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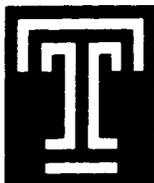
Temple University
Doctoral Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Board

Title of Dissertation:
(Please type)

Attrition and Retention of Urban African-Americans in Higher Education

Author:
(Please type)

Danielle Masursky

Date of Defense:
(Please type)

March 14, 2000

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Date Submitted to Graduate Board: 4-5-00

Accepted by the Graduate Board of Temple University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**.

Date 5/16/00

(Dean of the Graduate School)

ATTRITION AND RETENTION OF URBAN AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by
Danielle Masursky
May, 2000

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ABSTRACT

Attrition and Retention of Urban African-Americans in Higher Education
Danielle Masursky
Doctor of Philosophy
Temple University, 2000
Dr. Edmund Amidon

Attrition is a consistent feature of higher education -- only about half the students who start college will ever receive a degree. The attrition rates of African-American students is even higher than that of their white counterparts. Attrition in general, and especially that of high risk students, is of great concern to university administrators and others who believe a college education contributes to general success in life.

Vincent Tinto is the most prolific, and possibly most respected, of the theory-based college attrition researchers, but his model, which focuses on the integration of students into the college environment, has been criticized for not addressing the experiences of minority, and other non-middle class, students.

The subjects in this study were 20 African-American students who returned to college after their first year and 18 African-Americans who left college for at least one semester after they began. In-depth interviews were conducted with each subject. Among the topics covered: Why did they decide to attend college? What have been their experiences of the college environment? And for those who left: What influences, including outside pressures such as family obligations and their financial situation, affected their decision to leave college?

Results suggest that the central concept in Tinto's model, social integration, is not the key to these students' college experience. Among persisters and those departers who returned to college, their own determination to finish seems to be the key factor – a

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resolve that appears to result largely from their belief that a college degree is the only means of achieving their ultimate goals for career and life satisfaction. Most students who departed college faced significant life challenges such as child bearing and financial difficulties.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I must express my intense gratitude to the 38 people who afforded me the great privilege of hearing their story – the students, current and former, whom I interviewed for this study. Without their generosity, this work would not have been possible.

To my advisor, Dr. Edmund Amidon, whose commitment to students is legion and whose gentle prodding over the years was instrumental to my success.

To my husband, Lawrence Jacowitz, whose greatest gift to me as I pursued this project has been his pride in my accomplishments.

To my fellow students, whose diligence and ability to juggle the many facets of their full, rich, and complex lives has inspired and heartened me throughout this process: Dr. Barbara Bunkle, Dr. Gloria Kersey-Matusiak, Dr. Marion Kelley, Anne-Marie Kiehne, and Todd Williams.

And finally, this is dedicated to my father, Harold Masursky (*zichrono livrachah*), whose intelligence and commitment to education is the ultimate reason that I undertook this formidable endeavor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

"Attrition has been a surprisingly stable feature of the higher education enterprise" (Tinto, 1982, p. 693). Only about half the students who start a college education in America will ever receive a degree. This figure is cited in virtually every research report on the topic of college persistence. With the exception of a slightly higher number after World War II, when the GI Bill was in effect, this figure has remained consistent for over 100 years — as long as records have been kept. The nature of colleges has changed during that time: at the turn of the century, virtually all colleges were private and a relatively elite group of men attended them. Currently, over two million students from a wide variety of backgrounds start college each year, mostly at public institutions. In addition, during the last few decades, literally billions of dollars of public money have been provided directly to students to make a college degree more accessible (Stampen, 1980).

Attrition rates of African-Americans are consistently higher than rates for whites (Lang, 1988). Studies vary in reporting graduation rates, but the rates for blacks have been shown to be as low as half that of whites (Stewart, 1991).

The good news is: even though the attrition rate stays approximately the same, as the number of students who start college increases, the number who finish also increases. In particular, the number of minorities graduating from college improved greatly throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Lang, 1988).

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However, the sheer consistency of the attrition rate helps to keep researchers interested in the issue of college persistence and how to influence it. And it's not an esoteric pursuit, not an intellectual exercise -- the underlying question is always, "What can be *done*?"

Statement of the Problem

Context of the Current Project

Temple University accepts about 2000 incoming freshmen each year and a similar number of transfer students. In 1996, minority (i.e., non-white) students comprised 41% of Temple's student population; black students comprised 22% of the total student body. The proportion of black students has risen almost 23% in seven years, while the proportion of white students has dropped almost 30% in the same period. Temple's overall enrollment (approximately 28,000 in 1996) has declined just over 13% since 1989.

Besides historically black colleges, comprehensive urban universities are still the "major haven for blacks and other minority students" (Lang, 1988, p .4). Universities such as Temple bear the responsibility for educating non-mainstream students, which requires a significant commitment of resources. Temple has not shown any reluctance to shoulder this burden, but like many other schools, its success at this enterprise has not been what is desired.

Vincent Tinto is by far the best known of the theory-based college attrition researchers -- his model (1975) is frequently referred to as "the" model of student attrition. Integration is the key to student persistence is this model. He bases his theoretical model on Durkheim's theory of suicide, which suggested that suicide is a

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result of a lack of integration into the fabric of society. While Tinto acknowledges that dropping out of college is a less drastic form of rejecting a social system than is suicide, the conceptualization allows for the introduction of integration as the primary determinant of persistence. Tinto's model has generated a great deal of well-respected empirical research (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1979, 1983), concerned primarily with developing a predictive instrument which allows universities to identify high risk students at the beginning of their college career, and examines various student populations for the generalizability of the model. The problem with the research based on Tinto's theory is that virtually all of it has been conducted at large public and private residential universities whose student populations are overwhelmingly white and middle, or upper-middle, class. Universities such as Temple are composed of a different type of student — many of whom are working class and/or non-white; few of whom live on campus. Whether Tinto's predictions apply to these students is presently unknown.

<div align="center">Personal Context</div>

For the past two years I served as the director of a federally-funded retention program at Temple for at-risk students.[1] The major activity of this program, like many of its kind, was to provide academic assistance and resources to low income and non-white students. The primary intention of the program, and others like it, is to furnish students with information and skills that their previous, relatively deprived, educational experiences did not furnish, among them, study skills and time management. This program has a long

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[1]The Health Careers Opportunity Program recruits and retains at-risk students in medical schools and training programs for other health professions, such as physical and occupational therapy. Race and income are two of several criteria that qualify students to participate in the program.

<div align="center">3</div>

track record throughout the U.S. And its activities are based on sound and tested principles.

I interviewed every student who applied to the program. These students were volunteering to spend six weeks during the summer prior to their freshman year in college in a full-time academic preparation program. All the students I spoke to appeared to be fully committed to college. Despite their commitment and the substantial additional support these students received, many of them still left college. It's not that the program was ineffective. However, even this additional assistance, and their apparent enthusiasm for college, was not sufficient to keep these students in school. Tinto's model would suggest that these students had not become sufficiently integrated into the university environment. This explanation may not be adequate — the question the current project intends to answer is "Why did these particular students, or students like them, leave college?"

Problem Statement

The attrition of African-American students and other marginalized (non-white and non-middle class) students is of great concern to university administrators and others who perceive a college education to be of benefit to general success in life. Despite decades of programs aimed at improving the retention of minority students, the attrition rates are still consistently high, and higher than their Caucasian counterparts.

Vincent Tinto is the most prolific, and possibly most respected, of the theory-based attrition researchers, but his model (1975) has been criticized for not addressing the experiences of minority, and other non-middle class, students. Tinto's theory has maintained its credibility over two decades, but the experiences of marginalized students

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are an essential part of the college attrition puzzle, and their voices have been largely absent from the research to date.

William Tierney (1992a, 1992b) advocates a more multicultural framework for investigating college attrition, and suggests that we must consider the nature of all students' participation in college if we are ever to substantially improve their graduation rates.

Tinto proposes that students undergo a process of cost/benefit analysis when trying to decide whether to stay in college. Is this true? What counts as a cost for a marginalized student? What counts as a benefit? Do students who stay in college weigh these considerations differently than do students who leave?

Tinto suggests that influences outside the university environment are only relevant to college persistence as they are reflected in the students' changing commitment to the goal of completion. What events happening outside the college are significantly impacting students' likelihood of staying or leaving, and why?

Social integration has become virtually the *sine qua non* of college retention in the perspective of many attrition researchers (e.g., Lang, 1991; Stage, 1990; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985) and college administrators. However, the process of integration cannot be identical for members of subcultures and members of the mainstream culture. What is the role of social integration for non-white students at a predominantly white university? Why do they leave college? What happens to students who start out committed to the goal of a college diploma, but who leave before obtaining it?

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Research Questions

1. What reasons do low-income, first generation, African-American students give for departing college? What reasons do similarly at-risk students give for staying in college?

2. How do low-income, first generation, African-American students perceive the social environment of the university? What activities and interactions have a positive influence on their college experience? What activities and interactions are problematic or create barriers for these students?

3. How do outside influences, such as family obligations, affect low-income, first generation, African-American students' commitment to college? Do these types of obligations impact differently on students who stay in college and those who leave?

Significance

The attrition of African-American students and other marginalized students is of great concern to university administrators and others who perceive a college education as contributing to general success in life. Despite decades of programs and other aid aimed at improving the retention of minority students, the attrition rates are still consistently high and higher than their Caucasian counterparts.

What are the dynamics of persistence for high risk students? Why do they stay in school and why do they leave? What is the relevance of Tinto's model, especially the concept of social integration, to these students' experiences?

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Study Limitations

The ambitions of the present research project were very modest — to explore the pressures that African-American students experience to leave college and the factors that help them stay in college, especially as these elements are related to Tinto's concept of social integration. For this reason, the targeted student population was limited in several ways.

This study concerned only African-American students, although the experiences of other minorities is both of interest and considered very important. Including other minority groups would have required substantial expansion of the study design and an exploration of other students' perspectives must be saved for a future project. Further, the subjects were generally "traditional age" students, again to maintain the simplicity of the study design.

This study attempted to focus on students immediately after their freshman year. While the dynamics of attrition clearly evolve throughout a student's college career (e.g., Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985), it is again beyond the scope of this project to examine the complete retention time frame. Because attrition is highest after the freshman year, this period was chosen by the current researcher, as it has been by others (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1983).

Tinto, along with other researchers, prefers to make a clear distinction between students who are dismissed from college and those who withdraw "voluntarily" (Tinto, 1987). The students' motivation or reason for leaving is relevant to the dynamics of the attrition process. Pascarella, Terenzini, and their colleagues have generally ignored academically dismissed students (e.g., 1977), because there were so few of them at the

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institutions where their empirical research was conducted. In the present study, the departers group consisted of both "voluntary" leavers and students who were dismissed from college. Because the purpose of the interviews was to explore students' multi-dimensional reasons for leaving college, the distinction was unnecessary, since both voluntary and involuntary reasons for leaving were discovered and discussed.

The subject population was composed, as much as possible, of students from low income households and those among the first generation in their family to attend college. This limitation was imposed to concentrate on the experiences of students who are considered most at risk for leaving college. Furthermore, these students have largely been excluded from mainstream attrition research, therefore their perspectives represent a gap in the existing knowledge of college attrition dynamics.

Community colleges and other two-year colleges have recently been the subject of more research, especially with regards to at risk and minority students. However, the present study did not systematically address students who attended community college, and attempted to concentrate on students who attended large, urban, four-year institutions.

Finally, the students in the present study were generally African-Americans attending predominantly white institutions, as are the majority of blacks who go to college. While the experiences of students who choose to attend black colleges are completely relevant to the examination of Tinto's model, the subjects in the present study represent the majority of students attending institutions of higher education.

A final note about the subject population: while it would have been ideal to have males and females evenly represented in each group, persisters and departers, otherwise

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suitable interview subjects were not rejected in order to achieve a gender balance. All subjects who made themselves available were interviewed, without regard to gender. While gender is always an excellent variable to include in any analysis, because the current study included such a relatively small number of subjects, gender was not examined separately.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Descriptive Research Results

Throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, researchers considered the characteristics of students who stayed in school and those of students who did not complete college. A number of qualitites and issues relating to college persistence have been consistently observed.

Family Background

The relationship between family socioeconomic status and attrition has been studied extensively and the results have been fairly consistent -- more departers come from less affluent families (Astin, 1975; Cabrera, Stampen & Hansen, 1990). However, the exact dynamic is not entirely clear. For example, cne researcher found that low parental income was associated with attrition more as a result of students' low aspirations to attend college, rather than lack of ability to pay (Baum, 1987).

Individual Characteristics

As important as the family is in determining a student's success, their own ability is even more crucial. Measures of intelligence have been shown to have a strong influence on college completion — without exception, the higher the intelligence level of students, as measured by IQ tests, the more likely they are to graduate from college (Sewell & Shah, 1967). These researchers also found that SES has its greatest impact on attendance in college, while "intelligence" is a much stronger correlate of graduation.

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Financial Considerations

Contrary to pervasive popular wisdom, self-support and part-time work are not good predictors of success or failure in college. Reviews of the literature show no consistent relationship between work and grades (Spady, 1970) or work and attrition (Pantages & Creedon, 1978). Financial difficulties are cited as one of the top three reasons why students leave college, but students tend to overstate the influence of their financial situation, because it is a more acceptable reason for leaving than are others, such as lack of motivation (Summerskill, 1962).

Receiving financial aid, especially grants and work-study allocations, increases persistence among economically disadvantaged students (Astin, 1975; Murdock, 1987), though ability to pay has not been widely studied and is not well understood (Stampen & Cabrera, 1988).

Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure

Vincent Tinto is by far the most well-known of the theory-based college attrition researchers, though William Spady's work, while not nearly as acclaimed, predates his by several years (1971). Both base their theoretical models on Durkheim's theory of suicide and the resulting models are quite similar. Tinto (1975) credits Spady in a footnote for having first applied Durkheim's work to college attrition. In his well-known book on the subject of college attrition, *Leaving College* (1987), Tinto adds Van Gennep's (1960) concept of rites of passage to the rationale for his theory.

Tinto's model has generated a great deal of well-respected empirical research, developing a predictive instrument which would allow universities to identify high risk students at the beginning of their college career, and examining various student

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populations for the generalizability of the model. Tinto's model is frequently referred to as "the" model of student attrition, and his influence in the field cannot be underestimated.

Tinto has been concerned since the beginning with the inadequate attention given to questions of definition and the lack of theoretical models to explain the processes that prompt students to leave higher education. Questions of definition usually concern two major areas -- the distinction between failure and voluntary withdrawal, and the distinction between temporary leaving, or stopping out, and permanent departure.

Tinto notes that his model seeks to explain the exit from specific institutions and does not address the issue of leaving the entire system of higher education; in other words, his model ignores the transfer of students to other schools. In 1975, Tinto suggests that the model is predictive. but later describes it as simply descriptive (1982). specifying the conditions under which varying types of departure occur. Meanwhile. his empirical friends treat the model as predictive, so that, ultimately, it is unclear how the model should definitively be viewed. According to Tinto, the model intends to highlight the complexities of the elements affecting student departure, especially the formal and informal social interactions in which the student participates within the institution. The model focuses on the institution's impact on student departure, and only takes into account students' abilities and other background factors as they interface with the institution's social system. Tinto is interested in the policy implications of student departure and therefore concerns himself primarily with the institution's responsibilities regarding student leaving.

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Durkheim's Theory of Suicide

According to Durkheim, suicide results from the lack of integration into the common life, or fabric, of society. The likelihood of suicide[2] increases when two types of integration are deficient: insufficient moral consciousness and insufficient collective affiliation, the latter of which results from a lack of consistent, intimate interaction with others, holding values that are different from the general social collective, and lacking a sense of compatibility with the social system.

According to Tinto, applying Durkheim's theory to the process of departing college requires only that a university be seen as a social system with its own structures, values and rewards. Of course, dropping out of college is admittedly a less drastic form of rejecting a social system than is suicide. However, the conceptualization allows for the introduction of social integration as the key factor in the attrition process, which is Tinto's primary focus and his purpose for borrowing the theory. Several writers, notably Tierney (1992a), have taken exception to this analogy.

Van Gennep's Rites of Passage

Tinto includes Van Gennep's (1960) work in his own theory because Van Gennep is interested in the process by which membership is established, especially the rituals through which members move from one status in their society to another. Participation in these rites facilitates the transmission of beliefs and norms, and ensures the stability of the society over time, as young members mature and accept responsibility from older

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[2] Durkheim actually discussed four types of suicide. The one relevant to Spady's and Tinto's models is *egoistic*. The other three are: *altruistic*, a result of societal norms that encourage suicide (such as *hari kari* in 14th century Japanese society); *anomic*, resulting from times of extreme social upheaval (such as wars or economic depression); and *fatalistic*, which results from excessive control or periods of repressive regulation.

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group members. Van Gennep believes that the transitional phase inherently includes feelings of weakness and isolation, because the member has given up the norms associated with their previous status, but have not yet fully adopted the norms of their new status. The ceremony or ritual serves as a vital structure to support the participant during this normless period.

Tinto acknowledges that the analogy between tribal rituals and college participation is not seamless, but he insists that the process Van Gennep explores is "functionally similar" to the one college students face when attempting to become incorporated into college life, primarily, separating from an existing normative system and assimilating a new normative system which promotes maturity and success in the larger society. It is interesting to note that college attendance does not actually include any ritual, unless you count high school graduation, which may mark the transition for the majority of students who attend college, but certainly doesn't serve the purpose that Van Gennep is exploring, or Tinto, for that matter.

Tinto's Model of Institutional Departure

Integration is the key to student persistence is this model. Tinto distinguishes between the social and academic domains of the university, though both require integration and truly successful students must balance their integration in the two realms. For example, excessive social integration will probably impact negatively on academic integration. Tinto proposes that insufficient social integration is most likely to lead to voluntary withdrawal, while insufficient academic integration is more likely to lead to dismissal.

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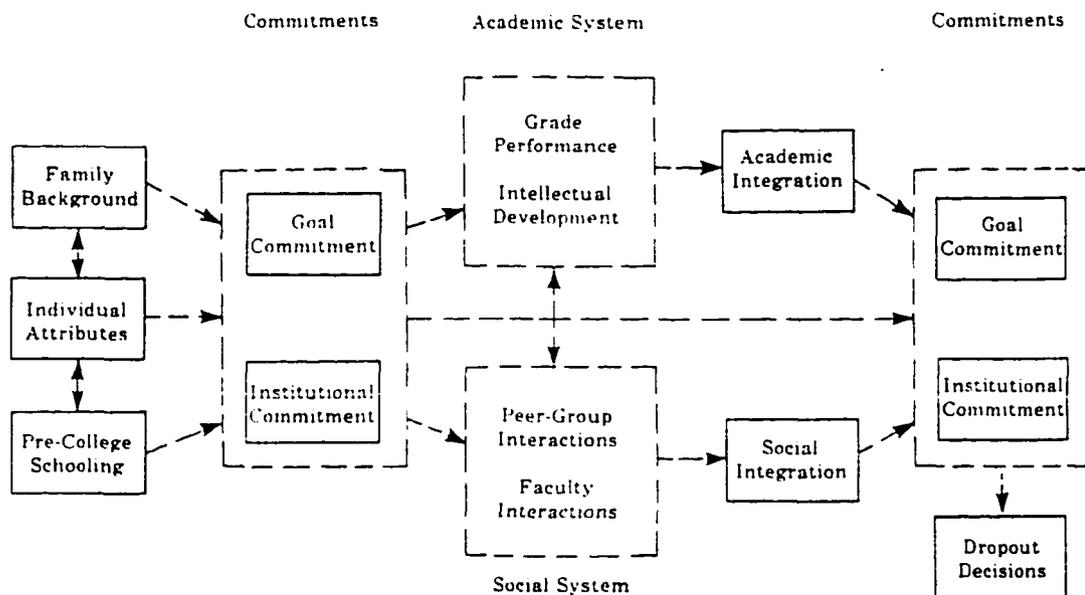
Figure 2-1. Depiction of Tinto's original model (1975) of student attrition

The Variables

Family background. This includes social status, community residence, and high school experiences.

Individual attributes. This includes attributes such as sex, race, and ability, but also students' expectations and level of motivation.

Goal commitment. Tinto perceives this as one of the central elements of the model, because students' commitment is likely to be directly related to persistence. This includes the intensity of students' commitment, as well as their level of commitment — for example, a student who planned to complete a doctorate may be interacting with their college experiences differently than a student who is only a planning to obtain a four-year degree. *Institutional commitment* is a related variable, concerning students' intentions regarding the specific institution in which they are enrolled. This includes the financial

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and time commitments that a particular educational setting may require, as well as students' rationale for choosing that school -- for example, the college other family members attended, or a school that will guarantee entrance to subsequent educational settings, such as a certain law school.

Academic integration may manifest itself in students' academic performance and in their sense of intellectual development, including the sharing of intellectual values. Indicators of *social integration* include frequency and quality of contact with peers, shared values in non-academic areas, and involvement in the life of the institution outside of the classroom. Levels of integration are influenced by students' pre-college characteristics and level of commitment, and integration also mediates subsequent levels of commitment to completing college.

