

down of assistance this is not the case as some individuals get more than one type of assistance.

4. Each individual is counted only once, even if they receive more than one type of assistance.
5. Percentages of No Assistance and All Receiving Any Type of Assistance columns add to 100 per cent. The other four columns are the breakdown of assistance given.

6. Each individual is counted only once, even if they receive more than one type of assistance.
7. Unfortunately the survey did not ask questions relating to employment and therefore this could not be investigated in this sample.
8. It is possible that full-time students could get a sabbatical from their employer and this could include fees and /or wages.

9. The University of Newcastle does not give graduate HECS scholarships to students doing course work degrees. If all universities have this policy full-time students would be disadvantaged further.

## Academic background and achievement of single and married mothers undertaking tertiary study

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Currie and Baldock (1989) in a survey of mature age participation in tertiary education show that the Australian rate has altered over time. In the 1950s and 1960s the rate was low, but during the 1970s and early 1980s it increased dramatically while the participation rate of school leavers declined. From 1987 the growth of mature age student numbers was halted as a result of the Federal Government's decision to increase the proportion of school leavers.

Currie and Baldock suggest that this policy is the result of misconceptions about mature age students which led to their being regarded as an expendable pool of talent that can be ignored in order to enhance the educational opportunities of school leavers. Three of the most important misconceptions are:

Firstly, that mature age students are largely "recyclers", who already have a tertiary qualification and are returning to gain another. They are thus seen as unworthy and as depriving young people of the opportunity to gain a first qualification. Currie and Baldock's figures show this to be untrue. Most mature age students come from backgrounds and circumstances that mitigated against completing secondary school. They represent talent from earlier cohorts which was and is in danger of being wasted.

Secondly, that mature age students are a poor investment because they are often part-time students, and part-timers are supposed to have a lower success rate than full-time students. However, the figures show that it is only certain classes of part-timers who do poorly, not including well-motivated mature-agers.

Thirdly, that mature-agers are a poor investment due to the length of time since they left school and the fact that many are early school leavers who enter tertiary education via special entry provisions. However there is by now substantial

evidence that mature age students are in fact an excellent investment in terms of graduation rates and subsequent workforce contribution (West et al, 1986).

The material reported here concerns a special subgroup of mature age students — single and married mothers. Because of the specially vulnerable status of single parent families, a number of government initiatives have encouraged supporting mothers into further education and training, notably the dual-eligibility provisions (terminated in 1987) whereby social security recipients were able to also draw TEAS while enrolled in fulltime study and the recent introduced JET (job, education and training) program.

An unknown proportion of single mothers have availed themselves of these provisions, but little information on how they fare is available, as student records do not note marital and parental status. The present project explores the experience of this group of students, using a comparison group of married mothers.

### Procedure

The study was conducted in 1987-88, with a sample of 185 single and married mothers enrolled at Macquarie University (MU) and Macarthur Institute of Higher Education (MI: now part of the University of Western Sydney). These two institutions were chosen in order to maximise the spread in socio-economic background to respondents.

MU has a relatively high academic entry requirement, has a large postgraduate enrolment, and is known for its large intake of mature age women, particularly in the humanities, social sciences and biological sciences.

MI has a working class catchment area and has lower entry requirements than MU. In 1986, over one-third of its commencing students did not have a single family member with a tertiary qualification. Mature

age women students are concentrated in welfare, nursing and health studies and teaching; there are fewer of them than at MU.

Our original intention was to conduct interviews with a relatively small sample of single and married mothers. However it soon became apparent that our participants had already given a lot of thought to the issues we raised, and that it would be feasible to use a mail questionnaire that allowed generous room for comments. It thus became possible to study a larger sample.

Topics covered in the self-report questionnaire included social background, educational and employment history, reasons for return to study, university experience, social and material supports available, and experience of personal and family change.

Standardised measures used were the Attitudes to Women scale (Spence and Helmreich, 1978) the Monash Values, Self-concept, Abilities and Leisure Activities scales (West et al 1986), and the time-line system of summarising life history devised by Elggvist-Saltzman (1987).

Institutional records do not indicate whether students have children or not, so it was necessary to sample from these records on the basis of sex and age, and to select a larger number than would otherwise have been required. Questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of 739 MU and 170 MI female students aged 25 and above. 272 were returned, of which 87 were discarded, 66 because the respondents were childless and 21 for miscellaneous reasons. The final sample comprised 107 partnered and 78 single mothers; 137 from MU (78 partnered and 51 single and 48 from MI (21 partnered and 28 single).

