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The undergraduate experience of turnaround after academic suspension: A phenomenological analysis

S. Melanie Hoell
The University of Montana

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THE UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE OF TURNAROUND
AFTER ACADEMIC SUSPENSION:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

by
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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
The University of Montana
May 2006

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The Undergraduate Experience of Turnaround after Academic Suspension: A Phenomenological Analysis

Chairperson: Catherine Jenni, Ph.D

This study investigated the perceptions of six college students who experienced academic difficulty, academic suspension, and an eventual academic turnaround to return to good academic standing at The University of Montana in 2005. The researcher applied a qualitative, phenomenological/psychological methodology developed by Amedeo Giorgi to access, analyze, and explicate the subjective and psychological dimensions of the phenomenon.

The results of the data analysis revealed that the participants traveled an emotional path that consisted of three parts. The journey was characterized by two academic spirals, first a downward one and later an upward one that was mitigated by a transformational pivot which changed the direction of the spiral. During their initial college experience, the students felt overwhelmed, inadequate, different from other students, and eventually disengagement from the college experience. As the students struggled academically they felt frustrated, confused, anxious, guilty, embarrassed, and ashamed and when academically suspended, the students were shocked, afraid, in denial, and they felt cornered and forced to reflect on their life circumstances. During the students’ return to good academic standing, they made a conscious decision to change and develop different habits, felt empowered and changed by success and support, and were hopeful and looked toward the future.

This study hoped to benefit the subjects themselves by providing an opportunity for them to share, examine, and understand their college experience. The study has implications for other students who may experience similar circumstances and for other stakeholders in the successful college experience: college retention personnel, educational administrators, and school counselors and advisors who are dedicated to improving students’ adjustment to college, academic success, and persistence and graduation rates.
For Ma
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Chapter One

Introduction

More students leave than stay (Tinto, 1993).

In April, 2005, this researcher began the data collection for a study of The University of Montana college students’ experience of academic difficulty, academic suspension and reinstatement, and subsequent return to good academic standing. Across a two-week period of time nine students who fit the research profile and who had volunteered to participate in the study were interviewed and audio-taped. The researcher, who has worked for over twenty years as an academic advisor for at-risk college students, did something unprecedented in the interviews with the nine research participants. She listened. She took no intake notes, made no assessments, and offered no advice. She interrupted rarely and then only to clarify or keep the interview on track.

At the completion of the interviews, the researcher transcribed each verbatim. Then the researcher did another unprecedented thing. She analyzed the transcript data using a qualitative method of phenomenological distillation. The results of the data analysis for six of the participants appear in this study. This study may be the first of its kind in the research literature on college students’ experience of academic difficulty, suspension, and return to good academic standing.

These findings offer rich description and deep textural context to the large mass of research on college student attrition, persistence, and retention to graduation. Much is known about larger samples of college students’ experiences but very little is reported in the literature from the individual student viewpoint. This study breathes life into the college student data that are most often collected in large numbers. By doing so, this
turns populations into unique people and provides educators with new ways of looking at and learning about the experience of college students who struggle to succeed.

Background of the Problem

There are many reasons to study college student success and failure. Multiple audiences are affected by the successful or unsuccessful college experience. These include college students themselves, their parents and extended family, their peers, and eventually their life partners and their children (Gamson, 1991). There are frequent references in newspapers, magazines, college recruitment materials, and in the educational research literature that extol the benefits of a college degree. Beyond academic reasons, economic extrapolations indicate that college graduates will make over one million dollars more than their counterparts who do not have college degrees. There are also well-documented benefits that accrue to particular individuals, as well as to society in general, that result from successively higher levels of education (McClanahan, 2004).

College faculty, staff, and administrators are other stakeholders who are invested in educational outcomes. The increasing access to higher education by a more heterogeneous mix of applicants has stimulated college personnel to develop strategies and curricula to address college persistence (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). Studies have been directed toward pre-college academic preparation, college student profiles, and the transition from high school to college (Cuseo, 2003). A great deal of study has focused on the variety of issues surrounding the vicissitudes of the freshman year experience (Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999) and more recently, new data is emerging about alarming attrition related to a perceived sophomore, or second year “slump” (Graunke,
Woosley, & Sherry, 2005). Research points to the fact that returning and adult learners require different transition assistance and access to academic remediation and study skill acquisition (Thomas, 2005). Educators must be sensitive and responsive to a wider and wider range of student types and needs. Emphasis is increasingly placed on the cost to colleges of not meeting goals to provide the best social, academic, and engagement experiences for all students. Institutional costs of student attrition include the loss of future tuition, fees, and faculty lines, and increased student recruitment costs (Habley & Morales, 1998).