The model diagrams a process of interactions between the individual and the systems of the college, as measured by students' integration, which continually modifies students' goals and commitments which in turn leads to persistence or departure. Student's background and attitudes directly and indirectly impact their performance and development, as do their interactions with faculty and other students. It is this process of becoming integrated which most affects students' continuance in college. However, the model suggests that students' goals and commitments are both predictors of and reflections of students' experiences of, and ultimately their intentions regarding, college. Tinto contends that a sufficiently high level of initial commitment will keep students in college regardless of their experiences and their level of integration; on the other hand, the process of integration will strengthen students' commitment.

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Additional Issues

External influences. While Tinto acknowledges that events outside the college system may impact students' persistence, he asserts that these influences are best evaluated via students' changing commitment to the goal of completion and to the college they have chosen.

Cost-benefit analysis. Tinto ascribes to the notion that decisions with regard to any activity can be evaluated in terms of the actor's perceptions of the costs and benefits of that activity as compared with the alternative. Tinto asserts that students' changing commitments are a result of this ongoing analysis. This allows the model to include students' perceptions of external factors, such as the job market, and the viability of various alternatives to college, such as taking a job before completing their education.

The Empirical Tests

Pascarella, Terenzini and their colleagues have empirically examined Tinto's model repeatedly, with varying results. In all these studies, students who were dismissed for academic reasons were excluded from the analysis, both for the sake of simplicity and because these students represented a tiny fraction of the students who left their schools.

One of the primary intentions of these studies was to develop and test a multidimensional instrument to assess the components of Tinto's model, and to determine the validity of this instrument by accurately identifying freshmen who leave and stay in college.[3] Subsequent studies also attempted to determine whether the predictive ability of the instrument varied across institution type and among different kinds of students.

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[3] These studies focus on the freshman year because the greatest amount of attrition happens between the freshmen and sophomore year at most educational institutions.

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The keystone of this instrument was a 34 item Likert scale. The items were consistently analyzed into five subscales: institutional and goal commitment, peer relations, informal interaction with faculty, faculty concern for teaching and student development, and academic and intellectual development.

The instrument ultimately operationalized the concepts from Tinto's model thus:[4]

Background characteristics (primarily collected from an incoming student survey form)
- high school grades
- sex
- race
- academic aptitude (SAT or ACT score)
- intended major
- mother/father formal schooling
- parental financial support for college
- expected need for part-time job

Goal commitment I
- highest expected academic degree

Institutional commitment I
- student's pre-enrollment expectation of satisfaction with this college
- student's pre-enrollment expectation that they would transfer to another school

Social integration
- seven-items measuring extent and quality of student's peer relations at this college
- five-items measuring quality and impact of student's interactions with faculty
- number of faculty contacts (discussing personal problems or to "socialize informally")

Academic integration
- freshman year cumulative GPA
- seven-items measuring student's perception of their intellectual development
- five-items measuring student's perception of faculty concern for student development
- number of faculty contacts (discussing coursework or seeking academic advice)

Goal commitment II
- highest expected academic degree
- rating on item: "It's important for me to graduate from college."

Institutional commitment II
- rating on two items:
- "I'm confident I made the right choice in attending this college."
- "It's important for me to graduate from this university."

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[4] Earlier studies utilized a less comprehensive set of variables.

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In these studies, the instrument, taken as a whole, could distinguish between the majority of persisters and departers, though between 20% and 30% of students were incorrectly classified. The variables in the instrument generally explained a relatively small, though consistent, proportion of the variance in persistence/withdrawal decisions — typically between 10% and 20%.

Contrary to Tinto's model and to conventional wisdom, background characteristics did not directly affect persistence/withdrawal decisions for students at residential universities. However, background characteristics played a greater role in predicting persistence at one commuter school (Pascarella, Duby & Iverson, 1983).

The early studies, which were confined to samples of residential students, indicated that social and academic integration were equally important in students' decision to remain in college (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977). Subsequent analyses revealed that social integration was almost twice as important as academic integration for women's persistence, while only academic integration was important for men (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). Studies with students at commuter institutions indicate that social integration was a much less relevant variable than academic integration (Pascarella, Duby & Iverson, 1983).

Of particular interest to the researchers was the significantly higher amount of informal contact between faculty and students who ultimately stayed in college in some of the studies, though this result was not duplicated in all studies (Terenzini, Lorang & Pascarella, 1981), and faculty contact was found to be a more significant predictor of persistence in men than in women (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979). When the type of interaction was examined, it was found that frequency of contact with faculty did

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discriminate between persisters and departers, discussing "intellectual or course-related matters;" contact characterized by students as "social or informal" did not contribute to discrimination (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977). The researchers have continued to debate the issue of where student-faculty contact belongs in the model -- Tinto places it with social integration, and while the researchers acknowledge this, in later studies they put items regarding student-faculty contact in both the social and academic integration scales.

Despite the myriad limitations of their research, including the inconsistencies among educational settings and types of students and the restricted operational definitions of the concepts, the authors maintain that Tinto's model still provides a useful framework for understanding the persistence/withdrawal process in higher education.

Limitations

In subsequent writings, Tinto does not acknowledge the many distinctions present in these various studies. For example, he asserts that informal faculty contact is "one of the most important forms of interaction impacting upon student persistence" (1985, p. 37), though this result was not obtained in all studies, despite attempts to replicate it, and the statistical relationship that has been found cannot be considered causal. He continues to discuss the centrality of integration (1987), though its influence on persistence has repeatedly been shown to be indirect. Tinto does admit to several shortcomings in his model (1982), beyond the fact that it can only account for a limited amount of variance (as all models do), including its insufficient emphasis on the role of students' financial situation and the lack of distinction made among the experiences of different races and genders.

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Terenzini and Pascarella (1980) have themselves admitted repeatedly that the operationalization of the concepts cannot capture the complexity of the constructs contained in the model, and they call for a more precise specification of the variables to facilitate research in this area. They even concede that their research, albeit carefully designed and executed, has yielded an "oversimplified picture of what seems to be a highly complex set of dynamics" (p. 281).

The Role of Social Integration

The role of social integration in this model is especially troubling. The influence of Tinto's model is so comprehensive that social integration is considered virtually the *sine qua non* of college student persistence. Many researchers' discussion of the influences on persistence simply assume that social integration is one of the important factors (e.g., Lang, 1991; Stage, 1990; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). However, a close reading of the research does not support this confidence.

Social integration has been operationalized in a variety of ways, including participation in extra-curricular activities (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977, 1978) and having an on-campus romantic attachment (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). In addition, Pascarella, Terenzini, and their colleagues admit that they are unsure where faculty contact fits into Tinto's model, though they have always placed it with social integration.

In any event, the statistical relationship between social integration and persistence is not actually very consistent: for example, in one study social integration accounted for more of the variance between persisters and departers than did academic integration (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977), while in another, academic integration accounted for more of the variance (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978). Nor is the relationship particularly

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strong: social integration typically accounts for between 5% and 15% of the variance between groups of students who leave college after their freshman year and those who stay.

More importantly, there is substantial evidence that social integration is not the essential dynamic for all students. For example, social integration has shown to have more relevance for the persistence of women and residential students. For minority students, integration into the college environment may be an essential component for persistence, however, it is unlikely that social integration operates the same way for disenfranchised minority students as it does for middle-class whites. What "integration" means to minority students is possibly quite different, and fostering integration for minority students probably requires something different on the part of university faculty, staff and administrators than efforts made on behalf of whites.

Loo & Rolison's (1986) investigation of the construct of social integration found that minority students felt more isolated and less integrated than did white students. They also noted, as have other researchers (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Terenzini, et al., 1994) that minority students depend on their relationships with other same-race students to buffer them from the difficulties inherent at predominantly white campuses.

<div align="center">The Alternative Views</div>

<div align="center">Social Construction</div>

Tierney (1992a) takes issue with Tinto and the other social integrationists, on the grounds that they have misrepresented the notion of integration. Tierney's area of expertise is Native Americans in higher education, but the issues he raises are relevant to the experiences of all disenfranchised students in college. He argues that in order to

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engage minority students we must conceive of universities as multicultural entities where difference is both inherent and appreciated.

Tierney takes exception to the way that integrationists are approaching the process of integration on two fronts. One is the individualist perspective that dominates the theory, the other is the way that multiculturalism is ignored.

Individualistic Perspective

Tierney notes that Tinto emphasizes the experience of the individual throughout his writing: from this perspective, individuals go to college, become integrated or not, stay or leave. The discussion does not examine the group dynamics of the process, though that has always been the appropriate level for the analysis of culture. Differences based on the groups to which students belong, such as gender, class, and race, are overlooked. In addition, the concept, borrowed as it is from anthropology, is misapplied, because the examination of integration without the consideration of how the process occurs within the context of the institution's groups, is both incomplete and inaccurate.

Multiculturalism

Tierney suggests that integrationists perceive culture as monolithic, that a single culture is reflected in both the institution and society. We all know that to be false. Students who are non-white and who are not middle class are left out of the model and the analysis. He goes so far as to suggest that integration as it is being used here represents the imposition of the values of one culture onto another while simultaneously forcing the members of the subordinate culture to take responsibility for their inability to adequately and efficiently adapt.

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Tierney believes that the concept of college as a rite of passage is also problematic for two reasons: it doesn't apply to members of outside cultures, and departure is not a relevant option.

Initiation

Conceiving of college as a rite of passage assumes that all participants hold the same underlying understanding of both the institution and the value of the ritual. Tierney argues that the metaphor doesn't apply to students who are coming from other cultures to a system that is dominated by mainstream white, middle-class cultural values. The conceptualization cannot be used to explain the initiation of a member of one culture into a foreign culture, that is, a culture other than their own.

Departure

As other anthropologists have pointed out, initiates in other cultures do not have the option of leaving a rite of passage. Initiates' participation is assumed and their successful completion is virtually assured. Dropping out doesn't exist in other cultures' rituals, whereas failure is already present in a university, as an inherent part of the institution's operation. For this reason, Tierney contends that the conceptualization doesn't apply to college, which is a completely voluntary activity and from which departure is simple and relatively stigma-free. In addition, there are many viable alternatives to college, such as taking a job, and often those alternatives are more appealing or valuable for the participant.

Tierney proposes that the problem of dropping out, rather than being conceptualized as a process of acculturation, might more usefully be considered in terms of an institution being unable to adequately operate in an admittedly multicultural world. He suggests that

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our solutions to the dropout problem have been ineffective because we have been asking the wrong questions. We must reconsider the nature of all students' participation in college if we are ever to substantially improve their level of participation.

Bean & Metzner's Model of Non-traditional Student Departure

Bean and Metzner (1985) have proposed a model of college attrition for "non-traditional students," which they define as older than 24, not living on campus, attending college part-time, or a combination of these. They claim that these students are more concerned with the academic offerings of the college and are less influenced by the college's social environment than are their traditional counterparts. Because these students have a limited experience of the social environment of the college, other factors from Tinto's model have greater proportional influence on their retention or attrition, particularly variables outside the college, such as family obligations.

The model focuses on four sets of variables: *Background variables* include characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity, as well as affective elements such as the students' goals. *Academic variables* include student behavior such as study habits, and support systems of the college such as academic advising. The researchers define *environmental variables* primarily as the outside pressures students face, such as finances and employment responsibilities. *Intent to leave* is the fourth variable, which is influenced by such psychological factors as stress and satisfaction.

Empirical tests of the model revealed two important dynamics with regard to students' decision to leave college. Strong environmental support will compensate for weak academic support, but strong academic support will not mitigate poor environmental support. Secondly, nonacademic factors will compensate for poor

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academic success, but high academic success will only result in continued enrollment when accompanied by a positive psychological experience of school.

Clearly, for non-traditional students at least, social support is the most central element of student success. Aspects of Tinto's social integration into the university are present here, such as peer relationships, but facets of students' experiences that Tinto suggests are peripheral, especially influences outside the university, have greater importance to these students than Tinto asserts.

Tracey & Sedlacek

Tracey and Sedlacek (1985) suggest that the process of college achievement is different for black and white students. Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) proposed seven non-cognitive variables which they believed to be related to academic success and college persistence for all students, especially minority students:

- positive self-concept
- realistic self-appraisal
- understanding of and ability to deal with racism
- preference for long-terms goals over short-term needs
- availability of at least one person to provide strong support
- leadership experience
- community service experience

Tracey and Sedlacek (1984) developed an instrument called the Non Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) to measure these dimensions. They found that the NCQ contributed to the accurate prediction of GPA for both black and white students. More significantly, in a longitudinal study (1985), they found that the NCQ was a much better predictor of black student persistence than it was of white student persistence.

Specifically, positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, support, and community involvement were related to continued enrollment for black students after three semesters,

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while only self-concept was related to white student persistence. Interestingly, support was no longer a relevant variable after eight semesters in college, nor was a preference for long-range goals. Community service experience and understanding racism were most related to persistence later in black students' academic careers.[5]

An 18 item Likert scale, two nominal items and three open-ended questions comprise the NCQ, so that each of the seven dimensions is measured by one or two items. For example, "realistic self-appraisal" is measured by one nominal item, which asks students how confident they are about graduating from college; support is measured by one Likert item.

Unfortunately, the assessment that the NCQ provides largely places the burden of achievement back on the shoulders of the individual. Tracey and Sedlacek's evaluation virtually suggests that black students must be of stronger character than their white counterparts in order to successfully complete college. On the other hand, colleges could use this information to help students develop these characteristics, such as self-confidence and a preference for long range goals, though the research implies that success is dependent on the existence of these qualities prior to beginning college. Colleges could certainly provide students with opportunities for leadership and community involvement, and assist in the development of support networks, since those variables are related to persistence according to these researchers, and most others, including Tinto and his colleagues.

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[5] It does seem possible that these variables indicate something about the type of students who persist over four years, as opposed to measuring qualities which aid in persistence.

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Blacks in Higher Education

Minority Presence in Higher Education[6]

Minorities comprise a growing share of college undergraduate enrollments, though

overall, college enrollment has been declining. In 1995, minority students represented

28% of the college population, up from 23% in 1990, 20% in 1986, and 17.5% in 1976.

That growth has not been consistent in the African-American community, however,

which in 1995 comprised 10.3% of the college population.[7] This figure is up from 9.6%

in 1992 and 8.7% in 1988, and about even with enrollment at its prior highest: 10.2% in

1976. The decline in college enrollments since its height in the 1970s has been

particularly steep for black males — the ratio of black women to men has remained

about 60:40 throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The growth of minority college enrollment had largely been concentrated in

community colleges, which increased 16.2% between 1976 and 1986, while minority

enrollment increased less than half that at four-year institutions (Mow & Nettles, 1986).

This trend has leveled off in the 1990s, with gains in minority enrollment at four-year

institutions and small declines in minority enrollment at community colleges. Enrollment

at historically black colleges is down considerably from their heyday; they enrolled only

16% of the black students who were participating in higher education in 1993.

Various studies of student enrollment yield varying college going rates. Rates

reported for black students entering college immediately after high school graduation

range from 27% to 53% compared with 32% to 51% for whites. In 1993, the U.S.

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[6] All data from U. S. Department of Education (1995), unless otherwise noted.

[7] 1995 figures from U. S. Department of Education (1997).

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Department of Education reported that 42% of white high school graduates between the ages of 18 and 24 attended college, compared with 33% of blacks and 36% of Hispanics. The college participation rate has remained stable for blacks since 1990, when it leveled off after rising fairly steadily from 26% in 1985 .

A comprehensive study of nationwide retention rates estimated that 42-51% of blacks eventually obtained a college degree, compared with 57-59% of whites (Astin, 1982). However, one study found that attrition rates for blacks and whites did not differ significantly when calculated as a percentage of those who entered college immediately after high school — 16.1% and 16.9% respectively (Hilton, 1982).

Unfortunately, blacks, who comprised about 10% of college enrollment in 1993, received only 8% of the associate degrees awarded that year, and only 6% of the baccalaureate degrees. These figures have remained relatively constant over the past decade.

Black students' educational aspirations are not dissimilar to their white counterparts: in the 1989-90 school year, approximately 30% of black students enrolled in an institution of higher education were working toward a baccalaureate degree, compared with 40% of whites. Fifty-four percent of black students said they eventually intended to pursue an advanced degree, a slightly higher proportion than whites (52%).

The reasons all students give for choosing the school they attend are primarily academic, such as the reputation of the school (83%) or offering the courses that the student wants to take (92%). However, black students are much more likely to cite receiving needed financial aid than are whites (57% vs. 33%), and more black students wanted a school where they could get a campus job compared to whites (38% vs. 26%),

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though the proportion of black students planning to work while attending college is not much higher than white students (75% v. 70%).

In the 1989-90 school year, black students were much less financially well off than were their white counterparts: 40% of black students were in the lowest family income quartile compared with 21% of whites; twice as many white students come from the highest quartile as do blacks (28% vs. 12%). These income levels are reflected in the distribution of financial aid. Sixty percent of blacks attending any institution of higher education were receiving some type of financial aid, compared to only 40% of whites. Over half of the black students in college received financial aid in the form of a grant, compared with just over 30% of white students.

Black Experiences in Higher Education

Christoffel (1986) synthesized the research done in the area of minority retention and proposed the following barriers to college success by black students:

- low parental education
- lack of adequate financial aid
- poor academic preparation in high school
- inadequate high school advising regarding college and career options
- low goal-orientation regarding college
- poor study habits

Like many other researchers, she notes that ". . . the decision to drop out of school is nearly always a combination of factors. Among these are uncertainty about what to study and transition/adjustment problems" (p. 6).

Many researchers report that black students describe predominantly white institutions as unfriendly and unsupportive (Crossen, 1987; English, 1991; Feagin, 1992; Pounds,

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1991; Terenzini, et al., 1994)[8]. Adjustment problems faced by freshmen are typically intensified for minority students, because they also face difficulties related to racial difference such as social isolation, a lack of minority role models, and staff and administrators who do not necessarily understand their problems (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; English, 1991; Feagin, 1991).

Alienation is mentioned repeatedly as a dominating issue for blacks attempting to obtain a college degree (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Preer, 1981; Suen 1983).

Minority students, especially first-generation college students, are much more likely than their white counterparts to experience some ambivalence about the cultural transition to college (Terenzini, et al., 1994). Black students are also more likely to doubt themselves and express some concern about failing — they may require more validation or reassurance from members of the university community about their ability to succeed in college (Feagin, 1991; Terenzini, et al., 1994). This latter finding is especially ironic in light of reports by students that instructors and advisors communicated doubts about their ability to keep up with the challenges of college rather than encouraging the students or offering them extra help (Feagin, 1991; O'Brien, 1994).

While black students depend on the support of family and friends (Kraft, 1991), family members may question the value of college and peers who have not attended college can be overtly critical and belittling (Terenzini, et al., 1994). Recall that the success of non-traditional students depended mostly on their receiving "environmental support," even if their academic background was weak (Metzner & Bean, 1987).

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[8] Though many white students have a similar complaint about institutions of higher education.

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Some black students, especially those who attended either predominantly black or very integrated high schools, may experience negative racial attitudes for the first time in college, and this is typically a startling and unpleasant experience (Feagin, 1991; Kraft, 1991). Both these researchers note that students felt they needed to develop a thick skin to keep from being embarrassed or hurt both inside and out of the classroom.

Adjusting to college is a challenge for all students. Minority students, especially first-generation students, face additional hurdles which can't help but contribute to their higher attrition rate.

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CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Methodological Issues

Definitions

There are three concepts which should be defined for the purposes of this study, since

myriad definitions exist and have been utilized in various research contexts -- minority

student, dropout or departer, and institution of higher education.

First, the issue of higher education institutions must be addressed. Many of the

reviews of published research concern four-year undergraduate colleges and universities

in the U.S. Community colleges and other two-year colleges have recently garnered

substantial attention, and are especially important with regards to minority experiences in

higher education, since such a large proportion of their student populations are non-white.

However, the current project primarily concerns students who attended a large, public,

urban, four-year institution, and focuses on the issues most relevant to this student

population.

Secondly, there has always been a dilemma in persistence research regarding the

definition of departure. The limitations of most research requires that the focus remains

on students who leave the college where he/she is registered, usually the institution where

the research is being conducted. Many researchers would prefer the luxury of defining a

"dropout" as anyone who leaves the higher education system entirely and never receives a

degree from any college. Unfortunately the logistics of accurately confirming a student's

status once they leave the researcher's institution hinder the use of this definition.

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In addition, a distinction must be made between students who are involuntarily dismissed, usually for academic reasons, and those who voluntarily withdraw. Voluntary withdrawal can be complicated -- students may be seeking a more challenging environment, or simply pursuing opportunities not provided at their present situation. In addition, they may choose to do college work at a more or less selective, or more or less costly, institution. Many studies make assumptions or conjectures about the status of students who have left. Often the conclusions being drawn by the researchers assume that students have left the educational system entirely (i.e., students have failed to complete a college degree), though these students' status has rarely been determined. A particularly striking example is researchers examining attrition at community colleges — when a student fails to reenroll it is unclear whether they have quit or transferred to another, e.g., four-year, school (Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). These two behaviors have dramatically different implications for student withdrawal modeling.