The MU mothers were somewhat older (mean of 40.0 years) than those enrolled at MI (mean of 35.5 years), but the ages of the single and married mothers were very

similar. Number of children ranged from 1-7, with a mean of 2.17. Four of the 78 single mothers were widows, six had never married, 49 were divorced and 19 permanently separated. When results had been analysed, issues requiring further exploration were designated, and an interview subsample of 20 was selected to represent major types of experience that emerged in the data.

### Results

#### Which mothers turn to study?

Currie and Baldock (1989) show that mature age students constitute a very mixed group. Some already have tertiary qualifications, but overall they come from less advantaged backgrounds than school-leaver students. Our sample represents this mix. Over one-quarter of the total sample and almost one-third of the MI students were early school leavers.

As expected, MU students came from higher SES backgrounds than MI students and had themselves had more education prior to entry. Over two-thirds of the MI students by contrast had made use of some form of special entry for mature agers without normal academic entry requirements, including training in a profession that did not require matriculation at the time they entered.

The partners of the married women had above average jobs and education, but the ex-partners of the now-single had lower job status, less formal education and more patchy employment records. It seems therefore that the end of a marriage to a lower-achieving man is quite often an antecedent to tertiary (re-)entry.

Almost one quarter (22.2%) of the sample had received most of their education overseas, reflecting the prominence of immigrants among mature age students in general (Currie and Baldock, 1989).

West et al (1986) developed a fivefold typology to describe mature age tertiary entrants — early school leavers, upgraders (who already possess a post-secondary qualification), changers (who already possess a post-secondary qualification but are shifting discipline) deferrers and returners. This typology offers a useful way to categorise student mothers and to explore variations in background associated with the different types of entry. We accordingly invited respondents to describe how they came to be in these categories.

Table 1 shows the sample was spread across the five categories, with early leavers the largest group and deferrers the smallest. Respondents' comments illuminate these figures and highlight some of the attitudes and constraints that discouraged girls from education in earlier cohorts.

Thus the early school leavers, particularly the MI ones, were likely to come from homes where education was seen as "wasted

Table 1: Entry qualifications of students

Qualifications	MU		MI	
	Married N %	Single N %	Married N %	Single N %
Early school leavers	22 (26)	13 (26)	7 (33)	8 (30)
Updaters/upgraders	13 (15)	4 (15)	7 (33)	4 (15)
Change discipline	25 (29)	12 (24)	3 (14)	3 (11)
Returners	13 (15)	13 (26)	3 (14)	4 (15)
Deferrers	12 (14)	7 (14)	1 (4)	8 (30)
Total	85	51	27	21
Missing data	1	1	0	0

Table 2: Reasons for entering tertiary study

Reason	Married %	Single %	MU %	MI %	Total %
Independence	1 (1)	8 (8)	4 (5)	4 (0)	4 (4)
Personal growth	16 (15)	15 (14)	16 (15)	17 (17)	16 (14)
Stimulation/satisfaction	18 (21)	12 (12)	17 (20)	11 (6)	15 (16)
Goal/purpose	1 (2)	2 (1)	2 (2)	1 (2)	1 (2)
Advance career	14 (21)	3 (12)	12 (17)	9 (17)	11 (17)
Improve job/income prospects	21 (22)	30 (31)	24 (24)	28 (31)	25 (26)
Finally able to do it	4 (5)	6 (12)	4 (6)	6 (13)	5 (8)
Help others	3 (1)	2 (1)	2 (1)	3 (2)	3 (1)
Gain Australian qualification	3 (2)	3 (4)	3 (1)	5 (4)	3 (2)
Prove I could do it	1 (1)	5 (5)	6 (3)	1 (0)	5 (2)
Other	12 (9)	10 (5)	10 (7)	15 (8)	12 (8)

= Figures are for first, second and third reasons combined, and converted to percentages. Figures in brackets are percentages for the first reason only.

on girls" or not appropriate for people like themselves. A number reported being "counselled out" of school by teachers, school counsellors and "the nuns" ("Your're wasting your time and ours").

Some women had little secondary or even primary education, for various reasons including being taken out of school to help with seasonal work. Others were from financially comfortable families that nevertheless saw education as alien. A 44-year-old described a nephew who had been the first member of the family to progress past School Certificate. Although he did not in fact finish secondary school, he was known forever after among the family as "The Professor". Her own decision to study had shocked the family, who regarded her as a bad mother, and she was now divorced.

