on-one or small groups (primarily for the purposes of "talk") while the men tended to interact in groups (particularly for physical activity). The eighth metatheme, sources of variation, enforces the variety among the students studied; Benjamin argues (1990:162) that the students "...were characterized not by their homogeneity, but rather by their extraordinary variety." Place refers to the fact that each university campus is in some ways unique and that the characteristics of the place influence the daily lives of the students (1990:162). Finally, Benjamin (1990:162) speaks of cross-linkages in that domains overlapped as did subdomains such that romantic others, for example, interfered with academic performance and so on.

Benjamin's (1990) work is extremely useful because it is one of the few qualitative attempts to explore the first year experience. It is the lived experience of the student that is the central concern, in contrast to studies that tend to impose measures of institutional experiences on the student. His (1990:iv) overall conclusion is that:

...at its most meaningful, university life for them [students] was constituted out of their daily

interaction with those others significant to them: their parents, their friends (old and new), and their lovers. On balance, during their first semester at university, these relations formed the foreground of their experience, with academic concerns, however important, relegated to the background.

Benjamin highlights the importance of obtaining students' perceptions of their first year experience.

Linking the Present Research to the Past

The present research is best considered as a contribution to the recent qualitative attempts to explore the first year experience of university students. Specifically, the contributions of this paper must be understood in light of works by Attinasi (1989) and Benjamin (1990). While this study is motivated by similar concerns as those of Attinasi, (that is, an attempt to collect qualitative data describing the students' first year experience and to develop concepts based on that data) his data were gathered from Mexican American students after their first year experience whereas the current data were collected from Canadian university students while they were enrolled in their first year.

This study will allow the author to compare results, to some extent, with those of Benjamin (1990). This research was not, however, intended to replicate Benjamin's (1990) work. In fact, it was conceived of and designed prior to consulting his results. Throughout the paper I isolate

several of Benjamin's (1990) key findings for discussion, especially those findings that are most relevant to this study. Qualitative studies of the student experience must take place at a variety of different institutions to provide an opportunity to compare results across Canadian institutions.⁸ Benjamin's (1990) data, however, were obtained from students during their first semester experience while the results reported here were gathered in March 1990 (at the end of the second semester). The sampling strategies used in each study are also somewhat different (a complete description of the sampling strategy employed here is included in the next chapter). As Benjamin (1990:195) argues: "...any future effort with university populations would need to attend to at least three key dimensions: gender (male-female), residence (on-off campus), and year of study (1-2-3-4)." The research strategy used in this paper attends to each dimension, especially the on-off campus experience. Benjamin (1990:197) suggests that the absence of off-campus student subgroups limits his study. I pay special attention to the off-campus experience.

The research perspective guiding this work is somewhat different from those perspectives used by Attinasi (1989)

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⁸ Given my earlier argument on the potential impact of structural/environmental variables on the first year experience, it is conceivable that the experience of Carleton University students may, in some ways, be different from the experience of Guelph University students. The reader is encouraged to consult Benjamin (1990) for more detail on the experiences of University of Guelph students.

and Benjamin (1990). Attinasi's (1989:251) study is guided "...only by a broad research perspective- the sociology of everyday life...." while Benjamin (1990) concentrates on student development theory. Benjamin (1990) supports an ecological model of student development. He (1990:197) states that:

An ecological perspective re-introduces context...all events, processes, and persons can only be understood fully when seen in context....Indeed, what is 'whole' about 'whole students' is that they be seen in all of the contexts out of which they constitute their daily experience.

Although this paper can be considered in light of student development theory, it is more conceptually oriented.⁹ My purpose is to assess the adequacy of attrition researchers' conceptualization and operationalization of Tinto's concepts of social and academic integration by allowing students the opportunity to define their institutional experiences.

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⁹ This is not to say that Tinto's model cannot be considered a part of student development theory. In fact, as was discussed earlier, his model has been used to study a variety of educational outcomes. At various points, Benjamin (1990) refers to and criticizes Tinto's work; however, Tinto's model is not the central concern of his study.

CHAPTER THREE

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The Institutional Setting

The data were collected at a single institution, Carleton University. It is a young university, having been established in 1942, and it is fully accredited by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities of the Province of Ontario. Carleton is classified as a medium-sized institution; its undergraduate enrolment was approximately 17, 000 and its graduate enrolment was about 2, 100 in 1989 (This is Carleton, 1989). Residence accommodation was provided for approximately 1, 800 students in 1989 (This is Carleton, 1989) meaning that Carleton is primarily a commuter institution. There are five academic faculties that offer a variety of graduate and undergraduate programs: Arts, Social Sciences, Science, Engineering, Graduate Studies and Research.

Carleton is located in the nation's capital, Ottawa, Ontario, and is situated south of the centre of the city bordering the Rideau River and the Rideau Canal. One of the most important structural characteristics of the university is that its twenty seven buildings are linked by a series of underground tunnels. Due, in part, to the recent expansion in the student population at Carleton and declining government funding, a private fundraising campaign

called the Challenge Fund is in operation. The result has been the construction of and expansion of several campus buildings, including a student residence.

One of the key policy issues at Carleton over the past decade has been its "open door admission policy" where students are admitted to the university with lower high school grade point averages than accepted at most other institutions in Ontario (students require a minimum overall average of 60% from high school to be considered for admission to Carleton). For this reason, Carleton University has battled against an adverse reputation as "last chance U".

Student attrition at Carleton University is an important issue. In December 1988, a proposal was submitted by the university to the CRB Foundation Drop-out Prevention Program in which it is suggested that a Transitions Program to combat drop out among at-risk students be created (at-risk being defined as first year entering students with high school averages between 60% and 65% and returning Carleton or admitted students on academic probation). In this proposal (1988:2), it is claimed that: "Of the new students who register in Arts and Social Sciences at Carleton in First Year, about one in four will fail to register the following year and slightly fewer than one in two will fail to graduate from Carleton within five years of their first registration." These numbers suggest the extent of the

problem.¹⁰

Research Design

In the present research, priority is given to the voices of students.¹¹ The data stem from two sources: 1. written comments to open-ended questions gathered from a select group of first year students during a pilot study and 2. in-depth interviews with first year students who registered at Carleton University in the fall of 1989 and who continued to be registered in March 1990. Because the purpose of this study is to conceptualize the first year experience, rather than to explain attrition or educational outcomes, it was decided that the information would be obtained from students while they were in their first year. By asking the interview subjects to discuss their future goals, however, it was hoped that some links could be made between the

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¹⁰ There has been expanding interest in the institutional experiences of students at Carleton University as is indicated by the recent completion of a Task Force report on the First Year in Arts (1990), the existence throughout the 1989-90 academic year of "Brown Bag" lunch sessions on teaching and learning in the Social Sciences and a survey of off-campus student needs conducted by Carleton University Counselling Services. The Arts Task Force report (1990) highlights such issues as socio-cultural adjustment, intellectual-academic adjustment, rates of student attrition and the adequacy of first year courses and is representative of growing concern with the first year experience of university students.

¹¹ The data analysis techniques used here are heavily influenced by Kirby and McKenna's discussion of "methods from the margins" in which they argue the need for intersubjectivity in research: "When managing and analyzing the data, this means that priority will be given to the voices from the margins" (1989:129).

students' first year experience and their future educational plans.

Phase One: Pilot Study--Students' Written Comments

This project began with a pilot study in which a select group of first year students was asked to provide written comments to a series of open-ended questions. These comments served two purposes: first, to gather general information on students' perceptions of their first year experience at Carleton University, and second to assist in the design of questions for in-depth interviews.¹² As is mentioned above, much of the literature available on students' first year experiences tells us very little about their actual perceptions; therefore, I was hesitant to begin interviewing students without some prior understanding of their concerns. In what follows, I present the methodology surrounding the pilot study and briefly refer to the key findings. The results, and a more detailed analysis, are found in Appendix 6.

The Sample

The information was gathered from students registered in a large day division first year Sociology class (size

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¹² This research is part of a larger project which also involved data gathered from a first year Sociology night division class. These students were asked to indicate the five activities they spend the most time at per week and to keep a journal of their activities for one week including social, academic and routine activities. The data are not included here due to their extensive nature and the relatively separate issue of how students spend their time.

approximately 430). The purpose was to obtain comments from students who had at least experienced one large first year class. Data collection took place during class time in November, 1989. All those who attended the class were asked to participate. The sample was essentially one of convenience, due to the accessibility of the subjects to the researcher (which, of course raises the issue of sample bias). Because the overall composition of the class in attendance was first year students, it was not necessary to exclude upper year students from the sample as their numbers were too small to have any effect on the results. Although the sample was not representative of the student body or the class sampled (full attendance was not obtained; total class attendance was 242, of these 26 students left prior to the exercise), the information obtained is useful to aid in assessing the adequacy of the concepts of social and academic integration.

The Instrument

The students were asked to form into groups of approximately ten in which they would discuss their first year experience according to general questions provided by the researcher. Responses were obtained from eight groups (Groups A) who were asked to evaluate their positive and negative university experiences according to these questions: 1. Residence life, faculty relationships, friendships, and campus activities are all elements of the

university experience. What would you say have been: a) your best experiences at Carleton University? b) your worst experiences at Carleton University? Eight groups (Groups B) answered the following questions concerning their extracurricular activities at Carleton: 1. What extracurricular activities are you aware of that are available at Carleton? 2. What extra-curricular activities do you attend or participate in at Carleton? How often? 3. How important do you think it is to be involved in extra-curricular activities at Carleton? Why do you feel this way? Finally, nine groups (Groups C) provided information on their positive and negative academic experiences when asked: 1. What factors have had a positive impact on your academic experience thus far at Carleton? 2. What factors have had a negative impact on your academic performance at Carleton thus far? 3. How important are academic activities to a person's overall experience at Carleton?

Data Analysis

Each response, for all the groups, was read carefully and considered in detail while the in-depth interview questions were being constructed. The actual codes and frequencies that were later determined were less important for the design of the interview questions than was the range of and nature of responses provided by these students. In order to assess concepts or to compare the written responses with the interview results, however, it was necessary that

the data take a form presentable to the reader.

Data analysis took place using qualitative induction; that is, coding categories emerged directly from the students' responses (Berg, 1989:111-112). The data were coded according to questions; each question was considered separately; and the unit of analysis was the entire response. Not all the questions asked of the students were equally relevant to the present research and, therefore, only the responses to select questions are presented in Appendix 6 (although all questions were read for the interview design). Both questions asked of Groups A and the first two questions asked of Groups C were especially applicable to this study.

An attempt was made to identify as many coding categories as possible in the responses. For the purpose of this work, a coding category refers to the label attached by the researcher to any idea, event, theme or common property that identifies the content of the response (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:139). Where possible, the labels stemmed directly from the students' words. Responses that seemed to suggest similar ideas, events, themes or properties were assigned the same code and a frequency count was recorded for each coding category. In order to provide some degree of representativeness of responses, only those coding categories that emerged for at least two groups are presented. Because the data were group data, similar

responses for any group were considered as one response.

Results

The written comments gathered from students point to several influences on their first year experience. First, there seemed to be a relationship between social experiences and positive evaluations. Second, some experiences could have both positive and negative influences on the first year (being in residence and professors, for example). Third, students seemed to appreciate differing forms of control in their lives such as independence and academic control. Fourth, the classroom experience of students was highlighted. Finally, the emergence of the themes transportation and parking points to a need to consider the structural effects on students' lives (see Appendix 6 for a complete analysis of the written comments).

This information led to certain questions being asked of first year students during in-depth interviews. It was decided that the interview subjects would be asked to describe their best and worst experiences at Carleton in order to allow the students the freedom to pursue issues of importance to them. The students' social and academic experiences were to be examined, especially to explore potential overlap and classroom experiences. The effect of students' living arrangements was to be discussed in light of the parking/transportation problems mentioned (assumed to be most serious for off-campus students) and the positive

and negative effects of living in residence that emerged.

Coding Limitations

The greatest limitation to the coding of the written comments was the nature of the data themselves. For the most part, very brief responses were provided and of course, it was not possible to discover the context in which the response emerged (that is, how the response developed in conversation). It was also not possible for the author to probe for information that might provide more insight into the meaning of the responses. It is for this reason that I did not attempt to further reduce the coding categories into more conceptually oriented categories. The issue of coder reliability (also an issue here) is explored in detail in the ensuing discussion. The usefulness of the data, therefore, is limited. It was decided that a research strategy was necessary that would allow me to explore the student experience in greater detail, with the opportunity to probe for more information and to continue to give priority to students' voices. What follows is a discussion of the methodology surrounding twelve in-depth student interviews.

Phase Two: In-depth Student Interviews

The Sample

Data were collected from students in a series of twelve in-depth (average of 1 1/2 - 2 hour) interviews. The sample was essentially one of convenience and was chosen from

students registered in a day division first year Sociology class that had not been previously sampled. There was no reason to believe that self selection occurred among the day division classes; therefore, the only concern was to sample a class that had not previously been asked to reflect on its experiences.¹³

A list of all the students registered in the first year Sociology course was obtained from university records. The list included the names, student numbers and academic status of all the students. Any student who was not registered as a first year student (upper year students and qualifying year students) was excluded from the list. Also removed were students who had withdrawn from the course and students enrolled as special students. Previous research (see Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983) suggests that institutional experiences may be different for males and females. As a result, forty male and forty female prospective subjects were chosen randomly for study from the remaining list of the first year Sociology class. Random selection was used to avoid asking for volunteers who might have been, in some ways, different from the remainder of the class.

Research by Bean and Metzner (1985) suggests that older, part-time and commuter students may have experiences very different from "traditional" first year students. Work

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¹³ The reader is reminded that the only Sociology night division course had been previously sampled during the initial research phase.

by Chickering (1974) points to differences in the college experiences of commuter and residential students. For these reasons, interview candidates were split into on and off-campus students using university records. Foreign students and students for whom a local phone number could not be reached were further eliminated from among the forty male and forty female candidates (one "female" candidate was eliminated due to mistaken gender). The author was left with a list of 36 females (29 off-campus and 7 on-campus) and 36 males (32 off-campus and 4 on-campus). A second sample of 15 males had to be drawn because two male, residence students did not appear for their interviews and could not be reached to reschedule. Two male on-campus students were obtained from this second sample.

The candidates were selected for interviewing based on accessibility and willingness to participate. All interview subjects were fully informed of the nature of the study, the duration of the interview and were asked for permission to tape record the interview (see Appendix 1 for a copy of the informed consent form). Permission to take notes during the interview was obtained. Interview subjects had to conform to the following criteria: students had to be registered as full time in September, 1989; be less than or equal to twenty years of age and be Canadian citizens. Representativeness was not an important consideration in the selection process because the study was designed to explore

rather than to validate conceptual issues (see Appendix 2 for subject demographic information). The final interview sample consisted of three female and three male on-campus students, three female and three male off-campus students who registered at Carleton University in the fall of 1989 and continued to be registered in March 1990. All the interview participants were single. The interviews were conducted between March 12, 1990 and March 28, 1990 in a private office in the Sociology/Anthropology Department at Carleton University.

The Instrument

The interview questions emerged from a consideration of three areas: 1. the written comments gathered from students in phase one of this study 2. my feeling that more information needed to be obtained about student experiences at a variety of institutions 3. the limitations of past attrition literature. It was especially important to gather information that would enable me to respond to many of the weaknesses identified in American attrition research, namely the problems of conceptualization/operationalization surrounding the terms academic and social integration and the need to learn more about the students' definitions of situation (especially their perceptions of their environment) using qualitative research techniques.

The interview format is best described as semistandardized; that is, a set of predetermined topics was

established for discussion but the interviewer and the subjects were allowed ample opportunity to digress (Berg, 1989:17). A series of questions was organized according to six general topics: The First Year Experience in General, Fit to the Environment, Worthwhile, Social Integration, Academic Integration and The Overall Experience. Each topic was created with a general purpose in mind. The First Year Experience in General, for example, included questions aimed at discovering how students define their institutional experience and the salient issues of concern to them (see Appendix 3 for a copy of the interview topics, questions and the general purpose of each topic). Within these topics, however, the questions were sufficiently open-ended to allow the subject to respond in any way he or she desired. The topics merely served as organizing principles and did not limit the information to be provided by the subjects. Although some structure was apparent in the interview design, (for the most part topics were discussed in order from general to more specific, topics were predetermined, some questions were more specific than others) a conscious attempt was made not to place excessive structure on the students. The students' experience (or anyone else's for that matter) cannot be easily moulded to fit any one structure because it does not unfold that way in day-to-day existence. This fact was best indicated by the tendency of students to discuss many issues within the context of one

question and by the fact that responses to questions would often overlap.

Not all questions were asked of all students and not all questions were asked in the same order. In some cases, questions could be omitted because the student had already discussed the issue at hand and in other cases, the question was not relevant to that student's experience. The decision to omit a question was made by the author based on the unfolding of the conversation with the student.

A series of questions proved to be difficult during the in-depth interviews. These questions concerned the use of the term "the university" (for example, question 1.09 Can the university help with your problems?). I had intended this term to refer to the general administrative structure of the university but the students interpreted it in a variety of ways. Because the questions were considered as guides only, I did not interfere with their interpretations during the interviews. The purpose was not to obtain any particular response or interpretation, but rather to suggest avenues for discussion.

In addition, students were asked to fill out a brief structured questionnaire designed to gather basic demographic information and to obtain student responses to a limited series of measures that are commonly used by attrition researchers to assess academic and social integration. The items were adapted from a series of three

questionnaires provided the author by Sid Gilbert, who is currently studying student attrition with the Career and Education Achievement in the Student Environment project at the University of Guelph (see Appendix 4).

Prior to conducting the interviews, permission was obtained from the university ethics committee and the interview schedule and questionnaire were pretested in a series of four interviews with two female students (one off-campus and one residence student) and two males (one off-campus and one residence student). The pretests resulted in minor changes being made to the interview schedule, primarily the addition of a question concerning social and academic pressures, the clarification of the term academic experiences and the addition of a question concerning social activities. All the pretest interviews fell within the expected duration of 1 1/2 hours. All the pretest interview subjects felt that their first year experience was sufficiently tapped by the questions asked (with the exception of social and academic pressures). During the subsequent twelve in-depth interviews, however, it was discovered that question number eighteen on the structured questionnaire did not allow for a 'not applicable' response. This question was altered for the later interviews and the implications of this change are discussed later in the paper.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with a review of the interview tapes. The tapes were listened to once in order to supplement the notes taken during the interviews and to ensure that all the relevant information provided by the students had been captured.¹⁴ The tapes were listened to a second time in order to add direct quotes where the summaries of student responses seemed to indicate that coding may be problematic or that more specific information would be useful. The tapes were listened to a third time to verify the quotes and to add further quotes that were illustrative of emerging themes in the data.

Managing the Data:

The data were organized according to the interview topics, questions, the student's gender and the residence status of the subject. For example, all of the male, residence students' responses were grouped together according to the interview topics and questions within the topics. Similarly, the female residence student interviews, the female off-campus interviews and the male off-campus

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¹⁴ The responses were paraphrased as close as possible to the students' own words and summaries of the students' responses were recorded. Special attention was taken to include information that was relevant to the students' accounts of their own experiences while enrolled at Carleton University. Where the notes seemed to be incomplete for coding, the original interview tape was consulted. One tape was inaudible and thus only the interview notes could be used. The problem with this tape was realized immediately following the interview and I took special care to review the interview notes at that time.

responses were placed together. The only reason for organizing the data in this way was to help the author to see common patterns (or unique patterns) in the responses for male/female students or on/off campus students. When coding, I read the data according to group (for example, I read all the responses from each male residence student in sequence). The information obtained from students was sufficient to establish on/off campus differences. Gender variation, however, was difficult to assess due primarily to inadequate detail in the responses. As a result, only obvious gender differences are noted.

Coding Procedures:

Data analysis proceeded by qualitative induction; that is, categories and subcategories came directly from the data (Berg, 1989:111-112). The unit of analysis was the entire student response to the questions within each interview topic. Coding categories were not, however, determined separately for each question, but emerged across questions/topics. Because the responses to questions tended to overlap and students were free to pursue a variety of issues within each question, it did not make sense to retain the topic headings or questions as categories or subcategories. The questions/topics were used only as a way of organizing and managing the large amount of data.

While the entire response to each question was read,

not all the information in the questions was necessarily coded. I read the student responses with the research issues in mind; therefore, some information was more likely to be coded than other information. Only responses that dealt with the students' own experiences were coded (as a result, question 6.09 was not included) and I was interested in information that provided insight into students' experiences at Carleton University. In particular, a few questions (questions 4.10, 5.10, 5.11, 2.24-2.27 especially) asked for specific responses that were not directly relevant to the present research questions.¹⁵ Question 4.10, for example, asked students if they were able to get to know many people at Carleton University and in most cases, I asked students to estimate the number of people they came to know. The actual numbers of people mentioned were not coded because not all students provided estimates, the estimates were only tentative in nature and the research issue was not to ascertain the numbers of people met but the processes that underlie peer relationships. Questions 2.24-2.27 aimed at discussing preparedness for university. For this paper, I was not concerned with the number of students who felt prepared or not prepared but rather with the issues students discuss when asked about preparedness. As I have already noted, questions containing the term 'the university' (1.09,

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¹⁵ The reader is reminded that the interview data gathered here are part of a larger project that examines student attrition issues more generally.

1.10, 4.14, 5.29, 5.30) led to problems. Several students responded to these questions with "yes" or "no" responses, which were not coded because of the confusion surrounding the questions.

The interview coding took place in five stages: 1. a small section of the data was isolated for open-coding 2. the remainder of the responses were open-coded 3. data reduction followed the first read of the interviews; subcategories and organizing categories emerged 4. the responses were read for a second time to determine the accuracy of the coding and to reconsider the subcategories and organizing categories 5. each response within a subcategory was considered as the subcategories and organizing categories were described.

In order to make the process more manageable, the students' responses to questions in the topic, The First Year Experience in General, were isolated for coding as the first stage. Residence students' responses were considered together and off-campus students' comments were grouped together. Due to the extremely general nature of the topic, it was decided that it would be useful as a starting point for analysis. Initially, the interviews were open-coded; that is, they were coded in as many ways as possible (Berg, 1989:117). The responses of each student were read and coding categories emerged from these responses. A coding category refers to the label attached by the researcher to

any idea, event, theme or common property that identifies the content of the response (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:139). Similar responses were assigned the same coding category. Often several ideas, events and themes arose from a single response and each was labelled and recorded.

Two lists of coding categories resulted, one for the residence students and one for the off-campus students. These lists were examined to see if any similar or different coding categories had arisen. The lists were then collapsed into one set of coding categories for all the students' responses within this topic. This set of coding categories became a base from which to continue reading the remaining interviews. Tentative subcategories and organizing categories were also noted (subcategories and organizing categories are defined below).

The second stage of coding involved reading the students' responses within the remaining topics. Again, each response was read and its contents were identified, labelled and recorded. I continued to code as widely as possible. Similar information was given the same coding category and a record was kept of tentative subcategories and organizing categories that seemed to be forming. The list of coding categories that emerged from the first stage was then added to, altered or kept the same.

During the third stage of coding, data reduction began. The list of coding categories was looked at for overlaps and

similarities. Coding categories that seemed to be linked by a similar idea, event or theme were collapsed and labelled to form what I refer to as subcategories. The coding categories became the contents of the subcategories (in some cases a subcategory would contain many coding categories whereas in other cases, it might contain only one coding category). Various subcategories seemed to suggest similar, yet distinct issues. Subcategories that appeared to be related were placed together for consideration within what I call an organizing category. The organizing category represents a single issue or theme to which various subcategories can be tied. Subcategories form the contents of the organizing category. Following the third stage of analysis, three levels of categories became apparent: the coding category, the subcategory and the organizing category.

As Kirby and McKenna (1989:128-129) point out, the researcher constantly reflects on the data and the process of analyzing them; the researcher moves back and forth between the data, concepts, ideas and explanations. Data reduction stems from this process. As is suggested by Berg (1989:118) and Attinasi (1989:255), I kept research notes while coding the interviews. I recorded three series of memos: methodological notes (concerning decisions on how to code, what to code, and so on); analysis notes (concerning similar ideas that were suggested by coding categories,

records of tentative organizing categories and so on) and personal reflections (concerning my feelings, struggles and triumphs while coding and interviewing). These sets of notes were indispensable to the data reduction process (see Appendix 5 for a presentation of my personal reflections).

After the interview results were set aside for a few days, I returned to them and read each of the responses again to see if the coding categories seemed to capture the nature of each response and to see if any potential coding categories had been overlooked. The subcategories and organizing categories were reconsidered during this fourth stage. In some cases, subcategories appeared to fit better within a different organizing category (often because the subcategories tended to overlap) and some subcategories were further collapsed into a single subcategory. In total, seventy subcategories and eleven organizing categories emerged after two complete readings of the data.

The organizing categories and subcategories presented in the following chapters evolved through a dynamic process. The more often that I read the responses, the more I understood what the students were telling me. The organizing categories and subcategories that were established after the second reading of the interviews were not considered to be "final". The need to be flexible and to allow the data to move among organizing categories and subcategories became evident while I wrote the category

descriptions (see Kirby and McKenna, 1989:160 for further discussion). In order to describe the contents of the organizing categories and the subcategories, I returned to the original data and read the responses that were placed in each subcategory. This procedure was useful for a variety of reasons. First, it enabled me to remain "grounded" in the students' responses. Second, I was able to clarify the contents of the organizing categories and the subcategories and specify the links between them. Third, I was able to check for any responses that may have been overlooked. Finally, it ensured that all of the responses within the subcategories were considered while I wrote the descriptions (see Kirby and McKenna, 1989:161). This process helps to avoid the temptation for the researcher to be selective in what he/she chooses to include in the category descriptions.

Coding Issues: Reliability, Mutual Exclusiveness,
Exhaustiveness -- Research Phases One and Two

There are three types of reliability that must be discussed here: inter-time, inter-observer and research participant. Inter-time reliability refers to coding done by the same researcher at different times. As was discussed, the data in both phases were coded at least twice by the same researcher to check for consistency. Nachmias and Nachmias (1981:277) argue that one of the least discussed reliability issues is whether or not the researcher and subjects agree on the interpretation of

responses. Some degree of match between how the research participants code the data and how the researcher codes the data would need to be ascertained before a complete reliability assessment could be made (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1981:277). Limited resources prevented this process from being undertaken.

Inter-observer reliability refers to the degree to which different coders make the same coding decisions (Walizer and Wienir, 1978:405-407). Because the interviews and written comments were coded by one person only, variability among coders was not an issue in this paper. As Kirby and McKenna (1989:160) argue, however, large amounts of material mean that many interpretations of the data are possible. Similarly, the more unstructured the material is, the more interpretations may vary. The written comments obtained from students tended to be brief and uncomplicated and were gathered more or less as a guide for the subsequent in-depth interviews. Therefore, no attempt was made to have the comments coded by a second researcher. The interview data were much more unstructured and complex and consequently, it was decided that some steps must be taken to determine whether or not two researchers would obtain the same coding results. The purpose of this study was not to obtain frequencies of certain responses. As a result, the degree of match between coders was not as important an issue for this research as it may be for other studies.

A complete assessment of inter-observer reliability would require that the entire coding procedure be undertaken by a second researcher (especially if one was to compare induced categories emerging from the interviews). Due to a lack of resources, this was not possible (but could be undertaken). A second researcher was provided with the list of subcategories I identified following the second reading of the interviews and was asked to use these subcategories to code select responses. Questions 1.01, 1.02, 1.03 were coded for all the female off-campus students; questions 1.01, 1.02, 1.03, 1.04, 1.05 and 1.09 were coded for one male off-campus student and questions 1.01, 1.02, 1.03, 1.04, 1.05, 1.10, 1.09 were coded for one female residence student. The results of this "second coding" were examined with three concerns in mind: 1. to see if there were any circumstances where the second researcher had a code that I did not have 2. to search for any obvious coding disagreements 3. to see if there were any responses for which I did not have an appropriate subcategory.

A comparison of results did not reveal any serious problems in the original coding. Circumstances where the second researcher had a code that I did not have seemed to be more a matter of cross referencing than my overlooking codes. For example, I found it necessary to reconsider the links between the subcategory, Living Arrangements and Convenience and the subcategory, Getting to and From the

University. Similarly, I had to rethink the relationship between the subcategory, The Social/Academic Balance and the subcategory, Social Relations and Academics. Where necessary, I added these cross references throughout the responses. In some cases, I had not missed a code but had included it later in the student's response.