The advantage of in-depth interviewing vis-a-vis this dilemma is that each student's future plans and intentions, as well as current status, can be fully determined, so that conclusions about leaving college are not confounded by students who have in fact moved on to other educational situations.

Thirdly is the question of who constitutes a "minority" student. Technically, because whites comprise the majority of the college population as well as the population of the United States, any non-white student is a member of the "minority." However, for the purposes of the present study, only African-American students were included. Because they comprise the largest minority group in college and because they are a group who are of particular interest to attrition researchers, they are the focus of this research study. The

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college experiences of other minority 0g00roups is also of interest. but are not included in the present study in order to concentrate on issues relevant to African-American students.

The Intersection of Psychological and Sociological Approaches

Stage (1989), in an examination of the state of the college student outcome literature, notes that two approaches co-exist without much meaningful synthesis. Researchers tend to either develop sociological models and collect large amounts of data which are then aggregated and used to classify students, or they use psychological theories to determine which aspects of college life have a positive impact on student development. such as their satisfaction or achievement, and so on. Stage suggests that the connections between these two approaches have remained largely unexplored.

The present research study attempts to bridge this gap in a small way. While the concepts are derived from sociological models, such as Tinto's and Tierney's, the technique. in-depth interviews, returns to the psychological level to examine students' individual experiences.

The Qualitative Contribution

The qualitative approach to research is grounded in Max Weber's concept "*verstehen*," or understanding (Crowson, 1993). Understanding is dependent upon observing and interpreting human behavior through the actor's own frame of reference and becoming acquainted with the subjective state of mind of other people. Searching for understanding is often considered to be in contrast to the central goal of positivist inquiry, which emphasizes determinable facts and generalizable cause-effect relationships.

While the information obtained via quantitative methods is powerful and valuable, qualitative procedures provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about people.

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Qualitative methods allow researchers to share in the perceptions of others and to explore

how people give meaning to their daily lives and make sense of themselves and others

(Seidman, 1998). As Berg (1995) notes: "If human beings are studied only in a

symbolically reduced, statistically aggregated fashion, there is a danger that conclusions,

though arithmetically precise, may fail to fit reality" (p. 7). Qualitative methods also

provide the opportunity to explore the process of a phenomenon rather than solely the

outcomes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Furthermore, it is a mistake to equate empirical with quantifiable. All research can be

considered scientific as long as specific and systematic methods are employed to discover

and understand social realities and how they arise, operate and impact on individuals.

"One does not conduct research only to amass data. The purpose of research is to

discover answers to questions through the application of systematic procedures" (Berg,

1995, p. 10).

Many qualitative methods have their own underlying philosophical paradigm with

assumptions that differ distinctly from quantitative methods (Berg, 1995). Techniques

such as ethnography are thorough systems of gathering information about people and can

stand alone as methods for increasing our understanding of human experience. However,

information gathered via qualitative methods can also complement quantitative data and

contribute to the overall knowledge of the phenomena being studied.

Validity and generalizability are always at issue when research is being conducted. If

research findings have external validity, then they inform us about the larger population

from which the sample was drawn. In quantitative research, the relevance of the data is

assured through random sampling. In interview studies, it is not possible to employ

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random sampling, which is a statistical concept that depends on a large number of participants. However, collecting in-depth information even from a relatively small group of people who have all experienced similar social conditions provides a powerful description of their reality (Seidman, 1998). This reality offers insight to the inquiry, even if the results cannot be assumed to apply to all persons in a similar situation. Seidman notes:

> The job of an in-depth interviewer is to go into such depth in the
>
> interviews that surface considerations of representativeness and
>
> generalizability are replaced by a compelling evocation of an individual's
>
> experience. (1998, p.44)

Seidman goes on to note that the researcher is examining the possibilities of shared experiences and interpretations of those experiences among the study participants, as well as helping the research consumer to better understand "the intricate ways in which individual lives interact with social and structural forces" (1998, p. 45).

While theory has a place in all social science research, the goal of the qualitative research process is to understand how the participants make meaning of their experience, and it is rarely appropriate for testing hypotheses in the traditional sense (Seidman, 1998). Indeed, the purpose of qualitative inquiry is typically to explore complexities of a phenomenon of which the researcher may not yet even be completely aware. For that reason, it may be efficacious for the study design to be considered "emergent" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 209). If the structure created by the research process facilitates the understanding of the participants' experiences, "it has gone a long way toward validity" (Seidman, 1998, p. 17).

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Qualitative methods are being increasingly utilized as the complexity of human

experience challenges our ability of expand our comprehension and highlights the

limitations of extant theories and explanations (Crowson, 1993).

A good example of the complementarity that qualitative methods offer exists in a

recent study of Temple University minority students (English, 1991). Students

completed a well-tested standardized instrument to measure their experiences in college

in an attempt to explore attrition issues. Forty-eight statements concerning five areas of

student life comprised the instrument. For each statement students indicated whether it

represented a major reason, a minor reason, or not a reason for their departure. Five

personal statements, two academic statements, three financial statements, three

institutional statements, and two employment statements emerged as major reasons for

students' withdrawal. However, in the interpretation of the statements, the researcher was

forced to conjecture about how these statements actually relate to students' experiences at

college. For example, one of the institutional statements that was selected as a major

reason for these students' departure was "impersonal attitudes of faculty or staff." The

researcher suggests that this result may reflect students' incongruent expectations, since

many students in the study had transferred to Temple from smaller schools. While this is

a perfectly reasonable explanation, without exploring the issue further with the students

who participated in the study, there is no way to determine the veracity of this

interpretation. Additional information collected via a qualitative approach would

explicate students' experiences and greatly improve the value of the quantitative data

collected.

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An early study of student attrition offers another example of the value of qualitative information in expanding on quantitative data. In an attempt to explore more fully students' reasons for leaving college, all departers at a large public university were interviewed by college counselors after completing a form which presented a comprehensive list of reasons for withdrawing (Demos, 1968). While a large minority of students' chose financial reasons, such as needing a job, on the self-report form, interviews indicated that students had underplayed reasons dealing with their difficulty with the academic work, their lack of motivation, and their indecision about a major. The interviews also revealed that students's reasons for leaving were typically specific rather than vague and were the result of several contributing factors. In addition, students were generally quite decisive about their decision and had usually discussed it in some depth with important family members.

Most of this interesting information would be difficult to obtain from quantitative instruments, and the study showed that the two methods actually yielded different conclusions about the students' college withdrawal decision. In fact, the data produced by the qualitative portion of this study have not generally been confirmed in the accepted attrition literature, gathered primarily by mailed surveys (which accepts students' reports of primarily financial reasons for withdrawal), suggesting that alternative data collection methods offer valuable counterpoints to conventional wisdom.

An unusual study conducted by Terenzini and his colleagues (1994) utilized focus groups at four types of educational institutions to examine the process of high school to college transition for various kinds of students. The study design allowed the researchers to explore the students' perceptions in their own words, and to determine common

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themes across various student populations. The researchers are quick to point out that their findings cannot be generalized because the sample was not drawn randomly, but their study offers unique insight into students' experiences and suggests many additional avenues of inquiry.

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

<div align="center">Setting/Sample</div>

The subjects in this study are 20 African-American students enrolled in college full-time, who returned to school after their freshmen year and 18 African-Americans who were enrolled in an institution of higher education, but who took at least one semester off after they began. All the students but three were between the ages of 18 and 23. All the participants grew up in an urban area, including Philadelphia and New York City. A complete list of participants appears in Appendix A.

The parameters guiding the number of subjects were selected for largely pragmatic reasons, though it was a reasonable expectation that adequate useful information regarding the issues being explored were obtained through this number of interviews. The intention of focused interviewing is to talk with enough subjects so that the topic is sufficiently explored. A number of interviews is rarely specified prior to commencing with a qualitative research project, rather, interviewing usually continues until nothing new is being learned and the information saturation point has been reached (Seidman, 1998). A maximum number of interviews (20 in each group) was specified at the beginning of the project for purely practical reasons, relating to the researcher's time, resources, and capacities.

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Instruments/Measurements

In-depth, focused interviews were conducted by the researcher with each subject. Interviews were conducted throughout the late fall semester of 1998 and the spring semester of 1999.

A very similar list of questions were used with both persisters and departers, though slight variation was necessary to account for the difference in their college history. Among the topics covered: Why did they decide to attend college? What do students consider to be the "costs" associated with coming to college? What are the benefits? What have been students' experiences of the college environment? What outside influences, such as family obligations and financial pressures, have affected their college attendance? What do they consider to be barriers to their persistence? What do students believe has facilitated their continued attendance in college? A complete list of the interview questions appears in Appendix B.

Some of these questions were selected to examine the concept of social integration, as conceptualized by Tinto. Additional questions were included to determine students' background, focusing largely on their academic experiences, and the encouragement and support the student has received vis a vis college attendance. Many of the questions were designed to get a sense of the pressures students experience to leave school and to examine the decision-making process of both persisters and departers. Pilot interviews were conducted with five students to help to validate and refine the questions, though few substantive changes were made. The wording of several questions was made more explicit or clarified, and several questions were added, including questions about students' employment during college and their consideration of an historically black

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college as an alternative to the school they eventually chose to attend. In the spirit of the focused interview, additional topics or issues were pursued with individual participants as they arose during the course of the interview.

Process

Students were recruited primarily through notices placed throughout Temple's campus, and in selected neighborhoods in north and west Philadelphia. Due to privacy restrictions at Temple, it was not possible to select the sample the way that had been originally planned. It had been intended to acquire a list of African-American students who had re-enrolled at Temple for their second or sophomore year and to acquire a second list of African-American students who had not re-enrolled at Temple for their second or sophomore year. Letters were to be mailed to both sets of students, and 20 students from each group were to be recruited and interviewed. In this way, several factors of interest could be somewhat controlled: students would be a similar age and their college experience could be assumed to be similar to the extent that they attended the same school. These controls were ultimately not possible, due to the recruiting technique that was actually utilized. An alternative recruiting technique was planned when permission was denied to contact students by mail: a snowball technique was to be employed. Persisters were recruited from Temple's campus (as described below) and referrals to students who had left school were solicited. Unfortunately, although referrals were requested from all persisters who were interviewed, and many of the students agreed to assist in the recruitment of departers of their acquaintance, this technique did not yield a single interview subject who had left school. Due to the much looser recruiting that was ultimately employed in order to interview the number of desired students, the age

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and schools attended by the study participants are of a much broader range than originally intended. However, because of the exploratory nature of this research, the information gathered is still considered useful, both in terms of examining these students' college experience and in terms of appraising the applicability of Tinto's model to urban African-Americans.

The recruitment of persisters consisted primarily of placing flyers (Appendix C) around Temple's campus, especially in the student center, the library, advising offices, the gym, and the African-American studies department. A classified ad (Appendix D) was also in placed in the Temple student newspaper, though this avenue was not very fruitful.

It proved very difficult to recruit a sufficient number of departers, even more than originally expected. The snowball technique was a complete failure. Although many of the persisting students agreed to assist in the recruitment of departers of their acquaintance, this did not ultimately yield a single interview subject who had left school. Once the referral method was determined to be unproductive, flyers (Appendix E) were placed in libraries and grocery stores throughout north and west Philadelphia and at the Spring Garden campus of the Community College of Philadelphia. Flyers were also sent, with permission, to several community centers for posting. Most of the flyers got no response, and there was never more than one response from any particular location. When an inadequate number of college departers were contacted through this method, flyers were placed throughout Temple's campus (Appendix F) specifying that desirable students needed to have taken at least a year off from school. While the original recruiting restrictions were relaxed with regards to age and the school attended, three

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people who responded to community advertising who were significantly over the age limit were not interviewed. Table 3-1 shows the schools attended by the students who were interviewed. It was originally the intention to interview only students who attended a four-year university, because the dynamics of community college attendance and attrition are presumed to be somewhat different, and Tinto's model has not been systematically applied to it. Six of the students in the departer group attended community college, three went on to a four-year university and three did not. The three students who attended only a community college were included in the research study for several reasons. Because the recruiting proved so difficult it was deemed impractical to exclude these students after the extensive recruiting that was required to contact them. More importantly, these students did not appear to make a distinction between a two- and a four-year college – to them, they had started college. They all intended to ultimately obtain a Bachelor's degree, and none of the three started college with the intention of stopping with their Associate's degree. Because their attitude about college seemed to be similar to their counterparts who started or continued at a four-year institution, the content of their interviews was judged to be useful for the purposes of the research study.

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Table 3-1. Institutions Attended

	Persisters	Departers
Temple	19	10
Community college	1	6
HBCU* (Lincoln, NW State, Del State)	1	2
Messiah	2	
U of Penn		1
Pitt		1
Shippensberg		1
Cabrini		1
West Chester		1
Drexel	1	
Penn State	1	
St. Joe's	1	
NYU	1	

Note. Multiple responses, does not sum to group N
* Historically Black College or University

All flyers requested that the interested student contact the researcher by telephone. When contact was made, students were asked three screening questions, to ensure that they fit the study criteria: age, race, and the type of area they grew up in (to insure they came from an urban area). The limitations of the study were explained to students who were eliminated from the study, and they were thanked for their time, and interest. These students were offered a copy of the final report, as a token of gratitude for their willingness to participate.

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Before the interview began, each respondent signed the IRB-approved consent form (Appendix G), which explained that their participation was voluntary, and outlined the measures that were taken to protect the data and their anonymity, if they choose to remain anonymous. Each subject then filled out a "biographical" information form that contained questions about themselves and their immediate family (Appendix H), and a brief "academic" information form, containing questions about their academic background, such as high school GPA and major in college (Appendix I). This information was used to create a profile of the research subjects.

All interviews were conducted by the researcher. All interviews were tape recorded and generally lasted about one and one quarter hour, depending on the subject's volubility. All subjects had the opportunity to ask questions prior to, during, and after the interview.

Only the students' first names are used in the final report; students' family names do not appear anywhere in the report. Participants were offered the opportunity to select a pseudonym for use in the transcripts and final report, if they would prefer that their own name not be used. Two of the 38 students preferred to use a pseudonym.

Participants were compensated for their time with $10 or $15 in cash at the time that the interview was conducted. The departers were offered the larger incentive, based on the expectation that they would be less likely to participate for the lower sum. All participants were offered their own copy of the final report. About half the research subjects requested a copy of the report. The receipts that students signed appear in Appendix J and K.

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Design

A phenomenological qualitative design was chosen deliberately to explore a particular, if limited, aspect of this issue in depth. Much of the extant research in this area has been quantitative, attempting to construct prediction equations that will allow university administrators to determine at entry which students are likely to leave. Students' voices, the presentation of their own experiences and reactions, has been noticeably absent.

Analysis

Standard content analysis techniques for interpreting qualitative data were utilized, primarily determining themes present across students' responses. Content analysis is a procedure for drawing inferences by systematically and objectively identifying the characteristics of a verbal or written communication (Holsti, 1968). Both the manifest, or overt, and latent, or underlying, content of the communication can be examined via this method. Using content analysis researchers create coding schemes in order to formulate constructs that add depth to the interpretation as well as report the frequency of a given concept and determine its magnitude in the observations (Berg, 1995). However, preserving students' perspectives in the presentation of the information contributes significantly to understanding and interpreting their experiences.

For the current research project, a coding form was created for each question topic. These forms contained the names of all participants. The comments made by each participant relevant to the topic were recorded on the form. The completed form was then examined for emerging themes. An example of a coding form appears in Appendix L.

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The presentation of the data includes themes that have emerged from the data, the frequency that they were cited, and significance or importance of these issues for the students. The coding scheme reflects the major concerns of the study -- what background characteristics or activities have influenced students to attend, remain in, or leave college; what obligations outside the university environment are impacting students' college experience; and what elements of the college environment have positively or negatively influenced student persistence or attrition.

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CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

Thirty-eight students were interviewed for this study, 20 students who have continued

in college without a break and 18 students who have taken a break from college for at

least one semester, though most were out for at least one year. Eleven of the departers

were currently in college at the time they were interviewed (during the spring semester,

1999), three more were planning to start college again in the fall, and one had enrolled in

a vocational program.

This chapter presents the information that was collected on these students during the

extensive interviews with them. The following chapter (Chapter 5) will relate the

information to the research questions and to Tinto's model of college attrition.

Two major sections comprise this chapter. The first is a presentation of the students'

background or demographic information, which is being called a profile of the students.

The other section presents information on the students' college experiences. This second

section has three subsections: considering college, attending college, and leaving college.

Between these two sections the reader is strongly encouraged to read about each of the

interview subjects: a summary of each interview, three or four paragraphs in length, has

been placed in an appendix. A brief summary of the chapter highlights appears

immediately after this introduction.

Due partly to the small sample size, and partly to the obvious over-representation of

certain kinds of students (e.g., females, dorm dwellers, and students who have returned to

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college), this sample is not assumed to be representative of the complete population of urban African-American college persisters and departers.

The information in this chapter is presented and discussed as raw numbers in deference to the limited size of the sample. The presentation of data in tables is for comparison purposes only and no statistical evaluation or significance is implied. The sample size is considered large enough to make meaningful comparisons, but not large enough to draw generalizable conclusions, therefore all results are considered suggestive.

Summary

These two groups of students (persisters and departers) seem to have more in common than they have differences. Some students in each group came from single parent families and some students in each group were the first in their families to go to college. Some students in each group had wanted to go to a black college if they could have afforded it, and some students in each group had rejected black colleges because they wanted a diverse college environment. More than half the students in each group had an SAT score under 1000. Some students in each group participated in organized campus activities and some students in each group were not involved in their colleges in that way. Some students in each group struggled with feeling under-prepared for college level work and with alienation once at college. Despite these similarities, a few key differences will be discernable in the chapter that follows: many more of the persisters than the departers claimed that they "always knew" that they would go to college, more persisters than departers reported that their parent(s) had strongly encouraged them to go to college, more persisters than departers are receiving substantial financial help from a parent or parents in order to pay their college expenses, more persisters than departers

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plan to continue with their education after college, and more persisters than departers said that they are comfortable approaching a professor for help. Several departers and none of the persisters had considered taking time off from school prior to attending college, that is, not proceeding to college directly from high school. More persisters reported having a B average in college, while more departers reported having a C+ average. Several departers, and none of the persisters, talked about how coming to college had led them to view the world as more than just their neighborhood, while several of the persisters, and none of the departers, said that their college experience hadn't changed them.

Profile of Participants

The following section presents what is considered background information on the students who were interviewed. This includes the educational background of their parents and siblings, as well as details like their own gender and age.

Gender

Table 4-1 indicates that males comprise a larger proportion of the departers group (almost half) than the persisters group (about one-quarter). The gender composition of the study sample seems to reflect the national trend of more African-American males than females dropping out of college. As tempting as it is to draw conclusions from this figure, the fact that the sample is not considered representative makes such an exercise invalid -- the higher proportion of males in the departers group could be coincidence, or could indicate something about the type of people who respond to solicitations for research subjects.

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Table 4-1. Gender

	Persisters	Departers
Male	4	8
Female	16	10

Age

Table 4-2 shows that the departers group is slightly older than the persisters. This is due largely to the recruiting restriction in the persisters group – sophomores only. With the departers, who were mostly recruited after the persisters and were more difficult to obtain, the age restriction was relaxed, so that the range of ages is somewhat broader.

Table 4-2. Age

	Persisters	Departers
18	2	0
19	10	0
20	7	3
21	0	2
22	1	5
23	0	5
24+	0	3
mean	19	21
median	19	22

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Table 4-3 presents some differences in the educational backgrounds of these two groups. However, the differences are not especially systematic. Overall, more departers went to public and vo-tech high schools than their persisting counterparts. However, because of the sample size, it is probably inappropriate to draw strong conclusions from these figures. The boarding schools were attended by two male departers, one was a school for the children of single parents (Girard College) and one was a school for troubled boys (Glen Mills).

Table 4-3. Type of High School Attended

	Persisters	Departers
Public	4	7
Magnet*	9	6
Catholic	4	0
Private (received scholarship)	1	0
Vo-Tech	0	3
Boarding	0	2
Bussed to suburban schools	2	0

* public schools with specialized programs

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In general, the high school choices made by these students had several distinct derivations. Several students had been recognized early as having scholar potential and they had been steered into special programs or schools. Others had been pressured by parents to go to college preparatory programs, not always of their own choosing. Some had attended their neighborhood schools without any attempt to leverage their high school experience. Others were not considering college at the time they choose their high school, so that had not been a factor in the choice. Two students had been placed into programs specifically designed for troubled students, and had developed college ambitions there.

It is worth noting that several students (four persisters and three departers) went to more than one high school, though for a variety of reasons. One persister and one departer moved, and enrolled in the school closer to their new home. One persister and one departer changed schools to participate in a magnet program (both wanted the "Health Academy" program). One persister and one departer, both males, were switched to smaller, specialized schools because they were perceived to be "headed for trouble." The fourth persister changed for her senior year to a school which she and her mother believed would improve her college prospects. Table 4-3 reports the type of school attended during students' senior year.