The upgrader and changer categories mostly comprised nurses and teachers who had entered these occupations when entry requirements were lower, and who now needed a degree to get ahead. Nursing was a very common background. Respondents explained that at the time they left school it had seemed an obvious and attractive occupation "for a girl".

It was altruistic, brought financial independence as well as career training and provided the opportunity to live away from home. However many nurses were

disillusioned or even outraged at nursing conditions and were hoping to use their degrees to "get away from hospitals"; thus they could be categorised either as upgraders or changers and in practice the distinction between these two categories proved hard to draw.

Deferrers had matriculated, but decided against tertiary entry. Impatience with study and lack of money were common themes. Several had been counselled poorly at school, found they lacked the prerequisites for the courses they hoped to take, and lost enthusiasm. An early pregnancy was another common reason. One mother had become pregnant while doing her HSC. She applied for entry to teachers' college and was interviewed but

*At the interview it wasn't actually said but I got the feeling that they were virtually telling me that "You better go look after your baby" type of thing. That was the attitude that came across, so I never got to start the teaching course when I wanted to . . . So I ended up working in a bank for six months, and then another few jobs, a bit of factory work here and there. And after that I ended up having another two children. So . . .*

A different group of "deferrers" were immigrants from countries where they were unable to enter higher education for political

reasons, for example because of their family's bourgeois background.

"Returners" were particularly likely to have married while at college or university and subsequently dropped out, because of pregnancy or to fit in with their husbands' plans. One returner for example — now a single mother — had gone straight from school to university with a good HSC and parents' and teachers' blessing. But

*I didn't enjoy it... I met my (ex-husband) and felt that getting married and having kids would be more exciting. I hated Uni then — I thought it was full of North Shore types... Live and learn...*

#### Reasons for entry

Almost three-quarters of the sample offered at least three reasons for returning to study. In Table 2 the first, second and third reasons offered by each student have been combined and converted to percentage, and first reasons mentioned are also included (in brackets).

#### Occupational reasons

The most common reasons offered were occupational. In Table 2 these have been divided into "career advancement" and "job prospects", in order to discriminate those who referred to career goals from those who were principally concerned to move out of relatively dead-end situations. The single mothers were more likely to be in the second category (30% vs 21%), as were the MI students (28% vs 24%), reflecting the generally more disadvantaged situation of these groups.

However the borderline between improving job prospects and career advancement was hazy, with many respondents mentioning both. The point is illustrated in Table 2, where we see that although married students were more likely than the single to offer "career" as their main reason (21% vs 12%), the difference is less marked when first, second and third reasons are combined and compared (14% vs 8%).

An important factor here is the high turnover in the most populous women's professions, nursing and teaching. The nurses in particular were uncertain about whether to seek advancement in their present, dissatisfied with their own lack of education and frustrated at underusing abilities they knew they had.

They realised they needed some means of intellectual and personal growth and some had also become absorbed in particular interests. They were tired of being looked down on as "just a mum" or "factory fodder". They wanted to prove to themselves and to others that they were as competent as the next person. They needed independence. They wanted to take a clearer direction in life and organise the future around long term goals.

These of course are the feelings that Betty Friedan diagnosed long ago as women's "problem without a name". No longer incognito, it is now seen as a natural response to gender-based unequal opportunity. With an average age of forty years, many of our respondents however had grown up to see truncated education and domestic employment as natural for women and even as romantic.

In consequence they came to the experience of dissatisfaction at a personal and idiosyncratic level. One married mother described how she found that she was enjoying her children's school projects and homework more than they did, and concluded that there was a message for her there. Others, particularly the now-single, had more painful experiences of being bullied and demeaned by husbands and others who regarded a "wife" as by definition an inferior person.

Although frustrated abilities provided the major incentive to tertiary entry, it is important to stress the variety of mature age students' lives and motivations. While many had first embraced and then become dissatisfied with domesticity, the sample included a group of younger women who had never been particularly domesticated in their ideas. Some of these had gone into non-degree professions, nursing in particular; others had run businesses, or worked in whatever jobs were available.