Responses for which there seemed to be coding disagreements were fully discussed. It was decided that these discrepancies were not serious and did not merit changing the original coding. In fact, these discrepancies seemed to be more a product of the sheer number of subcategories to consider and of one researcher's greater familiarity with them, than the result of disagreement. Finally, and most important, there were no circumstances in which a subcategory was not available for a response, a finding that is directly linked to the issue of exhaustiveness.

One of the requirements of a coding scheme is that it be exhaustive; each response must be able to be classified (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1981:275). Throughout the data analysis, I was careful to ensure that all the relevant student experiences could be accounted for by the subcategories and organizing categories. The fact that the subcategories emerged directly from the students' responses helped to ensure the exhaustiveness of the coding.

A further consideration in this study is the mutual

exclusiveness of the subcategories and organizing categories. To be mutually exclusive a subcategory should refer to a single dimension of a response (Nachmias and Nachmias, 1981:275). There is a great deal of overlap among the subcategories developed from the in-depth interviews. Each subcategory, however, refers to a distinct idea, theme or issue that warrants its separation from other subcategories.

Data Presentation

The results of the student interviews are separated into four chapters for ease of presentation. Each chapter contains a series of organizing categories. Within each chapter, the dimensions of the organizing categories (the subcategories) are described in detail and sample quotations are provided. All the quotations are identified by the subject's gender, residence status, interview number and the question number from where it was obtained (for example, MOC051.03 refers to male, off-campus, interview number 05 and question 1.03). Some quotations have been edited, as is indicated by the use of brackets (), to ensure individual confidentiality. Punctuation has been placed where it seemed necessary and student pauses have been removed (that is, when students stopped to ponder their responses they would often use a phrase such as "um", "uh"). I was careful to select quotes that were illustrative of the range of experiences reported by students. Further, the links

between subcategories within an organizing category are specified. Finally, analysis between subcategories and organizing categories takes place. The purpose of this paper is to explore the range of experiences students describe as significant to their first year at university not to report on the frequency of certain types of responses.

Each subcategory, arguably, is worthy of inclusion in this paper. Due to space limitations and the abundance of data, however, it was not possible to retain all the student information. The decision to include a subcategory was based on four criteria. First, as a general guideline, only those subcategories that were reported by at least two of twelve students are included. Second, subcategories were retained on the basis of my sense of the importance of the subcategory to the student experience. This decision specifically involved my impression of the influence of the subcategory on other areas of the students' lives and the importance of the subcategory to the understanding of the student experience overall. Third, the relevance of the subcategory to the current research issue, namely the assessment of past attrition researchers' conceptualization and operationalization of the social and academic experience was evaluated. Finally, the amenability of the subcategory to policy initiatives was considered. The subcategories Getting Home and The City of Ottawa, for example, were not

relevant to institutional policy (the university cannot control available transportation to the student's home town and the institution can do little to alter perceptions of the city). In contrast, the use of student services is an example of a subcategory amenable to policy (see Appendix 7 for a complete list of subcategories).

Although this study relies heavily on qualitative data, some limited quantitative analysis was possible. Where warranted, quantitative data are embedded in the qualitative descriptions. As is mentioned above, students were asked to respond to a limited series of fixed choice questions following the interview. These results are presented in tabular form. In the subsequent four chapters, I highlight the issues and experiences students deemed to be important to their first year at university. I present the results of twelve in-depth interviews with first year students. In Chapter Eight, I assess the adequacy of past attrition researchers' conceptualization and operationalization of the concepts of institutional experience, social and academic integration using the information obtained from students.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDING AND MAKING FRIENDS

Meeting friends, making contacts, sustaining relations and interacting with people were among the salient aspects of the students' experiences. The "human dimension" of the university experience formed an important part of student life. Among the themes that emerged in my discussions with first year students were Personal Contacts, Socializing and Orientation Week. Each of these themes provides insight into the interpersonal relationships that take place at a university. It became clear that an understanding of students' interpersonal relationships could only be gained through recognizing the range and strength of personal contacts, through knowledge of the social activities that draw students together and through an exploration of the Orientation Week experiences of many of these students. I discuss each of these issues in detail under the appropriate categories and subcategories. Categories are identified by capital letters.

PERSONAL CONTACTS

Personal Contacts in General

Interpersonal relationships have long been cited as salient to the undergraduate experience (see Tinto, 1975,

1987). In fact, Benjamin (1990) found that interpersonal contacts tend to predominate in the student experience. Many of the students I interviewed pointed to the general importance of the people around them. For some, "the people" were part of their positive evaluations of their university experience:

I'd say the number one thing that I like is the people (MR102.05).

...I've had a good experience at Carleton the first year. But I don't know if the university had a lot to do with that like the actual institution. I think it's more the people involved than anything else (MOC096.08).

Students referred to the overall importance of friends/contacts for a variety of reasons, among them that peers are a source of support or assistance; that having friends can affect a student's self confidence; that people can help the transition to university, especially the process of fitting into the setting and that personal contacts may be related to students' decisions to remain at or leave the university. The following comments provide a range of responses that indicate the overall importance of personal contacts:

Fitting in means a support group. It means feeling comfortable when you go out with people. Like you don't feel like you're an outsider intruding on other people (MR112.10).

And if you want to go to university it's important ...that you meet people and have friends, otherwise you don't have anyone there...it's kind of hard to go anywhere (MOC052.10).

Just that I just felt comfortable knowing that

they (friends) were there and that I could turn to them if I had problems and that they'd turn to me if they had problems and it just you know made me feel worth something I guess (FOC124.03).

If I knew I was going to come back next year nobody to talk to...I'd have nobody to live with...I'd go try something different (MOC094.01).

Benjamin (1990:81) criticizes past research for its failure to differentiate among types of peer relationships. One of the concerns in this study is to discover with whom students make personal contacts. When asked with whom they socialize, all the residence students agreed that their contacts were mostly with people from Carleton (although two males did know people from outside of Carleton). The responses were not quite so clear cut among the off-campus students. For one male off-campus student, his peer relationships were balanced between Carleton students and non-Carleton students. A second male off-campus student associated most with friends outside of Carleton. Similarly, two female off-campus students pointed to having contacts with people outside the university. In the words of off-campus students:

I suppose most of my friends do go to Carleton but at the same time I still do have several close friends who don't, but I suppose the majority are at Carleton (FOC124.07).

And being an off-campus student I tend to socialize with people that come here and also other people that don't go to Carleton University (MOC054.06).

People from outside of Carleton. Most of the friends that I usually go out with are from (his old high school) (MOC024.07).

This experience seemed to contrast with the experience of the residence students:

People from Carleton. I haven't really, I don't think I know anybody in Ottawa who's not from Carleton (FR044.07).

I think I only know about 2 or 3 other people in Ottawa that are not Carleton students...but I'd say in general basically people at Carleton (MR104.07).

Mostly people from Carleton. I've never really met people from outside of Carleton...(MR014.07).

Students' contacts may be determined by where students live (off or on-campus). Chickering (1974:62) found that commuting students tend to have more close friends at another college or not in college at all than do residential students. One student's experience (he lived both on and off-campus) concurred with this finding:

Ya you meet more Ottawa people I think off-campus...on-campus you're always with students (MOC094.06).

Although some students did maintain contacts with old friends who were also Carleton students, all but one student agreed that most of their contacts at Carleton University were new contacts.

This discussion points to the importance of personal contacts in general for the student experience, to potential differences among residence and off-campus students' contacts and to the fact that students were able to differentiate among types of contacts. These issues will

become clearer as more of the students' experiences are explored.

Making New Contacts

Given Benjamin's (1990) finding that peer relationships are not undifferentiated, it should come as no surprise that students pointed to a variety of personal contacts: new contacts, old contacts, romantic relationships, the family and upper year students. The reality of being a first year student is that one confronts a multitude of new faces.

I think coming here too has made me more outgoing. You're forced, you don't know anybody so you're forced to...talk to people, make the first move (MOC092.11).

I think it's helped a great deal. It's improved my social skills I guess in the way that I can, it's easier for me to meet people than it was before...(MR114.14).

Perhaps one of the unintended consequences of university attendance is its effect on a student's social skills.

For the students with whom I spoke, making new contacts was one of the central preoccupations of first year life. For nine of twelve students, meeting people was cited among their best experiences at university:

I guess all the new friends I've met is really the best thing so far (MR011.01).

...I just met so many people and had such a good time and it really made the transition to university a thousand times easier so it was great (FOC121.01).

My best experience was just meeting a whole range of people I guess (MOC091.01).

And the best part would be the fact that I'm meeting all these new people (FR071.01).

The reasons why making new contacts was so positive for many students varied. For some, new contacts made them happy with their choice of Carleton as a university while some students noted the relationship between new contacts and fitting in at the university. For many students, meeting new people made the university experience a worthwhile one and, for some students, new contacts eased the adjustment to university and helped them establish some sense of identity or self assurance.

...basically...I really like the way that most of my classes are taught... and all the good friends that I made here (FR042.03).

Fitting in I just went to a party... with one friend and I did not know a soul but I really enjoyed myself and I ended up meeting a lot of people that night...(FOC082.11).

I think it (meeting new friends) really helped ease me into it because he (a new friend) had, he lived with two other guys and the guys had girlfriends so there was some girls I got to know and then they all had friends. So all of a sudden I had a new bunch of people...(FR074.01).

When asked how he dealt with what he perceived to be an impersonal setting, one student responded:

Just the people I guess, keeping up on, just trying to know more people... (MR011.05).

Conversely, not knowing people was cited as a negative experience or a worry for some students and as a reason for

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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)

not being fully involved in the university by others:

Actually it's (the first year) alright but it's not that great because you don't really know anyone and you're still your first year so like at the bottom of the hill kind of thing...(MOC051.03).

Cause (reason for not hanging around the university) I don't know too many people here (MOC021.03).

I was really, really nervous about starting university. I thought I'd have no friends and I'd be totally isolated...(FOC121.01).

So the first couple of weeks are tough when you don't know anyone and you don't know where to go but after that it gets a lot easier (MR101.03).

Meeting new people was not always an easy or a positive experience for first year students:

Bad experiences I guess getting to know different people...having to adjust to these people (MR011.02).

Sometimes it's difficult to meet people, depends on where you go. I said before that I didn't like Hull very much. I think it's, I don't know why, but in Hull it seems like there's a little bit of tension there...(MR104.04).

Residence students, in particular, are often thrown into a new roommate situation. For some students, the new roommate experience can be positive and can develop into a close relationship. For others, the roommate relationship is negative and still for others, it seems to be quite neutral. In fact, as can be seen by the students' comments, the roommate relationship is a potentially powerful one in that it can lead to a positive or negative evaluation of the

university experience. The new roommate often helps a student to build a network of new friends. The roommate's special status is explored by Benjamin (1990). He argues that the likelihood of the roommate relationship being the closest one developed is high mainly due to the proximity of the roommate.

We (roommates) never knew each other before but we get along so well and I think it really makes the difference....If we hated each other we'd probably be like after September I want out of here (FR041.01).

My roommate he's quite a guy. He likes to get out and do a lot of things too....My roommate he's, he only lives in (local town) and he knows pretty well half the people in the school so it's sort of nice...(MR012.11).

...my roommate...we're totally different people like I can't see why we're together...basically we don't really talk that much and we seem to get along better if we stay that way. So that's probably the most negative aspect of all of university has been not having a roommate who I've gotten really close to...(MR116.10).

Most relevant to the present study is the fact that students specified a link between their expected staying and leaving behaviour and the making of new contacts. That the making of new friends was cited by many students as a reason for staying at the university, or in one case for returning to Carleton in two years, is not surprising and is consistent with the expectations of Tinto's (1975,1987) model of attrition (at least seven students directly mentioned friends as a reason for returning to Carleton). What was surprising, however, was that for one student

making new friends was a reason for his decision to leave Carleton for one year.

It's (going to Europe) been something I've wanted to do since I was about eighteen and I really had nobody to do it with and not enough money and this year I've met a couple of people that are in the same boat as I am I guess...(MOC096.06).

The intricacies of new friendships and staying/leaving behaviour are not yet completely clear.

I found that the making of new contacts was linked to a wide range of student experiences, which lends support to Benjamin's (1990) similar findings. For example, to understand how students established (or failed to establish) a social/academic balance meant somehow coming to terms with how the students made (or did not make) new contacts (see section entitled The Social/Academic Balance). New friendships could be cross-referenced to various social activities; to students' perceptions of the social environment at Carleton; to the use of university services; to classroom relationships and to the size of the university campus, among others. These linkages indicate the complexity of new relationships and the overwhelming impact of new contacts on the first year experience in general. These cross references will become clearer in subsequent discussion.

Residence and Off-campus Relationships

While a student's living arrangements may determine

with whom he/she interacts, they are clearly related to how a student establishes new contacts. The link between living arrangements and meeting new friends, however, is complex and seldom simple. What struck me as I listened to the students was the sense of community that seemed to be apparent in residence and that living in residence was very much the centre of peer relationships for many students. The effects of new contacts, both positive and negative, were heightened when residential living was considered. Living in residence eased the burden of making new friendships in a variety of ways: by the fact that students were surrounded by new faces, by establishing a network for expanding friendships and by the speed at which new contacts could be had. In fact, some students pointed out that they wanted to be in residence to help to get to know people:

...I really wanted to be in residence and I think it's really helped being in residence getting to know people...(FR041.01).

I'm from (home town) and I know only one person other than myself here so it was sort of important that I went to res and I live in a suite so I've met some really good friends (MR011.01).

Many residence students stated that they were rarely alone:

...you're living on a floor with like 48 other people and it's, there's always somebody there, there's always something to do. You're never alone sort of thing...(FR044.06).

...you've always got someone around if, not everybody's always doing work. There's people that are always doing work yes but there's a lot of people that aren't and you can always find someone to go out with...(MR014.06).

Residence living seemed to be somehow related to the speed at which contacts could be made and to the expansion of the network of friends:

Just the fact that we're together like as a group. We know that we're on the same floor. We're going to be living together the whole year. Just going out like at night or something and drinking all together as a group and you know I think that has a tendency to bring you together really fast for some reason and I guess it's that team aspect really...(MR111.01).

...in residence I mean your first hour probably you meet the people that are living across the hall from you and the people that you share a washroom with and the people next door to you and automatically you're forced to know you know, at least five or six people right away. And those five or six people might know five or six other people. So it helps a lot because you get to ...meet people a lot faster which makes the first little while easier (MR104.06).

I'd say yes a lot of it (where meet people) is the people on your floor and then people in your classes or people, friends of other people on the floor sort of thing (FR044.11).

It is possible that where the student lives in residence can influence the contacts he/she makes:

...if I lived on the hallway I'd have probably never known who (name of friend) was or (name of friend)...(MR014.11).

I sensed a developing form of community among the residence students. This sense of community was due to the fact that residence students seemed to "stick together" and tended to describe their relationships in terms of belonging or feeling a part of a group.

Carleton, people from res actually (are her peer group), the people in residence more or

less. It's just the people I see everyday, the people I eat with, the people that, the last people I see before I go to bed, the first people I see when I wake up. It's just they are everybody I see. They are the people I know (FR074.07).

...it (residence) also gives you a feeling of belonging to something or somewhere....If you're in trouble...there's always people there... my best friends are the people on my floor (FR041.01).

Mostly well, my (residence) suite sort of made us a tight group. If it's anything we always go out together (MR014.02).

...camaraderie with people, like people on my floor, getting to know them, feeling like part of the group sort of (as a positive social experience) (MR114.03).

Although the residence experience resembled a community spirit, at times relationships were tenuous at best and could be a source of problems. Residence living could be a double-edged sword.

And negative (social experiences), having to live with people that you might not otherwise talk to. That's probably the worst and just the fact that, feeling obligated to, it's sort of uncomfortable walking by them in the halls or whatever...(MR114.04).

...you don't want to be enemies with anybody or have anybody against you because it just makes it so much harder when you're living just down the hall from them and you're going to see them everyday whether you want to or not (FR042.14).

Recently in residence there's been a lot of disagreements going on and generally I'm a person that is very easy going and I don't like to argue with anybody. I think it's just the stress of being near the end of school...so everybody's starting to get rather snarky with each other so I think that's probably the worst part (FR071.02).

Finally, the effect of living arrangements on personal contacts is best understood in the context of a residence/off-campus comparison. Many of the off-campus students with whom I spoke felt that being in residence could lead to more contacts or closer contacts than off-campus students experience. While there was no way I could assess the accuracy of this belief, the importance of the perception is not diminished.

Ya, it's not like I find like some people I met who are in residence they're much closer and they're like friends with a lot more people whereas we have not as many friends as them....Their floor's like their family in a sense. So they, I would find that residence people experience, get a lot more socially from university (FOC084.06).

Go to residence. You just meet more people. You are in a smaller environment...(MOC092.12).

The people who are in the dorms, they just, they meet so many new people just from their floor (MOC024.06).

Some off-campus students had friends who were in residence and therefore, they used their residence connections to make new contacts. In general, some residence students did make contacts with off-campus students yet there seemed to be a feeling among some residence students that these contacts may be different or that off-campus students were not easy to meet. Living in residence can lead to close knit communities, but these communities can become exclusive and limit the formation of friendships outside the residence. The exclusiory and connective nature of the residence is

pointed out by Benjamin (1990) who found that residence living could restrict the variety of events in which students participate and the people students come to know.

...I just know them (off-campus students) as people from class sort of thing...(FR044.12).

...so now I'm starting to figure out there's quite a bit of gap between people that are living in residence and oc....Sometimes that's a little difficult talking to people that are oc like going to Olivers (campus bar) sometimes. It's pretty nice when you know people in res... (MR012.11).

Things really, really would be tough to live off-campus and to not know that many people...(MR106.08).

As Benjamin (1990) argues, proximity is one of the basic criteria in friendship formation. He found that new friendships could be limited by proximity, especially in terms of the residence living arrangement. In addition, Benjamin (1990) discovered that similarity is a second basic criteria of friendship formation.

Common Interests/Common Problems

Students were drawn together by similarity. Common interests, common problems and sameness were recurring themes when students discussed peer relationships and fitting in at the university. In terms of feeling a part of the university some students had the following to say:

...just my personality with everybody else's is all the same therefore, I just felt that everything was good and fit in. Nothing really made me fit in. I sort of made myself fit in (FOC062.11).

Well I think...we (members of his social group) all have the same sense of humour sort of. We enjoy the same things, like going out on weekends....Common interests really I'd say is how I managed to fit in...(MR112.08).

I think that everyone on our floor kind of found a common ground. We all seemed to like the same things...(MR101.11).

While common interests were important for peer relationships (both off-campus and in residence), some students valued similarity for the security it offered them in knowing that other students had the same problems:

It (the transition to university, was just realizing that so many other people were in the same boat as you were. I felt so alone. Like obviously other people were going through it but it seemed like I was the only one and when I met all these people I realized that they had the same fears that I did and the same concerns and it was just easier to go through it knowing you had other people there with you (FOC121.01).

Well like I said about my friend. She left home for the first time so there was always somebody around that was going through basically the same experiences. That's why I like res because there's always somebody there that you can talk to. They're going through the exact same thing. They just left home so there's, you can talk to somebody like my suite mates...(FRO71.05).

Students could be drawn to one another through the academic realm as well as the social:

...I find that people who are getting bad marks at university tend to be, stick together like because they have a common interest in failing. So you know like I know a couple of people on our floor, they never go to class. They never do any work. They're failing out and they're good friends. So you know, actually they're roommates. So whereas the friends that I have are interested in their education and they take pride in their marks (MR115.01).

And since people tend to be going towards the same goal as you are then you have the same interests and when you have the same interests then you can socialize a lot better like you can say well why don't you come over and you know, we'll work on an essay or do something like that...(FOC065.01).

These students point to a relationship between the academic realm, social relationships and common interests (see the topic: Academics and Social Relationships). Common interests established a basis for the formation of peer relationships.

Different People/Different Places

Although students were drawn together by similarities, they perceived the differences among people at Carleton as being at least partly responsible for them fitting into the university.

...there's so many different types of people here that everybody fits in.
...here it just seems that you know there's so many different cultures and nationalities and types of people and you know even things like you know the preps and the heads and that sort of stuff. And there's just something for everybody here (FOC122.08).

...as far as the people that come here, there's such a wide range of different types of people that come here it would be kind of hard not to fit in...(MOC052.08).

I think everyone fits in at Carleton.

It's sort of you know, the everything school. You know, everyone goes here. And it's so big that you'll find at least one of everyone you know (MOC022.08).

Difference produced similarity for some students. As

the first comment indicates, subcultures can and do form so that different groups are available to assist students in finding common linkages. For other students, difference may be something to which they have to adjust, especially if one has difficulties finding a match between one's family background and other students at the university (see section on The Demographic Environment).

...I feel I fit in because, well I've come down from being a snob so like I can like...I'm friends with a lot of different people so now I'm able to fit in with them. But I still find that, you know, I don't fit in for the fact my father might have money or that I might be (religious orientation) (FOC082.08).

In addition, diversity can make it difficult for some students to develop peer relationships and can make a classroom situation tenuous:

Things that make it hard to meet people are the number of people, I guess the great number of people here. And the diversity of people... (MR114.12).

...for (course name) some people are feminists and some people are just taking the class to learn and when there's such a broad distinction between the people in the class, you know, it causes problems (FOC085.14).

The negative impact of dissimilarity emerged in Benjamin's (1990) study. He found that relationships between peers could be confounded by difference. The existence of difference, however, can be both positive and negative. For many students toleration was learned. Perhaps one of the unintended outcomes of a university education at a fairly large (see above comments on the size

of the university and the discussion of The Physical Environment) heterogeneous institution is the toleration of and the experience of diversity.

I guess the most positive experience is meeting people from all across Canada and North America and understanding the different aspects I guess of Canada.

It kind of opened my eyes a little more than just reading a textbook and hearing what people are like in Vancouver or Alberta or the East Coast. You get kind of a first hand opinion of people who are there (MR101.01).

I'm sort of a social person. I like to meet other people, find out about what they're doing, other parts of the country. I've travelled all over Canada. It's kind of interesting talking to people from different places (MOC091.01).

Since I went to a private school, I think private schools are termed rich boys schools, and the people I met there were all, they were all rich people....And those people have a set form and I got too used to doing that form.... And now I'm meeting people...I've never experienced people that have family problems and I only know one friend that ever was divorced and now I'm meeting people and it seems like divorce is the common thing...and this is just like totally new and I'm like sometimes I'm just wiped out by it...(MR013.03).

Meeting a range of people can have positive outcomes beyond the immediate university experience.

Upper Year Students

One of the themes that emerged from discussions with students was that their personal interactions at the university were not limited to other first year students. Contacts with upper year students could have a positive

effect on the first year experience. More information would be needed, however, before the importance of these interactions could be sufficiently explored. Although some off-campus students did mention contacts with upper year students, these relationships were more apparent among the residence students.¹⁶ The role of the upper year student was that of a mentor. Upper year students guided the new students through both academic and social experiences and provided information about the university to the new students. The role of mentor surfaced in work by Attinasi (1939). He found that students already at the university served as interpreters of the geographies for new students.

Like I met a lot of second year guys on my floor and they sort of help out like telling you what's going on around campus and they tell you different things that are going on (MR011.01).

Well there's a friend of mine, a good friend of mine on the floor. He's in third year. He's in (program) and he's sort of you might call a role model that I've used through the year and from like from day one I looked for him for like questions I could go like ask I could ask him. And he had a really good work ethic like he works really hard. He's a really good student and someone like...you can sort of follow. So I used him and I talked to him (MR111.02).

...one girl that lived in my suite before she got a single (room), she was at Carleton last year and she was also here the year before for her Q (qualifying) year so she knew lots of people, she

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¹⁶ The reader is advised to exercise caution here. It was often difficult to assess the class standing (upper year) of the friends the students made at the university and with whom they came to the university. This difficulty was especially true among the off-campus students.

knew the ropes and she showed me, you know, where to go to dinner, where to do laundry and so on ... (FR074.11).

Upper year students were especially useful for finding out where to go, (see topic: Where Do I Go, What Do I Do, Where Am I?) and were important to first year students' academic lives (see sections: The Social/Academic Balance, Social Relations and Academics and Student Evaluation).

Old Relationships

The interactions of first year students with old contacts has generally been overlooked in much of the student experience literature (Benjamin, 1990:61). Benjamin (1990) found that the majority of the students in his sample had on-going contacts with old friends with whom they had come to the university. He (1990) further points out that such relationships with old friends at the university could be both a source of support for new students and could limit contacts with new friends. The information I obtained from students points to the importance of considering interactions with old contacts. For many students, however, I was unable to clearly assess if contact was maintained while at Carleton or to assess the strength of the continuing contacts. As a result, the reader is advised to interpret the results with caution. The students did provide some information that allows me to speculate on these issues.

Three of the residence students had old contacts at the university and three did not. For the residence students, the contacts did not appear to be strongly maintained and the students did establish that the majority of their interactions were with new friends at Carleton.

Always new (friends). I only have three friends here from home and I have hardly even seen them and if I see them it's because we had planned to see them and that doesn't happen very much. It's pretty well they have their friends, I have my friends...(MR014.08).

All new (friends). I didn't know anyone when I came to Carleton. I didn't know anyone else that was coming to Carleton except for I met, I didn't know anyone and then once I was here I met two people actually that I'd known but not really well (MR104.08).

Five of the off-campus students had old friends at Carleton. At least three of these students appeared to be maintaining these contacts and one student pointed out that he was getting more familiar with old contacts. The fifth student was originally a residence student and it was unclear how strongly he maintained his old contacts at the university.

I've gotten to know a few people a bit better, ones I knew before. I mean I've met a few people through them...(MOC024.02).

I have two other roommates, both of them I was very good friends with in (home city) and both of them I live with and we all have the same courses. And then I have three other friends who live somewhere else who are also good friends of mine from (home city). So I already had my set, I already had a bunch of friends up here so all we've done is met more...(FOC082.14).

So I guess it (the social experience) wasn't as hard for me just because I have those five people here as tending to be one person coming to Carleton for the first time and all my friends are still back at home...(FOC064.02).

The students' comments point to the potential influence of old contacts on the first year student. Having old friends can smooth the transition to university, it can provide new students with the confidence required to make new contacts and it can create a network for making new friends.

Similarly, for one female residence student, not having old friends at the university made the university experience difficult at first and she advised students to go to a university where old friends were present. At the same time, having no old contacts at Carleton forced her to make new ones and was related to her perception of independence:

Well when I got here in September none of my friends came to Carleton and like I said before my friends and I have been close since kindergarten and all of a sudden I was without my support group, my support net and I had to do all these things by myself...without my friends I didn't have anybody to talk to...(FR071.03).

...sometimes I wish I would have been down south in the general area of my old friends but being here I've had to get a lot of independence. I mean I have to do stuff on my own. I don't have that same group that I did, and if I do it on my own I know I can do it on my own. It's not the people that I'm with that are helping me do it (FR072.03).

One off-campus student pointed out that although she had a group of old friends, she rather liked being different from these friends. This preference suggests that some students may enjoy some independence from old contacts.

...I'm tired of everybody being the same as everybody else like it was at my high school ... (FOC082.10).

Benjamin (1990) differentiates between the old contacts students maintain at the university and old contacts that remain at home. He (1990) found concern among some students about their changing peer networks. While relations with old friends at home could be maintained among his subjects, Benjamin (1990) argues that this involved considerable work. Many of the students I interviewed did have some degree of contact with friends from home or at other universities. For some students, these continued relationships could be a source of support or a way of overcoming the gap left from leaving old friends. As students point out, leaving behind old friends can mean leaving behind a support group (see above quotes) or a set of very familiar friends:

I always had all my friends back home. We all knew what each other was like (MR013.03).

I think back home you have your friends since Grade Two and you just basically stay with that... (MR114.14).

Students tended to stay in contact with old friends either by telephone, letters or by going to visit them at home or at other universities.

I remember being here and I wrote letters and letters and letters. I mean novels when I first got here. It was really pathetic. That's when I should have been out meeting people (FR071.03).

I don't think the work was really done as much in the beginning as it could have been because I wasn't prepared for leaving home so I was more mopey. I was writing letters. I wasn't doing the work... (FR072.26).

Like I know during frosh week or even the first month, my phone bill was huge cause I was phoning all my friends and talking to all my friends all the time. Like I just had to talk to friends....But now I'm here and now I have all these friends and now we talk. I think I only phone one of my friends once a month now or even that...(MR016.04).