<div align="center">SAT Scores</div>

Table 4-4 shows that the students in the two groups did not differ noticeably in their SAT scores. In addition, the median score of both groups is below the admission criterion for Temple (1000), though not all students attended Temple. Seven of the

<div align="center">54</div>

departers did not report an SAT score; several said that they did not take the test because they went directly to community college, which does not require it.

Table 4-4. SAT Scores

	Persisters	Departers
mean	1020*	960
median	970	960

*one student had a score of 1670

College Grade Point Average

Table 4-5 indicates that the mean college GPAs of the two groups of students did not differ markedly, however, more of the departers have (or had) a C+ average, while more persisters have a B average. Three departers did not provide their grade point average.

Table 4-5. Grade Point Average

	Persisters	Departers
mean	2.8	2.6
median	2.8	2.7
B+ (3.4 - 3.5)	2	1
B (2.9 - 3.3)	8	3
C+ (2.4 - 2.8)	5	9
C (1.9 - 2.3)	5	2
Not reported	0	3

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Table 4-6 indicates that a larger proportion of students in the persisters group (almost three-quarters) reported that at least one parent had attended or graduated from college as compared to the departers group (about half). However, due to the small sample size, it is probably not wise to draw a strong conclusion about this factor.

Table 4-6. Parents' Education

	Persisters	Departers
No college	4	3
At least one parent has some vo-tech training	2	4
At least one parent has some college	11	6
At least one parent graduated from college	3	5

Sibling Education

The two groups did not differ dramatically in the educational background of their siblings, as shown in Table 4-7. A surprising difference is that a large number of the students (five) in the persisters group were only children, while no one in the departers group was. In addition, a striking number of the persisters (six) were the oldest child in their family, while only one of the departers was (meaning that generally their siblings had not yet reached the age to attend college, even if they planned to). This is an

intriguing result, but if it has meaning, it is beyond the perception of the researcher to comprehend. No information about siblings was collected from three of the students in the departers group.

Table 4-7. Sibling Education

	Persisters	Departers
No college	2	5
At least one sibling has some college	5	5
At least one sibling graduated from college	2	4
Oldest child in the family	6	1
Only child in the family	5	0
No information available	0	3

Financial Assistance Provided by Parents

Probably the most significant difference between the students in these two groups can be seen in Table 4-8, which presents their source of financial assistance. About half the students in the persisters group are relying on their parents to pay for college, while a similar proportion of the departers group are receiving no financial assistance from their family. This implies that the departers were generally in a more precarious financial situation, which may very well have affected their ability to stay in college. This result is

suggestive only -- students' reasons for leaving college were explicitly solicited and will be discussed later.

Three of the persisters and none of the departers said that their parents had taken out "parent loans" to help finance college. Two persisters and only one departer mentioned that their parents had been saving in order to help them pay for college expenses. Two persisters and two departers remarked that their parents had wanted to be able to help out more than they ended up being able to.

Table 4-8. Financial Assistance Provided by Parents

	Persisters	Departers
Major assistance from parents	11	1
Minor assistance from parents (usually "spending money")	7	5
Self or financial aid only	2	12

Living Arrangement During First Year of College

There does not appear to be any systematic difference in the initial living arrangements of these two groups, as shown in Table 4-9. However, the recruiting technique probably favored campus residents, and it is unwise to place too much meaning on these figures. It is worth noting that seven of the 14 dorm residents in the persisters

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group came from out of state and six of the 11 dorm residents in the departers group went away to college.

Table 4-9. Living Arrangement During First Year of College

	Persisters	Departers
Dormitory	14	11
At home	5	4
Off-campus	1	3

Many of the students changed their living arrangement during their college career. Two persisters and two departers started living at home after transferring to a different college where they had lived in the dorm, while two departers moved from the dorm to off campus after the transfer. Two persisters and two departers left the dorm to move home, three persisters and three departers left the dorm to move off campus, and one persister moved onto campus from home, all while staying at their original school. Three persisters and one departer said they would really prefer to live in their own off campus apartment, if they could afford it. Only one student, a persister, had moved back to the dorm after living at home, because she missed the freedom of dorm life.

Employment During College

Table 4-10 shows that many of the students in both groups held a job while at college. Many more of the persisters had a job on campus, while almost all of the departers were

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working off-campus; at least two were working full-time while going to school. Four persisters, but none of the departers, did not hold a job while they were students.

Table 4-10. Employment During College

	Persisters	Departers
Off-campus	4	16
On-campus	10	1
Both	2	1
Not working	4	0

Many of the students in both groups seemed to be able to juggle school and work with ease, but some of the students made comments about the difficulty of holding a job: "I work nights and it pays well, but it makes it hard to study," and "You can tell the difference between the students who have to work and the ones who don't."

Interview Summaries

Appendix M contains summaries of the interviews conducted with the 38 study participants, each approximately half a page long. It is important to the understanding of the results of this research to be familiar with the circumstances of the students who were interviewed. The summaries were moved to an appendix because they took up so much space, however, interested readers are encouraged to review these summaries and become acquainted with the study participants.

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Considering College

This section presents information about the students' perceptions prior to attending college. This includes their reasons for attending college, their choice of college, and their financial considerations regarding college.

Main Reason for Attending College

Table 4-11 shows perhaps the most striking difference between these two groups: the majority of persisters said that their main reason for going to college was their lifelong understanding that they would go, an idea that was usually communicated by their parent(s), while a much smaller number of the departing students offered this reason. The encouragement of their teachers or counselors in high school, other relatives, such as an aunt or grandmother, or peers was the reason that half of the departers went to college, as opposed to just three of the students in the persisters group. Two of the departers and one of the persisters admitted that a parent had virtually insisted that they go to college.

Five of the departers also said that they had never really thought about going to college until the very end of high school. They were usually encouraged by a high school counselor or friends to consider going to college. Three of the five went to community college, partly because they didn't think they could "make it" at a four year college and partly because they hadn't really prepared to go (for example, taken the SAT and filled out college applications).

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Table 4-11. Main Reason for Attending College

	Persisters	Departers
Always knew they'd go	13	5
Encouraged by high school teacher or counselor	1	4
Encouraged by relatives (e.g.. aunt or grandmother)	2	4
Self-motivated: make something of their life	3	2
Parent(s) insisted	1	2
Encouraged by friends	0	1

It is worth noting that several students in each group had very lofty rationales for their college ambitions. They wanted to be role models and wanted to "make a difference" -- make a contribution to their communities through educating themselves. One persister said she wanted to "bring her race up." and another said she wants to "fix what doesn't work." A departer commented, "I want to achieve something higher in life; life is about growth."

Choice of College

It is difficult to characterize the process by which students chose the colleges that they attended, though the majority of students in each group seriously considered more than one school. The decision process of many students seemed less focused than one might expect, especially considering the many local and regional options these students enjoyed, and the apparent extensive promotion that their high schools offered -- many

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went to high schools that strongly encouraged students to attend college and all the college bound students at these schools received advising about college options. Many high schools had college recruiting fairs, and some schools offered college tours. As shown in Table 4-12, many more persisters made their original college choice based on a desire to move away from home, while more departers deliberately chose a school that allowed them to be close to their family (though this result could very well be linked to the type of students who chose to participate in the study). Several students in each group chose the best school they could go to, that is, they believed it was better than the other schools they were considering or were accepted to. Departers were more likely than persisters to make a choice based on financial considerations (they received a scholarship or could afford the school). Three of the students in the departers group went to community college because of their last minute decision to attend college.

Table 4-12. Main Reason for Choice of College

	Persisters	Departers
Away from home	8	1
Close to home	3	4
Impressed by school/ School's reputation	4	3
Recommended by others	3	2
Received scholarship	1	3
Affordable	1	2
Last minute decision	0	3
(Considered more than one school)	14	12

Although it may not have been the primary reason for their college choice, financial considerations were relevant to many of the students. Many eliminated top choices because they couldn't afford to attend, and several transferred from schools they initially attended because the financial strain was too great. Many of these students express concern about their ability to pay for the remainder of their college years, and several are worried about being able to repay student loans. It's possible that more than one of the students interviewed will not actually obtain their degree due to financial limitations.

Considering a Black College

The salience of a black college to these students seemed to depend largely on the emphasis this option received at the students' high schools. Many of the students did not seriously consider a black school, either because they did not want a homogeneous college environment (saying things like, "the real world isn't like that") or because they perceived black colleges as academically inferior. Those who did consider black colleges generally chose not to attend them for financial reasons, noting that the good schools, like Howard and Clark, tend to be expensive and offer minimal financial aid. Several students expressed regret about their choice, believing that their friends who chose black colleges had more positive experiences than they had in predominantly white colleges. One persister and two departers started at local black colleges.

Family Support

Another striking element of both these sets of students' intentions regarding college was the strong encouragement they received from parents or other family members, as seen in Table 4-13. Indeed, one persister and two departers mentioned that a parent or parents had insisted that they attend college. And some of the students commented that

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they could not let their parents or family members down by not finishing their schooling: "I have to finish, for my family," and "I want to thank my mom (for helping me) and be able to take care of her." Almost no one said their family was anything other than encouraging of their college ambitions, though a couple of students admitted that a parent expressed concern about the financial burden and a couple acknowledged that a parent was disinterested in their college plans. A couple of students in both groups remarked that family members were supportive, but couldn't really "relate" to the student's college experience, because they had never been to college themselves.

Several students in both groups also mentioned that parents wanted them to do better than they had done, and they believed that finishing college was key to improving their situation. "My parents said it's harder to get what you want without going to college" and "My parents think they would have made more money if they'd finished college." Two persisters mentioned that a parent encouraged them by cautioning them not to make the same mistake that they did -- leaving college before graduating.

A number of the students mentioned the support and encouragement of other family members, such as aunts, grandparents, and older siblings: "My aunt is the only person I know who went to college and she helped me a lot to with the paperwork and everything," "My cousin was an inspiration," "My brother was an inspiration," "My uncle inspired me to make something of myself," and "My grandmother and uncle were very encouraging."

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Table 4-13. Factors Related to Family "Moral" Support

	Persisters	Departers
Strong parental encouragement	16	11
Support of other relatives (e.g., aunt)	5	4

Note. Multiple responses; does not sum to group N

Attending College

This section presents information about the students' experiences in college. This includes their expectations of college, their involvement in college, and their opinions about their college experience.

Expectations About College

Academics

The opinions about whether college was what these students expected differed quite a bit. A few said it wasn't as hard as they expected (two persisters and three departers), while others were surprised by how demanding college was (three persisters and three departers). Many struggled with time management. Three of the departers said that college was pretty much exactly what they had expected and two of the persisters said that they hadn't really expected anything. Two persisters and one departer commented that it was "just school" and they hadn't really expected that much from it.

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Social Life

Reactions to the social atmosphere were very mixed. This can partly be attributed to the different schools that these students attended. Students' varying expectations and preferences also account for some of the variation. Some students complained that college was too much like high school, where people formed cliques and were overly concerned with appearances. Others were very involved in campus activities and clearly enjoyed the experience they had or were having. Students from both groups specifically mentioned the television show "A Different World" as their source of information on college life, and they always commented that college was not like the place they had seen depicted on the show.

Seven persisters and 11 departers were commuting or had commuted to school, either from home or their own apartment, and generally seemed satisfied with that arrangement. Only one student, a departer, thought she was missing out by not living on campus. However, two students, one persister and one departer, remarked that they were glad to be living on campus because they would miss out if they were just commuting to school.

Paying for College

Almost all of these students depended on financial aid of some kind, and frequently multiple types, to finance their college education, even if their parents were helping them. Several students in each group complained about the difficulties of obtaining and keeping financial aid, and the bureaucracy involved in maintaining their aid. Four persisters and three departers expressed worry about repaying loans. Two persisters currently owe money to their university, which they said is "stressful." Two persisters mentioned that they worry about the expense and question if "this is worth the money." One persister

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and one departer, both male, mentioned that they are frustrated by the knowledge that being in school means they aren't earning money: "The lure of money is distracting."

Table 4-14 presents all the sources that these students are using, or used, to finance their education.

Table 4-14. Paying for College

	Persisters	Departers
Job for school expenses	11	13
Loans	8	7
Financial aid (unspecified)	8	6
Scholarships	4	4
Grants	2	3
Major assistance from parents	11	1
Minor assistance from parents	7	5

Note. Multiple responses; does not sum to group N

Campus Involvement

The two groups of students did not differ noticeably in the amount of their involvement in campus activities while in school: eight out of 20 persisters and seven out of 18 departers reported some active participation in a campus organization or regular attendance at organized campus activities such as (non-course) lectures or sports events. Several students reported being members of sororities, or political, religious, or music-

oriented student organizations and several students were actively involved in programs presented in their dormitories.

Two persisters and two departers commented that they were not outgoing people and did not really attempt to make friends or be involved in campus life. Two persisters and one departer remarked that they had friends outside of school that they preferred to hang out with. Two persisters said they were too busy with activities in their major department to get involved with social activities. One persister and three departers said that they wanted to be more involved. Four persisters and two departers said that they enjoyed their campus experience and the friends that they had made, but they had no interest in joining a club or other organized campus activity.

Dormitory Life

Students differed quite a bit in their assessment of dormitory life. Though living on campus is generally considered an advantage, both for convenience and campus involvement, some students did not enjoy their dormitory experience. Eight persisters and four departers said they were satisfied living in the dormitory, but only four persisters and one departer reported that their dormitory experience was really positive. Two of the departers reported feeling isolated in the dorms and one persister remarked that she had wanted to live in the dorms but her impression was that dorm residents were lonely. Three persisters and two departers commented that they had frustrations with their dormitory roommates, and the departers both remarked that their roommate trouble impaired their effectiveness as students. One persister and one departer found the dorms too social an environment, which distracted them from their studies. Only one student, a departer, felt that she was missing out on campus life by not living in the dorm.

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<u>Study Habits</u>

When asked if they were good students, one persister and eight departers said yes, even though some of these students had a marginal record of academic success. Three persisters and two departers said they thought they were good students until they started college, where the work was more challenging. Two persisters and two departers felt unprepared for college level work, while two persisters said that college was easy. Three persisters and one departer said they could be good students, if they stay focused, while two persisters reported that their grades did not reflect their hard work. Two of the departers reported that others had told them that they were good students, though they admitted that this was more true when they were younger. Two persisters and two departers did not really think that they were good students.

When asked about their study habits, four persisters and two departers confessed that they could have done better in school than they had done, if they had applied themselves more. Three persisters and one departer said they improved their study habits after they came to college, while three persisters and three departers made comments about the need to improve their study habits. Only one persister said she really focused on her school work and studied hard, while three departers made similar remarks. Four persisters thought they would do better if their classes were more challenging. Another persister said she would do better in smaller classes.

<u>Use of Campus Resources</u>

One of the most distressing findings in this study, though it is not an explicit element in Tinto's model, is shown in Table 4-15: many students in both groups eschewed the use of campus academic assistance. An alarming number of students in both groups said

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that they believed they could, and perhaps thought they should, be able to succeed on the basis of their own effort, without asking for help. These students made comments such as "I didn't want to look stupid," and "I thought I could do it on my own." Most of these students never used any campus tutoring services, even those who had experienced serious academic difficulty, though more departers than persisters reported using these services, while persisters were more willing to approach teachers for help. Several students said that they would talk to a friend rather than a professor or a tutor.

Table 4-15. Use of Campus Resources

	Persisters	Departers
Preferred to depend on self	3	4
Would seek teacher's help	10	3
Used campus tutoring	2	5

Note. Multiple responses; does not sum to group N

Three of the students (two departers and one persister) mentioned that they had attended a summer academic assistance program. It is probable that other students attended such programs, but this question was not explicitly asked during the interviews.

Alienation

Probably the most poignant element of the interviews was the statements students made regarding their experiences of alienation at college. Some students clearly did not expect to feel so disaffected at an institution of higher education, though their expectations could very well have been unrealistic, especially students who chose schools

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with very minimal minority representation, such as West Chester and Saint Joseph's. It's important to note that the students who were interviewed had left those schools and therefore their comments are not necessarily representative of all black students who attend predominantly white schools.

Whether their expectations were realistic or not, these students used phrases like "culture shock" to describe their experience of the college environment. One student commented that he felt terribly discouraged because he couldn't find anyone to study with at his (essentially all-white) school. Another student remarked that there was no comfort to be found in the small black community at the college he attended. Instead he found the atmosphere competitive and unsupportive. He noted that he couldn't afford to go home on weekends, the way other students could, and that contributed to his feeling isolated and powerless. Another student commented that it was difficult to discuss issues of race in her classes, because there were so few blacks and no one could relate to her perspective. Another student remarked that she had expected "educated" (read upper class) white students to be more open-minded and nice. Instead she was amazed at how uninformed her fellow students were. From her description, it is clear that the starting point of their interactions with her were their unquestioning acceptance of portrayals in the popular media of blacks and urban life, which were negative and stereotypical. On the other hand, her choice of the school and her expectations about the students that would be there was probably also based on what she had seen of upper class whites on T.V. and in other media. She said the experience "destroyed" her, but like most of the other students, she also remarked that it was a learning experience that she was glad that she had. These students made comments like, "I was so naive." and "It forced me to see

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that the world caters to whites." and "It changed me for the good – now I know how to deal with people in power and how to empower myself."

The literature on college attendance by low income students had lead to the expectation that students may have faced a substantial amount of discouragement from their own peers or family members. This was much less the case than had been anticipated. Furthermore, of the relatively few students who reported facing discouraging attitudes, the departers did not encounter this to any greater degree than did persisters. One persister and one departer remarked that friends who did not attend college accused them of thinking themselves better than them: "You're getting above yourself." One persister and one departer commented that friends thought college was unnecessary: "College is a waste of time." and "You don't need to go." A departer eventually left school at the urging of her boyfriend, who thought she should devote her time to him. A persister said that her high school counselor attempted to dissuade her from her college choice, implying that she was setting her sights too high. Another also reported a discouraging encounter with a counselor, who asked him "Why are you bothering to go (to college)?"

<u>How College Changed Them</u>

As Table 4-16 shows, a major response to the question "how has college changed you" had to do with "opening their minds" or "making their world bigger." Other factors mentioned were becoming more independent or becoming more mature. Several departers, but none of the persisters, talked about how coming to college had led them to view the world as more than just their neighborhood, raising their expectations about what they could do with their lives, what the world had to offer, and who they should

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associate with. Several of the persisters, but none of the departers, said that their college

experience hadn't changed them at all. One persister and two departers did not provide a

clear answer to this question.

Table 4-16. Main Way College Changed Them

	Persisters	Departers
"Opened my mind"	6	4
No change	4	0
Became more well-rounded	4	0
Learned to deal with people	3	4
Became more mature	1	2
Became more independent	1	2
"Think above the neighborhood"	0	4

Perceptions of Temple

(The following includes only the opinions of students who attended Temple: 19 of

the persisters and 10 of the departers.) Opinions about Temple varied quite a bit.

depending partly on where students came from, though the diversity of the school was

commented on by virtually everyone, and has long been considered one of Temple's best

qualities. Students who had transferred from schools with minimal minority

representation, such as Shippensberg, often made the most positive comments about

Temple's atmosphere.

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The nine students who came to Temple from out of town (seven persisters and two departers) virtually all said the same thing – that they couldn't believe how poverty-stricken the surrounding neighborhood was, even though six of these students came from New York City.

Students who transferred to Temple from smaller schools generally commented on how large and impersonal the school is, though some local students made similar remarks.

Faculty

It would seem that most of the students found Temple professors accessible and helpful, though many of the students who make these remark noted that they are assertive and seek teachers out. Some of the students were more critical of Temple teachers, saying some are boring or ineffective and some don't speak English well enough.

Advising

The students seem about evenly split with being satisfied with their advisor and being disgusted with Temple's advising in general or their advisor in particular. Several students commented that they would have benefitted from more guidance, especially in their first year at school. The most vociferous complaints about Temple regarded the financial aid office, but advising was certainly second, for those who had complaints.

Transferring to Temple

Eight of the persisters and four of the departers transferred to Temple from some other school. When asked about the transfer process, five said that Temple did not do enough to make the process smooth (one persister and all four of the departers). Most of the students did not feel that they received adequate assistance from Temple during their

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transfer. Most said that they received very little information about how to get around

campus and how to find the offices that could help them. None of the students felt really

welcomed to Temple, felt that Temple valued their presence, or that Temple appreciated

their decision to attend. One of the departers who took time off from Temple and

returned later also commented that Temple made the process of coming back difficult,

much more so than she would have expected.

Leaving College

This section presents information about the students' departure from college. This

includes their reasons for leaving college, and reasons for returning to college.

Reasons for Leaving or Changing College

In addition to the departers, who all left college for at least one semester, eight of the

persisters also transferred from their originally chosen college, though none had a gap in

their career. Table 4-17 lists the schools that persisters attended prior to Temple. Two

persisters transferred from community colleges, where they started, because they were not

challenged by the work there.

As shown in Table 4-18, the reasons that these students left school varied quite a bit.