A further group of well-qualified and mostly married younger women were using their children's infancy as a time for improving their qualifications while "at home with the baby"; for example a lawyer who was studying Japanese. While these women comprised only a small subgroup of the sample, their numbers can be expected to grow, given the increasing practice among young women of establishing a career before motherhood (Elgqvist-Saltzman, 1967).

Different but equally complex sets of reasons came from others. A group of migrant women had missed out on higher education in their country of origin because of warfare and political problems, and found that Australia offered them the higher education they had always wanted.

In other cases ill health was a factor. An early school leaver had worked as a secretary until she developed RSI. The family had heavy financial commitments (including care of a severely mentally handicapped child) and depended on her salary, but she was told by a counsellor that she was unemployable without further qualifications. She was able to obtain a rehabilitation scholarship to train as a speech pathologist to work with retarded children. Despite the material incentives involved, she gave as her main reason for entry the fact that she had never felt "as good" as others who had completed their education, and her main gain as personal satisfaction and increased

self-esteem.

Table 3 shows some other differences between single and married mothers, in particular the importance of marital separation as a reason for tertiary entry. Of the 78 now-single mothers one half agreed that their marriage breakup had been a factor in their return to study.

A number described their poor and insecure economic position following separation as the specific imperative. More commonly however the decision to study occurred earlier and was just part of a deteriorating domestic situation which led the woman to think through her alternatives.

As noted above, now-single mothers were likely to have married men of somewhat lower educational level to themselves or their fathers. The resultant clash of interests emerges very strongly in many of the accounts given. Husbands were described as not interested in intellectual matters, not sharing any interests, "never read a book", and in one case, illiterate.

Other conflicts arose from irreconcilable values, generalised hostility and antagonism, sexual jealousy, and insecurity. One woman living in a very isolated part of New South Wales, had found herself desperate for some mental stimulation, and had enrolled in a correspondence course. Her husband had sabotaged the project by hiding the mail causing her to leave him and come to Sydney.

Table 3 shows that some married students also gave marital separation as a reason for entry, and in fact there had been a number of temporary separations among the now-married. Some were continuing their studies against a fairly high level of complaint and opposition and commented that learning to live with disapproval was a new skill that they had gained.

By contrast, several had expected their marriages to break up and had turned to study to prepare themselves for single parenthood. However their new interests had improved things at home and they had remained married. A recurrent comment was that the husband had scoffed or disapproved at the start, but that when he "saw I was serious" his attitude changed. One commented that

*The first year was really terrible. He thought I was an imbecile or whatever, and... selfish... He didn't think I'd last you know, just one of those little whims I had... But now he's quite proud of me you know. He encourages me, boasts about my marks, he's really good... Complete change!*

The same change was reported in some ex-husbands who had disapproved of studies that the woman embarked on after the separation, but later became encouraging. We interpret this to mean that there is a group of men who see their wives as shallow and dilettante, and who only revise their

view upwards when she persists and succeeds in an activity such as study against their opposition.

#### Timing of Entry

Some one in twelve students gave as their major reason for tertiary entry the fact that for the first time they had the opportunity (Table 2). As the model age range was 35-44, this suggests that diminishing demands from children was a major factor. At the same time, however, the age range of the students and of their children, was very wide. We therefore explored this area further by asking why this particular time was the right time in their life.

The explanations given make it clear that beliefs about the mesh between occupational and family careers vary greatly. For some younger women, having a baby meant the chance to give up work and start studying for a better job while "at home with the baby". More commonly, especially for the now-married women, it was the youngest child's school entry, which freed up time. For some this brought not only more time, but the moral right to turn their thoughts to topics other than children's needs.

A smaller group thought that the youngest child's secondary school entry was a more appropriate time. Some put it even later. One married mother had started a course when her children were at high school, but withdrawn because of their resentment and waited till they left home before she re-enrolled.

A divorcee in her fifties had serious money problems, and thought that for her own sake it would have been better if she had been able to start her course when she was first divorced. But that had not been possible then because her sons were still in high school and she felt she should be "there for them" until they finished their education.

Single mothers entered study across the same broad age and life cycle range as the married, but gave somewhat different reasons for their timing. They did not feel so much need to justify their studies to children ("They can see I'm doing it for their sake, and that we'll all be better off"). But they were also often reluctant to enter study while children were under school age, as well as facing the more practical problems of child care costs and absence of a co-parent and child minder.