I've had the opportunity of going to quite a few other universities to see friends or whatever...(MR102.03).

While talking to old friends may provide some support, it could pull students away from meeting new friends or even from doing their academic work. Although she was not describing her own experience and was referring to the university experiences of old friends, one female student's comments point directly to the push and pull of old friends (note also the mention of living arrangements):

And all the friends that they had, being out of town, were their friends that were in university whereas someone who had stayed at home....They were sort of trying to get associated with the new ones without forgetting about the old ones. Whereas when you're away you have your new friends just to concentrate on and then your old friends you're writing to them and talking to them and that (FR042.15).

For students who leave their friends behind, keeping contact may be a temporal issue. The above students cited the importance of these old friends for the first weeks or months of university but the importance seemed to diminish over time. The maintenance of old contacts may depend on a student's living arrangements and the distance the student is from his/her old friends. Two male off-campus students,

for example, were originally from the area and were living with members of their family. Both these students maintained contacts with old friends who were not members of the Carleton community (see earlier subcategory: Personal Contacts in General). A male residence student had a best friend at The University of Ottawa with whom he was able to maintain some face-to-face contact:

...my best friend...goes to Ottawa U. So we'll get together maybe once or twice every two months or something and we'll do something and I talk to him a lot over the phone...(MR114.07).

Finally, a variety of students spoke to old contacts, who had previously attended university, about the university experience or visited old friends at Carleton who were already in university (see discussion of: Where Do I Go, What Do I Do, Where Am I? and see Attinasi, 1989 for his findings on Mexican American students' preparation for college, especially the role of mentor modelling and simulation). The extent to which these contacts were later maintained is unknown.

Old contacts come in a variety of forms and with many advantages and disadvantages. They can be a source of support, a pull away from new friends or a push towards new friends. The complexities of these relationships are yet to be fully understood.

Romantic Relationships

The establishment and maintenance of romantic relations

was a theme that emerged in discussions with the first year students. The significance, impact, strength and stability of these relationships, however, was not explored. The information from the students does point to both the strengths and drawbacks of a romantic relationship. For one female student, being closer to her boyfriend was a reason for liking Carleton University while at the same time, problems with her boyfriend were experienced. For other students, the breakup of a relationship produced some difficulty and still for another, the establishment of a relationship was difficult.

...and the only really negative thing is I met a guy who I really liked a lot. He knew how I felt, you know, how my religion meant a lot to me. So he said, you know, this can't go on. You're (religion) and I'm (ethnicity) and it won't work in the future.... So I was really upset about that because you know like it's just a problem because you find you like somebody and like are you going to go against your family...(FOC084.04).

Two weekends ago my boyfriend and I had an argument on the phone and then for the rest of that week I couldn't do any work whatsoever. And in the very beginning of school we had broken up like Labour Day weekend. So I got here and it was like what am I doing here? All I want to do is be at home and cry sort of thing. So I wouldn't do as much work as I could have...(FR076.01).

I had a girlfriend before I came to university and that was, that part was I guess, that social part was tough and that didn't work out.... I don't have a big regret over that but I guess that was a bit of a social stress that didn't work out (MR104.17).

As was the case with other personal interactions, romantic

relationships influenced other areas of a student's life. For example, romances can affect family relations, social background considerations, academic work and social life in general. Benjamin (1990) explores, in more detail, the impact of the romantic relationship. For his student contacts, romantic partners were a source of self-esteem and security as well as a source of demand in their academic lives. The romantic relationship can be positive, but it can be negative and difficult to maintain. Regardless, it requires work and needs to be examined carefully for its influence on other areas of the first year experience.

Types of Friendships

As I allude to earlier (see my discussion of residence and off-campus relations), not all friendships carried the same weight, impact or intimacy. I asked some students to estimate the number of people they came to know at Carleton and when doing so, students distinguished among types of friendships made at the university. Invariably, the number of estimated close friends was less than the estimated number of acquaintances. The smaller group of close friends usually represented a core group with whom the student interacted. This finding lends support to Benjamin's (1990:68) discovery that: "...establishment of anything resembling 'close' or 'intimate' relations was far from assured, with most subjects reporting relations with only a

small number of others (1-5)."

One student pointed to friendships on three levels: acquaintances, fairly close friends and very close friends. The students distinguished friends as "good friends", "really good friends", "lasting friendships", "best friends" and "close friends".

...I'd say the friendships that I have now are my closest friendships that I've ever had
...(FOC121.03).

Like most of my close friends are in residence (MOC094.11).

...really it's, there's (residence friend) and (residence friend) and I and that's pretty well it. We're close together...(MR014.11).

Close friends, for old or new contacts, could be further distinguished from the best friend relationship.

...people are always saying oh the friends you meet in university are the ones you're going to have for the rest of your life and I didn't necessarily believe them because I have really good home friends and I think I'm still going to have my really good home friends but this friend I've met is going to be one of my friends for life (FR071.01).

...my best friend moved to (city) to find himself (MOC024.09).

As I explain earlier, in the topic of residence and off-campus relations, the residence could produce a community setting where groups of close friendships develop. It seems logical that the more contact people have with one another, the greater the likelihood of close friendships developing. While the residence could result in close contacts, it seemed that the opposite was the case for the

classroom, a finding consistent with Benjamin's (1990) study. Although one student mentioned that she did make a close friend in class and another pointed out that a class could become a tight-knit group, the general feeling was that contacts made through classes may not be as close as those made elsewhere (see subcategory: Personal Contacts in the Classroom). Consider the following comments:

I knew, I know a few people in one of my classes, in two of my classes. I know people in all three of them, but you know, just one or two and I don't really hang around with them so (MOC021.03).

But otherwise, like I've met a lot of people in my classes...that I talk to and stuff like that but I don't know if I'd really say I know them that well but I know them more than I did before... (MOC054.10).

...all classes that I have there are people that I talk to in them, but I don't necessarily see outside of the actual class but I guess I'd classify as my friends... (FOC124.11).

The two male off-campus students quoted here stated that they really did not know anyone at the university, a tendency that may be a function of the fact that as off-campus students, they only came into contact with other students through their classes. More likely, it is a combination of living off-campus, not being involved in any formal university activities, not attending orientation and not having many old contacts at the university. These same two students, however, did allude to close friendships with

contacts outside the university. Two of the female off-campus students were involved in some kind of formal university activity or service and cited the effect of such participation on the closeness of their contacts (see later sections concerning formal university extracurricular activities and use of student services).

Discussions with students suggest that not all personal contacts carry the same impact on the first year experience (see Benjamin, 1990). What needs to be further explored is the meaning of "close friend"; that is, what does a close friendship represent to students and how is it determined?

Family Relationships

Just as the first year students seemed to maintain some degree of contact with old friends, they continued to be influenced by their families. Family influences arose in two general ways: pre-enrolment influences and post-enrolment influences. Prior to enrolment, the family was often involved in a student's choice of a university and in the formation of a student's desire to attend university in general. Some students received information about the university experience from family members (see Attinasi, 1989 for his discussion of Mexican American students and "fraternal modelling", "expectation engendering" and "getting ready" for college).

...I have a couple of uncles who are school teachers and they said that from what they'd

heard Carleton had a pretty good (name)
program (FR042.01).

...my parents really wanted, were pushing for
me to go to school...(MOC092.25).

...my parents...I guess the way they feel towards
me being at university is something. They're
proud of it. Cause in a lot of ways I think
I went to university, first of all to be the
first one in my family and second of all, it was
one of my dad's hopes that I would...(MR113.02).

The family continued to play a role for many students following their enrolment at Carleton. For some it was face-to-face contacts with a family member. This form of contact was particularly so for students who either lived at home or with a family member, and for one residence student who maintained contacts with a cousin at the University of Ottawa. For other students, it was contact over the telephone (and visits home, of course), and, for many, it was the presence of family ideals or family pressure that continued to influence their first year experience. These pressures could be both social and academic (see earlier quote from a female student on family pressures and romantic relationships for a social example). A few students cited the general importance of family relations. One female residence student, for example, argued that students need their family to get through university. As was the case with most of the students' personal ties, family contacts could be both a source of support or demand.

...other people will freely admit that they
got a D and laugh about it and I can never
understand that. I wouldn't tell anybody.

I'd keep that a big secret especially from my parents (MR115.01).

...I'd say the only thing really is my parents saying...shouldn't you be studying or they're always saying shouldn't you have gone, go to the library and study and I think the only (educational) pressure really is from my parents (FR045.33).

I called home a lot, talked to my brother. My brother just helped me through it (confusion over the future)...(FOC081.05).

Not only can the family place academic and social pressure on students but the family can put pressure on the student to leave the university.

...my mom doesn't like me being away from home. She's mentioned that to me numerous times that she wants me to come home...(MR016.04).

...they (parents) want me to come home next year because they don't like it that the fact that there's not many (religion) people up here...(FOC084.17).

The student data gathered here reinforce Benjamin's (1990) argument that although many students may physically leave their parents and family when they go away to university, family contacts continue to play a role in their first year experience. As Benjamin (1990) found, such contacts can be physical and emotional; they can be a source of support and demand in students' academic lives, their persistence decisions and their romantic relations, among others (see Benjamin, 1990 for an extended analysis of family relations and the first year experience). The similarity of the findings here with those of Benjamin (1990) confirms, as he argues, the importance of considering

family relations.

SUMMARY: Personal Contacts

Students' interactions with other students, new contacts, old friends, romantic partners, the family, and upper year students formed an extremely important part of their first year experience. Certain issues involving personal contacts are worthy of reiteration. First, personal contacts were rarely simple and tended to have an impact on virtually every other area of a student's life such as the academic realm, social activities, decisions to leave/stay at the university, adjustment to university, fitting into the university and perceptions of self assurance. Second, the people with whom a student comes into contact and the effects of these interactions may be related to a student's living arrangements. Third, students were not confined in their relationships to new students at the university. Many maintained ties with the family and old friends. Fourth, not all personal contacts may be equally important to the students. Close friends could be distinguished from acquaintances and from best friends. Finally, similarity and difference were both central to the formation of friendships. In fact, difference produced common interests in some circumstances. To understand how personal contacts are developed and sustained, knowledge of students' social activities is invaluable.

SOCIALIZINGSocializing/Social Activities in General

All the students were asked to evaluate the effect of a student's social life on fitting into the university (see Question 4.01, Appendix 3). Eleven of twelve students responded that they felt the social experience was important for fitting in at the university. One student felt that it was completely up to the individual whether a social life was or was not important. Of the eleven students, two students also referred to the fact that individual preference plays a role in the evaluation of the importance of a social life.

I think a social life can make or break a university life. For example I went out with a friend last night and she's having problems with her roommates and she was going to have to find a new roommate for next year and she's just having a lot of problems. So she decided she's going back to (city) next year. So I haven't found that problem. Like I find I have a good social life up here. I have a lot of fun but I also do a lot of work. But I agree in the sense that if you do have problems with your social life you're going to have problems. You're not going to enjoy university. It's not going to be the fullest it can (FOC084.01).

I think socialization has a lot to do with people fitting in because well to me, like I'm very I guess, open or whatever you would like to say so if somebody starts talking to me I'll start to talk to them. And I think that if somebody isn't going to socialize well then I don't think people would want to socialize with them...(FOC064.01).

I would say definitely socialization is the best way to fit in. If you didn't try new

things and you didn't try to meet people
it would be a lot tougher (MR104.01).

For most students, the importance of their social life is best understood through its impact on other areas of their first year experience. The students spoke of a range of experiences that overlapped their social life. The social life played a role in balancing students' academic work (see section: The Social/Academic Balance); it was related to academic success (see topic: Social Relations and Academics) and the social life was linked to self confidence (see discussion of self confidence) among others. These linkages to other student experiences will become clearer in further discussion. The voices of the students establish the intricacies of the social life in general:

I think for most people it is important to fit in and fit in socially because it brings so much more to university than just the work...(MR114.01).

...I think social aspect is very important. Social aspect helps you in school...if you get to know people they tell you about courses. Like now I pretty well can...pick what courses I'm going to take next year. They can tell you you should take this prof he's pretty good....If you weren't social you would never find that out if you didn't talk to people. So I think social aspect is really important...(MR014.01).

The students were further asked to evaluate the effect their social life had on their overall first year experience (see Question 4.16). Of the ten students who responded to this question in terms of a positive or negative evaluation, nine could be labelled as seeing the positive impact of

their social life on their first year experience. One student, a male off-campus student, stated that he enjoyed his experience but that he may have enjoyed it more had he known more people in his classes. Two students did not respond with a positive or negative evaluation. Again, the impact of the social experience is better accounted for in its influences on other areas of student life.

I was interested in determining the locus of students' social activities, that is where their social activities took place. The students were asked if their social activities evolved more within or outside of Carleton University (see Question 4.09). The responses indicate a clear difference between residence students and off-campus students. Five of six residence students said that their activities occurred on-campus. One residence student pointed to a balance between on and off-campus activities. Five of six off-campus students stated the opposite; their social activities were more oriented towards off-campus events. One off-campus student lived in residence for the first part of his first year; therefore, his experience was somewhat different but indicative of the overall trend towards off-campus students participating in social activities outside the university. His experience summarizes the pattern found here:

When I lived in residence it (social life) was almost totally Carleton.

And the longer I live off-campus the more it gets, it goes towards off-campus activities I

think (MOC094.09).

The location of off-campus and residence students' activities can be partially explained in terms of available transportation (see subcategory: Getting to and From the University) and the convenience of students' living arrangements (see section: Living Arrangements and Convenience).

It was interesting to note the use of terms such as "going out" when students discussed their social lives. It appeared as though "going out" could be thought of in terms of more 'formal' social activities whereas staying in refers to more 'informal' social involvement. This distinction is explored below in the section entitled The Informal Social Life.

The importance of the general social life for fitting into the university and the role of the social life in other areas of the student experience is apparent from the students' comments and will be the subject of much of the remainder of this paper. Given the salience of the social experience, some understanding of the activities in which students participate is useful.

Sport-Recreational Activity¹⁷

Sports and sport-related recreational activities played a role in many of the students' lives (at least nine of twelve). The male students were more likely than the females to actually participate in sports activities. Six of six male students directly mentioned some sort of sport-related participation (either on or off-campus) whereas only two of six females referred to sport-related participation. In fact, some males linked sports participation with their gender. Benjamin (1990) notes the preference of the women in his sample to interact in one-on-one groups for the purpose of "talk" while the men preferred to interact in groups and for the purpose of physical activity.

...I'm a pretty good basketball player I guess...just going out there...and playing ball and that. I guess, you know, automatically people look at you and say...oh there's an athlete and I guess if you're a male you automatically see someone, an athlete and you sort of get feelings, I don't know how to describe it. It's like if you see someone really 'geeky' playing something...you're not going to automatically take to him sort of thing. And since most of my friends are athletes like we found something in common right away. So that's how I felt like I fit in (MR112.11).

And I live on an all male floor so we really get involved in sports a lot and it's sort of nice when everybody's got a common thing they want to do...(MR012.11).

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¹⁷ Students were asked in the structured questionnaire (alluded to in Chapter Three) to indicate the university activities in which they participated. I use this information here to supplement the interview data. The information is also used later in the paper.

Two interesting linkages emerge here. One is the role of sports in creating common interests for these male students and the other is the role sports can play in helping some individuals to fit into the university.

Sports participation can lead to a variety of outcomes. For example, one student used sports to deal with the "impersonal" environment he faced and a second cited the use of the squash facilities as a positive experience. One male was happy that Carleton did not have a varsity hockey team because he found varsity participation at another university was too time consuming.¹⁸ Students do not necessarily have to participate to feel the effects of sports activities. The events surrounding sports teams can be equally important.

...there was like the rugby team so there was rugby parties, rugby events like games and stuff (one student's response to the question describe your social life)...(FR074.02).

One student's advice to Carleton on how to help students to fit in referred to the potential for sports to create social involvement and to the need for more facilities:

I guess they could help by allowing more services...to be available because I find that with the recreation centre like with aerobic classes and squash. Aerobics is full up all the time and I find that's not fair because I mean you're paying for it too and if you would like to take classes I mean, you should be able to....(FOC062.13).

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¹⁸ This student spent the first few months of 1988 at another university. He did not finish any courses there.

I would say for football games...I think that they should offer....something or maybe they should do something about getting the people involved with the sport because there's a lot of socialization to do with the sport and the fans. So I think that they should emphasize maybe sports even tennis or something else a lot more (FOC062.13).

Sports involvement could be limited by a lack of facilities or as some students found, by not knowing what sports the university had to offer or how to get involved (see later section: Where Do I Go, What Do I Do, Where Am I?).

Better athletic facilities (as advice to Carleton University on the first year experience)....I can't believe we only have one gym in this, at a university (MR116.08).

...I really wanted to get into sports this year. But I never knew anything about the sports on campus (varsity)...(MR011.06).

...I would have liked to have joined...like a team but I wouldn't know how to go about, to do it because I'm not informed...(FOC062.13).

There seemed to be some differences between residence and off-campus students' sports participation. All of the residence students who discussed sports participation (three males and one female), were involved in intramural sports.¹⁹ One male off-campus student was involved in intramural sports, but his participation was likely due to the fact that he lived in residence for part of his first year. This

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¹⁹ This does not mean that they were not involved in other sports such as varsity curling, swimming or squash as well.

experience contrasts with the off-campus experience. These students were involved in sports such as swimming, squash, skiing, and aerobics.

Sports involvement, through participation or otherwise, could have a significant effect on the first year experience. For many, sports involvement was related to feeling a part of the university.

Going to Bars/Pubs

In addition to sports activities, the students' social lives also included going to bars and pubs. All of the students mentioned going to bars at least once during discussions of their social experiences. In fact, going to bars and pubs seemed to play a central role in most of the students' social lives. The bars/pubs most often referred to were Olivers, Roosters and The Brees (which are all on-campus bars), Hull and the Market in general (both Hull, in Quebec, and the Market area in Ottawa have a large number of bars). Bars seemed to be a place where students were able to meet new people, but that was not always easy. As one male student commented, it can be difficult to talk to people in a bar. Going to off-campus bars and pubs was one way in which residence students could be pulled away from campus and into the larger city to socialize and attending on-campus bars or pubs drew off-campus students to the university.

...it's (social life) mostly bar action now. Before (in high school) it was little parties... or go to a movie but now it's totally away from that. It's always let's go to a bar tonight or I don't think I've been to a movie this year except for one and that's it...(MR014.02).

Well the on-campus night life, I mean Olivers and the Brees and things like that make it easy (to meet people) (MR104.13).

The only on-campus activity I could find I participate in is when...if I happen to come back on a Thursday night to Olivers or just going to Roosters between classes. But otherwise we go to places in the market. We go to Hull or we just go to peoples' houses (FOC084.09).

...like I go out to bars like at least once a week (FOC064.02).

One student's description of a typical week of social experiences highlights bar activities:

Monday night, stay in and watch TV or whatever. Tuesday go to the Brees, get loaded, come back home...Wednesday... usually not too much on Wednesdays. Watch the Leafs (hockey team) game. Do some work sometimes. Thursday, well Thursday's geez, Thursday's one you can do almost anything on. You can go to Zap, a bucket of beer at Zap (here I asked where Zap was and the response was in Hull) or Olivers is good Thursday or you can go to the market because it's shooter night at Stoney Mondays. Thursday, it's a hard night to decide what to do on. And then I either stay in Friday or Saturday because I can't afford to go out those nights, too expensive. Sunday mostly do my reading on Sundays, a lot of school work (MOC094.02).

As can be seen from the students' comments, bar attendance was an important social activity for males and females, residence and off-campus students.

Residence Social Events

Aside from bars and sports events, there exists what I call a formal residence social life. By a formal social life, I am referring to the events that are planned and structured within the residence setting. In the context of a discussion of fitting into the university, some residence students referred to the following formal activities that took place in residence: an Airband Contest, Residence Picnic, Res Week, Residence Floor Parties, Floor Dinners, Secret Santas and a Residence Formal (resembles a prom). For residence students, there were a variety of events to encourage social relationships. Furthermore, some off-campus students perceived the residence as providing "something to do" most of the time, a fact that was substantiated by at least one residence student.

The fact that there was something "going on" most of the time in residence leads me to another residence social event theme, that of the residence as a party atmosphere. A few residence students referred to the fact that residence could be related to excessive partying. One female student mentioned that her suitemates were always partying, although she pointed out that residence does not have to be that way for all people. A male student cautioned against leaving school work until the weekend in residence because the residence turned into a party on the weekend (see Benjamin, 1990 for a discussion of the residence as "party time" at

the University of Guelph). The existence of a residence social life, where activities are often made available and planned in advance, must be explored further for its consequences on the overall social experience of first year students.

Formal University Extracurricular Activities²⁰

The majority of students who spoke of formal university activities (such as clubs, societies, theatre, lectures) pointed to the potential positive outcomes of involvement in these events. Especially important was the mention of formal activities and their link to meeting new friends, making contacts, adjustment to university, fitting in and finding common interests with people. Some students had advice to offer to other students on how to form peer relationships:

Ya join the club of their interest. That always, you know, gets you together with people that have the same interests as you (MOC022.12).

I would also say that a first year student if possible, to join some sort of club because that also helps to meet people and...you have something in common with them...(FOC084.08).

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²⁰ This subcategory refers to formally organized university-wide activities such as clubs, societies and formal activities. It does not include sports events, residence events or orientation week events. A further problem was encountered while coding social activities and that was the mention of attending concerts. In many cases, it was difficult to ascertain the locale of such concerts and therefore concert attendance was made into a separate subcategory.

It is interesting to note the link students made between clubs and finding peers with common interests.

There seemed to be a gap between some students' attitudes towards formal activities and their actual involvement in these activities. The belief that clubs could assist in fitting into the university or meeting new friends did not necessarily translate into participation. Two male students, for example, cited the importance of clubs for meeting people yet neither student joined a club or society. Two of the students who did participate in formal activities pointed to the importance of such activities for meeting people and fitting into the university. The reasons why some students do not participate in formal events could be explained by a lack of knowledge (see topic: Where Do I Go? What Do I Do? Where Am I?) and by a fear of involvement (see section dealing with self confidence). Whatever the reasons for participation or lack of participation, the potential influence of formal activity involvement on the first year experience was recognized by these students.

The Informal Social Life

The majority of students, when discussing their social lives, referred to activities that are not easily described among extracurricular events. These activities were more "informal" in nature and more or less involved just being

together with friends. Earlier, I point to the students' use of terms such as "going out". "Going out" seemed to describe events such as going to bars or going out to dinner. There existed a second sphere of social life that was not structured around bars or formal university activities. For the off-campus students, this more informal realm encompassed such things as sitting around with friends and watching television or talking, spending time at friends' houses and going to friends' houses to watch movies. Among the residence students, the informal social life involved activities such as people coming and going from a student's room, going to the cafeteria to eat together, staying on the floor to play cards and watching television in the residence lounge.

Just talk a lot (social activities), people coming into your (residence) room or you go into their room and just sitting and talking for awhile (MR114.02).

Well our group, we kind of, we're very big on going out to dinner...so we'll usually just go out to dinner, have a couple of drinks. None of us are big drinkers and then just go back to one of our places and sit around, watch tv. and talk...(FOC124.02).

...there's another group (on the residence floor) which I'm included in. We're very quiet. We stay in res a lot. We work and then we just talk amongst ourselves. We don't do a lot. We watch a lot of movies and just spend quiet time (FR074.12).

The social value of "talk" should not be underestimated.

Although the students may not have been "doing a lot", the informal realm played an important role in their social

lives.

The Social Life as Dynamic

The picture I have painted of the students' social lives thus far has been quite static and does not capture the changes that can take place over the course of the first year experience.

I haven't been doing all that much lately. It was quite different at the beginning of the school year. It's (social life) going through a few changes because of, quite a few people have moved away...(MOC024.09).

...back in September and October it (social life) was more a lot of going out places....We still do some of those things but a lot more of it is staying on the floor or just going out to the Brees or something (FR044.02).

...it's funny, like how the group (of friends) has changed through the year. Before like at the beginning of the year it started off with basically four guys, myself, the third year guy I was talking about and two other individuals and we sort of hung around a lot and...then it was the three of us...(MR112.08).

The activities in which students participate can alter during the year. Friends can move away, a student's living arrangements may change thus affecting his/her social life and the circle of friends a student makes is not necessarily fixed. Understanding students' social experiences means allowing for change. The students did not present static accounts of their interpersonal relationships. During the first week of the school year, the university encourages socializing among students through its orientation events.

ORIENTATION WEEK

Orientation Participation

Of the twelve students I interviewed, eight participated in some way in orientation week events. Of these eight, two were off-campus students and six were residence students. It is important to note that at Carleton, off-campus and residence orientation events are somewhat separate.

The Impact of Orientation Week

The majority of the students who took part in orientation week events referred to the positive aspects of participation. The "frosh week" experience was particularly important for establishing personal contacts and for creating a feeling of belonging to the university. For some students, the contacts they made during frosh week continued throughout the year. Even among some students who did not participate, there was a feeling that orientation events could have helped them to meet people.

Definitely that's (frosh week) where I met the people that I still am friends with....I guess that's all really frosh week is to do and I guess in a way prepare you for school, the academic aspects. But really it didn't, I don't think it really informed me too much about that. I'd say frosh week is mostly for socializing and getting used to the social aspects of Carleton (MR112.23).

To fit in was frosh week really. That was the important time. If you didn't really go out and really get involved in things going on during frosh week for the first year guys I think you really missed out...(MR012.11).

...when I came for frosh week I met so many people and they've been well so far lasting friendships (FOC121.01).

While frosh week participation was central to friendship formation for some students, other students pointed to the more negative aspects of orientation. Among these factors were that insufficient activities were available for off-campus students, that frosh week was too oriented towards alcohol abuse, that it was too immature, that students may be put in uncomfortable situations and that it was sometimes hard to know how to get to the off-campus sessions. Related to these negative evaluations was the fear orientation week engendered for some students prior to arrival.

Well when you first come to school it's frosh week for first year students and you don't really know what to expect. You've heard all the horror stories from older brothers and sisters, older friends or whatever who have already gone (MR101.03).

Benjamin (1990) found similar results among his subjects; students emphasized both the positive and negative effects of orientation. Orientation could ease the transition to university while at the same time, it could be disorienting (especially for some female students in his sample).

Orientation events are perhaps the strongest attempt by the university to involve students in meeting new people and in the university as a whole. For most students, frosh week successfully provided a way to establish a network of

personal contacts.

SUMMARY: Finding and Making Friends

Interpersonal interactions formed a central dimension of the first year experience. Their impact cannot be understood apart from their overlap with other areas of the students' lives. The personal contacts students made and sustained and the social activities in which students participated affected their evaluation of their overall first year experience, their feeling of fitting into the university, their academic lives and their successful adjustment to university life among others.

Personal contacts were differentiated (new contacts, old contacts, family) and they varied in their influence on students. Contacts were created through similarity, difference, sports involvement, going to bars and orientation week events. The interpersonal relationships in which students involved themselves were, at least in part, determined by their living arrangements. Whether a student lived on or off-campus helped to determine the contacts he/she made and affected the locus of a student's social activities. Finally, personal relationships were not static but changed and developed over the course of the first year.

Peer relations will continue to surface as a topic of discussion throughout this paper. The "pushes" and "pulls" of friendships were particularly clear when students spoke of their academic experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

GETTING THE GRADES

The previous chapter showed that peer relations and socializing formed an important part of the student experience. University life, however, demands that students succeed academically. Academic issues, such as grades and course workloads, did not exist in isolation but were a part of the students' whole experience. Two themes evolved from the conversations with first year students that help us to understand the unfolding of their academic lives: The Academic Realm and The Social/Academic Overlap. The Academic Realm includes such factors as students' evaluations of their educational experience, classroom experiences, student-teacher interactions, the evaluation of students and the effect of living arrangements on academic work. The Social/Academic Overlap establishes that social and academic experiences were often difficult to separate. The students' world was one of overlapping dimensions such that many students pointed to the need for a social/academic balance, to the influence of academics on social relations, to the impact of social relations on academics and to the potential for personal contacts to arise within the academic realm. What follows is a detailed discussion of each of these themes.

THE ACADEMIC REALM"Evaluation" of Academic Courses

It is commonly accepted that much of the university experience involves student evaluation. Just as students were graded, they too evaluated their academic experience. These judgements took place at two general levels: the overall academic experience and specific course evaluations. The majority of the students with whom I spoke appeared to enjoy their overall educational experiences. For many, academic experiences were among their most positive evaluations of their first year overall. Understanding the overall impact of students' courses on their first year was often difficult and complex. While some students stated that they enjoyed their classes, they also pointed to the fact that they had few specific positive or negative academic experiences.