The most common reason given by departers can be summarized as "distraction." This

includes students who did poorly in school because they were overly involved in campus

activities and did not attend to their school work, and students who were distracted by

jobs or other off-campus pursuits. Four of the female departers left college because they

got pregnant and had a baby. Many of the other students who were interviewed reported

that they knew girls who had dropped out of school, permanently or temporarily, because

they had a baby. One of the departers said that finding adequate acceptable child care

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was the primary barrier to her college persistence and that child care provided by the college would have made it possible for her to stay and finish.

Table 4-17. Persisters' Previous College Attendance

Student	School prior to Temple
Blair	Northwest State (HBCU)
Edward	Drexel
Lanesha	Penn State
Robert	Community
Shaneka	Messiah
Tahera	St Joe's
Taneema	Community
Tasha	Messiah

Financial considerations were reported by several students in each group. This includes students who ran out of scholarship money and students who just found the cost of the school they chose to be too much of a financial burden.

Several students in each group also reported that they didn't fit into the school that they originally chose (invariably virtually all-white schools such as Messiah College, Shippensberg and Penn State): "I was bored, the school was so large and impersonal," "It just didn't work out," and "I felt so out of place, no one understood me."

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Table 4-18. Main Reason for Leaving or Changing College

	Persisters	Departers
Distracted by other activities		5
Had a baby		4
Financial considerations	2	3
Felt alienated at school	4	2
Depressed		2
Family obligation		1
"Burned out"		1
Not academically challenging	2	

Returning to College

Eleven of the departers had re-enrolled in college at the time of the interview (during the spring semester, 1999) and three more said that they would be starting college again in the fall. One departer was enrolled in a vocational program. Table 4-19 presents the college attendance of the departing students. Most of the students were attempting college again because they believed their degree was necessary for their career and lifestyle goals. They said things like, "I knew my future depended on getting my degree" and "It's harder to get what you want without a college degree," and "Once I have my degree I'll have more options." Several also communicated that getting their degree was a goal that they were committed to, just for the satisfaction of finishing, for example: "School is a part of my life, I've never been tempted not to finish." Four of the students said that being out of college made them realize how narrow their options were without getting the degree: "I saw what's out there if you don't finish" and "There was nothing

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for me to fall back on." At least five of the students had experienced serious financial difficulties, and two of those students were transferring to less expensive schools while the others had worked to save the money that they would need. One student had left only because of a family obligation and had started back as soon as she was able.

Table 4-19. Departers' College Attendance

Student	School
Al'ha-leem	Lincoln (HBCU), Berean Inst (Voc)*
Brian	Pitt, Temple*
Calvin	Penn (graduated)
Deirdre	Delaware State (HBCU)
Devona	Community
Edward	Community
Ernesto	Temple*
Glenda	Temple*
Lakiesha	Temple*
Lanie	Community, Temple*
Leandra	Community
Marcus	Shippensberg, Community*
Michael	Cabrini, Temple*
Nena	Temple*
Nija	Temple*
Rachelle	Community, Temple*
Sias	West Chester
Stephen	Temple

* currently in school

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Reason for Participating in the Interview

Each of the participants were paid for their time. The recruiting emphasized this payment, under the assumption that payment would be necessary to gain people's cooperation. However, in light of the difficulty in recruiting students, a question about their reason for participating was added to the interview. Although the early interviews did not include this question, students who were asked seemed to respond as much out of an interest in the study as a desire to earn a little money. This seemed especially true in the case of departers. Other reasons articulated by students included a desire to help with the research and a desire to talk about their experiences. One student commented that talking helps relieve the pressures associated with attending school and this was probably true for other students, even if they did not explicitly state it as a reason for their participation. A couple of students remarked that they were drawn to the fact that the project focused on African-American experiences. Two departers hoped that their participation in the research study might give them the boost they needed to get themselves back in school.

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CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The ambitions of the present research project were very modest — to explore the background and college experiences of urban African-American students, and to examine whether these experiences are captured by Tinto's model of college attrition, especially the relevance of the concept of social integration. The sample was kept relatively small so that each student could be interviewed in depth and their unique experiences investigated as fully as possible. The purpose of this study was also to investigate the applicability of Tinto's model, and the way it has been operationalized, to this specified student population, with particular attention to the relevance of social integration as a mediating factor in student attrition.

The research questions stated in Chapter 1 are a distilled version of the issues that Tinto's model raises vis a vis the students that are the focus of the current research project, that is, urban African-Americans.

1. What reasons do low-income, first generation, African-American students give for departing college? What reasons do similarly at-risk students give for staying in college?

2. How do low-income, first generation, African-American students perceive the social environment of the university? What activities and interactions have a positive influence on their college experience? What activities and interactions are problematic or create barriers for these students?

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3. How do outside influences, such as family obligations, affect low-income, first generation, African-American students' commitment to college? Do these types of obligations impact differently on students who stay in college and those who leave?

Summary of Results

This section is composed of a brief summary of primarily demographic information about the study participants, followed by highlights of the research results consisting of a comparison of the two groups.

Participant Profile

Thirty-eight students were interviewed for this study, 20 students who have continued in college without a break and 18 students who have taken a break from college for at least one semester, though most were out for at least one year. Four males and 16 females comprised the persisters group while eight males and 10 females comprised the departers. The mean age of the persisters was 19 while the mean age of the departers was 21. About a third of the students in each group attended "magnet" high schools (nine persisters and six departers). The median SAT score was 970 for the persisters and 960 for the departers. The median GPA was 2.8 for the persisters and 2.7 for the departers. More than half the students in each group lived in the dorm during their first year of college (14 persisters and 11 departers). Virtually all the students were working while attending college, either off or on campus; only four persisters did not have a job. Virtually all the students depended on financial aid of some kind, though more persisters than departers were receiving substantial financial assistance from parents.

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The reasons given by departers for leaving college varied, but the most common reason can be summarized as "distraction." This includes students who did poorly in school because they were overly involved in campus activities and did not attend to their school work, and students who were distracted by jobs or other off-campus pursuits. Four of the female students left college because they got pregnant and had a baby. Financial considerations and feeling alienated or depressed were also reasons revealed.

Comparison of Participants

In general, persisters and departers seem to have more in common than they have differences. For example, some students in each group came from single parent families and some students in each group were the first in their families to go to college. Some students in each group participated in organized campus activities and some students in each group were not involved in their colleges in that way. Some students in each group struggled with feeling under-prepared for college level work and with alienation once at college.

Despite these similarities, a few key differences are discernable: many more of the persisters than the departers claimed that they "always knew" that they would go to college, more persisters than departers reported that their parent(s) had strongly encouraged them to go to college, more persisters than departers received substantial financial help from a parent or parents in order to pay their college expenses, more persisters than departers plan to continue with their education after college, and more persisters than departers said that they are comfortable approaching a professor for help. Several departers and none of the persisters had considered taking time off from school prior to attending college, that is, not proceeding to college directly from high school.

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Theoretical Implications

Tinto's model of college persistence diagrams a process of interactions between the individual and the systems of the college, as measured by students' social and academic integration. These processes continually modify students' goals and commitments, which in turn leads to persistence or departure. It is the process of becoming integrated which most affects students' continuance in college. For example, insufficient social integration is most likely to lead to voluntary withdrawal, while insufficient academic integration is more likely to lead to dismissal. Pascarella, Terenzini and their colleagues empirically examined Tinto's model repeatedly in order to develop and test a multidimensional instrument to assess the components of Tinto's model, and to determine the validity of this instrument by attempting to accurately identify freshmen who leave and stay in college. These empirical tests found that social integration was a key variable in predicting which students persisted in college, however this result was more pronounced with women and with residential students.

The present research study found some support for Tinto's model, especially his original conceptualization, which places equal emphasis on initial commitment and the processes of integration. However, the results of the current study do not support the centrality of social integration in predicting college persistence for urban African-American students.

Social Integration

The element in Tinto's model of college persistence which has been identified as the most influential in student retention is social integration. In the many quantitative analyses of students' persistence, this factor is the one considered the most predictive of

student retention. The centrality of this component is so widely accepted as to be virtually the *sine qua non* of student persistence (see, for example, Lang, 1991; Stage, 1990; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). The researcher's suspicion that Tinto's model did not sufficiently capture the experiences of urban blacks was the primary purpose behind this research project.

The two groups of students interviewed for the present study do not differ noticeably in the amount of their involvement on campus, in fact, a slightly larger proportion of students who left college reported that they were actively involved in campus activities while in school (7 out of 18), as compared to the students who have persisted in college (6 out of 20). In addition, more than half the students in both groups lived in the dorms for at least part of the time they were in college (14 of the persisters and 10 of the departers). These two characteristics, dorm living and involvement in campus activities, are two of the major operationalizations of "social integration" in the extensive quantitative analyses of Tinto's model, conducted primarily by Pascarella and Terenzini throughout the 1980's.

In a 1985 summary of the implications of his model to college withdrawal, Tinto reiterates the role of students' sense of connection with their college as a key to their persistence. However, many of the departing students in the present study had strong feelings of connection to college and to their particular college, and their regretful and often temporary departure was based on other factors. This is not to say that a strong connection to college will not contribute to any student's motivation to finish. The question raised by the present study is how primary a role integration serves in facilitating the persistence of this particular type of student.

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With the understanding that this analysis is based on a very small group of students who are not assumed to be representative of their cohorts, the results of the present analysis are striking enough to suggest that social integration does not hold the central role in the retention of these students. Clearly additional research is necessary before generalized conclusions can be drawn.

It is quite possible that social integration is in fact a key to the persistence of minority students, however, what comprises integration for minority students may be different than it is for whites. The operationalization of this important concept also deserves additional consideration.

Though the current research project did not compare residential and non-residential students, it is important to note that Pascarella and Terenzini's previous research (e.g.. 1977) found that social integration was not the best predictor of college retention for non-residential college students. Unfortunately, this distinction, between residential and non-residential students. has not been adequately acknowledged in subsequent references to the applicability of Tinto's model.

Faculty Interactions

Another key feature in the analyses of Tinto's model concerns the interactions of students with their college faculty. There were a broad range of comments by these students about their college teachers. Their reactions were strongly affected by the type of high school the students went to -- some students attended smaller schools where they received quite a lot of personal attention from their teachers and these students invariably said that the teachers in college were impersonal, though they also recognized that their high school experience influenced their expectations. Reactions to faculty were also

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influenced by the students' willingness to approach them. Some of the students in each group acknowledged that they were uncomfortable seeking out teachers (three persisters and two departers). This difference in students' personalities is not accounted for in the quantitative measures of faculty interaction that have been such a critical part of the analysis of Tinto's model. However, persisters were much more likely to report that they were comfortable approaching teachers for help or advice (10 persisters vs. three departers). This result, of more persisting students being willing to approach faculty, is consistent with the quantitative results obtained, and touted, by Pascarella and Terenzini. but suggests that the causal direction has been misinterpreted.

Initial Commitment

Students' comments with regard to their college intentions are striking in their consistency. Many of the students in both groups, over half the persisters, said that they "always knew" they would go to college. Many reported that they cannot fulfill their vocational or lifestyle goals with out a college degree. Interestingly, four of the persisters said that they needed a college degree in order to make a lot of money, but none of departers made a remark of this kind. Three of the departers specifically said that what they wanted to get out of college was to become an educated person, but none of the persisters stated their college objective in this way.

Many of the students in both groups expressed their intention to continue with their education after college, though this was true of a larger proportion of the persisters. Many of the students, especially persisters, mentioned that they would be the first person in their family to get their bachelor's degree and this was a source of pride and motivation

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for them. A few students said that they would let down their family if they didn't finish, and they could never do that.

Table 5-1 clearly shows that a larger proportion of persisters report all the factors that comprise initial commitment, lending at least suggestive support to the notion that the mind set that students bring with them to college is a significant ingredient in their ultimate success.

Table 5-1. Factors Comprising Initial Commitment

	Persisters	Departers
Always planned college	13	5
Planning post-college education	10	6
Can't get a meaningful job without college	18	12
Would be first in family to get bachelor's degree	13	9*
Not finishing would let parent(s) down	3	2

Note. Multiple responses; does not sum to group Ns
*This number includes students who are not currently enrolled.

Though "initial commitment" appeared in Tinto's original model, it was subsequently shown, during quantitative analysis, to have a relatively minor impact on predicting retention. The results of the present, albeit preliminary, research suggest that this factor

is more central to the persistence of urban African-American students than has been shown in previous research studies.

Practical Implications

The present research project suggests that at-risk students need more comprehensive assistance than Tinto's model, and the subsequent empirical research, with its emphasis on social integration, has proposed. The widely accepted barriers to college discussed in the literature are evident in these students' experiences, and social integration in college is not likely to be sufficient to overcome them.

Tinto's Model

Unfortunately, the results of the current research project, though modest in its scope, suggest that what students bring to college is more important to their ultimate success than are their experiences in college. This is captured in Tinto's model by the elements of initial commitment and social integration. The prevalence of comments by the study participants with regard to their initial commitment and the irrelevance of social integration to their persistence implies that their determination prior to college is more important than their sense of belonging once in college. This is a cursory assessment of these students' complex experiences and warrants a good deal more investigation. However, for colleges eager to contribute to student graduation, the implication is that efforts on behalf of at-risk students need to start long before students enter college, in order to facilitate their commitment upon entering, rather than simply providing opportunities for student involvement once they arrive.

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Barriers to Success

Christoffel (1986) summarized the barriers to college success by black students thus:

- low parental education
- lack of adequate financial aid
- poor academic preparation in high school
- inadequate high school advising regarding college and career options
- low goal-orientation regarding college
- poor study habits

All of these characteristics were noted in the study participants, even the students who have been successful in college so far. Any interventions designed to improve minority retention should consider and address all these issues. It is important to note that most of these barriers have been present in these students' lives for a long time, and their impact is not likely to be sufficiently mitigated by short-term programs or solutions.

Recommendations

For institutions of higher education who wish to facilitate the successful graduation of at risk minority students, the results, albeit preliminary, of the present study suggest several potential avenues to pursue. The following comments are generalizations which may not be warranted from the data collected from a relatively small sample. However, assuming the experiences of the study participants are at least suggestive of the issues faced by students of this type, these recommendations seem justified. It is worth noting that these propositions would likely be beneficial to most students, even those not considered at risk of dropping out. It is also worth noting that these recommendations do not comprise especially innovative or insightful comments: see for example, a volume published in 1985, *Increasing Student Retention*, which contains many of these same suggestions. Despite the longevity of these concepts, it is clear that the interventions that

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would benefit students are not necessarily reaching them. Schools such as Temple University, though clearly well-intentioned, have not yet adequately instituted the interventions that are known to contribute to student persistence and academic success.

The students in this study clearly could use more guidance in selecting a college environment that is appropriate for their needs and personality. From these students' experiences at their selected colleges, as well as the prevalence of transferring, many of these students did not pick a learning environment that was ideal for them. It is unrealistic to assume that the average 18 year old is fully aware of what will suit them best. However, additional information about their options and the possible implications of their choice could only be of benefit to their long-term success. This information could come from high school counselors, college recruiters, and perhaps most usefully from current college students who could relate their recent experiences.

A related issue is these students' expectations about college and about the particular college they attended. Some of these students did not really understand what college would be like, both academically and socially, and what the college they chose would be like, even if they had parents or siblings who attended college. Again, additional information from a variety of sources would probably help these students be ready for what they will face, especially in their first year at school.

Advising, both academic and financial, is extremely important to the success of all students, but especially to students who may have fewer personal resources. These students expressed a desire for more and on-going advice about their options and the implications of their choices. Additional advising would be useful prior to college, as well as throughout their college career. In his chapter titled "Creating Conditions for

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Student and Institutional Success" in the volume *Increasing Student Retention*, Forrest (1985) states "Probably the single most important move an institution can make to increase student persistence to graduation is to ensure that students receive the guidance they need at the beginning of the journey through college to graduation" (p. 74). He asserts that a genuinely comprehensive program of orientation and advising provides students with appropriate information to base educational decisions upon and offers an early opportunity for them to establish good working relationships with faculty and staff. Such a program also allows the institution to assess student interests and abilities, and especially to determine weaknesses or areas where students would benefit from additional attention or instruction. Along with the function that the college administration serves in promoting student success, there are less formal avenues: more than one student mentioned that a mentor of some kind would have been, or would be, beneficial, especially during their first year of college. In terms of financial support, there are many civic and professional organizations that offer scholarships and fellowships that these students would be eligible for. High schools and colleges need to inform students about other sources of financial support, beyond government grants and loans, and encourage students to be proactive in seeking these forms of assistance.

Many of these students mentioned their study habits and would clearly benefit from stronger skills in this area. Additional instruction both prior to and during college would be helpful. While they often know they would benefit from improved study skills, many students did not seek this type of assistance, even if it was available. Colleges need to be creative to provide support in this area that will really reach and benefit the students who need it.

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Dormitory life is not always what these students expect, nor was it a positive experience for all of them. There is clearly room to make the on-campus living experience more meaningful and more supportive of students, especially those for whom college is an unfamiliar environment. Help with selecting an appropriate dormitory and appropriate roommates would be beneficial prior to college, and once in college, students could use more support when problems arise or their situation turns out to be unexpected or unmanageable.

Some of the students who participated in the interviews clearly wanted or needed someone to talk to. Although professional counseling services are available at Temple and most other schools, perhaps for a variety of reasons, students are not seeking this service. Colleges need to consider ways to make these services more available and appealing because there are clearly students who are not receiving them and would benefit from them.

Assuming that schools such as Temple are interested in increased enrollment from myriad sources, it would be wise to examine the transfer process. The students who had undergone transfer were not satisfied with their experience, especially in terms of obtaining adequate information about the school. In addition, students did not feel welcomed or valued, which is not likely to be the university's intention.

Temple University offers a wide range of academic and emotional support services to students. Presumably other colleges offer similar assistance. However, the adage "build it and they will come" clearly doesn't apply to all students. Because there was no comparison group of white or middle class students in the present study, it is not possible to determine if these students' concern with self-reliance is unique, but many of these

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students are not taking advantage of the many opportunities available to them for assistance that they could benefit from. This finding is confirmed by a 1980 study by Friedlander, who found that at-risk students were less likely than their average and high achieving counterparts to take advantage of available academic assistance. Colleges need to examine the locale, presentation, convenience, access, and enticement of these services if they are to serve students who clearly need them. Because many schools already provide a wealth of services, the next step is to effectively facilitate students' use of them.

Unfortunately, despite previous research on Tinto's model, the present study offered no support for the notion that encouraging student involvement in organized campus activities leads in any systematic way to increased retention. However, meaningful campus associations may contribute to student motivation, and while additional investigation is clearly necessary, schools should not abandon efforts to engage students fully in their college environment.

In addition, schools should do all they can to facilitate good relations among students of different ethnic backgrounds. Large, diverse institutions such as Temple may have an advantage in terms of the variety of classes and extra-curricular activities available to students. However, if schools with a more homogeneous population are going to recruit minority students, they need to provide opportunities for the dominant cultural group to learn about and understand these students. The alienation that the students in the present study experienced at white schools, both socially and intellectually, seems to have contributed substantially to their desire to leave, though often they transferred to another school rather than dropping out completely. A more welcoming and understanding

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environment may serve to encourage minority students to continue with their studies at these types of schools, which clearly desire their presence.

Future Research

The ambitions of the present research project were very modest — to explore the pressures that African-American students experience to leave college and the factors that help them stay in college, especially as these elements are related to Tinto's concept of social integration. For this reason, the targeted student population was limited in several ways. However, future research projects would benefit from the exploration of these additional factors or issues.

This study focused only on African-American students. Including other minority groups, would be a valuable addition to a future project. Furthermore, the students in the present study are African-Americans attending predominantly white institutions, as are the majority of blacks who go to college. The experiences of African-American students who choose to attend black colleges are completely relevant to the examination of Tinto's model and should be included in future research efforts.

Otherwise suitable interview subjects were not rejected to obtain a gender balance in each group (persisters and departers). Because gender is always an excellent variable to include in any analysis, and because attrition is especially high among male African-Americans and other ethnic minorities, larger numbers of each gender should be included in future research projects.

This study attempted to focus on students immediately after their freshman year. The dynamics of attrition clearly evolve throughout a student's college career, therefore future research should examine students at the end of each of their college years and especially

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include students who successfully graduated. Furthermore, for simplicity's sake, the present study focused on "traditional age" students. However, future studies should include college students of all ages.

Students who transferred to other institutions of higher education were included in the study population, however, transfer students were not examined in any systematic way. Students who transfer between institutions are of interest in future research projects, especially since transfer students are particularly difficult to track in traditional institutional research.

In some fundamental way, the students of most interest in the present research project were not necessarily located for it -- those who have experienced so many barriers to completing college that they have truly dropped completely out of school. Many of the "departers" in this study were actually "stop-outs" who had already returned to school. It's possible that this proportion of returning students accurately represents the number of students in the departing college population who return, but considering the high percentage of incoming freshman who never complete school in nationwide statistics, it seems unlikely. Future research studies should concentrate on locating and collecting information from African-Americans, and other high-risk students, who drop out of college and do not return. Obviously the recruitment of such students is difficult and requires tenacity and creativity. However, their reasons for leaving college are of particular interest to college administrators and others who are motivated to increase the number of minority students who complete college, and to researchers who would like to understand the dynamics of college attrition for all students.