In consequence their entry was very influenced by external events. They saw their adult education as made possible by new policies: abolition of tertiary fees ("for the first time it was FREE"), university encouragement of mature age students ("the University of Sydney had an advertisement and that's what did it") introduction of special entry schemes and quotes ("I heard about 'The Entry'") government financial support (e.g. through the "dual eligibility" policy of allowing fulltime single parent

Table 3: Students who agreed that the following were relevant to their tertiary re-entry. (Multiple response)

Relevant factor	MU		MI		Total %
	Married N %	Single N %	Married N %	Single N %	
Example of spouse	23 (27)	4 (8)	2 (10)	1 (4)	16
Example of friends	20 (23)	15 (29)	6 (29)	4 (15)	24
Marital separation	5 (6)	23 (45)	0 (0)	16 (59)	24
Personal development	82 (95)	49 (96)	20 (95)	24 (89)	96
Financial improvement	31 (36)	31 (61)	10 (48)	19 (70)	49
Status improvement	52 (60)	23 (45)	12 (57)	12 (44)	54
Always wanted to	59 (69)	36 (71)	14 (67)	20 (74)	70
Show I could do it	64 (74)	24 (47)	15 (71)	16 (59)	65

Table 4: Fields of study

Field	MU		MI	
	Married N %	Single N %	Married %	Single %
Economic/commerce	3 (3)	4 (8)	2 (10)	—
Education	13 (15)	16 (31)	2 (10)	6 (22)
Nursing	—	—	3 (38)	2 (7)
Science/technology	15 (18)	3 (6)	—	—
Arts/social sciences	49 (57)	25 (49)	4 (19)	4 (15)
Welfare	—	—	4 (19)	12 (45)
Law	2 (2)	1 (2)	—	—
Other/Not known	4 (5)	2 (4)	1 (4)	3 (11)
<b>N</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>

students to draw both social security and TEAS), child care assistance (several students reported choosing or transferring to MU because of its child care facilities) and the introduction of new courses that were right for them. A dramatic example of a publicity program that hit a very personal mark was given by one student.

*I was in Bankstown Square one night — my marriage was in a very bad way. There was a group of people from Macarthur giving people information... They talked to me and it was like a straw to a drowning person.*

About half the sample thought it would have been easier to take their degrees at a younger age, and about one-quarter thought it would be better later (some of these were the same people, who thought either earlier or later would be easier than now). The difficulties of juggling family and study commitments was the main problem, mentioned more often by the married (35%) than the single (23%).

At the same time, there was general agreement, especially among the single mothers, that age, motivation and experience made for a better student, so that the "easiest" time was not necessarily the best time. One thirty-four year old had become pregnant during her HSC years and her subsequent attempt to enter university had been frustrated by repeated pregnancies. Now a lone parent of four and an education student she was

*Getting a lot more benefit from it because I'm not straight out of school. Plus I've got four children of my own and so I've got the experience of what children are like... You're told here at college that when you hit the classroom you get a bit of a shock you know. "Ahhh, kids!" I don't have that problem. So I think I'm glad it turned out this way really.*

#### Enrolment patterns

Table 4 shows that the sample were concentrated in traditionally "female" areas of study and a comparison with overall enrolments showed the mothers to have made more "traditional" choices than younger women students.

Reasons given were that these seemed the "obvious courses to do, that the professions involved were attractive, particularly because they involved working with people and helping people, that the hours of work would fit in with family responsibilities, and that staff teaching the course were sympathetic to people like themselves.

A postgraduate science student for example commented that in all her time as an undergraduate she had only ever had to take one class that kept her from being home when her children returned from school.

Only a small minority of mothers were in non-traditional areas, but they were determined to stay there and succeed. This could

Table 5: Pattern of study

	MU		MI	
	Married N %	Single N %	Married N %	Single N %
All F/T	4 (5)	6 (12)	8 (38)	19 (17)
P/T, changed to F/T	5 (6)	5 (10)	—	2 (7)
P/T, some F/T	7 (8)	4 (7)	1 (4)	—
All P/T	51 (59)	20 (39)	8 (38)	2 (7)
F/T some P/T	4 (5)	8 (16)	2 (10)	3 (11)
Other/Not known	15 (17)	8 (16)	2 (10)	1 (4)
<b>N</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>27</b>

involve strenuous effort and careful planning. One student who was driving 130 kilometres every day after a course she was doing had been transferred to another institution.

Several other mothers were taking technology courses that would qualify them to work in areas where the job demands were not already ironcast into a structure incompatible with mothering responsibilities, for example in some newer areas of computing.