I'm enjoying my classes....

My profs are all pretty good, interesting, easy to listen to.

The more I get into some of the courses the more I want to know more about them (MOC091.01).

There's not really much to tell. It's (academic experience) just going to classes and stuff like that (MOC055.02).

...I guess everything's just been kind of normal, not positive or negative, just kind of there.

Well I mean I don't think I've really, I don't sort of, when I walk out of a class I don't feel horrible about it but at the same time I don't feel absolutely terrific about it. I just kind of went and enjoyed it and that's that type of a thing (FOC125.03).

Just as students were asked to comment on the effect of their social experiences on fitting into the university, they were asked to discuss the influence of their academic experiences (see Question 5.01). Most of the students (nine of twelve) stated that academics were important to fitting into the university. The reasons for this feeling were varied but many students referred to the need for an academic/social balance and to the link between academics and social relations (which will become clearer in subsequent discussion). At least two students felt that their educational life had little impact on their sense of fit to the environment and one student had mixed feelings. Consider the following comments:

I'm in (program) and you know people don't even know if you go to class or not. I don't think it has anything to do with how it's affected me (MOC095.01).

I don't think it's (academic experience) as big as the other one (social experience) but I think that it definitely has an effect because if you're not doing well then you're not going to be happy...(FR045.01).

Understanding students' educational experiences was complex because students made evaluations at both the level of their overall experience and their course experiences. Specific course comments arose quite often. In some cases a specific course received a positive rating while in others, a class was judged negatively.

Nobody should have had a class that had that many F's (failures) and FNS's (failure - no

supplemental exam allowed) (FR071.05).

Well I like (course) because I have a great prof and he teaches us as well as you know, keeping us amused so you don't get bored (FOC081.02).

For many students, these course specific evaluations led them to drop out of classes. Five of twelve students dropped at least one course during their first year. In all cases, dropping courses led to a reduction in the student's course load.

Regardless of the positive or negative judgements, or the level of the opinion expressed (overall experience or specific class), the criteria of evaluation were very consistent. These criteria will become clearer in later discussion but include such factors as: professors (teaching quality, for example); grade performance; course content; the learning experience; exams and course expectations. To understand these evaluations, one must further examine students' perceptions of their academic lives.

The "Structure" of a First Year Class

When students discussed their academic lives, they pointed to a variety of structural variables that formed a part of their course experiences. Among these variables were: the level of noise in classes, the size of classes, the people coming and going from classes, the time available in the classroom and class schedules. The most important structural aspect of the students' first year educational

experience was class size. In fact, many of the other variables cited by students (noise, time available) were directly related to large classes. The majority of the students attended large classes (size of approximately 200-400 students) and for many, having such large classes was very different from their high school experience.

Most of the comments concerning class size focused on the negative aspects of large classes. Large classes, according to students, tend to inhibit professor or teaching assistant relationships and conversely small classes assist these interactions (see the section entitled The Unfolding of a First Year Course). Large classes can be responsible for a lower level of teaching quality and less teacher concern. Students referred to being less involved in large classes, to poor learning environments, and to feeling nervous. According to students, meeting new friends can be difficult in large classes (see the section Personal Contacts in Classes). Finally, large classes robbed students of their sense of identity (see the section on Identity).

Except for like some of my classes are really large and that's kind of a downside cause it's really hard to learn like as far as learning environment goes...(MOC052.06).

Well I come from like a mid-size high school. You'd only have like about 25 or 30 people in a class. Whereas you walk into a class now and sometimes it's hard to find a seat in Theatre A, like there's so many people. And I always had a good relationship with my teachers back home like personal sort of relationship where

a lot of times you'd stay after class and talk or whatever. And here I find that you can't really do that. There's just not the time or there's just not the opportunity. Well maybe I'm overlooking something but I'd say there's no opportunity really...(MR112.06).

It was...I wasn't so much nervous before, but I guess when I walked in, I walked into my first class was Theatre A. So I walked in there and there was about 500 people in there I guess. And there was people sitting in the aisles and it was full. And I guess at that moment it kind of hit me...you're in university now...this is a lot different than it was in high school (MR101.03).

When asked how this situation made him feel he responded:

A little bit nervous, a little bit nervous when you're walking into a lot of different people.... I guess once the class started you kind of forgot about everybody in there...(MR101.03).

Although the majority of comments were directed at the more negative aspects of large classes, some students found that these classes helped them to avoid being "singled out" by professors and from feeling self conscious. Similarly, Benjamin (1990) discovered that his subjects were not comfortable in large classes for many of the same reasons cited here and he found that students did not seem to prefer large classes for positive reasons, but rather for the opportunity they provide to avoid attention.

The level of noise in the classroom was a second structural dimension referred to by the students. Too much noise affected concentration and was directly linked to large classes.

It's very intimidating when you first get there. I mean I have two Theatre classes and all of a sudden I'm in a class with 250 people, very

big. It's hard to hear sometimes what the profs talk about so generally I sit very close to the front. But when the other people are talking, if they would just either leave if they don't want to listen to the lecture or be quiet it would be so much better. I mean there are certain people that are there to learn and not to waste their money and if they're not going to either be considerate enough to let these people do it then they shouldn't even be here (FR075.12).

Large classes were related to one student's impression that people can come to and leave class as they please and to several students' feelings that there was insufficient time available to have class discussions, to meet people or to see the professors after class.

I don't really know it's just kind of you're there and you listen and I mean there's one thing that I find a lot different from high school that I guess in one way I sort of miss, which seems contradictory, is the discussions that would go on and often, that can't happen because it's so big and so many people would have questions and it's just there's not time and all that...(FOC125.12).

Not all students, however, pointed to a lack of time in classes. Some were concerned that their attention spans were lost in long classroom sessions.

The final structural variable to be considered here is that of the class schedule. Most students' social and academic lives were affected by their class schedules. Some students, for example, found that early morning or night classes could limit their social lives while others pointed to the fact that they did not have any night courses or Friday classes which freed their schedules for socializing.

Some students further established that matching schedules with their peers could help their social lives. Class schedules could lead to free Fridays (which helped to get academic work done), to not having early classes so classes were not missed (or conversely to early classes that were missed), to night classes that made writing tests difficult, to days that were heavy and thus tiring, or to large breaks between classes that led to more study time. The interviews with the students suggest that the positive and negative influences of students' class schedules be taken into consideration.

The structural variables cited by the first year students help to explain their academic experience. Furthermore, understanding how first year courses unfold can lead to greater knowledge of the nature of the academic experience.

The Unfolding of a First Year Course

The unfolding of the students' first year educational experience refers, very generally, to the "process" of academics that is, to students' relations with professors or teaching assistants or to what happens to students within the classroom. Three areas emerged for discussion here: student/professor/teaching assistant interactions, the content of a first year class and the individual's role in the educational experience. Each of these dimensions will

be discussed in turn.

In terms of student and professor/teaching assistant contact, I talked to students about both the teaching they received and about their individual relationships with the teaching faculty.²¹ Students clearly defined what they saw as good and bad teaching for both professors and teaching assistants. Students spoke of three general themes: 1. the attitude of the teacher 2. the techniques of teaching and 3. the need for professors/teaching assistants to know the names of students. The students pointed to the need for a positive attitude among teachers. This attitude included such ideas as: being open to students, being open to questions, being willing to share and learn, having patience and consideration for students, allowing students to express and form opinions, not being "above" the students or "over their heads", talking "to" the class and not intimidating those who do not understand. In addition, the students referred to the need for professors/teaching assistants to express their want to be in the classroom, to enjoy their work, to care about what they are teaching, to be concerned about the students and to care that the students understand the material.

The teaching techniques used in the classroom were the

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²¹ Due to space limitations, it is not possible to explore in detail students' experiences with the teaching faculty. Rather than present a summary of students' evaluations of the teaching they received, I find it more useful to discuss the basis for their evaluations.

subject of scrutiny by the students. Many students were concerned that the teaching faculty prepare them adequately for exams and that they help the students to succeed academically by giving them the "right" things to put in their notes and by having sufficient assignments to assist the students. The ability of the teaching staff to make a classroom situation interesting and exciting was important to students. According to students, interest is increased if the teacher does not "just read" the textbook or notes, but promotes discussion, has debates, uses other methods of expression (overhead, blackboard), provides examples or personal experiences to illustrate the lecture, is not "mundane", is humorous or lively and can relate and relay information effectively. Students were further impressed by professors who had expertise, who "knew what they were talking about" and who had an impact on their field. Finally, teachers would be well advised to pay attention to their speaking skills (some were too fast, some too slow, some had heavy accents that were difficult to understand, some spoke in "monotone"), to the speed at which the course unfolds and to the need to "get the point across" without going off on tangents.

Knowing the students' names and treating students as individuals seemed to be an important requirement students were looking for in professors/teaching assistants (see the topic of Identity). Some students missed the face-to-face

contact with high school teachers. Others desired one-on-one contact and professors/teaching assistants who know their students. Although many students wanted individual attention, some pointed to the negative impact of teachers knowing only a few students at the expense of others being ignored. The words of students best summarize their perceptions of teaching:

Meanwhile my (course professor)...he makes it more entertaining. Like he talks directly to people and he asks them questions but if you don't want to answer you just kind of shake your head...(FR075.13).

He you know...he doesn't talk at us he talks to us...he puts in his jokes...he makes the best out of having that many students in his class you know, he does answer questions and we can have discussions going on...(FOC085.13).

...my teachers make things fairly enjoyable to be there. I have a (course) professor and he does a lot of interesting things in class that make it worthwhile getting up for his () classes. He does () experiments and things like that ... (MR105.03).

It was clear that many students desired individual relationships with their teaching faculty. It was further apparent that students were very much able to evaluate the classroom teaching they received. What was not as clear was the extent of and nature of individual interactions students had with the teaching staff. The overall impression left by the students, however, was that the majority of them (at least nine of twelve) would not describe their interactions with professors in terms of a "relationship". The lack of relationships does not mean that students did not have any

individual contact with professors (either inside or outside the classroom). In fact, many students (at least nine of twelve) did have some form of contact with a professor outside of the classroom setting (the frequency of contacts outside the classroom is explored in a later chapter). My feeling was that students differentiated between what constitutes relationships with professors or contacts with professors. Consider the following comments:

It's tough to know your professor especially when you're one of 500 or even if they have only two classes...you could be one of 1000 of their students. So it's pretty tough to have a common relationship with your professor. High school, I mean you're in a classroom and everyone knows everyone else and the teacher knows everyone but, I would say that the professors in university, it's not really a cold relationship but it's not...it seems really impersonal I guess is what I'm trying to say (MR105.21).

When asked to describe his relationships with his professors this same student went on to say:

I guess with a few of my professors I don't even know if I have one. I mean, a couple of them if I ran into them on a street, I don't think they'd recognize me. And then a couple of others I mean I know enough to say "Hi"...(MR105.21).

Other students responded to this same question:

None. Classes seem to be so big...I haven't talked to one of the profs yet....There's no relationship, just student/teacher relationship (MOC055.21).

I don't think I really have any (relations) (FOC125.21).

I really haven't, I would say I really don't know any of them (professors) at all except

I probably (course) maybe...(FR045.21).

The nature of students' interactions with their teaching assistants was mixed. Several students (at least five of twelve) experienced a "personal" relationship with a teaching assistant (TA) such that the TA knew the student or was a friend. A few of these students stated that their teaching assistant interactions tended to be more personal than those with their professors. Other students attended the TA group sessions and still others used their TA's for help with their classes in a more "functional" relationship. Several students pointed out that their TA interactions were very limited.²²

Well I go to my TA groups and talk to them. Most of them seem pleasant. They know what's going on in the world. They can help you with your problems in your courses and stuff (MOC095.25).

...I think with TA's you have a lot easier relationship than with a teacher. All my TA's know who I am and it makes it a little bit easier. You know you're just walking around the school or something and they say hello to you and they know your name whereas a professor probably wouldn't even if they did recognize you (MR105.25).

It's much more personal and in reality I think I would go to the TA before I went to the professor....It's more personal...they get to know your names and stuff like that and it's just more personal (FOC125.27).

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²² One student's discussions of his TA contacts were somewhat inconsistent. While he stated that he did not really know his TA's and that he had not met with them, he mentioned going to TA's for help. It is likely that this confusion is a result of "outside" the classroom relations being separated from "inside" the classroom relationships.

Regardless of the nature of the student and professor/TA interactions, the potential impact of these contacts was apparent. The majority of the students were satisfied with their professor relations. Many did not expect a personal relationship with a professor and many did not see any reason to contact a professor unless they were experiencing course difficulties.

Well I was just expecting a more...not as personal like in high school or before high school, you know your teachers and you often have them like four times in the course of your high school career....I was expecting in university it would be very much different. You're kind of just a face in the crowd...(FOC122.15).

...with the numbers you can't really expect too much and then when you do get some feedback it's very surprising. It's very pleasant...but it's not generally what is to be expected (FR075.24).

Some students chose a major of study or failed to choose a major based on such interactions. For many, their contacts with professors/teaching assistants helped them with their courses. In fact, teaching assistants could be invaluable to the course experience in that they often helped to "focus" a course or to explain a course. Even casual contacts influenced the student experience.

My (course) prof is my buddy. Like when I have, when I had my essays due I would call him up all the time. Like my roommates and I would have him on the phone past 12 o'clock at night. You know it's like you know, we need your help.... When I had problems with those classes like and the things we had to do I couldn't see myself calling another prof....My prof is not a friend, but he's like...someone I could turn to. So I think that's a lot better because he's helped me

through a lot of things concerning the university. Like I've talked to him about things that don't even have anything to do with his course and he's helped me out a lot (FOC085.21).

Well, with my (course) and my (course) there is I guess about 60, 65...people in those and the prof got to know you. Like my (course) prof (name) he was absolutely fabulous. We talked to him outside the class. I mean we ran into him in the tunnel one day and he recognized us and talked to us and he sat, while he stood, and talked to us for like fifteen minutes. It was really nice. I like that just because I've always gotten along well with teachers at school and here was a prof that actually recognized me. I don't think my (course) prof would even recognize me if I was to bump into him even though I sit really close to the front....So there's that factor of not being anybody except a number almost (FR075.12).

It is evident from the voices of students, that establishing teacher contacts was not a simple task and could be inhibited by large class sizes. Establishing contacts can rely on a student's perception of the accessibility or approachability of the professor, an impression often created in classroom time. Furthermore, interaction depended on individual student effort, the age of the professor/teaching assistant (many stated that younger TA's made relations easier) and a student's perception of whether or not he/she needed to contact teaching staff (see later discussion of The Individual).

Quite a few of...I got along pretty good with / (course) prof and my (course) prof (name) he's pretty nice and they make you feel comfortable in class and it sort of makes it a little bit easier to go to them after class and see them. (Course) my major but I find it a hard time going to see my (course) prof. He's a nice guy and everything but he doesn't

give me that feeling that I could go and
talk to him whenever I want...(MR011.05).

The students' comments emphasize the complexity of student/teaching faculty relationships. The need for personal contact and the impact of interactions is highlighted. Two further themes that concern the unfolding of the first year course must be briefly examined here: the content of a course and the individual's role in the course experience. The content of the course includes the course workload. Workloads varied according to course and student, but the majority of students experienced an increase in the amount of work they had to do, especially an increase in the quantity of reading required. Benjamin (1990) also found that the majority of the students in his study experienced increased workloads. Just as students evaluated teaching quality, they evaluated what was taught. Among the criteria for evaluation were: relevance of the content, whether or not the student could relate to the content, and the interest level of the course. Uninteresting content was one of the factors cited by students who dropped courses.

Not only was the content of the class important for its interest, but for the amount a student could learn from the course. Many students felt that their first year courses provided a positive learning experience and for some, learning new ideas made the first year experience a worthwhile one. Coming into contact with new ideas, however, did lead to some career confusion among a few

students.

...I enjoy learning. I like learning new things and everything seemed to be new at Carleton ... (MOC025.03).

When I came here I was so headstrong knowing exactly what I wanted to do with my life and then I got here thinking well is that really what I want to do and meeting new people and getting different ideas and seeing things from different ways and you get confused about whether you really know what you want to do or not (FOC121.04).

While the classroom may have provided a learning experience for students, many were uninvolved in the classroom teaching process, that is, many cited a lack of content discussion and a lack of student participation in classes. The lack of involvement was not always negative. One student much preferred the "laid back" atmosphere.

...I'll just sit there and just write notes, take lecture notes from the professor on the stage....In my (course) class it's a lot smaller. There's only about 50 people in it but it's the same thing. You go in there, sit down and take notes. There's really no discussion involved in any of the classes (MR115.12).

There's never been anything like out of the ordinary that's ever happened in a classroom like so far (MOC055.13).

One of 500, just a number. You know your teacher doesn't know who you are. You're just part of the crowd in my classes anyway. Go in listen, take notes and leave (MOC095.12).

Despite the learning experience, the classroom was a rather uneventful place for many students.

Finally, students recognized and spoke of their role in the academic experience. Most were able to choose which

classes to take and whether or not to attend classes. Being able to choose their own courses was important for some students and could make working at a course easier for them. Students had mixed feelings on the need to attend classes. While some pointed to the advantages (such as getting different perspectives and easing the pressure of reading) others found that their classes had little to do with exams and that they could learn just as much from reading the course textbook. Study habits and work effort, not surprisingly, were seen by students as playing an important role in their academic success/failure. Especially central was the need for effective time management skills and the need to learn to take lecture notes. The amount of effort expended did not always guarantee success. Just as essential was to study properly, which for some students meant such things as learning what needed to be absorbed from the readings and consulting previous years' exams.

The unfolding of a first year course involves three general themes: student and teaching faculty interaction, the content of the course and individual student participation. Each of these themes played an important role in the students' evaluation of their academic experience. The themes that emerged here were consistent with many that evolved in Benjamin's (1990) work. The students in his study used similar criteria to evaluate teaching (technical expertise, caring, humour, favouritism,

for example) and professors seldom interacted on a daily basis with their students. Student/professor relations normally took place in the classroom and were affected by class size, student expectations for a relationship (or not) and faculty behaviour. Professor-student contacts that did occur were typically for academic reasons (see Benjamin, 1990).

The first year course experience, as with most of the realms of student life, overlapped other areas of student existence. One of the most apparent areas was that of student identity which will be explored at greater length in a subsequent chapter. What happens to students during their course experience affects their academic evaluations. At the same time, professors/teaching assistants evaluate the student.

Student Evaluation

The theme of student evaluation encompasses three areas: students' exam and test experiences, students' grade performance and the course expectations that influence students' success or failure. The students had very few positive things to say about their exam experiences. Exams produced stress and pressure for many of the students and were among some students' worst university experiences. Students in Benjamin's (1990) study felt similar stress induced by exams. Although the actual writing of exams went

well for some students I interviewed, exam preparation could be full of problems. Heavy workloads, the fear of writing exams, and the expectation of difficulty were among those factors associated with problems. Other students found it hard to write exams in a room with many students and several students felt that their exams were too compact (for example, three exams in four days). Students' positive or negative evaluations of their exams and tests were, not surprisingly, often tied to their grade performance. Failing tests or exams can lead to negative reactions and doing well or passing an exam or test can result in a positive evaluation.

The majority of the students felt that their overall grade performance at university (at the time of the interview, student perceptions only) was about the same as in high school (eight of eleven students who compared their performance felt their grades were comparable, one felt they were lower and two saw an increase). When students talked about their grades, they often spoke in terms of how they felt about their performance. The impact of "good" or "bad" grades must be understood in terms of how the students react.

...getting bad marks too in the same respect.
Learning to deal with marks during exams,
especially exams...maybe not receiving the
marks that you're used to like or expected....
Well for example, I want to major in (program)
and my (course), I received an A on my essay....
I studied hard for the exam and I thought I
knew it well and I got my mark back and it

was 54% which is really bad. But if you consider almost three-quarters of the class failed the exam...you look at it differently but still it's hard to swallow 54 especially if you really want to get a good mark in the class, that class in particular (MR115.04).

I just, it was about the fourth essay I wrote up here and I was getting about a C+ average already and I just like wanted better marks and I got an A back and I was really happy (FOC081.01).

Ya getting my first A on an assignment was pretty positive I think (MOC095.03).

When asked how he felt about the "A" this student further added:

Just you know when you see your marks up on the board and yours is, you got a good mark, you look around you see everybody's below you... this feels good (MOC095.03).

Grade performance affects a student's sense of self (see section on Self Confidence). Benjamin (1990:40) similarly found that: "...grades were often seen by subjects as a true measure of their self-worth." The above comments point to two further themes. Students often evaluated their performance in light of the achievements of others and the impact of grades may depend on a student's personal goals. The tendency of students to evaluate themselves personally and through the eyes of others emerged in earlier work by Benjamin (1990). As two students commented:

A 75 at university is fine (FR075.07).

I just mean grades. You know I'm getting fairly decent average. I'm well I was at Christmas around 75 I guess oh, which isn't bad...(MOC021.04).

The grades some students received were related to their decision to drop certain courses, particularly failing grades. Dropping courses was also a strategy used to improve their chances of success by some students in Benjamin's (1990) study.

...I couldn't be up to par anyway so instead of failing the course...it was just easier (to drop it) (FR076.07).

Grade attainment is determined through meeting the standards and expectations of a course. The students discussed a range of different expectations depending on the course and their program of study. Some students pointed to difficult standards in courses (for example, difficult essays or assignments), some found the work in university similar to that in high school, for some the requirements of university were rather lenient and still others were uncertain of the academic standards. Many students stated that they came to university expecting the academic work to be difficult. Some students found this expectation to be true while others did not. Meeting the minimum requirements of a program concerned several students and did not concern others. In fact, some students dropped courses in which they were doing poorly so that they could maintain the minimum required grade average.

The students specified a variety of influences on their grade performance, a response that lends support to Benjamin's (1990) argument that performance is related to a

wide range of variables previously unaccounted for in the literature. A feeling of fitting in could affect grades (and vice versa, grades could lead to fitting in). Study habits, course content, peer relationships and teacher interaction, among others, influenced students' grades. Where a student lives can affect his/her academic work.

Academic Work and Living Arrangements

There was a feeling among several off-campus students that accomplishing their academic work was easier because of where they resided. In fact, living off-campus was a choice some students made to avoid residence distractions.

...if I was in residence I'm sure I'd have a harder time doing well in school...(MOC055.06).

...I had a lot of time to do the reading and the essays (as an off-campus student)....No people around you bothering me (MOC025.06).

Living off-campus does not guarantee that doing academic work will be easier. It is more likely that the nature of living arrangements influences how much work a student can complete.

I did more work when I was on-campus. But that might have a lot to do with my living situation now which is eight guys in one house. Maybe if I lived with like one or two other people it would be a lot different...(MOC095.06).

Living in residence could both pull students away from academic work or push students towards their academic work. Residence living could be a distraction. The noise, a lack

of privacy and the number of people present were among the distractive features of residence living. On the one hand, several residence students stated that they could go to the library, to a study lounge or lock their suite door to escape the distractions. Many students found the presence of other students a convenient asset for their work (the issue of control over private space in residence is explored at length by Benjamin, 1990).

Ya I'd say it does (residence does affect education). It probably makes it harder in a way because you have everybody around you all the time....I think in a way though it makes it easier too that if you have people in the same program as you on the floor then...always somebody right there that you can talk to about something or other...(FRO45.06).

I guess the biggest influence (on grades) has been in residence, tough to get work done there sometimes. But in other ways it helps cause you can get notes off somebody else (MR105.08).

The impact of additional variables on a student's academic success is explored at length later in the paper. For now, it is sufficient to understand the potential effect of living arrangements on academic performance.

SUMMARY: The Academic Realm

The students discussed a variety of themes that provide insight into their experiences with their studies. A summary is in order. Students were both evaluated and they evaluated. Most students cited the importance of their academic life to fitting into the university. Students

formed opinions on their overall academic experience and their specific courses. These judgements stemmed, in part, from their perception of structural variables. Large classes were typically the subject of conversation; they seemed to have a negative effect on the first year for most students. Students clearly defined good and bad classroom teaching based on teacher attitudes (open to questions), teaching techniques (speaks clearly and proper speed) and whether or not teachers knew students' names. While students had clear opinions on classroom teaching, most did not have relationships with their professors. Their interactions with teaching assistants were more complex. Several students established a more personal relationship with at least one TA. Finally, students evaluated courses in terms of interest. Individual choice (to attend class, for example) played a role in the educational experience.

The majority of the students saw themselves as performing academically at least as well as in high school. The impact of grade performance was best understood in terms of how students felt about their achievements (failures). Various factors influenced students' grades. Among the factors was a student's living arrangements. Living in residence, for example, could both detract from and assist in the completion of academic work. Understanding the academic realm, however, is not easily accomplished. Quite often academics and social activities overlapped.

THE SOCIAL/ACADEMIC OVERLAP

The Social/Academic Balance

Thus far, I have pointed to the importance of students' social activities, personal contacts and academic experiences to fitting into the university. I allude to the potential impact of social activities and personal contacts on academic performance and to the influence of students' living arrangements on their course work. During my conversations with students, I realized that their social activities and academic studies often overlapped, sometimes to the point that I could not separate them. The students themselves established that the university experience is both social and academic. Finding a balance between the social and the academic was a preoccupation for many of the students. Sometimes, social relations could lead to less academic concentration and increased attention to academics could lead to less socializing. As will be seen in what follows, the social and academic realms exist in a dynamic relationship.

Similarly, Benjamin (1990) found that academics and social relations overlap in the student experience. He emphasizes the tension resulting from competing academic and social demands. Benjamin (1990) discovered that academic work was often assessed in terms of social processes and that social interaction reduced the time available for academic work. At the same time, he found that peer

relations could provide academic support. Both the positive and negative relations between the two realms will be explored at length in the ensuing discussion.

Some students with whom I spoke saw themselves as more academically oriented while others were more socially oriented and still others tried to maintain a balance. The relationship between the two realms was tenuous at best.

Consider the comments of students:

I think it (university) should be social well, as well as like educational. Like you can't sort of, it would sort of have to be like an equal balance because you can't put all of your time into your education because then you won't have your social and I think that the two of them have to I guess ...come together so, in order for a student to get what they fully want out of university or out of life in general...(FOC064.01).

You know I want to make the most out of university social life and education wise (FOC085.02).

As a student it, well if I didn't go out as much I could probably do better in school. I don't know. But I probably wouldn't have as much fun. I'm having a good time.

Actually I think my social life has helped in a lot of ways for my school because having, when we study I usually get together with three or four guys I know in a class...and we bounce ideas off one another and I think you retain a lot more, at least myself I do in group studying situations. And having a good social life has got me to meet enough people in different classes to be able to do that (MOC094.16).

Two students felt that the need for both a social and academic life depended on the individual, but in their own experience, they saw a need for balance:

As far as socially goes you might need the

social experiences but if you're just fitting ...into the university and the school you don't really need the social experiences cause you're just going to school (MOC054.01).

If the person has strong ties at home and with other friends then perhaps university to him or her is just a job. But other people really enjoy the life and you know go to Roosters all the time (MOC024.01).

I'm sure I, if I knew a lot more people in the classes it would be, I would have enjoyed it a lot more but I still enjoyed it so (MOC024.16).

...and I met a lot more people and I ended up going out a lot more and stuff like that (MOC051.02).

The students make us aware of two themes. First, there seemed to be concern with balancing the social and academic dimensions of student life. Second, we are reminded that social activities need not be university oriented. In the subsequent discussions, it will be seen how the social and academic overlap and how tenuous the relationship can be.

Academics and Social Relations

Students' academic experiences helped them to form social relations and drew students away from social activities.

...if you're like failing out of all your classes then...the chance of you socializing with people that are doing really well I don't think would be all that great (MOC055.01).

Well I've learned things different in the education. I think that just comes because it's a different school. (Course) I've learned different perspectives on things that I've never considered before....And now when you go out and talk to people and you

can start talking to them more openly and ...that's nice and it sort of like increases what you talk about (MR015.01).

Maybe a bit (educational affects social) in the way that instead of going out you stay at home and study or even if you do go out you're thinking maybe I should be home studying. I don't think it's really had that much of an impact though (FR046.02).

Grade performance, common educational interests, and discussions of course content assisted in friendship formation while having to complete assignments or work could keep students from socializing.