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The evidence in the present study that persisters were more likely than departers to interact with faculty seems to be more a result of student initiative rather than relations established by faculty members. It is possible that the results obtained by Pascarella and Terenzini in earlier studies (e.g., 1977) actually reflect student initiative rather than faculty encouragement. Because this factor was found to be predictive of retention in more than one of Pascarella and Terenzini's empirical studies, it warrants additional examination to understand its role in the dynamics of student success.

In addition, the key concept of social integration needs additional consideration. It is possible that social integration is an important aspect of the retention of minority students in college. However, what comprises integration for non-white students may be quite different from what whites experience in college, and therefore, from what has been investigated up to this point. The operationalization of social integration should be more fully explored for white, but especially for non-white, students.

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE

During the oral defense of this research project, a question was posed to me regarding my "heroes" in the group of study participants. I was also asked if my heroes were composed solely of the students who had persisted in, or returned to, school.

There are many to admire among this group of young people who volunteered to participate in my study, and not all are what would be called "successful." Many of these student overcame significant odds to be in college and are awe-inspiring for the simple fact that they made the attempt. I am also moved that they were so willing to share their experiences with me, a complete stranger who does not share their economic background, or even their race. In this brief epilogue, I will discuss ten of the students who particularly inspired me.

Many of the persisters are following a somewhat predetermined path, even if their own parents were not college graduates. However, several of them are forging new territory with spirit and tenacity. Among the departers are some young people who have shown real persistence -- picking themselves up, dusting themselves off, and making a renewed attempt to realize their dreams.

Al'ha-leem is probably my biggest hero. She has embraced her circumstances, despite disappointments, and has continued to pursue her educational and personal goals with enthusiasm and verve. She loved college when she started, but was forced to leave to raise her daughter. She experiemented with several alternative educational programs before settling on an electronics program at the Berean Insitute. She is a zealous advocate of post-secondary education, despite her own rather non-tradiational path, and

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she encourages virtually everyone she knows to pursue additional education. She has never let her circumstances dictate her attitude and her ultimate success is virtually assured.

Sheneka is another cheerleader for higher education, who believes that anyone can succeed in college if they put their mind to it. She proudly states that she is the first person in both her family and her neighborhood to go to college. She had no immediate role models, but rather depended on her own strong vision and optimism to get her this far. And she alludes to the barriers contained her earlier environment, the negative influences that she needed to overcome to even think of herself as college material. The fact that she does, and believes in the potential of others as well, insures that she can't help but motivate those around her to succeed.

Jamez was actively discouraged from attending college by at least one of his high school teachers, and had never thought of himself as college-bound. He had been in trouble as a young man and had been transferred to an alternative high school program, which turned out to be his saving grace. There, a teacher spoke enthusiastically of his own college experience and got Jamez thinking that college was something that he would like to try after all. He was motivated by a desire to prove to others that he could do it, and by his belief that college was "the way out." Like others who were interviewed, he saw college as a stepping stone to a better life, but based as much on a leap of faith than by much direct evidence in his own immediate environment.

Linda accepted the additional burden of being bussed to a suburban high school so that she could benefit from the educational advantage that it represented. But the situation forced her to live a double life, fitting in with her white classmates as well as her

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inner city neighborhood. The experience could have made her frustrated or bitter, but she embraced the opportunity and has a very positive outlook on its lessons. Her interest in holding elected office is a testimony to her constructive attitude.

Taneema enjoys the whole-hearted psychological support of her family but that is where their assistance ended. She grew up in very meager circumstances and had no reason to aspire to more. She was lucky enought to be part of a program that offered a college education to students who finished high school, but even so, her path to college was uneven. She admits that she got "off-track"for awhile, but she is focused now and seems unwilling to be distracted from achieving her higher education goals.

At the other end of the spectrum are students who have struggled, not always successfully, with their own frailty. Yet each has shown strength in his or her own way.

It was particularly poignant to speak to Brian. He is very concerned about college leading to a more meaningful life. He's interested in law school, and unlike other students I interviewed, he actually has a chance to get in. But he is terribly concerned about going into additional debt to finance it, so he probably won't pursue it. He feels really alone -- no one in his family has ever been to college and therefore can't relate to his experience. In addition, he is rather shy and believes that not being outgoing makes college more difficult for him. He is clearly a sensitive person who has dreams that he lacks the support to pursue wholeheartedly. He would probably thrive in a school much smaller than Temple, where he would get more personal attention. But he would probably never consider such a place for himself, and would have no way to pay for it, in any case.

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Calvin was another poignant interview. He is a gentleman of great promise, who in many ways seems to have lead a charmed life. Though he went to his local public high school, he was accepted to the University of Pennsylvania. He is very attractive, and worked as a model to finance his education. He is personable and well-spoken. But he was thrown completely off-track by a harsh and critical professor who facilitated a long bout with depression which lead to three semesters out of school. He eventually finished, but not with the same enthusiasm, and ended up getting a job significantly below his expectations. Like Brian, Calvin also could have benefited from some emotional sponsorship to serve as a buffer between his own fragility and the dog-eat-dog world of higher education.

Leandra has lead a very difficult life and has not always made admirable choices. She dabbled in community college, and found, almost to her surprise, that she enjoyed it and was good at it. But she was convinced to abandon her educational pursuits to attend to the needs of an older boyfriend, who thought her time could be best spent caring for him. The birth of her son put a temporary end to her educational ambitions. However, as she has matured, she has renewed her belief in her educational potential, and though not currently in school, she has faith that college and additional learning has a role in her future.

Edward is another person who has not made especially solid choices. He dropped out of community college after meeting a girl he wanted to spend time with. But he had very little help or support for his college ambitions, and stated that "no one really cared" if he pursued his education or not. It seems unreasonable to expect someone to succeed in such a vacuum. Although he has not returned to school, he believes that he is capable of

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college and will hopefully marshall his resources to continue with his education, which he so clearly feels a connection with.

Marcus is another student who was not encouraged to go to college by his high school administration, nor did he have any role models in his family, but he decided that he had college potential and he went. Needless to say, he was grossly underprepared for the experience, both academically and socially, and it is no surprise that he faltered. But he has since enrolled in community college in order to continue his education, and his success is due to his own doggedness and belief in himself.

I grew up in a middle-class family where my college attendance was basically assumed. In interviewing many of these young people it seemed to me unfair that their own potential should be so cruelly unsupported, even if they were lucky enough to have it recognized. While financial resources are a significant issue for most of these students, and many others as well, it seems to be emotional support that they were so often deprived of. The kind of encouragement that would solidify their own ambitions and help them through difficult times. I believe I benefitted greatly from the confidence that was always communicated to me about my future college potential. It was painful to see these students bereft of that and it was delightful to see so many of them supply it for themselves or unearth it along the way. It enriched my life to see their determination and even their failures. And I wish them well in whatever pursuits they undertake.

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APPENDIX A

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

The Persisters

Name	Gender	Age
Alissa	F	19
Asha	F	18
Blair	M	19
Brooke	F	19
Chanel	F	19
Cortney	F	20
Edward	M	20
Erika	F	19
Gail	F	19
Jamez	M	20
Lanesha	F	19
Linda	F	20
Na'Imah	F	19
Nicole	F	20
Robert	M	20
Sheneka	F	19
Sienna	F	18
Tahera	F	20
Taneema	F	22
Tasha	F	19

The Departers

Name	Gender	Age
Al'ha-leem	F	22
Brian	M	22
Calvin	M	25
Deirdre	F	23
Devona	F	23
Edward	M	23
Ernesto	M	23
Glenda	F	22
Lakiesha	F	20
Lanie	F	26
Leandra	F	24
Marcus	M	20
Michael	M	22
Nena	F	20
Nija	F	23
Rachelle	F	21
Sias	M	22
Stephen	M	21

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APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

<u>High School</u>

Tell me a little bit about your high school. What was it like? What kinds of students were there?

What percentage (roughly) of the students go on to college?

What kind of student were you?

What did you like about high school?

What did you do well with?

What did you dislike about high school?

What did you not do well in?

<u>Financial Background</u>

SES — parents' jobs, student's contribution to family income (if any)

Employment during high school, during college

Paying for college — financial aid received, help from parents, etc

<u>Family Background</u>

Where did you grow up (e.g., what neighborhood or suburb)?

Do you have brothers or sisters? What do they do? (Are they going to, or planning to go, to college?)

Do you have a child or children of your own?

<u>Considering College</u>

When did you decide to go to college?

Did your friends, and other students in your high school, go to college?

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Who encouraged you to go? (Ask about parents' support if student doesn't mention it.)

Did you know other people who went to college [e.g., friends of the family, community members]?

Did anyone discourage you?

Why did you decide to go to college?

What do you want to get out of it?

Did you consider an Historically Black College? Why or why not?

Entering College

How did you pick Temple?

What would you be doing if you had decided not to come to college?

What do you consider to be the things you "gave up" to come to college (sacrifices)?

PERSISTERS

The College Environment

What do you like about college?

What do you dislike?

What are you doing well with? (All aspects of campus life: academic subjects, social life, etc)

What are you not doing well with?

How did you pick your major? Have you changed your major? (Have you considered changing it?)

Where are you living while you're in college? Is this where you want to be living?

What do you do on campus other than go to class? (Organized student activities, library, sports, etc)

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Do you think there are enough activities for African-American students?

What do you think of the state of race relations here on Temple's campus?

Do you have a romantic attachment (boyfriend/girlfriend)? Are they at Temple?

Has college been what you expected it to be?

Do you think being in college has changed you? (How?)

What do you consider to be the things that "support" you being here? (Ask about faculty and advisors)

What do you consider to be the things that make it hard to stay here (barriers)?

Who have you talked to about difficulties you were having? (OR Who would you talk to?)

Do you think your experiences are the same or different from (all) other students?

Other black students? Other white students? Other minority students?

Have you ever considered leaving college? (If yes, why? Why didn't you?)

What do you plan to do after college?

Why did you want to be interviewed?

DEPARTERS

The College Environment

What did you like about college?

What did you dislike?

What did you do well with? (All aspects of campus life: academic subjects, social life, etc)

What did you not do well with?

Was college what you expected it to be?

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How did you pick the major you had in college? Did you ever change your major?

Where were you living while you were in college? Is that where you wanted to be living?

What did you do on campus other than go to class?

Do you have a romantic attachment (boyfriend/girlfriend)? Are they at Temple?

Do you think being in college changed you? (How?)

What did you consider to be the things that "supported" you being in college? (Ask about faculty)

What do you consider to be the things that made it hard to stay?

Who did you talk to about difficulties you were having?

Do you think your experiences were the same or different from (all) other students?

Other black students? Other white students? Other minority students?

Leaving College

What are you doing now that you're not in college? (Is this what you left college for?)

What would you say are the reasons you left college? (What is the main reason?)

Returning to College

Do you have any plans to return to college?

What factors would affect that decision -- under what circumstances would you return?

Why did you want to be interviewed?

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN
SOPHOMORES NEEDED
FOR COLLEGE OF EDUCATION PROJECT

EARN $10
FOR ONE HOUR INTERVIEW ABOUT
THE PRESSURES OF ATTENDING COLLEGE

LIMITED TO: Those who grew up,
or attended high school, in Philadelphia or
some other urban area like Camden, Baltimore or NYC.

$10 INTERVIEW 204-4423

$10 INTERVIEW 204-4423

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$10 INTERVIEW 204-4423

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Classifieds

For Rent

03455
Modem Apts. 2 bdrm with yard $550 + 1 bdrm $375. Two blocks from Temple's Main Campus. 215 236-4445 D. Johnson

FREE Rm + Board. Light house keeping + some

Misc.

Top reps are offered on-site staff jobs. All-Inclusive Deals , 32 hours FREE Drinks Special Discounts up to $100 per person Lowest price Guaranteed. Call now for details!
www.classtravel.com
800/838-6411

03451
FREE RADIO +$1250!
Fundraiser open to student groups & organizations. Earn $3-$5 per Visa/MC app. We supply all materials at no cost. Call for info or visit our website. Qualified callers receive a FREE Baby Boom Box. 1-800-932-0528 x 65.
www.ocmconcepts.com

African-American sophomores needed for College of Education project. Earn $10 for one hour interview about the pressures of attending college. Limited to: people who grew up, or attended high school, in Philadelphia or in some other urban area (like Camden, NYC or Baltimore) — suburbs don't count. CALL TODAY: 204-4423.
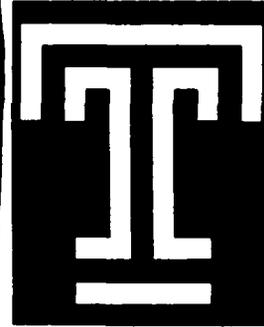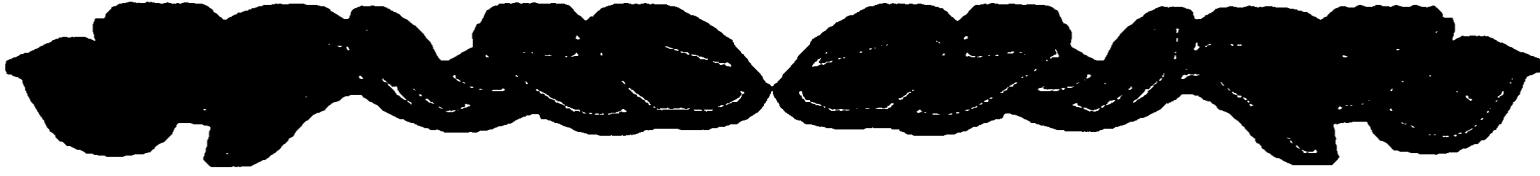
IF YOU ARE:

AFRICAN-AMERICAN & 25 YEARS OLD OR <u>YOUNGER</u>,
AND YOU ATTENDED AT LEAST **ONE YEAR** OF COLLEGE,
BUT **NEVER FINISHED**

EARN $15

FOR **ONE HOUR** INTERVIEW ABOUT ATTENDING COLLEGE
(ARRANGED AT A PLACE AND TIME CONVENIENT TO YOU)

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH PROJECT

CALL TODAY: 204-4423

INTERVIEW 204-4423
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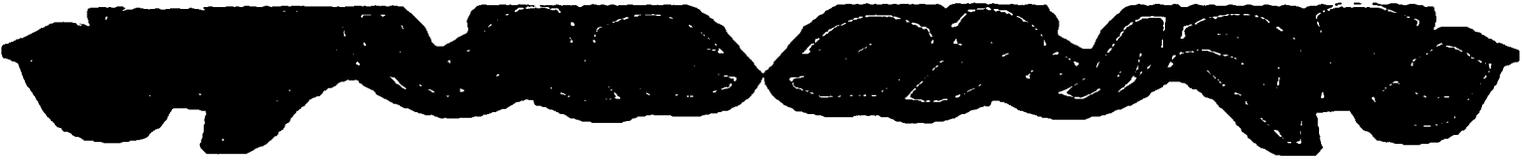
IF YOU ARE:

AFRICAN-AMERICAN & UNDER 23 YEARS OLD
AND YOU <u>LEFT</u> COLLEGE FOR AT LEAST ONE YEAR

EARN $15

FOR **ONE HOUR** INTERVIEW ABOUT ATTENDING COLLEGE
FOR COLLEGE OF EDUCATION RESEARCH PROJECT

LIMITED TO: Those who grew up, or attended high school, in Philadelphia or some other urban area like Camden, Baltimore or NYC.

CALL TODAY: 204-4423

INTERVIEW 204-4423
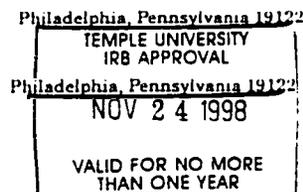INTERVIEW 204-4423
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CONSENT FORM

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
A Commonwealth University

College of Education

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

```
TEMPLE UNIVERSITY
    IRB APPROVAL
```
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122

Consent Form

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NOV 2 4 1998

VALID FOR NO MORE
   THAN ONE YEAR
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Investigator:	Danielle Masursky	Advisor:	Dr. Edmund Amidon
	College of Education		College of Education
	(215) 204-4423		(215) 204-1601

This study is an important exploration of the pressures African-American students face while attending college. Your experiences will make a valuable addition to the understanding of why students come to, leave, and stay in college.

All information collected for this study will be treated with the strictest confidence and will be used for research purposes only. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Personal information, including your family's education and income levels, and your own college academic history, will be collected during the study.

Your interview will be audio taped and professionally transcribed. The transcription will be included in the final report and the information you provide in the interview will be summarized in the report. In all documents you will be referred to only by your given (first) name; your family (last) name will not be used. However, if you wish to be anonymous, you are welcome to select a name for use in the transcript and final report (what is called a "*pseudonym*").

You will be paid a minimum of $10, a maximum of $15, at the end of your interview (depending on how long the interview lasts), as compensation for your time.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Ms. Ruth Smith, Office of the Vice Provost for Research, Institutional Review Board, Temple University, 1601 N. Broad St, Philadelphia, PA 19122, (215) 707-3249.

In addition, questions regarding the study may be directed to the investigator or her advisor, whose phone numbers are listed at the top of this form.

- -

I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Subject's signature   Date

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FORM

Name: _____

Gender:　☐ male　　　　☐ female

Age: _____

Which do you prefer:

☐ Black　　　　☐ African-American　　　　☐ No preference

☐ Something else: _____

Approximate family income in 1998:

☐ < $10,000　　　☐ $10,001 - $25,000　　　☐ > $25,000

Number of family members in household: _____

Family educational background:

	NOT HS grad	HS grad	technical/ vocational	some college	college grad
father	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
mother	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

High school attended: _____

Where is this high school located (what neighborhood or town)?

_____

(Re) Contact info:

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APPENDIX I

ACADEMIC INFORMATION FORM

Major in college: _____

Number of hours completed: _____

    IF DIFFERENT, number of hours attempted: _____

Approximate college GPA: _____

Approximate total SAT/ACT score: _____

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RECEIPT (PERSISTERS)

I certify that I have received $10 from Danielle Masursky for participating in her doctoral research.

Printed name: _____

Signed: _____   Date: _____

* *

Pseudonym (if desired): _____

* *

Do you want a **copy of the report** of this research study? It should be available next summer (1999). If you do, please write down your mailing address:

* *

IMPORTANT – REFERRAL

I'm also interested in interviewing people who left college, even temporarily, after their freshman year. **Do you know anyone** who did this? I'm paying **$5** for every **successful** referral (that is, someone I can actually get in contact with). Please write below the name and phone number of anyone you know of, or call me with the information at your earliest opportunity.

APPENDIX K

RECEIPT (DEPARTERS)

I certify that I have received $15 from Danielle Masursky for participating in her doctoral research.

Printed name: _____

Signed: _____   Date: _____

* *

Pseudonym (if desired): _____

* *

Do you want a **copy of the report** of this research study? It should be available next summer (1999). If you do, please write down your mailing address:

APPENDIX L

CODING FORM (EXAMPLE)

Why did you decide to go to college?

Alissa	Al'ha-leem
Asha	Brian
Blair	Calvin
Brooke	Deirdre
Chanel	Devona
Cortney	Edward
Edward	Ernesto
Erika	Glenda
Gail	Lakiesha
Jamez	Lanie
Lanesha	Leandra
Linda	Marcus
Na'Imah	Michael
Nicole	Nena
Robert	Nija
Sheneka	Rachelle
Sienna	Sias
Tahera	Stephen
Taneema	
Tasha	

APPENDIX M

INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

The Persisters

Alissa

Alissa grew up in New Jersey and went to Catholic school her whole life, She chose a Catholic high school because it was better, academically, than public school. She said she was "used" to being one of the only black students. She says there are things she didn't get, though, such as the opportunity to be taught by a black teacher, or having black history be part of the curriculum.

Alissa always planned to go to college and everyone in her family always encouraged her to go. Her brothers all started college, but didn't finish, and are all in the Armed Forces now. Her mother, her youngest brother and her mother's friends always said, "don't be like us, be better than we were, finish school."

Alissa picked Temple because she wanted to be in a city and get away and do something different. She lives in the dorm, is very active in campus organizations, and has a campus job. She started as a business major, but is switching to education: she says, "Business is O.K., the money is there, but it's about satisfaction, too."

Her mom, with whom Alissa is very close, is paying for school, and told her not to worry about what it cost, that she would cover it. Alissa says her mom sacrifices a lot and she doesn't know how she does it.

Asha

Asha went to a public high school in Queens, NY. She always thought she would go to college. She was always good at math and liked math and was encouraged by friends and teachers to go to college. Asha is the oldest of four children. Both her parents went to college but neither graduated, so she would be the first in her immediate family to graduate from college.

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Her mother suggested that she consider Temple. and she talked to people who had graduated from here. She majoring in engineering. which she says is very hard. and she has considered changing her major just because it is so stressful.

She lived in the dorm during her first year at school. but missed the housing deadline and is living off campus with a friend during her second year. She has taken full advantage of the activities on campus. She has a campus job and doesn't go home much on weekends because she's working. She got plenty of financial aid for her first year, but is having financial problems in her second year. Her parents weren't able to help her out and her mother did not encourage her to return. She considered taking a semester off, but was too afraid that she wouldn't return and finish. She says a lot of people she knows don't finish, and she knows it will be a significant personal accomplishment when she does.