Compared to the married mothers, the single were more likely to be enrolled in vocational courses — education, nursing and welfare. Once having selected a course, most students had stayed with it. Only five per cent of the supporting mothers (11% of the total sample) had transferred to another institution or another course, and these were mostly cases where the family had moved.

Table 5 shows that few of the MU students were enrolled full-time throughout their course. The figure is higher for supporting mothers (12% full-time and another 16% mostly full-time) who could draw both SPB and TEAS as full-time but not as part-time students, and thus had a financial incentive to full-time status. Full-time status was much more common for MI single mothers, who were more likely than their MU counterparts to be on social security.

Some married MU students had been enrolled for considerable periods, during which they juggled triple-track careers as mothers, paid workers and students (in one case since 1975). Single mothers had generally been a shorter time in the system, but six had first enrolled before 1982 and triple-tracked since then, reducing and increasing their course loads in line with current circumstances.

Close to one-half (43%) of the single mothers at MU and one-third (34%) of the now-married worked full-time while studying part-time. Although full-time rates at MI were much higher, almost half the students had some form of current employment and a further 11% were actively seeking work.

### Academic achievement

The academic performance of these students was superior. Both married and single mothers obtained results well above the average for all mature age students and much above that for all students. Within the MU sample, for example, married mothers had Grade Point Averages of 2.94 (where 3.0 is equivalent to a B or credit average) and single mothers of 2.67, compared to 2.58 for all mature age students, and 2.29 for all students.

Five student mothers had a GPA of 4.00, equivalent to straight A's and typical of only 0.1% of the total student population. MI does not convert grades to GPAs, but the same effect is evident. The married mothers averaged 7.75 A+B grades and 5.8 C grades, and the single mothers 6.3 A+B grades and 8.1 C grades.

This solid performance was reflected in self-ratings of academic performance, where almost two-thirds of the sample rated themselves "above average", almost one-third as "well above average" and only two per cent as "below average". However it contrasts strikingly with the 66 per cent who described themselves as coping "poorly" with university work and the 25% who thought they were coping "very poorly". There are probably two reasons for this discrepancy.

Firstly, assignments and study were often completed under harassing circumstances, through the night after the family was in bed or in a state of guilt about shutting off from the demands of husbands and children "sighing and sulking" in the near background.

Secondly, tertiary essays and assignments often involve topics that can be treated at a variety of levels. School leaver students are accustomed to this from their senior school years, and don't usually have so much trouble finding an appropriate level at which to work.

The mature agers however were constantly frustrated at never having the time to "do anything properly", even though they often achieved above average grades. Four in five thought they would be getting higher grades if they had more time for study, and one in

five (28% of the single) thought they would be gaining "much higher" grades.

As in West et al's (1986) national sample of men and women mature age students, we found no differences between the academic performance of early school leavers and others. This is a remarkable finding when one bears in mind that this group included some who for various reasons had very little secondary or even primary schooling, and some had "never read a book" between leaving school and starting their present studies. One woman with barely one year of high school described how

*I found I had to learn to write again, to actually put pen to paper and write things down, cause I really hadn't written or read anything for twenty odd years, and it's a long while to actually, sort of, not sit down. When you've got a family, you don't really have time if you don't do it in the evening and my husband didn't like me reading then . . . I'd thought about doing it years before, but I wasn't game enough. I made a few enquiries about people who went back at an older age and they said it was pretty hard. So I thought since it's only me, and . . . I don't take failure very well . . . But I always really wanted to, you know, do something more, make something of myself. And then Bert left and there was the opportunity. So I took it.*

### Discussion

Mature age students in general have above average success in tertiary studies, but mature age student mothers are exceptionally successful. Furthermore, the early school leavers are as successful as others. The reasons why these intellectually competent women have come late to tertiary study are complex. Some came from families where low income and/or attitudes unsympathetic to extended education discouraged sons as well as daughters.

In most cases however femaleness itself was a very important factor. Parents thought education was "wasted" on girls who would "only get married" and/or the women themselves remembering being more interested in romance than study, and/or an early pregnancy set their lives in alternative directions.

With a model age of around 40 years, the sample had left school at a time when female secondary retention rates were considerably lower than they are today. It may be therefore that they represent a group whose numbers will soon thin as more and more girls complete school and move directly to higher study.