Social Relations and Academics

Just as academics influenced the social realm, personal contacts and social activities affected academic work. Social relations had both a positive and negative effect on academic performance. Peers helping peers with assignments and academic problems and students studying together were often cited experiences. For residence students, peer assistance could take place on the residence floor.

Well we'd sort of plan to do something and we'd sort of say okay, Saturday night we're going out to a movie but nobody's going to come unless they've read two chapters of their (course) text or whatever it was. So we'd want to go out and we'd want to see our friends and we'd know well they're not going to go unless we get this done so we'd do it, and it was really helpful to get everything done (FOC124.01).

My friends have had a positive effect on my grades. I go to them for help, help on an essay or can you look over this essay or let's study together for this exam...(MR115.08).

...if you're having a problem if you live in residence, there's always someone you can go to. I mean on my, our floor is a (program) floor practically. There's so many people. There's second year (program)...there's like a fourth year (program) student. There's somebody you can go to whereas if you lived off-campus you might have your roommate or another first year (program) student or whatever. Who are you going to turn to? You'd have to rely on the people you know from school (FR075.06).

Social activities could pull students away from their academic work. For some, peer pressure was difficult to overcome and for others, their social lives in general negatively affected their performance.

My social life, that's what caused my grades to go down (FOC085.09).

Ya, there's sometimes where if you meet a lot of friends then there's a lot of peer pressure they can put on you....And they can drag you away from your educational...like I got this computer for Christmas...and the guys like playing video games, but I like studying in my room...(MR016.01).

If like when my roommate's studying then it makes me want to study but if she's just sitting there reading a magazine or reading a book and I'm studying I feel like I don't want to...(FR045.08).

Academics and social activities existed in a dynamic relationship that placed demands on and provided support for students. Having friends to assist with one's school work meant that contacts were often made in the classroom.

Personal Contacts in the Classroom

As Benjamin (1990) argues, it is not surprising that

peer relationships form a part of classroom life. The "closeness" of the relationships formed in classes is explored earlier in the paper. The classroom provided a place where most students could make contacts with new friends. For two male off-campus students, the classroom was the primary source of peer contacts at the university.

Just from the classes (where met people) and that because...in (program) because we all have the same classes and so a lot of us are all in the same classes so we tend to go to class together...(MOC054.11).

Ya just in the classes (met people) because I was never anywhere else but the Athletic Centre (MOC024.11).

And the other people (you meet) just you talk to people in your classes...(FOC084.11).

Having personal contacts in classes was very important to some students. They expressed a feeling of security and self assurance that arose from classroom friendships. Some students felt that classroom contacts made adjusting to the university experience easier and some pointed to the closeness that can develop in a classroom. As I allude to earlier, classroom contacts provided a source of academic assistance. The friends made in classes made possible an exchange of information about the university. At least two students, however, mentioned potential problems with classroom relationships. One student found that knowing people in classes led to too much in-class socializing (and thus noise) and another pointed to her frustration when the students with whom she normally sat in class changed their

seating arrangement. Making friends in a classroom was not always easy. As Benjamin (1990) also found, large classes could make this particularly difficult.

Classes sometimes make it a little tough to to meet people because...you're walking into a room where you don't know anyone of 500 people and you don't really have an opportunity to socialize with the people that are sitting next to you when you're in that class (MR104.12).

It gave me a more I guess positive attitude towards the school itself because I mean, when you socialize you sort of you feel better if you know more people because I mean you can...be by yourself and go to a classroom but you still know people type of thing so you don't feel like a loner or...you don't feel scared of going in. So that's really good (FOC064.16).

Kind of lonely sitting down in a class of 500 people. If you know someone in the classes I don't know if that's so good like there's quite a few people you see sitting in the class and they're always talking...and that distracts me so from listening to the prof (MR015.12).

The social and the academic converged in the classroom.

SUMMARY: Getting the Grades

Several themes arose that help us to comprehend the academic lives of first year students. First, the academic realm involved students' evaluations of their academic experiences and the feelings students developed as a result of being evaluated. Second, structural factors such as classroom size, noise and class schedules were an important part of the educational life. Third, what happened within the classroom setting formed the basis of students' academic

experiences. Students had few outside-the-classroom relationships with professors, but the teaching students received was subject to intense scrutiny. The limited contacts many students did have with teaching faculty had a positive impact on their first year. Finally, future researchers would be advised to examine living arrangements more closely for their effect on the academic performance of first year students.

Students' educational experiences could be helped or hindered by their social lives. Peers were both a source of academic support and demand and peer contacts were made during classroom time. Academics drew peers together while at the same time keeping students from more active social lives. Personal contacts, social activities and academic studies interacted in a complex relationship. The student experience involved more than academic performance and peer relations. For many students, the university was a new setting, a new environment to experience. Consequently, how students define the environment and how they discover the intricacies of the university setting are important issues to consider.

CHAPTER SIX

HOW DO I GET THERE AND WHERE DO I GO?

In the previous chapters, I explore the importance of peer relations and personal contacts to the first year experience and I discuss the unfolding of students' academic lives. It seems that the students' world was one of overlapping dimensions. The students further spoke of a variety of more structural dimensions of their experience with which they had to cope. Their living arrangements, for example, could conveniently be situated on-campus, close to campus or far away from campus and could affect both their social and academic lives. The availability of transportation and parking was among their concerns. Once the student is at the university, he/she is often faced with a new setting. Four dimensions of the university environment were described by the first year students: social, physical, demographic and academic. Living arrangements, transportation/parking and the university environment are the topics to be explored in this chapter.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Living Arrangements and Convenience

Several of the off-campus students pointed to the inconvenience of living off-campus. Being off-campus and

"always walking back home" made it difficult for one student to stay informed about the university (see section entitled Where Do I Go? What Do I Do, Where Am I?) and living off-campus influenced the social lives of others.

I think in my particular case it has (being off-campus has affected social life). I live about a forty minute drive from here and that can be a problem because everyone else is so close together and they hop on a bus for five minutes and they're all together and that's really great. And for me sometimes it was just a matter of I'd be later than they were because it took me longer to get in or I didn't have the gas money so I couldn't come in and stuff like that...(FOC124.06).

For this student, her friends often geared social activities to her situation. A second off-campus student referred to the convenience of living in residence and being able to walk home after a swim. Still another off-campus student pointed out that he preferred to socialize downtown because of the inconvenience of getting to campus:

...I don't live that close to the school so when I do go out and have a good time it's just probably end up going downtown or something like that whereas it would be well an inconvenience for me to come all the way over here and you know, I can't afford a cab and all that stuff so.... Therefore if I was living closer to here I'm sure I'd be doing a lot more here (MOC054.09).

Living off-campus can be an inconvenience for socializing and can make going to classes difficult as well. As one male established, coming back and forth for classes could be "a drag" and for a female student, her living arrangements were related to missing classes:

Ya okay we don't live very close...so some days we wouldn't feel like you know, coming to school like it could be bad weather you know, we don't feel like going or what have you. But if we were up in residence or if we were a lot closer, like much closer...but there's times that you know, we didn't feel like walking outside when it was really cold out or just you know. So there's a lot of times where you get up and you say nah I just don't feel like it today. So that's how being off-campus can make you miss class....Like you get tired of driving back and forth. Like you don't want it anymore. Like you're not in the mood (FOC085.06).

While it seems that the distance to campus may affect socializing at the school or attending classes, the relationship is more complex. Being close to campus can lead a student to go home between classes and living far away can keep a student on-campus between classes. One male student, for example, lived close to campus and went home between classes. Another male lived far away from campus and stated that it was "a drag" to come back and forth for classes but once he was on-campus, he was motivated to do his work because he had to stay.

I don't know if I've had any (experiences at Carleton) because I sort of go to school like my brother did. We don't live too far from here so I just drive over when I've got a class or walk over in the winter and just go back home. I don't really hang around too much (MOC021.01).

The residence experience was equally complex. Several residence students felt that being in residence was convenient.

In Carleton all the time (social life is oriented to Carleton). Residence sort of confines you into Carleton....We sort of find everything we need is

here...(MR014.09).

I'd say definitely yes (being on-campus affects educational experience). Ya proximity, everything's so close. It makes everything easier if you want to go to the library (MR115.06).

I mean if I do anything it's generally on-campus whether or not it's going to the Loeb cafeteria for a coffee in the morning or just watching movies in the tv lounge. I mean everything is on campus. You don't have to go off-campus if you don't want to. You can get a haircut here. You can do everything right here (FR074.09).

Being able to go to campus bars, to the university store and to the library were among the factors that made residence convenient for these students. As is alluded to in an earlier discussion, residence living can make it easy to do academic work with peers. Part of the convenience of residence can be explained by the existence of a series of underground tunnels that link the buildings at Carleton to residence (see discussion of The Physical Environment). Living in residence, however, can lead students to feel trapped, to miss their privacy and to be confined to the university campus (see earlier sections on residence and off-campus relations, academic work and living arrangements and Benjamin's (1990) findings concerning the exclusionary/connective nature of residence and control over private space in residence). In the words of two residence students:

It's just there's so many people that are arguing with other people right now (in residence)...so when these people are arguing with each other I feel very trapped. Like I can't go out for a

weekend somewhere because this is where I live, this is my home. So I just feel trapped basically (FR071.02).

...sometimes it's sort of hard to get used to because we're on-campus all the time in residence (MR011.05).

Living in residence can be double-edged: convenient and confining. The convenience or inconvenience of living on or off-campus is better understood by looking at transportation and parking issues.

TRANSPORTATION/PARKING

Getting to and From the University

Not all students experienced difficulties getting to the campus or getting around the city. Some residence students, however, felt that getting around Ottawa was difficult. This difficulty helps to explain why residence students tended to socialize on-campus:

...what's the point of going outside (off-campus), grabbing a cab, going out and getting a cold cause hardly anybody in residence has a car....We have to pay cabs and go outside or take a bus for three hours or two hours to get wherever you want to go to a bar or something like that...(MR014.09).

The travelling you know (had to adjust to), like it's hard to get around the city unless you want to take the bus or a taxi...(MR111.03).

The off-campus students who experienced transportation related problems pointed to a lack of transportation to school (which could lead to missing classes or to not coming back to campus to socializ), to getting caught in traffic or to the lack of parking on-campus.

...because I've got like five hours to spare between a class (reason for missing classes) so and without transportation it's kind of a drag to sit around all day waiting to go to the class...(MOC051.02).

Other than the fact that I get stuck in traffic and miss classes sometimes I suppose there's not really any effect (of being off-campus on educational life) (FOC125.06).

Parking at Carleton seemed to be a problem for several off-campus students. The problem was often a lack of parking spaces. A female student mentioned her fear of having to walk a long distance alone at night to get to her parking lot.

And the parking really perturbs me at this school. There is none (FOC081.04).

More parking. They need more parking (FOC061.03).

...my parking lot is way far away and I didn't really like walking alone at night (reason for disliking night courses)...(FOC125.31).

Benjamin (1990) found that campus security fears arose among the female subjects in his study. A fear of sexual assault existed for more than one third of the females in his sample. Finding adequate parking can be a source of stress for off-campus students, especially for female students who may be concerned about the safety of the parking lot. Once the student is on-campus, he/she must come to terms with the university environment.

THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENTWhere Do I Go, What Do I Do, Where Am I?

One of the salient themes to emerge from my conversations with students was what I refer to as "not knowing". I sensed that most students knew very little about the university before and after they arrived. Many students pointed to a continuing lack of knowledge throughout the first year experience. Several students were unsure of what it would be like to be at university or specifically, to be at Carleton University.

No (didn't know what university would be like before classes). All my friends were the same age or a little bit younger. Nobody in my family had went to university. There was nobody I could really talk to. I mean all the way through Grade 13 it was don't say the U word. We just didn't talk about university. Nobody wanted to leave. It was just you know, university's oh, that's the bad stuff...(FR072.15).

I didn't know what to expect. I expected the worst...(MOC052.16).

And plus it was a new experience for me. Like I had no idea what university was going to be like. No one in my family ever went to university. I don't have an older brother or anything like that or a sister....So I couldn't really go up to anyone and ask, "So what should I expect?" sort of thing. So it was a totally different experience and I liked it (MR111.01).

Some students mentioned that when they first came to the university they did not know what to do or where to go.

...I had no idea what was, like what to do or how to register or make sure I was in the right courses (MR011.01).

This same student later stated:

...at the beginning it was really uncomfortable like I had no idea where I was, how to get around town...(MR012.07).

In the words of a second student:

I guess the first day that I moved in I came and I didn't know anyone that was going to school here....And it's just well it's a little bit scary cause you don't really know where to go. You don't know what to expect...(MR101.03).

Not knowing can be a source of adjustment for students.

Not all students were completely without information before coming to the university. Some spoke to old friends as was the case for this student:

I knew a couple of people that I'd worked with in the summer that had talked about being in their first year....And it sort of seemed everybody who had been in residence sort of had a more enjoyable first year. They had more memorable experiences in a way (FR042.15).

The effect of knowing or not knowing what to expect was somewhat complex. Some students, who spoke to others about the university experience, did not feel that they gained much information and some felt that they needed to actually experience university to understand it. On the one hand, one student felt that having some information gave her a head start and self confidence. For those who had little information, not knowing could be difficult or scary. Not knowing could produce nervousness, fear, tension and stress. At the same time, however, not knowing about the university could motivate students and could be part of the overall excitement of university. Some students felt that there was

really nothing they could do to get ready for university.

I don't think there was anything you could really do to prepare yourself anyways (FR072.19).

Learning about a new setting can take time. Many students stated that one must learn as one goes along. The impression left by the students was that they continued to be uninformed throughout their first year experience. Many students did not know how to get involved in such things as sports and general activities. Still others were uninformed about the library, how to protest their grades, career options and the rules of academic programs. Finally, very few students knew much about the student services offered at Carleton to help them with their problems.²³ Consider the voices of students:

...no actually I don't really know much about the services or anything (FR041.06).

But I didn't really know what there was to offer as far as help went...(MOC051.10).

No I don't actually (know of services) besides CUSA (Carleton Students' Association) and RAW (Residence Association)...Well, there's somethings I guess like the writing tutorials and things like that (MR101.06).

...I didn't know what I was going to do if I couldn't get into (graduate program) and I really didn't know who to talk to like I found I finally found a number that's counselling but you know I, there's a lot of things at school

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²³ The reader is advised to use caution here. Students were merely asked if they knew of any services that exist to help them at Carleton (see Appendix 3, Question 1.05). It is unknown how they interpreted the word services. The general impression was that very few students knew a great deal about services in general.

that you don't know about (FOC081.04).

The only I guess, the only problem I've had all year is figuring out where to go and things like that....It's tough because no one tells you anything. I mean if you want to find out what's going on you got to ask quite a few people before you find somebody that knows what's going on...(MR101.04).

...being first year students we didn't necessarily know where to go (to protest grades)....I don't think we really knew what to do basically (FR071.05).

I haven't really had that many experiences at Carleton because I find that usually, like, they don't have a lot of on-campus (activities). Well, I'm sure they do but I just don't know about it yet like I'm not informed with everything that's going on and it's especially because I'm off-campus too right....You're sort of walking back home or you know, going back home so you're not on res...(FOC061.02).

In fact, students suggested that Carleton University would be well advised to make information more available.

I would just say to maybe try and have more opportunities available for first year students. Make them more aware of everything that's going on. Sort of more like they don't have to go out and find out what's going on, sort of bring it all to them in a way (FR046.08).

I think they could make things better knowledge ...(MR101.09).

Tell us more what's the services going on. I'm finding sometimes we don't know what's quite going on around the university and I think there's like a big gap between residence and the university...(MR011.09).

Lack of involvement in formal university activities could be partly a result of lack of knowledge.

Students do come to know various aspects of the university. Some of the sources of information have been

mentioned throughout this paper and others will be expanded on in subsequent sections. A brief discussion, however, is in order. For many students, old contacts provided information on the university experience (see section on Old Relationships). Residence students, in particular, found out about the university through upper year students (see topic: Upper Year Students). Still other students received information from residence assistants (see section: Residence Services), family (see discussion of Family Contacts), high school teachers, professors, frosh week events, their own initiative (see topic: The Individual) and through peers (see sections: Making New Contacts, Personal Contacts in the Classroom and Social Relations and Academics). Attinasi (1989:264) found that "peer knowledge sharing" was a common experience for the first year students in his study. Finally, one student pointed out that the university calendar kept him informed while another student found out about the university through her participation in university programs.

I think that what they have like is good like they have the tutorial and like other probably workshops...but I think that the students just don't know about it. Like I never knew there was a writing tutorial until...my this semester's (course) professor told me there was. I never knew there was. I guess they could inform more people I guess leaving like letters or something (FOC061.09).

I think it (participation in Transitions- a university program aimed at easing student adjustment) made me feel sort of more close to university life and closer to the people I knew

and sort of more involved in what was going on because our transitions leader always kept us up on what was going on within the school and I think to a certain degree I would not have known if I had not been in transitions (FOC121.05).

Learning about the university environment can be difficult and can take time. Two students pointed to the potential relationship between learning about the university and decisions to stay at the university. A female and a male student established that their decision to return to Carleton (in the case of the male to return following a trip to Europe) was partly determined by the fact that they knew the school and their way around the school. Although the students did not seem to be aware of many of the aspects of the university, they did form perceptions of the university environment. Attinasi (1989) provides a detailed examination of Mexican American students' perceptions of the campus environment. He argues that many of the post-enrolment experiences of these students can be seen as strategies to deal with the social, physical and academic geographies at the college. In what follows, I look at four dimensions of the environment: the social, the physical, the demographic and the academic.

The General Social Environment

Several of the first year students spoke of their perceptions of what I call the social environment of Carleton University. Many students referred to the

existence of social attitudes, the majority of which were positive. The social environment at Carleton was seen as friendly, accommodating, laid back, people-oriented and not snobbish, among others. Some students came to see the attitude at Carleton in comparison with other universities.

And I find (compared to another Ontario university attended for the first few months of 1988) it's more accommodating here, easier to meet people. People are, people seem friendlier to me anyway. Maybe it's because I was older. I'm not sure but (MOC091.03).

...I've gone over to Ottawa (University of Ottawa) ...and people...are really tense....Carleton seems to be more, it's not as conservative. It's more of a fun school and a lot more friendly and you can meet more people...(MOC052.03).

The people seem so friendly. Like I've been at other universities and maybe it's just because I'm biased now but people just aren't as friendly (FR072.01).

Students' perceptions of the social environment appeared among the reasons they gave for being happy with their choice of Carleton University, for choosing to study at Carleton and for fitting in at Carleton. These perceptions were also linked to the factors that made meeting people at Carleton easy or difficult. One student stated that she felt happy with her choice of Carleton because she felt comfortable:

I don't know it's just it's a real people-oriented school. I've heard like a lot of other schools... people that I've known have gone there and stuff like that, that it's very you know, everyone's in cliques and if you're not in a certain clique then nobody else talks to you and everybody's just somebody here and you know, everyone talks to everybody else and it's really just really

comfortable (FOC122.03).

Another student was happy with the social reputation of the university:

I like Carleton like, I like Carleton a lot and it doesn't have the reputation like other schools have like Western...I would hate to go to Western (University of Western Ontario). Just I don't know...like a lot of people label you for the university you go to type thing and like if you say I'm from Western, people will label you as like a preppy or something else. I guess I label too. But when you say you go to Carleton a lot of people...(are) friendlier to you....Carleton has a good peer evaluation I guess (FOC062.03).

According to a female off-campus student, fitting in at Carleton University should not be difficult because of the attitude of students:

The thing is though about this school I find people more friendly in a sense like they're not, this isn't a snobbish university and it's gotten to the fact that they're in first year university. They're not babies anymore you know. Like people do grow up and there shouldn't be any problems (FOC082.12).

While most of the comments concerned social attitudes, two off-campus students spoke of Carleton as having a social environment that was not only centralized at Carleton.

No but I find that at Carleton there isn't like there's only a limited amount of bars like to which other universities have and a lot of the socialization or whatever you would want to say is sort of downtown or in Hull because it's a city so it's not centralized around just the university whereas if like a lot of other universities are, like London, like Western is in London and that's the whole university right... (FOC061.02).

The second student pointed out that meeting people at

Carleton may be difficult because Ottawa is not "just a university town".

...in Ottawa because it's not just a university town there's other places to go than the university pub. So a lot of people don't just go there (MOC024.12).

How students perceived the social environment influenced their evaluation of the university experience. Similarly, students formed impressions of the physical environment.

The Physical Environment

The location of the campus, the campus set up and the appearance of the campus were among the physical dimensions students discussed. For many students, these perceptions were related to their specific likes and dislikes at Carleton, to their reasons for being happy with their choice of Carleton and to their reasons for choosing to attend Carleton. Students who liked the campus set up had the following to say:

Well the actual campus, I really like the way it looks and the way it's set up....I know that sounds corny but I guess if you're not comfortable in a situation you're not going to learn (FOC122.05).

I like its location. I like it a lot the atmosphere a lot better than Ottawa U mostly because Ottawa U's like a concrete jungle sort of thing like it's right downtown. There's no place where you can really go out or you know, throw a ball around or whatever whereas there's Carleton there's so much room. And I like the campus a lot better. It's easy to get around. It's you know, it's within walking distance...(MR112.01).

One of the things that I like is how it's located

sort of off by itself but you can still get to everything really easily...(FR042.05).

How the university "looks", its location and whether or not students could find their way around the campus all contributed to students' levels of comfort at the university. Benjamin (1990) found that the physical beauty of a campus could be a positive aspect in the first year experience, especially in contrast to female students' security fears. Unlike Benjamin (1990), I did not find that comments about the pleasantness of the campus were limited to female students. In the words two male students:

And the campus is really nice. I've gotten pretty adjusted to the campus...(MR011.03).

I kind of liked it (university) at first. Just walking through the campus in the summer time or just in the fall and it was really, it was quite nice (MOC021.03).

Not all students, however, were pleased with the "looks" of the university. Among students' dislikes were slow elevators, ugly buildings, a lack of places to sit outside, recycled air in buildings, "grungy" buildings and the presence of construction on-campus.

A great deal of students' comments on the physical set up of Carleton were directed at the size of the university. Size referred to the number of people at Carleton. Some students found it difficult to adjust to the number of people at the university, especially those who came from small towns. For some, the large numbers of people affected their sense of identity (see subcategory: Identity). One

student cited the size, and the lack of identity he felt was created by the size, as a reason for transferring to another university. Furthermore, meeting people could be difficult due to the large numbers. At the same time, the size of the university helped to create diversity among students, thus helping students to meet people. Many students saw the ability of the university to help students to fit in, to talk to students, to provide information to students and to treat students as individuals as being hindered by the size of the enrolment. The comments of students point to the influence of university size on their experience:

It was a bit of a transaction period because I'm from a small town with 1200 people and all of a sudden, my residence has the same amount of people as my town...I'm in a school of 23000 people approximately. And there's so many people ...(FR071.03).

...I applied last year (to an Ontario university) and I couldn't get in. And he (a friend) says it's a great school and it's quite a small school. So that, his information, affected my decision and just that I think I'd rather be in a smaller school (MCC021.04).

...the university isn't a great help but I imagine it's really tough to communicate to over 17000 people everyday what's going on. So I think eventually everyone finds out (MR101.10).

The structure of Carleton University is somewhat unique in that its buildings are connected by underground tunnels. A few residence students expressed their satisfaction with the tunnels and the convenience the tunnels provided. One off-campus student remarked that the tunnels allow residence students to go to class in shorts, if they desire.

I like the fact that they have the tunnels even though they smell. I mean in the dead of winter when it was so cold, it was nice not to have to go outside. That's one of the things I like about Carleton (FR072.05).

...the tunnels....It's sort of been the big joke. I hear a lot of people call us the tunnel rats because we always live in the tunnels which is sort of true. The tunnels make it really convenient. They sort of get stuffy after a while and I know for times there in the winter time I was, I never saw the light of day for two months....So I sort of feel that's kind of confining. The tunnels make it so much nicer. In residence you can sleep in, get up an hour, or half hour before class starts, just walk down the tunnels with a pair of shorts on, t-shirt...(MR012.05).

The tunnels linked students, especially residence students, to the university. At the same time, they could be confining for those residence students who "did not see the light of day" for months at a time. The physical location, the size of the university and the tunnels at Carleton were all environmental factors discussed by students. Students further discussed the demographic composition of the university.

The Demographic Environment

The demographic composition of the university was not one of the more apparent themes among the first year students. It did, however, help to explain why some students felt they fit into the university. Some students established that the social class composition of the university was responsible for them fitting in at Carleton

while for one student, her upper middle class background was a reason for her sense of a lack of fit. This same student felt that her religious upbringing did not allow her to fit in at Carleton. Consider the following comments:

Well, Carleton isn't so much a school where all of the rich kids go. I mean it's not a very snobby school. It has a great mixture of people some being better off, some being worse off and it's just everybody accepts people for who they are almost. I mean people don't, they don't dress for class...in residence everybody just slops around. And it's comfortable. It feels like a Saturday morning all the time. I like that... (FR072.08).

Okay, well first I'm (religion) and there's not many up here. So it's like you're (religion) and you know, like they've never met one before. So you have to understand that they think that you know, like some non (religion) people think that you're just you know, the exact same religion as them....Just things like that. And also the fact that I come from an upper middle class family so things I'm like I'm constantly being told because I have my own car and you know just like things about me. It's like oh you're rich you know, and that I've gotten very tired of whereas if I would have been at a different university I wouldn't have been experiencing that (FOC081.03).

The significance of this student's class and religious background to her first year suggests that more effort should be given to exploring the impact of the general demographic environment on the student experience. The final environmental dimension to be examined is that of the academic environment.

The Academic Environment

The students identified five dimensions of what I

consider the academic environment at Carleton: 1. its admission standards 2. its academic programs 3. the language requirements 4. the "last chance U" syndrome and 5. the overall academic atmosphere. When students spoke of their reasons for choosing to come to Carleton, many pointed to their fear that they would not be accepted at other universities given their high school grade point average (Carleton has traditionally accepted students with lower high school averages than other universities in Ontario). A few students chose Carleton over the University of Ottawa because of their dislike of the language requirements at that university. The positive reputation of specific academic programs was a drawing card for other students and still others came to the university that offered the program they wished to pursue.

It is interesting to note that two students pointed to their perception of the general academic environment as a reason for fitting in at Carleton and a third student cited the academic environment among his likes at Carleton.

...you walk into Roosters at two o'clock and everybody's sitting around. You know nobody seems really in a hurry to get places here most of the time. It's not like the atmosphere at say Queen's (Kingston, Ontario) where it's compete, compete, compete. Everybody's like so what did you get on the last test, what did you get on the last test? ...I'm going to be a doctor before you and stuff like that (MOC092.05).

Like I think I fit in more here than I would at Ottawa (University of Ottawa) so that's why I'm glad I'm coming here because like I'd feel

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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS
STANDARD REFERENCE MATERIAL 1010a
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more, a lot more intimidated by my classmates or other people at Ottawa than here (MOC052.08).

When questioned why he felt this way the student responded:

...I was never really a total scholar....I always had like average marks in school but it was just because I was probably just 'ucky because I was never like...studious throughout high school... (MOC052.08).

Or as another student stated:

Well I'm not a maths or science major so I don't think that I would have wanted to go to a university where it was math and science oriented...(MR102.08).

The perceived academic orientation of the university can affect the student's perception of environmental fit. A final dimension to be looked at involves Carleton's reputation as "last chance U" which refers to its lower admission standards than other universities. Several students commented on this reputation, and most were somewhat defensive of Carleton's standards:

...like a lot of people say you know, Carleton last chance university but I you know, I enjoy it. And I have more work than my friends at other schools so I don't know, it's just I think it's a good experience all around for me to be here (FOC082.06).

Well you know, the last chance U publication. I don't know they're (her friends) all, I have friends at Western and U of T (University of Toronto) and very prestigious schools and Carleton's still fairly young and it hasn't aged enough to have that same prestige. But I think it's going up. I mean almost anybody can get in but to stay here you have to work (FR072.01).

To what extent the academic reputation at Carleton affected the first year experience is not clear. What is clear is

that some students felt the need to defend the standards of the university. Students seemed to be drawn to Carleton for its standards (often for its lower standards) and for the positive reputation of some academic programs. Once at Carleton, however, the academic reputation was a factor with which several students had to come to terms.