Asha had the second highest SAT score in the study (1210).

Blair

Blair attended a science and engineering magnet school in Philadelphia at his mother's instigation. Everyone there goes on to college, many to Ivy League schools. He is the only child of a single parent. Both his parents attended college, though neither finished. He claims they both want him to finish college even more than he does.

Blair spent a year at Northwest State, but transferred to Temple because it was just too expensive. Blair lives at home and commutes to school, and holds an off-campus job. He's not interested in campus activities and spends his social time with his cousin and an old friend. He has loans for tuition and his mother gives him spending money, though he alleges that paying for college is the only difficult thing about it.

Blair has an usually cynical attitude about college. He criticizes colleges for focusing on teaching people how to get a job, yet says that he would not be here himself except that he needs the diploma to get a good job, which he is determined to have. He

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says he's lucky because the course work is easy for him, and he gets good grades, but claims this is mostly so that he can continue to receive financial aid.

Blair is an education major who aspires to be a vice principal.

Brooke

Brooke went to public high school in Baltimore County, Maryland. Her mother, who raised her and her older sister alone from the time Brooke was young, always encouraged them to go to college. Her mother, who attended college but never graduated, had hoped that Brooke would get a scholarship for college, but has taken out loans to help pay, and they both worry a lot about the expense. Brooke's sister attends community college.

Brooke chose Temple because she wanted to be away from home but not too far. Though she says that she has no relationship with her father, she says that he lives in Philadelphia and that Temple had the added benefit of being near him. Also her art teachers recommended Temple based on the reputation of the Tyler School of Art.

Brooke lives and works on campus. She likes Temple very much, considering it a home away from home. She finds the courses challenging and some of the teachers excellent.

She says that college as expanded her world, that before this she was surrounded by people of the same race and religion as herself. She doesn't care about making a lot of money, which she notes is not the prevailing attitude in her neighborhood, but she does want to be able to do something that she likes.

Brooke is an art history major who aspires to work in a museum.

Chanel

Chanel grew up in Chester in a single-parent household where she went to a college prep public high school. Her mother went to college when Chanel was a teenager

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and her aunt is in college now. She relies on financial aid, but says it doesn't cover everything and her mom "makes up the difference."

Chanel always planned to go to college and everyone in her family always made it clear that you go to college, especially her grandfather (her mother's father). She always loved school. Her high school was very oriented to going to college -- they had college fairs and tours of schools, especially black colleges. The principal was a big advocate of college -- students had their college acceptance letters sent to the high school, and the school would post them and announce who had been accepted where.

She commuted from home to Temple the first year, but felt like she was missing out, so moved into the dorm. She found college to be a big transition from high school, such a big campus with so many people, though says she's used to it now. She had to learn to take better notes and how to improve her study habits; she notes that the teachers don't remind you about deadlines -- they expect you to read the syllabus and remember what's due. The freshman seminar talks about time management, but she didn't take it seriously until she got scores back on her first tests and realized that she needed to do better.

Chanel has a campus job and is very involved with campus activities, though she doesn't belong to a particular group. She thinks college has changed her mind about things and made her more open-minded. She thinks it was a good idea to come straight to college after high school, but says she's "ready to be finished."

Chanel's major is business law and she wants to be a corporate lawyer.

Cortney

Cortney is an only child, raised by a single mother. She was bussed to a suburban school in Queens, NY because her mother wanted to get her out of the area where they lived. She liked the school, but not the long commute on the bus, and says she fit in better with the kids at her school than with the ones in her neighborhood. Everyone at

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school planned to go to college, and her mother pushed her also. She knew she needed a degree if she wanted to get a good job.

Though she applied to several colleges, Temple was the only out-of-state school to which she was accepted, and her mother thought it would be a good experience for her to go away. She lives and works on campus, but prefers to get off campus for her social life. She doesn't find the course work too challenging, but says there's a lot of it and she needs to work on her time management. She knows people from New York who came to Temple but went home because they couldn't get enough financial aid. She's worried that she'd lose credits if she tried to transfer schools.

Her mother, who earned an Associate's degree just before Cortney went to college, always saved for Cortney's education and is paying for everything.

Cortney, who's majoring in education, says she's grown up since she came to college and has learned a lot about herself and how to deal with people.

Edward

Edward always attended Catholic schools at his parents' insistence and felt that he missed out by not going to public school. His high school was very oriented to college and his parents always said that he should go to college. His father attended but didn't finish and his parents urged him to do better for himself than they had done.

Edward considered taking time off before starting college but his parents convinced him not to, concerned that he would lose his momentum and not go at all. He attended Drexel for a year, but the financial burden was too much and he transferred to Temple. He likes the diverse atmosphere at Temple, and finds it refreshing after his high school experience. He lives and works off campus but is involved with several campus organizations, which are helping him to develop organizing skills. His parents help with college and he has loans to cover tuition.

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He says he was very career oriented when he started college, but he feels he didn't realize what college could be. He has a dual major in computer information systems and marketing, and has recently gotten interested in advertising, but says he is in hurry to be done with school.

Edward had the highest SAT score in the study (1670).

Erika

Erika chose an agriculture magnet school, largely because she did not want an academically challenging high school. Most of her fellow students planned to go to college, many to Penn State. Both her parents went to college, but never finished and urged her to get a college degree so that she could make a better living than they have.

Erika chose Temple, which a friend of the family had recommended, because she could live at home and because it was affordable for her parents. She has an off-campus job, just for spending money. She participates in campus activities but does not belong to any organizations. She has an unusually positive attitude about school: she likes her classes and the teachers, and she doesn't believe that she'll never use the things she's learning. She expected college to be much harder, and thinks she's especially lucky that she doesn't need to hold a job, which she can see affects her classmates' studying time.

Erika is an education major and aspires to teach at her high school alma mater.

Gail

Gail is the only child of a single parent. She attended a private Quaker school on a full scholarship from 5th grade through high school. She was intimidated at first by the predominantly white composition, but grew to love the school and thinks she had a better experience there than she would have had anywhere else. The school strongly emphasized college and sponsored many college tours. She never considered not going to college, knowing that you can't do much without it.

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After her junior year of high school she spent two weeks at a journalism camp for minority students held at Penn State. It was the first time she was away from home. She was not attracted to the school, however, due mostly to its extremely rural setting.

Gail was accepted at Howard but decided not to go. She loved the University of Maryland, College Park, but couldn't afford it. Many of her high school friends went to Pitt, but she felt it was a party school and too far from home. She chose Temple because it was a big school and close to home. She has financial aid and her mother helps her out as well. She lives and works on campus, and writes for the student newspaper. She also has a retail job off-campus. Gail is a good student who has always been praised for her writing skills, and feels she does better when she's challenged, since she has a tendency to procrastinate.

Gail is a journalism major with an interest in law school as well as other graduate programs.

Jamez

Jamez started in public high school in Brooklyn, NY. However, he was getting into trouble and his father found a much smaller alternative program where he did much better. The school was not really college oriented, but his home room teacher talked about his own, very positive college experience and this prompted Jamez to start thinking more seriously about college. He said college seemed like the way out and he wanted to prove to people that he could do it. In fact, one teacher asked him why he was bothering with college, but that only made him more determined. Jamez is the oldest of four children. His father graduated from high school and his mother has an Associate's degree.

Jamez considered a black college but realized he needed to interact with a larger variety of people. He likes Temple, but doesn't find the classes very challenging. He says that the academics aren't the problem, it's paying for school that is difficult. His

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parents help out as much as they can, but that isn't much, mostly he's on his own and says he makes money any way he can. He lives in the dorms, which he enjoys, and has tried to be involved with campus organizations but says they're very "clique-y."

Jamez is majoring in computer information systems, but says that his real love is music.

Lanesha

Lanesha grew up in Chester, raised by a single mother, with one younger brother. She spent three years at a completely white high school, then transferred to Chester Academy so that she could spend her last year in a better environment. She found the academics there to be more challenging than her previous school; many of her friends from the neighborhood went there. She moved in with her grandfather so that she would be in the district, since her mother lives right across the township line.

She always planned to go to college and will be the first in her immediate family to graduate. Her high school was very oriented to going to college, they had college fairs and tours of schools, especially black colleges. The principal was a big advocate of college -- students had their college acceptance letters sent to the high school, and the school would post them and announce who had been accepted where. Everyone in her family always made it clear that you go to college. Her oldest cousin is a lawyer and another cousin is planning to go to med school. Lanesha says that everyone talks about how college is the way to make money, but she wants to be happy.

She started at Penn State, but "couldn't stand" State College, because it was so isolated and boring. The classes were huge and she thought the school was impersonal. She transferred to Temple this year because she wanted to be in a city and closer to home. She really wanted to go to a black college, but realized that she just couldn't afford it. She also commented that "society isn't like that" (all black), that it isn't "realistic." She thinks the black community is more "unified" at Temple, because they have to be.

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Lanesha lives in the dorm, is an officer in the African Student Union and very involved with their activities, which are focused on consciousness-raising. She has a work study job.

Mom helps her with college expenses, whatever her financial aid doesn't cover, and books. She got more aid at Penn, because they're actively recruiting black students at their main campus.

Lanesha started as an accounting major, but has switched to public relations.

Linda

Linda grew up in Boston and was bussed from the city to a predominantly white suburban high school. She felt this experience affected her in several ways – it forced her to learn time management, since she had to get up early for the long bus trip, and it taught her to take advantage of opportunities and get the full experience. It has also taught her how to "handle herself with whites" and how to fit in. However, it also made her feel like she was living a double life -- her suburban self and her inner city self.

Linda's parents encouraged her to go to college, though they didn't push her. Her father went to college for just one year when he was young; both her older sisters are college graduates. Linda wanted to go to an urban school and knew someone who had gone to Temple. She was also accepted to Howard and really wanted to go there, but was not offered any financial aid and couldn't afford it. She has financial aid for Temple, and her parents "make up the difference," though she says they are struggling to do so.

Linda lives in the dorm, has a campus job and is involved with campus activities. She says she is not typical, because unlike other students, she *wants* to be involved and wants to develop a broader perspective.

Linda is a political science major who plans to go to law school and has ambitions to hold elected office.

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Na'Imah

Na'Imah attended Girls High in Philadelphia, and says that although she was reluctant at first, she got into the spirit of it after her first year. She's glad to have graduated from there because the name "pulls weight" and "people know your caliber." She has always been a good student and always expected to go to college. As a Muslim, she says becoming educated is an obligation, so if she wasn't in college she would still need to be learning. Her father is a high school graduate, and her mother attended college, but never finished. One of her older sisters went to Peirce and another is in college now.

Na'Imah considered several out-of-state schools, including several of the black colleges, but she felt that Temple was the best school she was accepted to, with the added benefits of being affordable and being close to home. She lives at home and commutes to school, but she is very involved in the campus Muslim student association. She likes the atmosphere at Temple, saying that it is truly international and that it reflects the real world, though she says the classes are too big and that the class size makes it tougher on students. Na'Imah has a privately-funded scholarship and her parents help as well.

Na'Imah has a strong desire to represent and improve her community. She wants to have a career that reflects herself and also brings credit to her community, and recently changed her major from archeology to architecture. She is committed to getting her Master's degree.

Nicole

Nicole went to Catholic school all her life because her grandmother felt strongly that they offered a better education. Nicole didn't really like the schools and didn't think they were any different from public schools. One of her guidance counselors encouraged her to think about college, however she didn't feel that she was especially good student and didn't think that she was prepared for college. However, she says everyone in her

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family goes to college, it's "just the thing to do." Her father is a high school graduate and her mother went to college but never graduated. One of her sisters in currently in graduate school. She relies on financial aid and her mother pays for everything else. She comments that her mother is "used to paying for college."

Nicole is the only student in either group who took a year off before starting college. She went to "beauty school" to learn hair styling, saying she had "something to prove." She says Temple was the obvious choice for her and she never really considered other schools. When she started college she lived in the dorm and held both campus and off campus jobs. She says that she met other people who felt as she did – underprepared for college. She studies hard and says that getting good grades is everything. She believes that the purpose of college is to get a good job and "make something" of herself.

Nicole is a social administration major and says she needs a Master's degree to work on social policy issues such as child care and adoption.

Robert

Robert attended Catholic high school in Bronx, NY, because his single-parent mother could not afford to send him to the private school he wanted to attend and she refused to let him go to public school. He liked the school and believed it was much safer than the public school he would have attended. He always planned to go to college and his mother always encouraged him to go. His half sister is also in college now.

He attended Westchester Community College for one year, largely because his high school grades were too low for him to get into a good university. He transferred to Temple, hoping to get on the football team. He doesn't like it much. moving off campus after his first semester because he didn't enjoy dorm life. He has a campus job. though he claims that he doesn't need to work because he has financial aid and his mother pays his living expenses.

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He doesn't like school that much, but is convinced that you can't get a good job without it. He was never tempted by options other than college and has never considered leaving. He is a psychology major who is considering law school, but knows he would need better grades than he has to get in.

Sheneka

Sheneka attended Girls High in Philadelphia, at her mother's insistence, which has a separate guidance office just for college planning. She notes proudly that she is the first person in her family and in her neighborhood to go to college. She has always been a good student and a middle school counselor suggested that she consider college. By the time she was in high school, she just assumed she would go, as did all her classmates.

Sheneka chose Messiah College because she wanted a different experience and she wanted to get out of the city. She thought that people would be nice because they were privileged and came from educated backgrounds. She found instead that they couldn't understand anything about her and she felt completely out of place. She had been accepted to Temple, but didn't want to go there because everyone from Philadelphia did. She suffered through a full year at Messiah, but then transferred to Temple and says she loves it here. She feels much more comfortable and feels like she can learn better when she's relaxed.

Sheneka lives on campus, but says she's not really a joiner, though there are plenty of campus activities. She has a small scholarship and loans and a campus job.

She says she has a strong desire to better herself and her community. She encourages others to go to college or get additional education. She thinks anyone can do it if they believe in themselves. She says she needs the degree to get a good job, but thinks college is about more than getting an education, it's about becoming a well-rounded person. Though she feels that aspects of her neighborhood dissuade people from pursuing college, she feels she owes it to herself and her family to finish.

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Sheneka has a dual major in sociology and Spanish, aspires to work with troubled juveniles, and would like to go on for a Master's degree.

Sienna

Sienna is the only person in the persisters group who never attended Temple. She is enrolled at Tisch School for the Arts at NYU.

Sienna is an only child raised by a single mother, who is a teacher with a Master's degree from Temple. Her mother wanted to move to the suburbs so that Sienna could attend better schools, but Sienna didn't want to leave the city, a decision she now regrets. She went to a magnet school for arts through 5th grade and then transferred to a private school, at her mother's insistence. However, she didn't like this school and considered several others before choosing Girls High for its strong academics. Her reasoning was that she could get acting experience in other places, which she did, becoming very involved in Freedom Theater. This proved to be a very good choice. as she has found the academics at her university to be very challenging, and would have been even less prepared if she had attended the arts high school. While Girls High is very oriented toward college, she felt that her counselor was unsupportive of her ambitions, encouraging her to lower her expectations, because Tisch is so competitive.

She considered several schools, including several black colleges, but ultimately chose Tisch because it has the best drama school. She lives on campus, but says NYU is different from other schools, because it's right in the city, and not having that "cushion" of a college campus has made her grow up faster – when she came home for spring break she felt much older than her friends who went to more typical schools.

Her first year was very difficult, the academics were much more demanding than she had expected. She worked very hard, which she had never done before, always "settling for the easy B." The school is extremely expensive and a lot of people leave before they get a degree. She would never consider quitting, she couldn't let her mother

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down that way. She has minimal financial aid, depending mostly on loans and money that her mother saved for her college education. Though she didn't have a job her first year, she thinks she will have to work during her second year and is very worried about how she will manage everything.

Sienna aspires to a stage career, and says that she would "fall back on" casting if her acting wasn't profitable.

Tahera

Tahera attended a predominantly white magnet school until her senior year, when she transferred to her local public high school, which had a track for students interested in health careers. She said most of the students were struggling to better themselves and about half went on to college. She did volunteer work at a hospital, encouraged by her aunt, who is a nurse. Her mother went to college, but never finished, and her sister is in community college now.

Tahera was ready to go to the University of Connecticut, but she did not receive the financial aid package that she had been expecting. She spent a year at St. Joe's, which paid her tuition, however the school did not have a nursing program, so she transferred to Temple, which is affordable. She lives on campus so that she can be away from home. She is involved with campus activities but hasn't yet found an organization that she wants to join. She says the cost of school hinders her from engaging in extra-curricular activities. She depends on loans and her mother, who helps her out a little.

She likes Temple, where she is a pre-nursing major, because it has a diverse student body and a wide variety of classes. She considered medical school but says she just doesn't enjoy being a student enough to continue that much longer. If she had a different major, she would have liked to participate in one of Temple's study abroad programs, preferably in Italy. She says she was a really good student in high school, but

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now feels like she works hard and only gets average grades, which is frustrating. She finds school rather routine and says she only likes it when she's doing well.

Taneema

Taneema is the only person in the study who got her GED rather than finishing high school. She dropped out of her neighborhood public high school in her senior year, moved out of her family house and has been on her own since. Her brother and sister started college, but never finished, so she would be the first person in her immediate family to graduate.

Taneema was awarded a college scholarship in 6th grade and found that experience to be very motivating. Through the program associated with the scholarship she came to see how valuable an education is and saw that African-Americans could be successful. She admits that she got "off track" for awhile, but she wants to be able to raise a family in comfort and knows that she can't do that without an education.

She started community college but found that it wasn't challenging and transferred to Temple. She chose Temple because she wanted to be near her family and also thought her transition to college would be smoother if she went to a school where she would know other students. She wanted to go to a school with a mixed student population because she had always attended predominantly white public schools. She says she felt underprepared for college and admits that she was "barely admitted." But she claims that she's a good student and that things come easily to her.

She is not involved in campus activities other than her campus job. She says that she's somewhat of a loner and that she came to college to get an education, not make friends. Also, it's important to stay focused, and having lots of friends and a boyfriend would be distracting.

She says college has changed her a lot – made her much more socially adept. She believes that this is the major benefit of college, as opposed to the education. She

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considered a major in accounting, but wanted something she could love. She is an elementary education major, and wants to eventually complete a Master's degree.

Tasha

Tasha attended Girls High in Philadelphia, which had a separate guidance office just for college planning. Her family encouraged her to go to college, and it was expected of her, since she had always been a good student. She says college is the only way to get where she wants to go. She always liked science and was encouraged to consider becoming a doctor. Her father is a high school graduate and her mother attended college when Tasha was in high school, but never got her degree.

Tasha chose Messiah College, for which she received a full scholarship, but only spent a year there. It was a more alienating experience than she had expected. She finds the environment at Temple more comfortable, though the school is much less personal and that has been a big adjustment. She lived at home her first semester back in Philadelphia, but it didn't work to be home and she moved into the dorm in the spring.

Though Temple is more affordable than Messiah, she has no scholarship and relies on student loans. She is not working now, which is stressful for her, because she owes Temple money. Her parents help her out a little, but are not able to give much.

She had a lot of trouble with chemistry and largely for that reason started to consider nursing as an alternative to medical school. She also thinks nursing is more personal. She is minoring is Spanish and is spending the current semester in a full-time Spanish language program.

Tasha aspires to be a nurse practitioner, for which she would need a Master's degree.

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The Departers

Al'ha-leem

Al'ha-leem spent her last two years of high school at a public high school in Philadelphia, after moving back from a year in North Carolina, where she participated in a college prep program called Motivation. No one in her family had ever attended college and she never considered it herself until teachers and friends started to strongly encourage her. The Motivation program gave her the opportunity to visit schools and meet with college recruiters. She was interested in attending a black college, because she wanted to pledge a sorority. She was accepted, with a full scholarship, to her first choice, the Tuskeegee Institute, but was dissuaded from going by a teacher who said she would get too homesick if she went to school out-of-state. She eventually chose Lincoln as the "second most impressive," partly because she knew people who had graduated from there who had become successful.

Al'ha-leem lived on campus and had the full, typical freshman experience, living on campus and joining several organizations. She loved it, describing it as "wonderful." She said it was even better than she expected, she loved her professors and did well in her classes. She says she was "shocked" when she became pregnant by her high school boyfriend. She finished her first year and had the baby over the summer. She planned to come back in the fall, but just couldn't arrange for adequate child care. She says her family and the baby's father have been supportive, and do what they can, but they all work, and cannot keep the baby for all the hours she needs.

After leaving college she attended a nine-month training program to become certified as a nurse's aid. Two years ago she participated in a returning student program at Temple called New Choices, with the intention of resuming her college education. However, when it came time to return to school she could not secure adequate financial aid.

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She is currently half way through an Associate's degree program to be an electronics tech for which she received a full scholarship. She plans to get her Bachelor's degree in engineering after that.

Al'ha-leem is very enthusiastic about her time in college. She thinks it was an excellent, life-altering experience for her and she has become a major advocate among those she knows for pursuing some sort of post-secondary education.