However the histories of the younger sample members indicated that other events in women's lives — for example early marriage or pregnancy — continue to delay the tertiary education of competent young women, suggesting a continuing demand for mature age study.

Some implications of the findings merit emphasis. Firstly, government policies have been critical in shaping the lives of these women. Tertiary education was opened to them by a sequence of policy decisions, in particular the abolition of tertiary fees, the introduction of various special entry schemes and the dual-eligibility provisions that allowed social security benefit recipients to also receive TEAS.

These policies allowed many competent mature age women to enter the professions. Government policy can also function so as to discourage them and reduce their numbers. This has been the case with the policy changes introduced in 1987. It is to be hoped that new initiatives will reverse this trend.

Secondly, the place of work in the life cycle is in process of great change. It is not so long since we expected men to enter the workforce early and to leave it at 65, if they lived so long; and women to raise families

and then live quietly, firstly with their retired husbands and later as widows. Now children are few, life is long, and around the western world mandatory retirement is on the way out. Midlife career starts have to be seen in this context, and a variety of age-discriminatory practices overcome.

A third issue is the positive impact on children of mothers' mid-life transitions from homemaker to career woman. Our participants' aspirations for their children's education had often increased, as had the children's for themselves. They consider that their own academic successes had underlined the value of study and made it seem a possibility even in families that had no previous experience or expectation of tertiary education. Their tertiary experience can thus be seen as having significant flow-on to the next generation of tertiary students.

## A survey of overseas students in Queensland

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In 1985, the Australian Federal Government decided to allow tertiary education institutions to offer places to full-fee paying students from overseas. This decision was followed by a determined effort by the Government to induce the institutions to assume a dynamic entrepreneurial role in recruiting such students. As a result, various institutions have responded to the challenge and actively engaged in a wide variety of recruitment activities mainly throughout South-East Asia and, in particular, in Hong Kong.

The very positive and unexpected response of students from overseas to educational opportunities in Queensland created some strains on existing infrastructures and a need for the sharpening of administrative and pedagogic sensitivities. However, it was apparent that in the two years since the influx of full-fee paying students began, neither the time nor the resources had been devoted to systematically seeking their views. Hence this initial study was undertaken in the hope of providing some objective data and indications of future adjustments to the programmes and the supporting structures.

The objective of this paper is to present some basic data concerning full-fee paying students such as their origins, objectives, costs, benefits and future plans. In addition, the data shed light on students' motivation in selecting their particular institution and academic areas of specialisation. It is expected that this project will form the basis

for an ongoing monitoring of this particular class of students. This will help to ensure that as successive cohorts enrol, their performance is enhanced by a conducive environment.

### The survey

The survey was a questionnaire which contained twenty-seven questions divided into the following classifications: personal information; family background; study choices; expenditure pattern in Australia; (the student's) assessment of the cost/benefit of studying in Australia.

In the majority of cases, the questionnaires were distributed from some central contact point in each institution involved in the survey and their completion was not supervised.

It was the intention of the authors to seek to sample students studying in Queensland by selecting representative institutions. Those chosen were the authors' own institution (Griffith University), the Brisbane College of Advanced Education, James Cook University of North Queensland, Queensland University of Technology and the University College of Central Queensland.

The total population of full-fee paying students in these institutions at the time of the survey (October 1989) was 398. A total of 178 responses were received (or 44.7 per cent) which, in view of the preoccupation of students with end of year assessment, was considered reasonable. Not surprisingly, the

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response rate from Griffith University students (97.9 per cent) was considerably greater than the overall average.

Despite the previous comment, the statistics and associated discussion presented in this paper will not be institution-specific, rather the focus will be aggregate responses.

### Personal information

The respondents came from twenty different countries, with those in South-East Asia dominating. This is not surprising given the enormous demand in the region for tertiary education, the concentration of the institutions' recruitment activities in the region and the relatively close proximity of Queensland.

It is apparent that the impending major changes to the political and economic future of Hong Kong will have contributed to the high level of enrolments from the colony.

The youngest student was age 17 and the oldest 40, but 86.7 per cent of respondents were aged 25 or less. Females made up 44.9 per cent of the respondents. Only 5.1 per cent of the students were married but over half had brought their spouses to Australia with them.

The accommodation occupied is clearly a function of many socio-economic factors and the availability of different types of accommodation: (Table 2)

Probably for security reasons, a higher percentage of female students live in University residences and with friends and relatives