SUMMARY: The University Environment

Conversations with students resulted in the identification of four dimensions of the university environment: the social, the physical, the demographic and the academic. Environmental dimensions were linked to the students' choice of the university, to their satisfaction with the university and to their sense of fit to the university. Many students compared the social environment at Carleton to the environments at other universities and found Carleton friendlier and more accommodating. Friendly, laid back, people-oriented and not snobbish were among the descriptions of the social environment. When students spoke of the physical setting, they emphasized the location of the university, the "looks" of the university, the size of the university and the underground tunnels at Carleton. The size of the university was a source of transition for some students. The size of Carleton could result in a lack of identity and made meeting people both difficult and easy at the same time.

The demographic composition at Carleton was responsible for a sense of fit for some students and a lack of fit for one student in particular. The intensity with which one student described her class and religious mismatch at Carleton points to the need for further research. Finally, among the reasons students gave for choosing to attend Carleton University were its academic standards (lower admission standards) and the reputation of its academic programs. The "last chance U" syndrome at Carleton was the subject of comments by some students who seemed to feel the need to defend Carleton's academic standards. Although four dimensions of the environment emerged, the overall impression left by the students was that they lacked information about the university. Most students were uninformed about what to expect prior to enrolment and what was going on at the university after enrolment.

SUMMARY: How Do I Get There and Where Do I Go?

Where students lived, how they travelled to and from the university and their perceptions of the university environment were important structural dimensions of the first year experience. Living off-campus was described as inconvenient by many of the students with whom I spoke. Going to classes and socializing at the university were among the difficulties experienced by off-campus students. In contrast, residence students pointed to the convenience

of residence living such that everything they needed could be found on-campus. The distance a student lived from campus seemed to be related to the difficulties of getting to the university, but being close to campus did not guarantee increased contact. Living on-campus was convenient, but it could be confining. The tendency of residence students to stay on-campus and the problems faced by off-campus students getting to the university were partly explained with reference to transportation/parking issues. Getting around the city, finding campus parking and getting transportation to class were among the problems students encountered.

Once students arrive at the university, they face a new environment. Many students knew little about the university prior to arrival and most continued to express a lack of information during the first year. Students identified four environmental dimensions at Carleton: the social, the physical, the demographic and the academic. These dimensions were related to students' choice of university, to their satisfaction with and fit to the university. Any examination of the first year experience would be incomplete without reference to the individual student and to the individual's sense of self.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHO AM I?

In the previous chapter, I looked at students' perceptions of the university environment and how students became familiar with the new setting, yet there was another important aspect of student life: the individual dimension. How students viewed themselves, how they dealt with their problems and how they evaluated their first year experience were all a part of their daily lives. The students discussed several elements of their experience that are best described as personal such as personal identity, self confidence, becoming an individual, personal finances and the role of the individual at the university. The role of the university in helping students with problems was a second theme explored with students. Finally, the students were able to evaluate their overall first year experience and to point to their future plans. A better understanding of the first year experience may result from the exploration of individuals' roles in the experience, especially individuals' perceptions of self.

THE PERSONAL REALM

Identity

Feeling like a number, being a face in the crowd,

seeing the university as impersonal, passing through Carleton as a ghost and having no identity were among the descriptions employed by students in discussions of their experience. In their words:

I mean with the large classes, it almost has to be expected. But still being from a school of 1200 almost everybody knew everybody in the whole school so you always had your identity. But I don't know. It's not so much that it's bad. It's just very different. It's something that you have to get used to (FR075.12).

...a lot of first years I think feel the same way just we feel like a number once in a while (MR011.03).

I'm that kind of person who if I'm not challenged I won't do anything you know. If no one, you know, the teacher doesn't call on you in class here. There's nothing like that. No one knows you. If you don't do well then you're just stats go down on the computer. And I can do that quite well. I mean I can just go through Carleton as a ghost you know. Sort of pass through and no one knows (MOC021.04).

As I mention earlier in the paper, the lack of teacher/student relationships, large classes and the number of people at the university were perceived by students as leading to a lack of identity. Being a face in the crowd was a very different experience from high school for some students. This different feeling of anonymity was not unique to Carleton students. Benjamin (1990:29) found that the academic transition of a group of first year University of Guelph students left the majority feeling "...more like being abandoned, suddenly transformed from an individual into a number, standing alone against all others."

The majority of students wanted to be recognized and to have personal relationships within the university. In fact, several students mentioned the importance of professors and teaching assistants knowing students' names and the importance of professors/Ta's treating students as individuals. Some students felt that evaluation would be improved if professors could get to know the students. As was seen in an earlier chapter, being recognized by professors and teaching assistants was a positive experience for students. Anonymity was appreciated, however, among some students who feared being singled out in classes (see my earlier section on the structure of a first year class). For one student, loss of identity was a reason given for transferring to another university. Consider the intensity with which the students talked about the need for individual identity:

...maybe there should be more, I know we have our advisors for our program but more of a person you can go to that just has like a block of students. It doesn't matter what program they're in that you can just go to and say...like just for general help....You have this one particular person which could always be reached...that could be reached where they could help you more than just the service desk at res or some number that you just pick out of the administration building somewhere (FR072.13).

I don't know maybe you need that extra touch where you know, you can, you know your prof like the prof knows you in a sense. Because it's easier to go to help for questions or even for help on things. It's like half way through the year or three quarters through the year you're not going to, if you have a question, you're just going to feel very uncomfortable going up to this person

that you've been in his class for so long but can't you know, you don't know this person. It's a lot easier if you can have a one-on-one I guess relationship with your prof (FOC085.12).

...I think everybody wishes they (professors) knew your name at least if anything else, but that's unrealistic unless they had smaller classes which may be a realistic notion if the funds were there....So I guess all I can say is you know, I've expected what I've gotten (MR115.24).

It was primarily within the academic realm that students felt a loss of identity. In contrast, one student stated that it was "the people", his peers and his social life that helped him to deal with what he saw as an impersonal setting. The role of peers in creating a belief in oneself is explored in the following discussion.

Self Confidence

Just as a person's sense of identity can change so too can his/her belief in his/herself. Students spoke of the factors that influenced their level of confidence and of the effects of having self assurance. Feeling a sense of fit to the environment, having friends, socializing, and academic performance (see subcategory: Student Evaluation) were among the factors that affected students' levels of confidence. At the same time, self esteem had an impact on academic performance, helped determine whether or not a student participated in class, helped a student to deal with large classes and affected how students felt about their chances to succeed at university. The voices of students point to

the complexities of the self:

...how you feel about yourself or, it also affects how you do at school. I think if that if you feel you're accepted and you have a lot of friends, you have self confidence and you have people who are supporting you and it makes you work all the harder or makes you take more pride in your work in a way...(FR044.01).

I guess I didn't really come in with a lot of confidence in what I could do my first year... scared of what you know, what might happen if I couldn't do it...(MR115.33).

I was thinking (because of heavy workload) I don't want to be here. What am I doing at University? If I can't handle this what am I going to do in later years? But I made it (FOC081.02).

A student's self confidence is a fragile entity. Work by Benjamin (1990) points to both the potential impact of self assurance on the first year experience and to the overlap between peer relations, self esteem and academic performance (as is seen in the above students' comments). Benjamin (1990:24-27) distinguishes between two types of self confidence: social and academic. Social and academic self esteem were not static, but changed throughout the experience of the students studied by Benjamin (1990). Social esteem, in general, was a function of relations with others while academic esteem was seen in terms of individual ability (Benjamin, 1990:24). Among Benjamin's (1990:27) conclusions is that social and academic self confidence interact: "...satisfying connections with peers, and thus high or at least rising social self-esteem, was salient to both academic self esteem as well as academic performance."

How students perceive themselves is an important dimension of the first year experience. In addition to dealing with their feelings about themselves, many students had to learn about becoming "an individual".

Being On My Own

Ten of twelve students I interviewed were living apart from their parents. Of these, eight were away from home for the first time (one male student continued to live with his brother and one female student had left home prior to her first year at university). The remaining two students continued to live at home. For many of the students away from home for the first time, being on their own was an adjustment that could lead to homesickness. This experience contrasted the experience of students who did not leave home or who had left home before. Benjamin (1990) suggests that homesickness among students may be experienced at different levels and that adjustment to the university (including adjustment to independence) may take place on a continuum with some students adjusting quickly, others slowly and others not at all. He says, further, that family dynamics, such as family closeness, may affect levels of independence and homesickness. Homesickness was especially apparent for some of the students in my sample during Christmas exams.

The fact that your family's not there (is an adjustment) even though you may not go to them all the time you know, they're there still and the only way you can communicate is

over the phone sort of thing. Like the home aspect like you know, the relaxed, you're more relaxed in your own home obviously... (MR111.03).

...I didn't find there was that much of a change just because a lot of my last year of high school I lived by myself and so it wasn't a real transfer to you know live by myself or anything so and it wasn't like you know, I was right on party or whatever because I've already been through that...(FOC061.03).

While living away from home could be an adjustment (getting used to freedom, no one to tell you what to do, depending on yourself to do your work, developing self discipline, for example), many students pointed to the positive effects of independence. In fact, for seven of eight students who were on their own for the first time, being independent was cited among the factors that made the first year a worthwhile experience. Several students mentioned that they wanted the experience of leaving home and that being prepared to leave home could ease the adjustment. Conversely, not being ready to leave home made the adjustment more difficult for a female student.

I think that people that come away to university that go away from home and experience a year of, it's not complete independence, but it's pretty close. I think I've learned a lot more about life than I have about school this year so in that way I guess it's the best experience I've had (MR101.03).

I think it's (university)...not actually getting to know university but getting to know yourself also and...a lot of self discipline to get things done...(FR041.03).

I went to (Ontario university) for the first two months of 1988 and I lived at my parents' house and

I found it wasn't, it was sort of like going to high school again....But this year I've been on my own. I've been forced to feed myself, cook for myself, get to classes on my own. Sort of independence (MOC091.01).

Some students who did not move away from home for the first time, or at all, also referred to the need for self motivation and to the positive effects of learning to become an individual while at university. Two male residence students mentioned the potential impact of independence on their grades. One referred to the positive effect of having only to care for his room while the other established the negative impact of having to pay bills, do laundry and complete academic work at the same time. Furthermore, being away from home influenced decisions to remain at or to leave the university. For some, independence was a reason for staying and for another wanting to be closer to home was a reason for thinking of a transfer to another university (this student cited distance from home as a factor). Still another student wanted to leave Carleton in order to get away from home. The university experience is important not only for what students learn in the classroom but for what they learn about being an individual. Becoming an individual was a salient thrust of student life as was the role of the individual at the university.

The Individual

Four themes emerged from students' discussions of

individuality. First, there was a feeling among students that they must keep an open mind and that they must learn to deal with different situations. For many this meant getting used to change, learning to adjust and dealing with their own problems. Keeping an open mind was among the advice students offered to new students about fitting into the university. Second, the ethic of individualism was very much alive among these students. Some students mentioned that they were on their own to "figure things out" at the university. The individualistic ethic was very apparent when students stated that it "was up to the individual" to fit in, to get involved in the university, to speak to professors and to seek help with problems. The need to "get involved" in order to fit in was advice offered to new students by most of the students with whom I spoke.

It's pretty well all left to you. If you want to do it you do it. They've got it there if you want it you have to go and get it. Like you can always just go over to the admin building and find out someone to talk to. There's always someone there. I'm sure there's someone there to talk to. I've heard about it. But you know, I think they leave it up to you which is important. If you want to do something you've got to do it and that's the way it's going to be out in the real world....You've got to do everything yourself...(MR015.29).

I'd say (to fit in) try and get involved in a lot of things. Don't sit back and wait for people to approach you about things. Go out and get involved in what you want to do (FR042.12).

It (professors not recognizing him) makes me feel pretty bad actually. Like I guess it's up to me though really to go up and talk to them (professors) but like how's he supposed to go

around like to 300...people and get to know them all if they don't come to him. But I guess there's no, really way around it besides individuals going up to talk to him or her...(MR115.21).

Finally, students pointed out that individual differences need to be considered and that "being yourself" was important to fitting in at the university. Some students, for example, stated that the perceived importance of fitting in and the ease or difficulty of meeting people may "depend on the individual". The ease of socializing may further depend on a student's available finances.

Personal Finances

How students handled their finances is the final personal dimension to be considered. For most of the students in the sample, money had some effect on their first year experience. Worrying about finances, running out of money, learning to control money, saving money, and the high cost of tuition and books were among the issues mentioned. As the year goes on, maintaining financial stability may become more difficult. Even for one student whose parents paid for her education, the fear of wasting her parents' money was apparent. One of the most interesting findings was the role personal finances played in social activities and academic work. The activities in which a student participates can be limited by the amount of money available and the amount of money available can be depleted by participation in social activities. At the same time,

having less money for socializing and paying for their own education can lead students to study more. Consider these comments:

...I turned 19 in October so I went a little bit crazy from October till Christmas but I've had to calm down because first of all I don't have the finances, my marks slipped a bit so now I'm sort of dealing with what I did earlier in the term. It's not so great (FR071.02).

I had a good couple of months. Right now my marks are good like I said. So that helped in that way....With no money I couldn't go out that often so I tended to hit the books a lot more (MOC092.16).

Future researchers may find it useful to explore the impact of personal finances on socializing and academic performance.

SUMMARY: The Personal Realm

How students viewed themselves was an important dimension of the first year experience. The students referred to several personal aspects of their daily lives including personal identity, self confidence, being on their own, the individual's role at the university and personal finances. Feeling like a number or a lack of identity was common among the students I interviewed despite the fact that a majority of students longed for personal contact, especially with the teaching faculty. Students stated that their level of self confidence was determined by their fit to the environment, friends, socializing and grade performance. In turn, self assurance influenced their

grades, how they dealt with large classes, class participation and their fear of failure.

Being independent was an adjustment for many students but at the same time, it could have a positive effect on the first year. This adjustment was particularly the case for those students who were away from home. The ethic of individualism emerged among these students. Learning to accept things on their own and to take individual initiative along with the feeling of "it's up to the individual" are examples of the individualistic ethic among students. The interviews with students point to the need to consider the role of personal finances in determining social activity participation and academic performance along with the role of the university in helping students with problems.

THE "UNIVERSITY" AND STUDENT PROBLEMS

Student Services Used

Given that students seemed to know very little about the services available on-campus, it is not surprising that their use of services was somewhat limited.²⁴ While some services were used, such as the writer's tutorial, health services, math services and essay workshops, the overall impression was that students did not extensively use university services (at least three students used no

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²⁴ The reader is again advised to exercise caution. Students' interpretations of the word services was difficult to assess and the results may depend on these interpretations.

services). This lack of extensive use of services is not to say that the services used by students had no effect on their first year experience. In fact, students pointed to their benefits. As one student, who was involved in the university Transitions program, stated:

Well I was really leery at first but I went and it wasn't really what I expected because it's supposed to be that you have like a weekly meeting and you talk to the person and that and it certainly hasn't been that for our group. I mean we've met like three times the whole year so it hasn't been that way, but my group is all friends and we're friends with our transitions leader so even though we don't do some, you know, weekly specific things we still always know that if we have a problem we can talk to somebody else in the group or we can talk to him like just give him a call and he doesn't mind. So even though it wasn't really structured the way it should have been it was still very helpful I think (FOC121.05).

The use of services (or their usefulness) by students may depend on students' perceived need for such services, on the convenience of the services, on students' knowledge of the available services and on whether or not students feel comfortable using services. In the words of students:

I just never got around to it (using counselling service) because the place that we found is not too close to the school. And I just could never get into coming (FOC081.08).

...I just, I haven't had any need (for services)...if I had an essay then I would go and have it proofread or typed up at the tutorial service or the essay place or whatever. It's not so much that I don't want to do it, it's just I don't need to (FR071.08).

One student's reason for not using the writing tutorial

service was:

...I always did alright in high school on essays and things like that. I do alright on essays here but I guess the writing tutorial probably couldn't hurt (MR101.08).

In addition to university-wide services, residence students are provided with a convenient set of additional services.

Residence Services

Within the residence, services exist that were referred to by students such as: the residence fellow, the residence floor representative, the residence service desk and the residence association. The residence fellow and the floor representative seemed to play a role in residence life whether it be for noise control, providing students with information, acquainting students with the university, or introducing students to one another on the floor.

...they're (res fellows) sort of like your information group or whatever....Usually they have all the answers that you need but if they don't they can find them...(FR041.06).

...every floor has a floor rep and that was, she really went out of her way to make everybody feel like they fit in and get them involved in activities in frosh week...(FR042.13).

It's funny cause we have a res fellow in residence ...and usually if you have a question like that you kind of expect them to know and it's funny because I mean, he's in third year and he doesn't even know. I mean he has to figure it out the same way that anybody else does (MR101.10).

For residence students, assistance can be as close as the residence fellow or floor representative. More information

would be required before the importance of residence services in the lives of students could be assessed. Residence assistants at the University of Guelph, according to Benjamin (1990), provided practical help to first year students but their assistance was not always effective. In fact, Benjamin (1990) found that residence assistants at Guelph had little direct impact on the daily lives of his subjects. An understanding of why students use or do not use services may be related to the perception that different sources of help exist for different problems.

Different Problems/Different Sources of Help

Although it was not a dominant theme in the student experience, there seemed to be a feeling among some students that different sources of help should be used for different problems. According to one student, professors and tutorial services are consulted for course problems whereas peer counselling services are to be used for personal difficulties. Another student mentioned that health services are provided for physical ailments, but he was unsure of where to go for emotional problems. Similarly, a female student stated:

I mean I didn't go to my res fellow or one of my advisors for this kind of help. Like it's just adjusting help. You just have your peers to help you (FR071.05).

The belief in different sources of help for particular problems may lead us to understand more clearly which

services are used by students and help to explain the nature of students' relationships with teaching faculty.

SUMMARIZING THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE

Positive/Negative Overall Experience

Throughout this paper, I refer to the evaluations students made concerning their first year experience. Summarizing the first year in one evaluation is somewhat difficult as specific experiences were evaluated positively or negatively by most students. Given that limitation, however, I feel it is accurate to state that the overwhelming majority of the students I interviewed had a good first year experience. For some, the overall experience was "great", or "the best experience of my life" while others were satisfied with their first year and still others liked Carleton.

More specifically, eleven of twelve students stated that they were happy with their choice of Carleton University. The reasons for one student's dissatisfaction with Carleton were his desire to leave home and to leave the city of Ottawa, his dislike of the large size of the university, and the lack of identity he felt at Carleton. This same student, however, expressed happiness with what he learned at Carleton and he seemed to enjoy most areas of his experience. For many students, their overall positive evaluation was linked to their decision to remain at

Carleton. All twelve students felt that their first year experience was a worthwhile one, for reasons that have been made clear throughout the paper. As a result, the first year experience was positive for most of the twelve students I interviewed.

Just Come for the Classes

Two off-campus students felt that they had very few experiences at the university and they felt that their first year experience was essentially one of coming for the classes. As one student stated:

...I guess I have the feeling like I come to school to learn and/or to like to be taught and after I'm finished for the day I don't enjoy coming back just because I tend to think school. So that's probably why I gear myself more to what's outside than what's inside (FOC064.09).

In light of the earlier discussions about the tendency of off-campus students to socialize outside the university, it is important to recognize that the classroom may be the centre of the first year experience for many off-campus students.

Fitting In and the First Year Student

Eleven of twelve students stated that they felt they fit in at Carleton University. The remaining student had mixed feelings. Likewise, eleven of twelve students agreed with the importance of fitting in for first year students. The same one student had mixed feelings. The issue of fit

to the environment has been the subject of much of this paper. It is important though to point to the reasons students gave for the importance of fitting in. Among these reasons were: that fitting in helps students to socialize, that a sense of belonging is important to keep a student at the university, that fitting in provides self confidence and a feeling of comfort, that the experience is somehow easier if one fits in and that fitting in affects academic success. The student who had mixed feelings on the need to fit in cited a desire to be different from her friends.

Ya, I think if you feel you belong to something then it gives you more self confidence and...makes you more able to achieve your other goals and gives you a sense of pride in yourself in a way (FR042.10).

Well anywhere if you feel like you're an outcast that you don't belong in a place, you'd probably leave it (MOC092.10).

I think it is. I think it's important to feel that you fit in anywhere because if you feel excluded from anything you don't want to participate anymore (MOC052.10).

The majority of the students believed in the need for first year students to feel a sense of belonging to the environment.

Stayers and Leavers

At the time of the interview, nine of twelve students planned to return to Carleton for another year. Two students planned to leave (one to go to Europe and to return the following year and one to transfer to another

university). One student was undecided about Carleton but planned to remain in university. University records indicate that all of the nine students who planned to return enrolled for a second year. The remaining three students did not register. Although the reasons for staying and leaving behaviour are discussed throughout the text, a brief list of reasons given by students is warranted. The reasons students gave when specifically asked why they planned to stay at Carleton (see Appendix 3 Questions 6.04, 6.05) included: an overall positive evaluation of the experience, new friends, independence, ease of staying, the city of Ottawa, residence living, the people, the academic program, personal goals, knowing the university, the learning experience, professors and overall positive courses. The reasons cited for leaving Carleton were: the size of the university, the lack of personal identity, wanting to get away from home, meeting friends who wanted to go to Europe and wanting to be closer to home. If the information provided in the interviews was correct, Carleton lost two students who transferred to another university and one student can be considered a "stopout". The system of higher education did not lose any students.

SUMMARY: Who Am I?

My discussions with students resulted in a variety of personal dimensions of the first year experience being

highlighted. The students spoke of their sense of identity and self confidence, their experiences of becoming individuals, personal finances and their perceived role at the university. Several students pointed to a lack of identity (especially in the academic realm), to the impact of self assurance on such things as grades and class participation, to the positive and negative effects of independence and to a prevailing ethic of individualism. Furthermore, a student's finances may influence his/her social activities and academic performance.

How students deal with problems is a personal issue. Few students made extensive use of university services. The residence fellow and the floor representative, however, seemed to play a positive role in the residence student experience. The majority of students felt that their first year experience was a positive one and that they fit into the environment. Most students registered for a second year at Carleton.

Allowing students the opportunity to define their institutional experiences and giving priority to the voices of students has resulted in a complex portrait of the first year experience. The dimensions of everyday life that were important to the students have implications for how we theorize about the first year experience and for institutional policy that aims at improving the first year.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A CRITIQUE OF THE CONCEPTS SOCIAL, ACADEMIC AND INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCE: Theoretical, Research and Policy Implications

The voices of students direct us to the salient issues in their everyday lives. Several themes that emerged in this study are consistent with those that evolved in work by Attinasi (1989) and particularly in Canadian work by Benjamin (1990). The similarity of findings lends support to the results and points to the importance of obtaining student perceptions of the first year experience across institutions.

In this chapter, I explore the theoretical, research and policy implications stemming from students' daily experiences. First, I critically examine the conceptualization and operationalization of Tinto's (1975, 1987) constructs, social and academic integration and institutional experience. Information obtained from first year students forms the basis of the critique. Within this discussion, I present the results of twelve students' responses to select measures of academic and social integration gathered in a structured questionnaire. For ease of presentation, the critique is divided into three sections: 1. Social Integration 2. Academic Integration and 3. The Institutional Experience Overall. Within each topic,

I explore both measurement and conceptual issues. I argue that Tinto's concepts and especially the measures used to assess them, seriously underestimate the complexity of the first year experience. Second, I briefly discuss the policy implications of the issues brought forth by first year students. Finally, I link the students' experiences to the broader issue of equality in Canadian higher education.

THEORETICAL/RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Social Integration

According to Tinto (1975, 1987), social integration is determined by both sufficient contacts with members of the social system and congruence with the prevailing values of that system. Social integration is defined in terms of informal peer relations, extracurricular activity participation and faculty-student interactions (Tinto, 1975, 1987). Consequently, social integration is typically measured (see Chapter Two) as a function of these dimensions. In what follows, I look closely at each of these three facets of student life.

Previous conceptualization and operationalization of peer relations is problematic for several reasons: 1. the importance and impact of peer relations is underestimated 2. researchers do not differentiate among peer relations; they fail to examine relations outside the university and neglect to explore the varying impacts of different types of

peers 3. the impact of the family is, for the most part, ignored 4. existing measures do not accommodate the effects of living arrangements on peer relations and 5. friendship formation goes beyond Tinto's notions of isolation and incongruence. Many of these weaknesses are recognized by Benjamin (1990) in his critique of traditional student development theory, namely the need to differentiate among peers, the tendency of past researchers to ignore off-campus relations, the lack of attention paid to continuing family contacts and the need to consider in more detail, the importance of peer relations.

Students' written comments and data obtained from student interviews, underscore the importance of peer relations to the first year experience. The direct effect of friendships on staying/leaving behaviour, as cited by students, further reinforces their importance. The results of a structured questionnaire show that most of the interview subjects felt that they developed close personal relations with other students during their first year experience (see Table Six, Social Integration).

The impact of peer relations is typically measured by attrition researchers in terms of their influence on students' personal growth, attitudes and values; students' intellectual growth and students' personal satisfaction (see Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980). The students with whom I spoke agreed that their student contacts were personally

satisfying (see Table Six, Social Integration).

Conversations with students, however, established that the influence of peer relations went beyond personal growth or values. Peer contacts influenced virtually every area of a student's life; for example, friends helped students adjust to the university and affected levels of self confidence and identity. Tinto (1975) uses the term "social rewards" to describe the effects of successful social contacts. The fact that making new contacts was a central preoccupation of many students leads me to conclude that this term underestimates the importance of peer relations.

Attrition researchers tend to measure only interactions with other students (see Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980; 1983) thus ignoring contacts outside the university. Furthermore, attrition researchers display a lack of analytical sophistication regarding peer relations. The experiences of the Carleton University students lend support to Benjamin's (1990) findings at the University of Guelph; he emphasizes the limitations of examining only student experiences and interactions on-campus and the limitations of treating all peers as "coequals" in the first year experience. The tendency to overlook contacts outside the university may seriously limit researchers' abilities to understand the student experience, which may be especially the case for the off-campus experience. Several of the off-campus students had contacts outside of the university.

Many of the first year students maintained some degree of relations with friends from home or at other universities. These continuing ties could be a source of support for students or could pull students away from meeting new friends or from doing their academic work.

Not all personal contacts were equally important to the students and not all relationships had the same impact on the first year experience. Upper year students, for example, served as mentors for several students and old contacts, who came to the university with students, could help smooth the transition or provide a network for making new friends. Students were able to differentiate between close friends and acquaintances.

The role of the family in the student experience is virtually ignored in the attrition literature (Benjamin, 1990). Conversations with students support Benjamin's (1990) argument that although students may physically leave their family when they go to university, family contacts continue to play a role in the first year experience. Similarly, Attinasi's (1989) study of the experiences of Mexican American students points to the role of the "significant other" (such as parents and siblings) in the first year experience, especially in terms of students' preparation for college. Benjamin (1990:116) argues that: "...the prerequisites for academic and social integration have their roots not on campus but rather predominantly in

the routine transactions among family members experienced over a life time." In fact, students' continued family and friendship ties outside the university, call into question Tinto's (1987, 1988) suggestion that students must disassociate themselves from interactions with past communities in order to become full members of the university setting. The interviews with students point to the need to consider in more detail the extent to which interactions with past communities decline (the stage of transition according to Tinto, 1987, 1988) and the degree to which continued family/peer contacts may ease students' adjustment to university. Future researchers may find it valuable to pay more attention to what Tinto calls "events external" to the university experience.²⁵

The process of making friends seemed to differ according to a student's living arrangements. The tendency of off-campus students to meet people off-campus has already been mentioned. The residence seemed to be the centre of peer relations for residential students. While the residence could produce close peer relations, the opposite seemed to be true for the classroom. Two off-campus

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²⁵ This discussion is not meant to completely discount the stages of separation and transition referred to by Tinto (1987, 1988) but to draw attention to the complexity of peer contacts and to the need to examine in more detail, outside contacts. As can be seen earlier in this paper, it may be that maintaining old contacts outside the university is a temporal issue. The present data do not allow for a complete assessment of Tinto's work on the stages of a college career.

students, who only came into contact with other students through their classes, found that they did not get to know many people at the university. There was a feeling among some residence students that meeting off-campus students was difficult and that the nature of the relationship with off-campus students was somehow different. Using residential status (living on or off-campus) as a measure of social integration, as is done by Pascarella and Chapman (1983), cannot account for the complex linkages between personal contacts and living arrangements. Any future research should attend to the impact of where a student lives on peer relations.