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Brian
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Brain attended public high school in the Roxborough section of Philadelphia. His teachers had always told him that he should aspire to college, but he'd never thought about whether he really wanted to go. His senior year of high school, he decided to go to the University of Pittsburgh because it was away from home but also in state. He found that the city didn't have much to offer and after three semesters he left. He took a semester off, but he always planned to return to college. He chose Temple because it was big like Pitt, but close to home. He now lives at home and commutes to school.

Brian was raised by a single mother and is the first in his family to go to college. He feels that he never had anyone to advise him about it, that no one can "identify" with his issues and problems, though he says that no one has ever discouraged him either. He said several times that he is not an outgoing person and that makes it harder. He says it's hard to trust people and that not too many people "get to know" him. He said he's gotten to the point that he wonders what he's doing here – he has no clear career goal. He worries about getting his degree and still ending up with a low-level job. He says "any work is honorable, but I have something better in mind for myself" -- he wants to have a career, not just a job. He has been interested in law school, but now is concerned about starting work as soon as he gets his Bachelor's degree, so that he can start paying off his student loans. He's been thinking about these things for awhile, and says he's been

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considering contacting the psychology clinic or career services to try to sort out some of these issues.

Brian has done well in school, and has higher than a 3.0 average. But he says it's been hard – "nobody's helping me." He says he gets satisfaction from doing well and the key to success in college is having a good work ethic – working hard and having good study habits.

He had chosen a major in sociology, because it interested him, but he realized that it's not a practical major. He is applying for the medical records program on Temple's Health Sciences Campus.

Calvin

Calvin attended Bartram public high school in south Philadelphia. People always told him that he was smart and that he should aspire to college. Though his mother didn't stress college, his grandmother did. In addition, his uncle tried to get him to go to a magnet school (Carver Science and Engineering), but he said the local school was "good enough" and he wanted to be able to walk to school. In addition, he said that Bartram had excellent computer science, which is what interested him.

Calvin was raised by a single mother who attended, though never finished, college. Calvin is the youngest of four children, all of whom have gone to college, though only his two sisters finished college, his older brother did not.

Calvin got into the University of Pennsylvania, though he was rejected by Penn State. He deferred his admission, so that he could model for a year to earn the money for school. Penn offered him a very token amount of financial aid. His mother had saved some college money for him, but she ended up needing it for other expenses.

Calvin says that Penn was the "best thing that ever happened to me," but mostly he talked about how much trouble he had while he was there. He said he was so behind his fellow students academically that it was "pathetic" and he almost flunked out. But the

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Associate Dean shuffled his work load and got him a tutor. But he said it was his own hard work that turned things around, after he realized that "this is my life" and that his future depended on doing well. He said that he was surprised to see how few blacks and hispanics there were, which just "didn't seem right."

Calvin started out planning to major in business, but switched to political science, thinking he would do better if he choose a subject area that excited him. His junior year was rough, he felt like he was "running in quicksand." He took a political science class with a very difficult teacher who was very discouraging of him, and clearly took the wind out of Calvin's sails. He was living in the dorm and said that he and his suite mates all had a bad year. They wasted a lot of time, playing video games and procrastinating.

He decided that he needed a break. He left school, took an apartment off campus, got a job and tried to "occupy" his time. He talked with friends and family, especially one of his sisters, who cautioned him not to wait too long before returning to school. People knew he was depressed, and that he was trying to find something to get excited about. He eventually returned to school after taking three semesters off, partly with the help of a former professor, who wrote a letter to Penn, requesting that Calvin be readmitted.

He finished school and got a job, though it wasn't the job he wanted. He said that the experience changed him for the good, taught him how to deal with people in power and how to empower himself.

Deirdre

Deirdre attended Overbrook public high school in west Philadelphia where she worked at the school's T.V. station as a writer and news anchor. Her father strongly encouraged her to go to Girls' High, because he thought she would get a better education there. Deirdre attended the college track (motivation) program at Overbrook, which included an eight-week outward bound program at Temple in the summer after 10th grade.

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She said later in the interview that the school wanted her to stay an extra year (she had been held back in 4th grade), but she wanted to graduate with her peers.

Deirdre is the youngest of three children, her two older sisters currently attend community college, but neither has finished. Deirdre's mother went away to college after high school, but got lonely and came home; she currently takes classes at community college. Deirdre's father never went to college. Deirdre's aunt strongly encouraged her to go to college. Her oldest cousin, who she says is an "inspiration," went to Delaware State, a black college, and was part of the track team there. Deirdre, motivated by her aunt and cousin, choose to go to Delaware State. Her SAT score (which she would not report) was too low for her to be accepted at Temple.

At Delaware State, Deirdre lived in the dorm and was very involved in campus activities, including writing for the school newspaper. She says she was doing a lot of things, but not really studying much. Eventually the expense became too stressful and she fell into a "deep depression." She's been in and out of the hospital since she left.

Deirdre is planning to attend community college in the fall. Her classes will be paid for as part of public assistance (she is currently receiving Supplemental Security Income, a program that is part of Social Security).

<p style="text-align:center">Devona</p>

Devona claims that she always wanted to go to college, though she attended a vocational high school (Dobbins). She says that her mother and grandmother received vocational training, her mother is a home health aid. Her grandfather went to trade school for culinary arts, the subject area that currently interests her, though she started school planning to go into nursing. Her uncle went to LaSalle and always encouraged her to "make something" of herself. She has several cousins and friends who started college, but left when they had babies.

<p style="text-align:center">143</p>

She decided not to go away to college, even Widener seemed too far from home, though she did consider Cheney. Instead she attended community college while working at a bakery and living at home. Then she got sick and dropped out for a semester, saying it just got to be too much -- working and going to school. She is currently receiving public assistance, which she's using to pay for her classes. She says college is harder than she had expected, but she really wants to get her Associate's degree. She also says she'd like to get more involved at school, like playing on the volleyball team.

Edward

Edward attended Kensington public high school in north Philadelphia. He never considered going to college, he never liked school very much. The last few months of high school he decided that he wanted to go. Edward was raised by a single mother and has one sister, neither ever went to college. His mother thought college was a good idea and encouraged him to "go as far as you can." His aunt, who was a college graduate herself, helped him to fill out the forms. Other than these women, he says nobody really cared if he went and no one especially encouraged him.

He went to community college, mostly because he didn't think he could get into any other school. He had some financial aid and his aunt helped him also. He only attended one semester, during which he got distracted by a new girlfriend and stopped going to classes. He says he would like to return to school, that he misses it, and is currently trying to get a job so that he can afford to go. He responded to the notice about being interviewed because he thought it might give him a boost to get back in school.

Ernesto

Ernesto went to Girard College high school in Philadelphia, which is a private boarding school for the children of single parents (his parents divorced when he was 13). Ernesto's mother has an Associate's degree and is attending college now, working on her Bachelor's degree.

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He says that his high school was somewhat like college, and that made his freshman year at Temple easier. On the other hand, the students at Girard were taught to consider themselves the "elite" and it was a "reality check" when he graduated. At Girard it was "understood" that the students would go on to college, and they promoted the Ivy League schools. He wanted to go to Cornell for architecture and was offered a scholarship there, but was scared to go to a white school after his years at Girard, and he was concerned that it was too expensive. He considered other out-of-state schools, including Maryland and Howard, but finally choose Temple, majoring in finance. He would like to own his own business.

Ernesto has been in and out of college for six years. He paid for school himself, which he resented. Girard has an alumni scholarship fund, but he was given only a token award. He says each time he left college that he was scared not to come back, scared to have nothing to fall back on. But he says that his neighborhood "got to him" and many of his friends say that college is a waste of time. They're all engaged in making money, in both legal and illegal ways, which he admits was very tempting to him. He mentioned more than once the need to avoid "bad influences."

Completely unsolicited, Ernesto gave me a copy of a paper he had written for a class about Nathan McCall's book, *Makes Me Wanna Holler*. In his poignant and well-written reflection, he discusses how college has changed his perspective of himself, from a "self-proclaimed intelligent hoodlum" to what he "feared," a college student, "softened up." He writes: "I don't know if this experience is saving me or destroying me," and "It is a daily struggle for me . . . trying to understand why it is so hard to go straight and narrow. It is not a welcoming path for anyone."

Glenda

Glenda attended a magnet school in Brooklyn where "everyone went to college." Glenda was raised by her single mother, an immigrant from Haiti. Her mother, who has

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some college education, always told the children that they need to go to college to live. Glenda's two older sisters have both graduated from college and her younger brother is in college now.

Glenda wanted to go away to college and she is the first person in her family to do so. Her first choice was Spelman, but she missed the deadline for admission. She eventually choose Temple because it had the latest deadline. She wanted to be a doctor until she took college biology, which she says is different from the biology class in high school. Now she's thinking about law school, but she says she'll need a very high LSAT score because her GPA is only 2.5.

Glenda lived in the dorm the first year but says it was too distracting to be around all those people with "nothing to do." The second year she moved off campus (to west Philadelphia) with three other students.

During the spring of her first year she was academically dismissed. She says it was a "rude awakening." College is more demanding than high school. She says she got off to a "rough start," she knew she wasn't "getting it" but she thought she could pull it off. She didn't tell her mother about the dismissal, and she told her sister that she was taking a semester off, without giving the full explanation. She said that semester she had been financially strapped, that she hadn't budgeted well, and she had gotten a job. But she also admits that her priorities were "messed up," and that she had not studied enough. She went to community college that summer and for the fall semester.

Glenda is almost finished with college and says her experience of it was "bad," that she was not happy "going through it." But she concedes that it has made her smarter and more independent and has taught her to take more responsibility for herself. She says it's nothing like the T.V. show, "A Different World," from which she had developed her expectations of college. She's says the advising was inadequate and that students shouldn't be allowed to register by phone and not see advisors. She says Temple is so

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big and impersonal, that they don't care about you and she needed someone to help her, like a mentor or "big sister."

Lakiesha

Lakiesha went to a vo-tech high school in Philadelphia (Dobbins), though she participated in a college prep program called Legacy. Most of the Legacy student went on to college, favoring Temple and Lincoln. Lakiesha wanted to take a year off and work, try something different, but her mother said, "you're going to college, that's it."

Lakiesha was raised by a single mother who did not attend college herself, though she was later certified as a nurse. Lakiesha's mother wanted her to go away to college, but Lakiesha wanted to stay close to her family.

Lakiesha thought all colleges were the same, so she did not seriously consider schools other than Temple. She thought her first year wasn't hard, even though she was also holding down a part-time job. But in her third semester, she got pregnant by her high school boyfriend. She said it was too much, she was too tired to finish the term. She planned to take off only one semester while she had the baby, but she missed the deadline for readmission and ended up staying out one year. She says she was bored just working and wanted to be able to get a better job. She says that Temple made it difficult to come back and now she's determined to stay and finish. She lives at home and works to support her daughter. Her mother has always offered to help her financially, but Lakiesha wants to show that she can take care of herself.

Lakiesha plans to major in computer science, but she says that Temple insisted that she be undeclared when she returned, until she had passed the math requirements for the major.

Lanie

Lanie is not as typical a student as the others in this group. She has attended at least five institutions of higher education, leaving and returning as her finances allow.

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She is the oldest of the departers group, at 26, married with a three-year-old son. She said that everyone always assumed that she would go to college, that in her culture (Haitian) it is considered your "ticket out." She will be the first in her immediate family to get a college degree.

Lanie attended a magnet high school in Brooklyn, though she had wanted to go to the High School for the Arts. She says the school had great counseling and was very informative about colleges and scholarships. She has been studying dance all along, with plans to ultimately attain her PhD. She started at community college in New York, eventually earning an Associate's degree, and has been at Temple for three semesters, though not consecutively. She says college is "a part of her life" and she can't see herself not finishing.

She and her husband both work full-time and her husband is also a part-time student, studying psychology.

Leandra

Leandra was bussed to a suburban high school in San Diego. She was in a college prep program, and many of her friends went on to college. She always wanted to go to college and she was a good student, but she just didn't have the self-confidence to apply.

Leandra's father lives in Philadelphia, her mother moved her to California when Leandra was just a child. During her last two years of high school she lived on her own because her mother was involved with drugs. When she was graduating from high school she wasn't thinking about her future, just about finding a place to live and survive.

She started at community college because it had open admission, and did well, getting very involved with the African Student Union. She was working full-time and going to school full-time. However, she got "sidetracked" by an older boyfriend, who encouraged her to focus her attention on him. After she got pregnant, she stopped everything.

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That relationship did not last. However, Leandra converted to Islam, met her husband, and got married. He agreed to return with her to Philadelphia, where she wanted to help her grandmother care for her sisters' children. She says that her mother is straight now and is encouraging Leandra to return to college.

She watched her high school friends at schools like UCLA, and she is not sorry that she has taken the path that she did. She says she learned a lot more this way, and that she took the opportunity to take classes that would help her learn about herself. She is less interested in finishing college for career reasons, but instead wants to continue to learn. She would be the first in her immediate family to earn a college degree.

Marcus

Marcus attended South Philadelphia public high school, which he said was not college oriented. in fact, the counselors discouraged students like himself from considering college. He feels that society, like pop artist Janet Jackson, were instrumental in his decision to attend college, more than his teachers or family – inspiring him to achieve something higher in life. No one in his immediate family has attended college, or apparently ever considered it.

Marcus considered Howard, but it was too expensive. He decided on Shippensberg because he got financial aid, but it didn't work out. He attended a summer program composed mostly of African-Americans, which contributed to the fall semester being such a "major culture shock." He didn't get along with his roommate, a common problem which he thinks deters people from continuing in college. And he found no comfort in the small black community, which he said was competitive and unsupportive. After his first semester, he reconsidered his college ambitions. His mother suggested he go to community college and transfer to a four-year school after he got his Associate's degree and was better prepared. He finds that some of the classes are not challenging and

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he feels there is too much of a high school mentality there (i.e., immature), but it's affordable. He says he's a good student and that he studies a lot.

He doesn't regret his experience at Shippensberg, saying it was a great learning experience, that he had been so naive. He says he was afraid to take time off between high school and college because he thought he might lose his momentum to go. He says it's best to go when you're young and then you have the rest of your life to enjoy it. Marcus is an education major and is considering teaching high school.

Michael

Michael attended Cheltenham public high school in Philadelphia, where many students go on to college. His parents, who both went to college but never finished, said that all their kids should go to college because it's much harder to get what you want if you don't have a degree. He considered joining the military to earn money for college, saying that he really couldn't afford it.

He started at Cabrini on a track scholarship, but he didn't really like it -- the school was too isolated and he couldn't get around. He ran out of money and had to leave. He spent a semester working just to earn enough to pay Cabrini what he owed them. He lived with his grandmother and cared for her. When she died he continued to live in her house and started to attend Temple, which is close to her house and had been recommended by his brother, who graduated from there.

He is majoring in accounting and is involved with the black accounting organization and would like to join another organization. He says you enjoy school more if you're more involved. He would eventually like to get his MBA.

Michael works to pay for school, and has financial aid and loans as well. He is concerned about getting a good job after college and worries about paying back his college loans.

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Nena

Nena started high school at the Franklin Learning Center, but transferred almost immediately to Frankford because it had a better health academy. She had originally planned to be a doctor, but now is interested in going to mortuary school. Nena was encouraged to go to college by her mother, who she calls an "inspiration," her friends and her teachers. Both her mother, who works in pathology, and her grandmother, graduated from Temple. Two of her sisters are currently in college, though at least one of them has a child of her own.

After starting at Temple, Nena got pregnant. She took a semester off to have the baby, but came back after that. She likes school and wants her degree so that she can do something that she enjoys. She says college isn't as hard as she expected and that she would be miserable if she didn't finish.

Nena lives with her son and her son's father. She works, has financial aid and her boyfriend helps out. Once she gets her degree, they plan to get married.

Nija

Nija attended a magnet school for International Affairs, a school which she felt offered good college prep and from which most students go on to college. The school gave her the opportunity to visit colleges and meet with college recruiters. She investigated black colleges, but felt that they did not place enough emphasis on modern technology. Her father is not a high school graduate and her brother attended college but never finished. Her mother got her Bachelor's and Master's degrees while employed at Temple.

Her mother always said she should go to college, and since her mother worked at Temple, Nija thought she could go there for free. Also, she preferred not to go away to school. Nija lived on campus and was very active in her sorority.

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After three years at Temple, she found that she had lost her motivation. Her parents were divorcing and they had not been able to help her financially as much as had been expected. She was working off-campus and had a work-study job as well. She was put on academic probation.

She decided to take time off to go down to Virginia and help out her grandmother who lived there. She got a job and the "time went by fast." After a year, she started thinking about how she could be done with college if she had stayed, and she started to make arrangements to return.

Nija is currently finishing her final year of college. She had chosen criminal justice as her major because she wanted to go to law school. But now she feels that she is "not competitive" for law school and is considering a Master's degree instead. She is currently living at home with her father.

Rachelle

Rachelle attended a vo-tech high school in Philadelphia (Mercy) because she had no plans to go to college. In the spring of her senior year she started to think of college when one of her counselors suggested it. She says, "Times were changing, you couldn't get a good job anymore with just a high school diploma."

Her parents, who did not attend college themselves, were surprised by her choice, though both her older sisters had gone to CCP for nursing degrees. Rather than face taking the SAT, Rachelle decided to start at community college. She spent two years there, majoring in psychology. She says it was difficult at first, but she adapted and eventually got really involved, participating in as many activities as possible. She had financial aid and her parents helped. She also worked two jobs. Her parents gave her a lot of moral support as well.

Then she was needed to accompany her mother back to Haiti, as there was no one else available. She spent four months there. When she got back she enrolled part-time

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at Temple. She decided not to start out full-time because she didn't want to get "overloaded." She is a psychology major who wants to be a counselor, and would eventually like to go on for a Master's degree.

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Sias

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Sias attended a magnet school for science and engineering in Philadelphia. He says his mother "sent me there" and that there was never any question that he would go to college -- his parents are both college graduates and his six brothers and sisters have also gone to college. His high school "campaigns" for everyone to go to college, and the guidance counselors help students to fill out college and financial aid applications. In 11th grade he attended a college fair at the Civic Center. In 12th grade he started to really consider where he would go and how he would pay. He doesn't especially like math or the sciences, and prefers film and acting. He wanted a school that had "a lot of extracurricular activities."

Sias hadn't considered a black college, feeling they were too expensive and didn't offer enough aid. But his friends who went to black colleges seemed to have fun, the social like was good, and people helped each other.

Sias received a scholarship to West Chester. He lived on campus his first semester, but didn't like being away from the city, says he "felt trapped" out there. He attended for four years, commuting from an apartment he shared with friends, until the scholarship ran out. He wasn't particularly sorry to leave, he didn't like it that much. He commented that it wasn't like the T.V. show, "A Different World." He didn't like his major advisor, who he felt didn't have his best interests at heart. Also, there were very few black students on campus and he felt that he didn't fit in. He says people kept to themselves, that he was typically the only black student in a class and he couldn't find people to study with. He didn't feel comfortable talking with professors.

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Sias planned to immediately transfer to Temple, which is much more affordable, however, he missed the admission deadline for the fall and then decided to take the spring off as well, having "gotten used" to not being a student. But as time went by he started to see how little is possible without the degree. He has loans and works to pay for school. His mother has offered to help, but he prefers to do it on his own.

Ultimately he is glad that he went to West Chester, says he likes the things that he "knows and understands" now: that the world caters to whites and African-Americans need to deal with that. He also likes having been exposed to new ideas and realizing that the world is "more than just your neighborhood."

Sias lives off campus with two friends and is majoring in communications.

Stephen

Stephen attended his neighborhood public high school in Philadelphia, participating in the college prep program. He has an intense interest in rap music and was very distracted by it. A social worker was instrumental in referring him to an all-male boarding school for students who were getting into trouble, where he spent his senior year. There were no distractions at this school, it focused on "pure academics," and Stephen did well. He was also inspired by his brother, who went to the University of Pennsylvania and did well and had a good time. His family and friends were encouraging of his decision to go to college. His father is a college graduate.

Stephen seriously considered a black college, on the strong recommendation of a high school counselor, but they offer much less financial aid and are not "state of the art." He eventually chose Temple because it was closer to home and wouldn't cost as much. His parents want to help him financially, but haven't been able to give much. He relies on financial aid and working part-time, but says he has not found the financial aspect to be a difficulty. He spent two years at Temple, living on campus, but he had gotten involved in rap music again and in his third year was offered the opportunity to go out to

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Los Angeles and make a rap album. He planned to take only one semester off, but that has evolved into a full year. Stephen is re-enrolled for the fall, but the album is way behind schedule and may delay his school plans past September.

He feels that going to college gave him a broader perspective on life, got him thinking "above the neighborhood" -- he says you can end up getting complacent and being satisfied with what you have, if that's all you ever see. He has a lot of expectations for himself and his life now. He started out as an education major and is too close to finishing to switch now (just three semesters to graduate), but he wants to take some business classes, so that he can be more savvy in his music career. He commented that Temple needs to offer more advising, especially freshman year, because they leave it too much on the student to "figure it out."