Tinto (1975, 1987) argues that social integration is a function of sufficient contacts (lack of isolation) and congruence with the prevailing values of the social system. Measures of peer group interaction used by attrition researchers, often include an assessment of the degree of match between a student's values/attitudes and those of other students at the university (see Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980). The students I interviewed did point to the fact that not knowing people could be a negative experience and could be a reason for not becoming involved in the university. Students did seem to be drawn together by similarity. Common interests, personality match and sameness were cited as reasons for fitting in at the university. The feeling of belonging to the university,

MEASURES OF ACADEMIC INTEGRATION:

Table One Faculty-Student Contact-Academic

Over the last 2 semesters, on average, approximately how many contacts of ten minutes or more per month have you had with a faculty member outside of class for the following purposes:* The number of students is reported.

	zero	1-2	3-4	5+
	times	times	times	times
a) To discuss intellectual matters	6	3	1	1
b) To discuss course related problems e.g. change of exam time, grade appeal, essay due dates	4	4	2	2
c) To get basic information or advice about your academic program	5	4	0	2
d) To discuss plans related to your future choice of occupation	8	1	1	1

* One student did not respond to sections a, c, d.

Table Two Intellectual Development/Faculty Concern For Teaching and Student Development

Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements: The number of students is reported.

	Strongly Agree			Strongly Disagree	Does Not Apply	
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
1. My academic experience has had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas	4	8	0	0	0	0
2. <u>Few</u> of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally interested in students	0	2	2	6	2	0
3. <u>Few</u> of the faculty members I have had contact with are genuinely outstanding or superior teachers	2	6	2	2	0	0

MEASURES OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION:

Table Three Hours of Extracurricular Participation

In an average week, how many hours do you spend in extra curricular activities such as clubs, organizations, intra-mural or varsity sports? &

Number of Students	Hours
8	0-4
3	5-9
0	10-14
1	15-19

& This question did not specify university activities and could be taken to mean activities in general. One student indicated that she had never been involved in university activities and listed no activities in the following question, yet responded that she spent between 6-7 hours in extracurricular activities. For the remainder of the students, I believe it is accurate to think of this participation in terms of university events (due to the fact that they did indicate university activities in the following question).

Table Four Extracurricular Activities

If you participate in university activities, such as clubs, organizations, intra-mural or varsity sports, social events, student politics, symposiums and the like, what specific activities have you participated in? Please list:

- 4 students-- no response provided (3 females and 1 male)
  - 6 of those students who responded listed intramural sports/sports in general (5 males and 1 female)
  - 3 of those students who responded listed pubs, bars
  - 2 of those students who responded referred to clubs/societies (generally or specifically)
- Other activities mentioned by one student only included: frosh week, concerts, floor events, parties and RRRR elections.

Table Five Faculty-Student Contact- Social

Over the last 2 semesters, on average, approximately how many contacts of ten minutes or more per month have you had with a faculty member outside of class for the following purposes:*
The number of students is reported.

	zero times	1-2 times	3-4 times	5+ times
a) To discuss a campus issue or problem	10	1	0	0
b) To socialize in or mally (sharing refreshments, having lunch or dinner etc.)	8	1	1	1
c) To help in resolving a disturbing personal problem	10	1	0	0

* One individual did not respond to sections a, b or c.

Table Six Impact of Peer Relations/Faculty-Student Contact

Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements:!! Number of students is reported.

	Strongly Agree			Strongly Disagree	Does Not Apply	
	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
1. Since coming to this university I have developed close personal relationships with other students	8	3	1	0	0	0
2. The student friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying	9	2	1	0	0	0
3. My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values and attitudes	0	1	3	4	1	3
4. My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations	0	3	2	3	1	3

! Note: A not applicable response was not available on each student's questionnaire (its omission was realized later in the process). In those cases where NO outside contacts with faculty were reported in an earlier question, and the respondent circled 3 (for a neutral response) it was changed to not applicable. In other cases it was assumed that the student was making a judgement on the contacts he/she had with faculty.

however, cannot be fully explained using Tinto's notion of congruence. Although common interests established a basis for friendships, differences among students were not necessarily a source of incongruence. The toleration of and the experience of diversity was a very positive experience for some students. Both similarity and difference were important to peer formation. As I point out in Chapter Two, the extent to which congruence with the norms and values of the social system is an important dimension of the student experience is questioned by Attinasi (1989). He (1989:268) claims that: "...students become integrated for distinctly more cognitive and less moral reasons."

Peer group interactions are only one aspect of the definition of social integration. Involvement in semi-formal extracurricular activities is a second component of Tinto's concept. Tinto (1975:109) suggests that "...participation in these semi-formal and formal institutional activities provides a major link to the social and academic systems of the college,...." It is not clear, however, what constitutes extracurricular activities. The operationalization of extracurricular activities varies in the attrition literature. In some cases (see Pascarella and Terenzini, 1983), extent of involvement in extracurricular activities averaging two hours or more per week during the first year is the measure used and in other cases, (see Pascarella and Chapman, 1983) both student participation in

organized student activity and informal activity is measured. Studies that focus solely on participation in formal university activities may limit our knowledge of students' social lives in at least three ways: 1. the impact of students' social lives in general is understated 2. off-campus social activities are ignored and 3. the impact of informal social activities is not recognized. Information gathered from students points to several other issues that must be considered in light of students' social activities, among these, that social activities such as going to bars need to be measured, that the social life is dynamic and that social activities may vary according to living arrangements.

Participation in university activities was difficult to assess among the students I interviewed. As can be seen in Table Three of the Social Integration measures, the majority of students spent four hours or fewer a week in extracurricular activities. Four of twelve students did not list involvement in any university activities (see Table Four). For those students who did partake of university activities, sports involvement seemed to be the most common (see Table Four) followed by attending bars or pubs. Noticeably absent from these tables is an assessment of the impact of social activities on the first year experience, measures of more informal social activities and measures of off-campus activities.

Data obtained from the student interviews establish the importance of social activities to a student's sense of belonging to the university. Furthermore, the social life overlapped other areas of student existence including academic work, academic success and self confidence. The majority of the off-campus students oriented their social lives towards off-campus activities (the opposite tendency among residence students was, in part, a function of the existence of a formal residence social life). Unless such activities are accounted for in models of the student experience, the off-campus experience remains unmeasured. Not all student activities are formally organized university events. The existence of a more "informal" social life, where students get together and talk, plays an important role in the first year experience.

The interviews suggest that the "university experience" must be defined more broadly than the "campus experience", particularly when we consider the experiences of the off-campus students. While the campus setting is important for some students, it is necessary to consider the extent to which students orient their interpersonal relations to the university. Student life encompasses the range of experiences students encounter throughout their first year. What constitutes a "university" experience is currently a sensitive issue in student politics at Carleton University. A campaign is being waged over the definition of an

"academic" issue. At the centre of the controversy is whether or not topics such as abortion should be considered as "academic" issues. Such a debate highlights the need to consider, as Benjamin (1990:197) argues, the "whole" person who attends a university as opposed to the "first year student". As Benjamin (1990:196) further argues, the need to expand the range of variables we examine in the first year experience is apparent.

Social activities among first year students may vary according to living arrangements and gender. Males in this sample, were more likely to participate in sports than were females. Residence students seemed to participate in intramural sports while off-campus students were involved in sports such as swimming and squash. Accounting for the social experience means examining activities such as bar/pub attendance and recognizing that social activities change throughout the first year experience.

Tinto (1975) places student interaction with faculty under the concept of social integration, but argues that depending on the context of such contact, faculty interactions may influence academic integration. For this reason, attrition researchers tend to consider faculty-student contact under both academic and social integration, depending on the nature of the interaction. Measures concerning the quality and impact of students' nonclassroom contacts with faculty and measures assessing the frequency

of student-faculty nonclassroom interactions for "social" purposes are typically used by attrition researchers as indicators of social integration. Tables Five and Six provide the responses of the interview subjects to measures traditionally used to assess the social integration component of faculty-student relations. As can be seen in Table Five, there was very little student-faculty contact for "social" purposes. In general, students did not support the statement that their non-classroom contact with faculty had a positive influence on their personal growth and values (Table Six). The response to the impact of non-classroom contact on career goals was mixed. In both cases, several of the students provided a "not applicable" response.

Many issues emerged from the student interviews that are relevant here: 1. relationships with faculty seemed to be different from contacts 2. students' interactions with teaching assistants may be different from those with professors 3. the impact of professor-student contacts was not seen in terms of personal growth but rather it was more practical in nature and 4. student-professor relations seemed to be confined to the classroom. Given the information provided by students during in-depth interviews, the results presented above should come as no surprise. Most students did not describe their interactions with professors in terms of a "relationship" even though several students did have outside-the-classroom contact with

professors. Having a "common" relationship with a professor (where students know professors and professors know students) was not apparent for most students. For some students, relations with teaching assistants were more personal than with professors. The potential difference between relationships with different faculty means that attrition researchers may find it helpful to disaggregate the term "faculty".

Because students did not seem to know their professors personally, it is not surprising that they did not sense much impact on their personal values. Faculty-student contact (especially for professors and TA's) had a more practical influence on the first year (such as the impact of professors on choosing a major, or help with academic courses) and affected students' sense of personal identity rather than their personal values. While the extent of non-classroom contact with faculty seemed limited, students did evaluate the classroom teaching of professors. Unfortunately, the classroom has not been the focus of attrition researchers' attempts to understand the first year student experience. Given Pascarella's (1980) argument that the extent of students' informal contact with faculty may serve as a proxy variable for the quality of classroom experiences, classroom dynamics become important considerations. Lack of attention to the classroom limits our knowledge of the effect of student-faculty contacts.

The importance of classroom experiences is further highlighted in the following discussion of the construct, Academic Integration.

Academic Integration

Academic integration, as defined by Tinto (1975, 1987), consists of students' grade performance and students' perceptions of intellectual development. The former refers to a more structural type of integration while the latter is said to involve students' identification with the prevailing norms of the academic system. Attrition researchers (see Pascarella and Terenzini 1980, 1983) have expanded Tinto's construct to include measures of students' perceptions of faculty concern for teaching and student development and to include a measure of the frequency of student-faculty contact for academic purposes. Tables One and Two present the interview subjects' responses to select measures of academic integration. In general, there seemed to be little extensive outside-of-the-classroom contact for academic purposes (see Table One). There was especially limited contact to discuss future career issues (which is not surprising given that this is a more personal issue). Where meetings did occur, they were for very practical purposes. The majority of students had at least one contact per month with a faculty member to discuss course-related problems or to get program advice. As is seen in Table Two: all

students agreed that their academic experience positively influenced their intellectual growth, most felt that faculty members were interested in students and the majority felt that few of the faculty members were outstanding or superior teachers. Three issues must be discussed in terms of academic integration: classroom teaching, intellectual development and grade performance.

A comparison of the measures of academic integration to data obtained from the student interviews, reinforces the importance of students' perceptions of classroom teaching. The clarity with which students defined good and bad teaching leads me to conclude that the attention paid to the classroom in current attrition research is insufficient. In addition, interactions with teachers could be determined by a student's perception of the accessibility of the professor: an impression that is typically given in the classroom.

Whether or not students' perceptions of their intellectual development are based solely, or primarily, on their identification with the norms and values of the academic system is questionable. The students in the interview sample used a variety of criteria to evaluate their course experiences. The relevance of the course content, the interest level of the course and the amount of learning were important to students. When students spoke of academic expectations, they pointed to such things as

difficult standards (for example, hard essays), to lenient standards, to similar levels of difficulty as in high school or to uncertainty about the academic standards. In fact, as it will be seen in the subsequent discussion of the institutional experience, students seemed to have very little knowledge of the university in general that would allow them to make a judgement based on the norms and values of the academic system.

Tinto (1975) refers to a student's grade performance as the meeting of explicit university standards. Attrition researchers include grade performance among the indicators of academic integration. The assumption underlying its inclusion is that the higher the grade performance, the more integrated the individual. Based on student information, I would argue that it is the students' perceptions of their grade performance that should be the focus of attrition researchers' attention. While it is true that a student must meet the minimum requirements to continue at university, it is not necessarily the case that grades have the same impact for all students. Students tended to evaluate their achievements through the eyes of others and to discuss their grades in terms of how they felt about their performance. A better understanding of a student's academic experience would come from a consideration of the effect of grades on a student's sense of self.

More important than the critique of previous measures

and conceptualizations of academic and social integration is a discussion of those aspects that were salient to the students' experience but are unaccounted for by the current attrition literature.

The Institutional Experience in General

Four areas can be identified which formed significant aspects of the students' first year experience, but are virtually unrecognized in attrition researchers' attempts to measure the institutional experience of first year students. These areas include: structural elements (such as classroom structure, living arrangements and transportation/parking), environmental aspects (social, physical, demographic and academic, for example), the students' sense of self (identity, self confidence) and the overlap that existed between the academic and social experiences of students.

A series of structural aspects of the first year experience emerged in conversations with students including: classroom structure, living arrangements and transportation/parking. The structure of the classroom, especially class size, formed an important part of the student experience. Large classes helped to explain student-faculty relations, teaching quality, classroom involvement and students' sense of identity, among others (class sizes in Introductory Sociology in 1989/90 ranged from about 200 students to over 400 students). Where a

student lived was perhaps the most important structural aspect. Living arrangements affected both the academic and social lives of students.

Attrition researchers tend to use similar measures to assess the social and academic experiences of students in residential and commuter colleges (see Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980 and Pascarella et al., 1983). I have already referred to the problems with this approach in terms of peer relations and social activities. The sheer inconvenience of living off-campus can make socializing at the university and attending classes difficult, while living in residence can be both convenient and confining. Understanding how students travel to and from the university helps to explain why residence students tended to socialize on-campus and why off-campus students preferred to socialize off-campus. Furthermore, parking at the university was a problem for several off-campus students and may be especially so for female off-campus students who fear for their safety in parking lots. As a result, just getting to and from the university can be a source of stress. The negative impact of social integration on persistence in commuter institutions, that is found by attrition researchers (see Pascarella et al., 1983), may point to the need to consider transportation issues. If off-campus students face travel problems and the inconvenience of getting to campus, it is not surprising that those who are

more involved in the university may find this too much to handle.

The fact that attrition researchers do not pay adequate attention to the institutional environment is examined earlier in the paper. The information obtained from students reinforces this weakness. Any assessment of fit to the environment must include environmental variables. It was within the context of students' discussions of such variables that a sense of their congruence or incongruence with the university climate could be best determined. The students with whom I spoke referred to the social environment (such as the friendliness of the campus), the physical environment (such as the size of the campus and campus location), the demographic environment (the social class and religious makeup) and the academic environment (such as admission standards and the overall atmosphere). In addition, how much the students knew and understood about the university setting affected their social and academic involvement in the environment and for some students, knowledge of the environment was directly linked to staying/leaving behaviour.

It is important, at this point, to remind the reader of my earlier analysis of the political/economic conditions facing Canadian institutions of higher education. I argue that such conditions affect the organizational decisions of institutions thus shaping the boundaries of the students'

institutional experiences. The size of first year classes (although large classes are not a new phenomenon) is determined, in part, according to the availability of resources to the university. Similarly, institutional decisions concerning the allocation of scarce resources help to explain the accessibility of teaching faculty to students, the quality of classroom instruction and the level of student participation in the classroom. The expansion of enrolments at Carleton, for example, coupled with a lack of government funding is likely to result in heavier workloads for teaching faculty and less opportunity for the creation of small discussion groups.

A university's academic, social, demographic and physical environments are a product of political/economic conditions and institutional responses to such conditions. Carleton's "open access" admission policy, for example, is responsible for the creation of a heterogeneous student population. We have seen both the positive and negative effects of student diversity on peer relations (see Chapter Four). Several students directly mentioned the impact of admission standards on their experience. The linkages among political/economic conditions, institutional policy and equality in higher education will be explored at length later in this paper.

Although Tinto (1975, 1987) specifies the importance of individual perceptions of the institutional experience, the

influence of individual characteristics on the university experience and the role of individual intentions and commitments, his model does not explore how the individual's perception of self may change throughout the experience. As we have seen, students' identity and self confidence are fragile entities and play a central role in the first year experience. In fact, a lack of identity was directly related to one student's decision to leave Carleton University. Becoming an individual and learning independence were two major themes, especially among students who were away from home. The role of the individual in the first year experience went beyond intentions and commitments. The ethic of individualism (learning to accept change, learning to take individual initiative) was very much alive among these first year students. The interaction of students' intentions, commitments, changing conceptions of self and their institutional experiences is an avenue for exploration in future studies.

The available literature on student attrition from institutions of higher education does not adequately explore the extent to which students' social and academic experiences may overlap, which makes the separation of academic and social integration problematic. Attempts by attrition researchers to place peer relations for academic purposes apart from peer relations for social purposes (see

Pascarella and Chapman, 1983) point to the lack of adequate understanding of the overlapping dimensions of student life. Such strategies undermine the delicate balance that was apparent between the academic and social lives of students. Rather, the social and the academic seemed to exist in a dynamic relationship whereby students' academic experiences could help students to form social relations (or pull them away from such relations) and their social relations could assist (or hinder) their academic performance. Similarly, the classroom experience of first year students was both social and academic.

Summary: Theoretical/Research Implications

The current state of knowledge concerning student attrition from institutions of higher education is extremely limited. Existing models explain only a modest amount of variance in persistence/withdrawal behaviour. These limitations stem from the inability of such models of attrition to account for the complexity of students' institutional experiences. At the same time, the measures used to assess the social and academic realms of student life suffer from a variety of problems. One of the most apparent difficulties associated with such measures, that emerged from this study, is their failure to adequately account for the experiences of off-campus students.

Within this study, an understanding of how students

experienced or became a part of the academic or social systems required knowledge of students' interactions with and perceptions of the structure and environment of the university. How a student gets to and from campus, for example, may help to explain social and academic experiences. Coming to terms with students' subsequent goals and commitments may demand an examination of students' changing conceptions of the self.

No research dealing with the first year experience would be complete without attention being given to the overlap among the various dimensions of student existence. In fact, Benjamin (1990) cites the pervasiveness of cross-linkages in the student experience at Guelph and he argues that cross-linkages in the student experience are ignored in much of traditional student development theory. What this points to is the need for more research that gives priority to student voices across institutions and among varying student populations. At the very least, researchers should use a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research designs.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

While the purpose of this paper is not to explore policy initiatives, several issues of substance raised by the students are amenable to institutional policy. Some of these suggestions are directly applicable to Carleton

University, but the majority could apply across institutions. I shall briefly outline six of the key areas institutions are advised to examine: 1. personal contacts and social activities 2. awareness 3. identity 4. the classroom 5. parking and 6. academic standards.

Given the importance of personal contacts and social activities to the student experience overall, university policies that are sensitive to these issues could have a positive effect on the first year experience. First, the interviews suggest that an examination of the orientation events at universities would be useful. For most of the students who participated, orientation had a positive effect on friendship formation. The separation of residence and off-campus orientation events is of particular interest given the "gap" many students felt between residence and off-campus students and the potential that combined activities may have to lessen such a gap. It is suggested that consideration be given to the more negative aspects of orientation that may keep students from participating, such as alcohol abuse (which is being examined at Carleton), the maturity of the events and the fear that is engendered by frosh week.

Second, the level of student participation in university activities and programs is of interest to policy formation. The positive impact of sports involvement on the student experience was cited by students. Emphasizing

sports activities and assuring an equitable distribution of sports facilities were two suggestions made by students. Although students believed in the potential positive effect of involvement in programs, clubs and societies (and such involvement was positive for two students) this belief did not necessarily lead to participation. Non-participation can be partly explained by a lack of awareness.

The tendency of students to "not know" about the university led to an inability to get involved in social activities, to not knowing how to protest grades, to difficulty discovering career options and to limited use of university services that could assist students with such things as money management. Providing more information to students both prior to and subsequent to enrolment and through means that supplement available written materials could lessen the "communication gap" felt by students.²⁶ One suggestion is to use the classroom as the setting for information dissemination, either through TA's or professors. A second option involves the use of mentors for first year students. Benjamin (1990) establishes that the use of mentors has a long history. Many students pointed to the positive aspects of contacts with upper year students, Transition program leaders, residence fellows and professors

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²⁶ A program currently underway at Carleton, under the direction of Alumni Services, is one such attempt to provide information prior to enrolment. Alumni are taking an active role in discussing Carleton with new students across Canada.

(especially for information dissemination). A mentor program, whereby an upper year student volunteer or a professor is responsible for a small group of students may also be a positive step for institutions to take in helping students to maintain their identity. Given the fact that identity was related to one student's decision to leave Carleton and the fact that most students desired personal contact, the establishment of more personal relations at the university may be very important. The importance of personal relations brings me to the next policy issue: the classroom.

Because few students had outside-the-classroom contacts with their teaching faculty and because classroom dynamics had an important influence on the first year experience, the classroom is a central area for policy consideration.²⁷ First, the classroom was both an academic and social setting. For some students, especially two off-campus students, it was their primary source of peer contacts and for two off-campus students it was their main source of university contact. Second, the impact of classroom peer relations on students' sense of self and on students' academic performance was highlighted as was the failure of the classroom to produce "close" peer relations. Third, class size and time available in the classroom were issues

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²⁷ This discussion is not meant to discourage outside-of-the-classroom contacts.

relating to meeting people, professor relations and the general unfolding of the academic experience. "Optimal" class size is currently an issue in Canadian higher education (see Gilbert, 1989a; Benjamin, 1990). Continued underfunding of Ontario universities, increased overall enrolments, and especially increasing enrolments at Carleton, mean that large classes are likely to be with us for a long time. As a result, the university must make the classroom a priority and thus allocate more of its scarce resources to the classroom. Working within the confines of large classes, through the use of varied teaching techniques such as small group workshops, small group assignments and small group discussions could go a long way towards helping students to both establish classroom contacts and to maintain their identity.

Student comments point to the need to consider the quality of classroom teaching and to the need for teacher training. The students offered several suggestions to assist teaching faculty. Teachers were advised to: 1. establish a positive attitude with the students, be open, be willing to learn and allow students to express opinions; 2. vary teaching techniques, promote discussion, not merely read notes, use humour and pay attention to speaking skills; 3. try to know as many names as is possible (again small group workshops may assist here). Universities that direct at least as much attention to the teaching abilities of

their staff as that given to research abilities may improve the classroom situation for both teachers and students (see Benjamin, 1990 and Gilbert, 1989a for an extended discussion of the balance between teaching and research).

The classroom may be the most effective setting in which to help students learn study skills such as time management and lecture note taking (given the lack of overall use of student services). Creating a partnership between services and teaching faculty would be a positive step towards helping students to adjust to the demands of the university. Several classroom programs that follow such a strategy are currently used in Canadian universities.

The extent of parking available at Carleton University may be important to the off-campus experience and should be an area of concern among administrators. Directly related to the issue of parking is the availability of public transportation to the university. Reducing the cost of public transportation (buses) for students and improving bus service to the university has been a persistent issue in student politics at Carleton. Continued attention to this problem by both administrators and students is necessary.

Student comments direct me towards one final policy consideration, that of the academic standards of the university (a topic of much concern at Carleton). While some students were quite defensive about the academic reputation at Carleton, the positive impacts of an "open

door" admissions policy were also clear. The fact that most students felt they were doing as well at university as in high school may support Gilbert and Evers' (1989) view that upward revision of entrance requirements may deny the opportunity to study at university to large numbers of students. In addition, one of the unintended consequences of creating a heterogeneous student population was the fact that social tolerance was cited as a positive experience by several students.

This discussion of issues that are amenable to policy highlighted six areas: personal contacts and social activities, awareness, identity, the classroom, parking and admission standards. Each area has the potential to have a positive influence on the students' first year experience and each area points to the importance of students' post-enrolment experiences at the university. As a result, analyses of equality in higher education should go beyond a consideration of equal access to the university system.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY RE-VISITED

By directing our attention to students' institutional experiences, Tinto (1975, 1987) provides us with the opportunity to examine the broader issues facing Canadian higher education, namely equality of opportunity. As we saw in Chapter One, access to higher education in Canada and the quality of higher education are currently topics of much

debate. The student interviews establish the need to explore both how we define equality in higher education and the links between equality and quality.

Contradictory lived experience is the basis for popular questioning of institutional structures (Livingstone, 1987:131). The daily lives of twelve first year students reveal the gaps between what the university offers on admission (a promise of equality of opportunity through access to higher education) and what it offers for everyday interactions. The ability of students to benefit equally from their experiences and their ability to translate such experiences into academic success represent "process" indicators of equality (see Richer, 1988 and my earlier discussion of his concept of equality to benefit in Chapter Two). Providing equal access to higher education does not guarantee that students will be "processed" equally throughout their experience.²⁸ If we wish to examine the quality of higher education, knowledge of students' everyday lives is a useful starting point.

The students with whom I spoke discussed a range of processes to which equality of access was not always apparent. The differing experiences of on and off-campus students is one such example. The ability of students to access the social and academic environments of the

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²⁸ The reader is reminded that equality to benefit does not necessarily mean that individuals should be exposed to the same processes (Richer, 1988).

institution may be determined by students' living arrangements. Just getting to the campus was a problem for many off-campus students. Students' access to interpersonal relations and to teaching faculty contacts was affected by the size of the classes in which students were placed. Similarly, large classes limited the ability of students to access effective pedagogy (for example, professor-student interaction within the classroom was limited by classroom structure). Access to personal identity was not guaranteed by open access to the system of higher education. What is needed is a broader definition of equality that allows researchers to explore the range of experiences students encounter while in attendance at the university.

CONCLUSION

The expansion of interest in student attrition at Canadian institutions of higher education has led Canadian researchers to focus on the first year experience of university students in order to explain why students withdraw from or persist in university studies. The present research draws from an exploratory study in which qualitative data are gathered from first year students at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. Priority is given to the voices of students. Two contributions are made to the existing attrition literature: 1. information gathered from students is used to assess the adequacy of the

operationalization and conceptualization of previous measures of the student experience, namely the constructs social/academic integration and institutional experience 2. the most-commonly-used model of student attrition, developed by Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987) and later tested by various attrition researchers, is approached with a qualitative research design. This approach allowed students to provide us with a fuller picture of the first year experience than could be ascertained using quantitative techniques.

The findings from twelve in-depth student interviews and comments gathered from first year students indicate that the current literature surrounding student attrition, although extensive, provides limited knowledge of the processes underlying students' institutional experiences. Such limited knowledge results from the failure of existing models to account for the complexity of students' first year experiences. Specifically, four dimensions of the student experience are not sufficiently explored in the current attrition literature. These dimensions include: structural aspects of the student experience, students' perceptions of the university environment, students' perceptions of the self (such as identity, self confidence) and the overlap that exists between students' social and academic experiences. The need for further qualitative studies and research that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques is evident.

APPENDIX 1

Consent Form

I _____ give my consent to participate in a face to face interview of approximately 1 1/2 hours in length. I understand that the purpose of the interview is to discuss with me my experiences as a first year student at Carleton University. I understand that the interview will be tape recorded and that any information obtained on these tapes will be heard only by the researchers of this study. I understand that the interview is strictly confidential and that I will, under no circumstances, be identified individually. I understand that my participation in any part of the interview is voluntary, that I may withdraw from the interview at any time and that I may feel free to refuse to answer any questions that I would rather not answer. I understand that I may contact the researcher Lynn Barr at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University for any further information I would like concerning this study and for any information I would like concerning the results of this study.

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signature of subject

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signature of researcher

APPENDIX 2 INTERVIEW SUBJECT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Table One

Living Arrangements:

Number of Students	Living Accommodations
6	on campus
2	off campus with parent(s)
0	off campus with spouse
3	off campus with roommates
0	off campus alone
1	other (with brother)

 Total 12

Table Two

Time Taken To Get to Campus For Off Campus Students

If you live off campus, how much time does it usually take you to get to campus from where you are staying?

Number of Students Time Taken in Minutes

1	15 minutes or less
3	16-30 minutes
2	31-44 minutes
0	45-59 minutes
0	60 minutes or more

 Total 6

Table Three

Employment

Are you employed during the school year?

Number of Students	Response
10	no
2	yes

 12

Only two students were employed during the school year. One student worked 30-40 hours per week as an overnight babysitter and the other worked 30 hours per week as a waiter/bartender.

Table Four

Parental Education

What is the highest level of education that your parents received?

Level of Education	Number of Students	
	father	mother
elementary school certificate or less	0	0
some high school	2	1
completed high school	0	4
some technical, vocational training	2	1
completed community college or equivalent (CEGEP)	1	1
some university	2	1
completed bachelors degree (BA, BSc.)	2	4
some education at the graduate level (MA, PhD)	1	0
completed masters or doctoral degree	0	0
completed professional degree (doctor, lawyer, engineer)	2	0
	12	12

In this table, we see that seven of the students had fathers who had some university training, a completed bachelors degree or more intensive university training at the graduate or professional levels. Five students had mothers with either some university education or a completed bachelors degree.

Table Five
Sources of Finances for University

Please estimate the proportion of the total costs of attending university which will come from each of the following sources. Please make sure that the percentages add up to 100%. The number of students in each category is reported.

		Percentage of Support Provided +								
Source		0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	Over 81-90
Family	2	3	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	2
Gov't financial assistance (OSAP)	10	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Part time work	9	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Scholar- ship	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Savings from summer employment	5	1	2	0	2	0	0	1	1	0

+ This should be interpreted with caution- part time work for these students could refer to both work while enrolled at the university or part time work prior to enrolment. There was some discrepancy in the coding of the source of finances for one particular individual. The response was coded as it appeared but further responses by this student indicate some inconsistency.

Table Five a)
Funding Sources

Number of Students Who Received Funding (of any amount)	
Source of Finances	
Family	12
Government Financial Assistance (OSAP)	3
Part time Work	4
Scholarship	0
Savings from Summer Employment	11

Tables 5 and 5a show that all of the students interviewed relied on their families for some funding. In fact, seven of the students interviewed received over 40% of their finances from their families. Eleven of the students used their summer savings for finances, but of these students, seven received 30% or less of their funding from these savings.

5. What is the highest level of education that your parents received?

	father	mother
elementary school certificate or less	1	1
some high school	2	2
completed high school	3	3
some technical, vocational training	4	4
completed community college or equivalent(CEGEP)	5	5
some university	6	6
completed bachelors degree (BA, BSc.)	7	7
some education at the graduate level (MA, PhD)	8	8
completed masters or doctoral degree	9	9
completed professional degree (doctor, lawyer engineer)	10	10

6. What was your father's occupation while you were growing up ?

1. Briefly describe what he did for a living _____

2. What was his job title (eg. manager of shoe dept., auto body work, lathe operator) _____

3. In what kind of business or service was this job (eg. retail shoe store, auto body repair shop, machine parts manufacturing) _____

4. _____ not applicable (Please specify, eg. retired, deceased) _____

7. What was your mother's occupation while you were growing up ?

1. Briefly describe what she did for a living _____

2. What was her job title (eg. manager of shoe dept., auto body work, lathe operator) _____

3. In what kind of business or service was this job (eg. retail shoe store, auto body repair shop, machine parts manufacturing) _____

4. _____ not applicable (Please specify, eg. retired, deceased) _____

Worthwhile

What makes university a worthwhile experience?

What experiences are linked?

3.01 was your first year a worthwhile experience

3.02 why or why not worthwhile

3.03 did the experiences you mention earlier (negative and positive) have any effect on this evaluation?

Social Integration

What is social integration? How defined by students? What constitutes social? What are the effects on social life? How do the students define peer relationships? How do they come about?

How are social experiences linked to student evaluations of first year?

4.01 some researchers have claimed that a student's social life is important to make a student fit in to the university while others do not. how do you feel about this

4.02 describe your social experiences

4.03 positive social experiences

4.04 negative social experiences

4.05 does being an off/on campus student affect social life

4.06 how does being an off/on campus student affect social life

4.07 social life oriented towards people from Carleton or outside of Carleton

4.08 are the people at Carleton new or old friends

4.09 is social life in general more at Carleton or outside?

4.10 did you get to know many people at Carleton

4.11 how? where? meet people

4.12 what factors that make it hard

4.13 what factors make it easy to meet people

4.14 has the university done anything to help or hinder your social experience

4.15 class schedules affected social life?

4.16 what effect would you say your social experiences have had on your first year experience overall

4.17 have you felt any social pressures?

Academic Integration

How do students define their educational experience? What factors are salient? What are the links between educational experiences and student evaluations of first year? How do students define the role of the classroom in their experience? How do professors/ teaching assistants fit into the educational experience?

5.01 some researchers claim that a student's educational experiences are important to make a student fit in to the

- university while others do not. How do you feel about this?
- 5.02 could you tell me about your educational experiences
  - 5.03 positive educational experiences
  - 5.04 negative educational experience
  - 5.05 if negative what could university do to improve this
  - 5.06 does being an on/off campus student affect them
  - 5.07 grades, how evaluate compared to high school
  - 5.08 what has positive influence on grades
  - 5.09 negative influence on grades
  - 5.10 when did you find out how you were doing
  - 5.11 satisfied with timing of info or not
  - 5.12 could you tell me about your classroom experiences--
what's it like to be in a first year class
  - 5.13 positive classroom experiences
  - 5.14 negative classroom experiences
  - 5.15 tell me about educational standards set in classes
  - 5.16 agree or disagree with standards
  - 5.17 quality of teaching-- good or bad?
  - 5.18 what is good teaching
  - 5.19 what is bad teaching
  - 5.20 using your own criteria how evaluate your teachers
  - 5.21 could you tell me about your relationships with
professors , 5.22 have you met with any outside
  - 5.23 have you met with any inside of class
  - 5.24 have you been satisfied with your prof relationships
  - 5.25 could you tell me about your relationships with TA's
  - 5.26 how evaluate the ta's
  - 5.27 met with ta's outside of class
  - 5.28 what kinds of things help or hinder relationships with
profs and ta's
  - 5.29 has the university done anything to help your educational
experience?
  - 5.30 has the university done anything to hinder your
educational experience?
  - 5.31 class schedules had any effect on educational experience
  - 5.32 what effect would you say your educational experiences
have had on your overall experience
  - 5.33 any educational pressures?

OVERALL

Are there links between social and educational experiences?
What are the experiences that link to decisions to stay/
leave? What factors relate to attrition in progress (dropping
courses)?

How would students change the first year or would they?

- 6.01 has your social life affected educational
- 6.02 has your educational life affected social
- 6.03 do you plan to return to Carleton?
- 6.04 why or why not return to Carleton?
- 6.05 did the experiences (positive/negative) influence this
decision
- 6.06 if not return what are your plans?

6.07 if dropped course what influenced this decision?

6.08 what advice would you offer Carleton university about the first year experience

6.09 would you say that your experience is typical of friends

6.10 is there anything about your first year that we have missed and you would like to discuss -- have we overlooked anything?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Identification Number: _____

1. Do you live
1. _____ on campus
  2. _____ off campus with parent(s)
  3. _____ off campus with spouse
  4. _____ off campus with roommates
  5. _____ off campus alone
  6. _____ other (please specify _____)

2. If you live off campus, how much time does it usually take you to get to campus from where you are staying?

1. _____ 15 minutes or less
2. _____ 16-30 minutes
3. _____ 31-44 minutes
4. _____ 45-59 minutes
5. _____ 60 minutes or more

3. Are you

1. _____ single
2. _____ married
3. _____ cohabitating
4. _____ separated
5. _____ divorced
6. _____ widowed
7. _____ other (please specify _____)

4. Are you employed during the school year? 1. ___ no 2. ___ yes
If yes, approximately how many hours per week _____

If yes, what type of work do you do? _____

5. What is the highest level of education that your parents received?

	father	mother
elementary school certificate or less	1	1
some high school	2	2
completed high school	3	3
some technical, vocational training	4	4
completed community college or equivalent(CEGEP)	5	5
some university	6	6
completed bachelors degree (BA, BSc.)	7	7
some education at the graduate level (MA, PhD)	8	8
completed masters or doctoral degree	9	9
completed professional degree (doctor, lawyer engineer)	10	10

6. What was your father's occupation while you were growing up ?

1. Briefly describe what he did for a living _____

2. What was his job title (eg. manager of shoe dept., auto body work, lathe operator) _____

3. In what kind of business or service was this job (eg. retail shoe store, auto body repair shop, machine parts manufacturing) _____

4. _____ not applicable (Please specify, eg. retired, deceased) _____

7. What was your mother's occupation while you were growing up ?

1. Briefly describe what she did for a living _____

2. What was her job title (eg. manager of shoe dept., auto body work, lathe operator) _____

3. In what kind of business or service was this job (eg. retail shoe store, auto body repair shop, machine parts manufacturing) _____

4. _____ not applicable (Please specify, eg. retired, deceased) _____

8. Over the past academic year, how much time , on average, did you spend in classes and outside of classes per week on your studies?

1. _____ less than 10 hours
2. _____ 10-14 hours
3. _____ 15-19 hours
4. _____ 20-24 hours
5. _____ 25-29 hours
6. _____ 30-34 hours
7. _____ 35-40 hours
8. _____ over 40 hours

9. What is the highest degree level that you expect to obtain?

1. _____ certificate or diploma
2. _____ general bachelors degree(B.A.,gen B.Sc.)
3. _____ honours bachelors degree(honB.A.honB.Sc.)
4. _____ masters degree (Ma.,MSc.)
5. _____ doctoral degree (Ph.D.)
6. _____ professional degree (MD, LL.B, CA., DVM.)
7. _____ not decided yet
8. _____ not applicable

10. Are you confident that you made the right decision in choosing to attend university?

1. _____ extremely confident
2. _____ very confident
3. _____ somewhat confident
4. _____ not at all confident

11. Are you confident that you made the right decision in choosing to attend this university as opposed to any other?

1. _____ extremely confident
2. _____ very confident
3. _____ somewhat confident
4. _____ not at all confident

12. How would you assess the certainty of your educational plans right now?

1. _____ very certain
2. _____ somewhat certain
3. _____ somewhat uncertain
4. _____ very uncertain

13. Is it important for you to obtain a degree or diploma from a university?

1. _____ no, it is not at all important
2. _____ yes, it is somewhat important
3. _____ yes, it is very important
4. _____ yes, it is extremely important

14. Please estimate the proportion of the total costs of attending university which will come from each of the following sources. Please make sure that the percentages add up to 100%.

	Percentage _____ %
Family	_____ %
Government financial assistance (OSAP)	_____ %
Part-time work	_____ %
Scholarship	_____ %
Savings from summer employment	_____ %
Others _____ (please specify)	_____ % 100%

15. Do you think that you could complete your year without financial support from each of the following sources?

Likelihood of completing without support from:

	very likely	1	2	3	4	very unlikely	5
Family.....	1						
Government financial assistance (OSAP)	1	2	3	4	5		
Part-time work	1	2	3	4	5		
Scholarship	1	2	3	4	5		
Summer employment	1	2	3	4	5		

16. Over the last 2 semesters, on average, approximately how many contacts of ten minutes or more per month have you had with a faculty member outside of class for the following purposes:

Check ( ) your answer to each

	zero	1-2	3-4	5+
	times	times	times	times
a) To discuss intellectual matters	( )	( )	( )	( )
b) To discuss course related problems e.g. change of exam time, grade appeal, essay due dates	( )	( )	( )	( )
c) To get basic information or advice about your academic program	( )	( )	( )	( )
d) To discuss plans related to your future choice of occupation	( )	( )	( )	( )
e) To discuss a campus issue or problem	( )	( )	( )	( )
f) To socialize informally (sharing refreshments, having lunch or dinner etc.)	( )	( )	( )	( )
g) To help in resolving a disturbing personal problem	( )	( )	( )	( )

17. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the amount of out-of-class contact you have with faculty?

1. very satisfied
2. somewhat satisfied
3. neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. somewhat dissatisfied
5. very dissatisfied

18. Please indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements:

	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree	Does Not Apply
1. My academic experience has had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
2. <u>Few</u> of the faculty members I have had contact with are generally interested in students	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
3. <u>Few</u> of the faculty members I have had contact with are genuinely outstanding or superior teachers	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
4. Since coming to this university I have developed close personal relationships with other students	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
5. The student friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
6. My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values and attitudes	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
7. My non-classroom interactions with faculty have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
8. My program is providing me with the skills and knowledge I will need to succeed in the future	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

19. How often would you say you participate in university activities, such as intra-mural sports, social events, student politics, symposiums, and the like?

1. very often
2. often
3. occasionally
4. seldom
5. never

20. In an average week, how many hours do you spend in extra curricular activities such as clubs, organizations, intra-mural or varsity sports?

Record number of hours _____

21. If you participate in university activities, such as clubs, organizations, intra-mural or varsity sports, social events, student politics, symposiums and the like, what specific activities have you participated in? Please list:

---

22. Do you think participation in university events is important in helping first year students adjust to university life?

Very important -----not important

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

23. How prepared were you for university?

	Strongly Agree _____			Strongly Disagree	
a) I was academically prepared for university	1	2	3	4	5
b) I was emotionally prepared for university	1	2	3	4	5
c) I was prepared for university in terms of work habits and study skills	1	2	3	4	5
d) In terms of social maturity I was ready for university	1	2	3	4	5
e) I was motivated to study despite other things going on in my life	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX 5 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS- THE INTERVIEWS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The Research Agenda:

My motivation behind this project was to allow students the opportunity to speak. I wanted to find out from students what the relevant issues were during their first year experience. I was concerned that the attrition literature seemed to reflect on the student experience with little reference to student interpretations or feelings. After I completed my first read of the key works in the attrition literature, I was left with a feeling that something was missing, that the information was somehow incomplete. I kept coming back to the two central constructs of Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1987) model: academic and social integration. While I felt very comfortable with the suggestion that what happens to students after they enrol in university is important to educational outcomes, I was not happy with how the students' experiences were conceptualized and operationalized. I had nagging doubts about whether or not the student experience had been sufficiently captured in many studies. This uncertainty led to the formulation of my research issue, namely to find out how students define their experience at Carleton University (including their environment) and to use this information to examine critically the conceptualization and operationalization of the concepts social, academic and

institutional experience.

The Interviews

Allowing students to speak, however, is not as straightforward as it may seem. I constantly struggled with my desire to know about certain issues and the need to listen very carefully to the students. I was not comfortable with conducting completely unstructured interviews. The research issue seemed to guide me towards semi-standardized interviews; I wanted to suggest topics for discussion (the classroom, fitting into the environment and so on) while at the same time leaving ample room for students to speak. Maintaining a balance between myself as a researcher and myself as a listener was one of my preoccupations throughout the research process. This balance was made much easier during the actual interviews. I found that I was able to both listen to students and to respond to their issues as well as my own.

I was nervous about conducting the interviews. I was especially concerned that I not lead the students in any direction that might bias their responses. Eventually, as I interviewed more students, I was able to be more open, less fearful and less rigid. The resulting interviews were still too "formal" and much too constrained by my fears of directing the conversation. I was happiest when the discussions unfolded as conversations. Perhaps one of the most important discoveries I made during the interviews was

the importance of good probes. Often the simplest probes, such as "could you tell me more" or "how did that make you feel" were the most effective.

The Interview Analysis: Coding

Making sense of the voluminous data I gathered was the most difficult, yet uplifting, experience. My first attempt at organizing the data is best described as a "false start". I wanted to create lists of codes for each separate group of students; that is, for all the males, females, off-campus students and residence students. I was also caught up in the interview topics I had used. Initially, I planned to read the topics for common ideas, issues and then to read across topics. Finally, I was concerned that I not record just individual thoughts but that the ideas and themes have some degree of representativeness. Originally, only those responses for 2 of 6 male, female, off-campus and residence students were to be retained. This coding strategy became problematic for three reasons: 1. its complexity 2. I had wanted to put a structure on the coding procedure much too soon into the analysis 3. the nature of the students' world did not exist in the way I had intended to impose a structure. Once I immersed myself in the data, I soon realized that my original intentions were unrealistic. It became very apparent that the students' experiences did not neatly unfold; it was common to find overlap among student

responses and common for students to discuss many issues in the context of one question. The actual coding procedure began to emerge in conjunction with reading the data, conversations with my academic advisors and especially through reading Kirby and McKenna's (1989) discussion of methods from the margins.

As Berg (1989:115) and Kirby and McKenna (1989:140) point out, coding conventions are not firmly entrenched in the literature. Coding terminology can be equally confusing. As a result, I found myself getting overwhelmed by the abundance of coding terms. It was only after I came to accept that my methodology had to be guided by the nature of my research question and the data gathered, that I was able to continue with the process.

Developing categories and subcategories from the students' responses was labour intensive, exciting and frustrating. At first, I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information I had collected and I did not know how to manage it. The coding strategy I eventually developed evolved through stages. The first stage meant making the data accessible to myself and I found the easiest way to do so was to consider only a small section of it. I isolated the most general topic discussed with the students for initial coding, grouped together the residence and off-campus students' responses and began to read. I still found myself struggling to sort through the mass of data. To

enable myself to "see" the responses, I identified their content and then copied this content to large sheets of paper. I did this for each question in the topic. After I had done so, I found that labels (coding categories) for the content of the responses began to emerge quite naturally. As I continued to read the remainder of the interviews, I was able to abandon the use of large sheets of paper.

During the coding, I came across a variety of issues faced by other researchers (see Kirby and McKenna, 1989), namely the fear of distorting the data, the need to be patient and allow the codes to emerge and the problem of holding on to too much data. I was apprehensive, at first, about the use of categories and subcategories. I feared that they could not capture the richness of the student responses and that using categories and subcategories was somehow being untrue to that richness. The more I read, however, the more the responses began to speak to me and I realized that the categories and subcategories could actually help me to tell the students' stories more clearly. I came to think of the categories and subcategories as summary headings for the students' experiences. At times, I felt as though I should really be dealing with one BIG category. There were so many overlaps and every subcategory seemed in some way to inform another. In essence, this spoke to me of the "holistic" nature of the students' experiences in that the whole picture must be seen.

Sometimes, however, this can only be accomplished through pieces being placed together.

I found myself being somewhat impatient at points throughout the coding and I wanted the information to immediately lead to categories. After the second read through the interviews, I felt that I had adequately captured the range of responses with the subcategories and organizing categories. As I began to describe these categories, however, I learned the value of patience. Good descriptions can only arise through the interplay of the original data and explanation. The more the responses were read, the clearer they became and the more at ease I began to feel. Reaching the stage where I felt that I was satisfied with my treatment of the responses took quite a long time.

I developed a tendency to hold on to too much data. I kept records on what codes seemed to be linked and on what ideas and themes were emerging and these notes helped me to "reduce" the categories and subcategories to a manageable size. In addition, the notes helped to increase my patience. Knowing that I had recorded what I thought were relevant issues to be considered allowed me to continue coding. Because I conducted the actual interviews and listened to the interview tapes, I became very familiar with the data and knowing the data as well as I did helped me to code. I understood the context surrounding the responses

and I sometimes had to make a coding decision based on what I knew of that context. I found that my participation in each stage of the interviews was invaluable to understanding how the responses unfolded.

Accounting for the Process

As Berg (1989:115) points out, some categorizing techniques are worked out in advance and others are developed later. I was careful to keep track of my decisions and strategies, but I found it difficult to translate these decisions into steps that readers could easily follow. Perhaps this was due to the constant moving from the data to concepts and back to the data. My decision to include my personal reflections of the process became very important to me for that reason. I did not want what was a complex process for me to appear to be remarkably simple, void of both struggle and excitement.

The Writing of the Paper

I was elated after the first two subcategories were described. For some reason, I was so caught up in the technical (the "accuracy" of my coding scheme, for example) that I lost sight of the original purpose. When I began to re-read the responses, I lost that technical fear. The subcategories did resonate with the experiences I was reading and with my own first year experiences. I began more and more to believe that I had honestly captured the experiences of the first year students!

Summation

Giving priority to students' voices was paramount to the research at hand. It was their story I wanted to hear and to understand. The project was labour intensive but not without reward. Listening to students' experiences somehow made me understand and see my own first year at university with a new perspective.

APPENDIX 6 RESULTS: PILOT STUDY WRITTEN COMMENTS

The results presented here concern the comments of first year students who were asked to describe their best and worst experiences at Carleton University and the responses of first year students who were asked to describe those factors having a positive impact on their academic experience and a negative impact on their academic performance at Carleton. The second set of responses must be interpreted with caution. There was some confusion among the students as to the meaning of the phrase "academic experience". They were instructed to substitute the word educational experience and to interpret this as being concerned with their studies. The responses to the second set of questions could refer generally to the students' overall educational experience or specifically to the students' experiences with their studies. This confusion was less of an issue for the second question which asked students what factors had a negative impact on their academic/educational performance rather than on their academic experience. Regardless of the interpretation issue, the information provided does indicate those issues that the students see as important to their first year educational experience.

APPENDIX 7 CATEGORIES AND SUBCATEGORIES- TWELVE INDEPTH STUDENT INTERVIEWS

CATEGORY: PERSONAL CONTACTS

Subcategory : Friendships in General
Subcategory : Making New Contacts
Subcategory : Residence and Off-Campus Relationships
Subcategory : Common Interests/Common Problems
Subcategory : Different People/Different Places
Subcategory : Upper Year Students
Subcategory : Old Relationships
Subcategory : Romantic Relationships
Subcategory : Types of Friendships
Subcategory : Family Contacts

CATEGORY: SOCIALIZING

Subcategory : Socializing/Social Activities in General
Subcategory : Sport-Recreational Activity
Subcategory : Going to Bars/Pubs
Subcategory : Residence Social Events
Subcategory : Formal University Extracurricular Activities
(other than sports related, eq. clubs, societies)
Subcategory : The Informal Social Life
Subcategory : The Social Life as Dynamic
Subcategory: Parties in General
Subcategory : Drinking
Subcategory : Going out to Dinner
Subcategory : Going to Concerts
Subcategory : Going to Movies
Subcategory : Political Protests

CATEGORY: ORIENTATION WEEK

Subcategory : Orientation Participation
Subcategory : The Impact of Orientation Week

CATEGORY : THE ACADEMIC REALM

Subcategory : "Evaluation" of Academic Courses
Subcategory : The "Structure" of a First Year Class
Subcategory : The Unfolding of a First Year Course
Subcategory : Student Evaluation
Subcategory : Academic Work and Living Arrangements
Subcategory : Academic Adjustment/Change
Subcategory : Academics and Technology

CATEGORY: THE SOCIAL/ACADEMIC OVERLAP

Subcategory : The Social/Academic Balance
Subcategory : Academics and Social Relationships

Lineups	2
Specific Course Problems	2
Lack of Funding for School Activities	2

The best experiences cited by these students were overwhelmingly social in nature. Responses having to do with personal relationships and social activities made up the bulk of the comments (6 of the 11 reported categories). In terms of academic experiences that qualify among the most positive, academic control was mentioned. Students pointed to more selection in courses, classes as non-mandatory, and freedom of time scheduling as positive experiences. On a more personal note, having freedom or independence and being away from home were best experiences.

In contrast to best experiences, worst experiences were for the most part, academic in nature (6 of 14 of the reported responses). Among the academic difficulties were grades (such as receiving bad marks), having poor professors, 8:30am classes and large class size (hard to concentrate and learn, less of a relationship with a professor). Structural difficulties seemed to produce negative reactions from students. For example, registration problems, lineups and school funding were cited. Finally, it is interesting to note that students were experiencing difficulty just getting to campus. One can only speculate that many of these students were living off-campus. Although these results are not conclusive, the contrast between these students' best and worst experiences is

disconcerting. The university may be well advised to create a more positive academic climate perhaps by making it a more social atmosphere.

Group C

Question 1. What factors have had a positive impact on your academic (educational) experience thus far at Carleton?

Response Category	Count (Total Groups=9)
Meeting People/Friends	7
Extracurricular Activities/Social Activities (general and specific activities eg. Student Council events)	5
Academic Control (eg.course choice)	5
Teaching Assistants/ TA Groups/Labs	4
Being in Residence	4
Professors (good presenters helpful/concerned, office hours)	4
Independence/Freedom	3
Frosh Week (orientation)	3
Playing Sports/ Sports General/Sports Facilities	3
Social Environment (eg. sociability, social groups)	3
Writing Tutorial/Student Services/Library	3
Positive Courses (eg.interesting classes)	2
Bars/Pubs	2
Academic Organization (eg. class format -midterms, essays; grading system)	2

Question 2. What factors have had a negative impact on your academic (educational) performance at Carleton thus far?

Response Category	Count (Total Groups=9)
Large Classes/Class Size	9
Transportation (eg. buses)	6
Professors (eg. uninteresting/intimidating)	4
Being in Residence	4
Lack of Teacher Advice/Contact	4
Personal Finances (eg. costs, running out of money)	3
Social Activities/ Social Life (eg. parties)	3
Lack of Sufficient Number of Tests/ Assignments	3

Self Discipline Problems (eg. procrastination)	3
Food	2
Parking Problems	2
Not Knowing Expectations	2
Marking Inconsistency	2
Teaching Assistants (poor, not available)	2
Being "Just a Number"	2

Students pointed to a mixture of social and academic factors as having a positive impact on their educational experience. Academic control again appeared among the positive academic influences. Professors (for example as good presenters, or as concerned teachers), teaching assistants and discussion groups were highlighted as positive influences. The unfolding of the classroom situation itself was important. Students referred to interesting classes and the course assignment format among their responses. The effect of the social realm of a student's life resurfaces here. Meeting people, extracurricular activities, frosh week and sports involvement were recurring themes.

When asked what factors had a negative impact on their academic/educational performance each group of students mentioned large classes/class size as having a negative impact. It seems that at least four groups were concerned with what they perceived as a lack of student/ teacher contact which is directly related to class size. The concern of students as "being just a number" was also mentioned in conjunction with large classes.

Professors and teaching assistants could have both positive and negative impacts on students' educational experiences. Similarly, being in residence had both a positive and negative effect on the students' educational experiences. Residence could make it "hard to focus", or result in "too much partying and loud music". The students' social lives were also double-edged. As one group stated: "It's hard to go to Roosters and then go to class." Transportation and parking problems emerged again as an issue among these students. Some students were unable to get to the university due to structural hindrances.

The results suggest a variety of influences in the students' lives which deserve to be highlighted. First, there seemed to be a relationship between social experiences and positive evaluations. In terms of positive influences on the academic experience of nine groups of students and the best experiences of eight groups of students, the themes of meeting people, extracurricular/social activities, Frosh Week, sports, and bars emerged. Second, some themes could have both positive and negative influences on the first year experience (residence, professors, teaching assistants for example). Third, students appeared to be happy with different forms of control over their lives, namely independence in general and academic control. Fourth, the classroom experience cannot be overlooked in the first year experience. This experience refers generally to professors,

teaching assistants, class size, and class format. Finally, whether or not a student can physically get to campus and find parking once he/she arrives may be an important and often overlooked issue of student life.

APPENDIX 7 CATEGORIES AND SUBCATEGORIES- TWELVE INDEPTH
STUDENT INTERVIEWS

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(other than sports related, eq. clubs,
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Subcategory : Academic Work and Living Arrangements
Subcategory : Academic Adjustment/Change
Subcategory : Academics and Technology

CATEGORY: THE SOCIAL/ACADEMIC OVERLAP

Subcategory : The Social/Academic Balance
Subcategory : Academics and Social Relationships

Subcategory : Social Relations and Academics
Subcategory : Personal Contacts In the Classroom

CATEGORY: LIVING ARRANGEMENTS
Subcategory: Living Arrangements and Convenience
Subcategory : Services in Residence

CATEGORY : TRANSPORTATION/PARKING
Subcategory : Getting To and From the University
Subcategory : Getting Home (to home town or family)

CATEGORY : THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT
Subcategory : Where Do I Go, What Do I Do, Where Am I?
Subcategory : The General Social Environment
Subcategory : The Physical Environment
Subcategory : The Demographic Environment
Subcategory : The Academic Environment
Subcategory : The Importance Of Being at Carleton University

CATEGORY : THE PERSONAL REALM
Subcategory : Identity
Subcategory : Self Confidence
Subcategory : Being On My Own
Subcategory : The Individual
Subcategory : Personal Finances/Resources
Subcategory : The City of Ottawa
Subcategory : Keeping Late Hours
Subcategory : Personal Adjustment/Change
Subcategory : Pressures
Subcategory : Personal Goals

CATEGORY : THE "UNIVERSITY" AND STUDENT PROBLEMS
Subcategory : Student Services Used (Including Res)
Subcategory : Residence Services
Subcategory : Different Problems/Different Sources of Help
Subcategory : Bureaucracy
Subcategory : Student Services Known (Not Including Res)
Subcategory : CUSA and RAW Relations

CATEGORY: SUMMARIZING THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE
Subcategory : Positive / Negative Overall Experience
Subcategory : Just Come for the Classes
Subcategory : Fitting In and the First Year Student
Subcategory : Stayers and Leavers
Subcategory : First Year as Preparation for Second Year

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