Governing bodies such as state legislatures and regents, higher education commissioner’s offices, and the federal government have obvious financial interests in the college student experience and in success rates measured by persistence in college and timely graduation (Rossides, 2004). However, students falling short of the degree are not the only concern to taxpayers and their governmental representatives. A recent report about funding at The University of Montana indicates that in the past ten years college tuition has doubled. While tuition costs will continue to rise, the amount of state-legislated support for Montana resident students has dropped in the same ten-year period from a funding level of roughly 50 percent to a current level of closer to 30 percent. Worse, Montana college students commonly graduate with a debt load of between $20,000 and $40,000 and college students who leave before earning the degree may have similar debt loads (George Dennison, radio interview, March 13, 2006). Reports like these frame the relevance of research about the college experience, heighten the awareness of the financial aspects of student attrition and persistence, and encourage
focused efforts on deliberate and effective ways to increase the number and kind of students who persist in college until graduation.

However, despite the fact that emphasis on developing and applying effective retention strategies toward college students has increased over the past several decades, college student attrition rates continue to be reported as relatively high. The data collected for the past 20 years demonstrated little change in five-year graduation rates for combined institutions (bachelor, master, and doctoral). It ranges from a low of 50.9% to a high of 54.6% with a 2003 rate of 51.6% (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Stated another way, even among the students most likely to succeed – those who begin their college careers as full-time freshmen in four-year colleges and universities – only six out of every ten of them, on average, get a B.A. within six years. This translates into over half a million collegians every year who fall short of acquiring the credentials, skills, and knowledge they seek.

**Measures of College Success**

Research and data on college student persistence and retention typically involve studies that report rates of freshman to sophomore year persistence, graduation rates across four and six years, and assessments of retention programs (Swail, 2004). Because of rising costs of higher education, increased institutional competition for students, and advancements in technology, data warehousing provides interested parties with more and more increasingly complex retention data (Burd, 2004). At The University of Montana, it is now possible to identify populations of students who are at risk in particular ways or who are leaving prematurely (Office of Planning, Budget, and Analysis (OPBA), 2006),
and the imperative is to develop population-specific interventions such as financial incentives, special courses, and strategic advising.

Under the category of "leave no stone unturned," it makes sense to look beyond the standardized retention numbers that are regulated by the U.S. Education Department. In fact, there are many problems with the way that college retention is measured and how institutions are judged and funded, often for choices that students make that are beyond institutions’ control. There are reasons to apply a different lens to this problem says Terry W. Hartle, senior vice president for government and public affairs at the American Council on Education. Looking at a bigger snapshot, Hartle said “Transcripts are the DNA of higher education; they don’t lie” (Burd, 2004). In fact, Clifford Adelman, a senior research analyst with the U.S. Education Department, recently analyzed thousands of college transcripts of students and reported much higher graduation rates when counting the large number of students who start college at one institution and graduate from a transfer institution. Transfer students are not counted in graduation rates at all. Students who transfer are dropped from the freshman cohort at the college where they first enrolled and they do not qualify to be counted as a member of the freshman cohort at their transfer institution. Transfer students who graduate are in essence counted as dropouts and are included as numbers in attrition data (Burd, 2004)!

As Mark Twain was believed to have mused "There are lies, damned lies, and statistics!" There seems to be plenty of good reasons to look beyond population totals, descriptive statistics, and quantitative measures applied to populations of college students to seek out the more personal information about the success or lack of success in college students’ experiences. The narratives of individual college students and their records
provide complexity and depth to augment the facts and figures of anonymous populations in the same way that essay examinations complement the classroom assessments of true-false, multiple-choice, and "fill in the blank" tests. Individual transcripts provide a place to start in efforts to reveal more than the two standard measures of college persistence and retention.

The Individual College Student

A college student’s academic transcript is as individual as his or her fingerprint. Like a fingerprint, the transcript’s inky impressions represent a coded manifestation of the layers of the student’s academic background, interests, abilities, and achievements. The idiosyncratic educational history is distilled into letters and symbols, printed upon paper, and made official by embossing that certifies authenticity. The transcript presents a viewer with a picture of the student’s college experience, its breadth and depth or its narrowness, specificity, or limitations. Perhaps above all else, the transcript reports the official judgment of the scholarly academy about the student through individual course grades, term grade point averages, and ultimately the student’s overall cumulative grade point average.

Grades and grade point averages are the legal tender of the academic economy. In certain ways, academic records govern a student’s future. There are tangible and intangible rewards for the student who earns good grades. One less tangible reward for good grades is the attachment of an overall halo of success to that student and an invisible self-fulfilling prophecy extends to the student’s future successes. Alternatively, a student with a mediocre or poor academic record will certainly be impacted psychologically as well by the consequences of his or her academic failure. Just as success elates, failure
deflates, and students who encounter repeated failure develop secondary characteristics such as poor motivation, a tendency to give up and withdraw, and lack of interest in learning new things (Lebedina-Manzoni, 2004). It is not uncommon for students with poor grades to keep them to themselves and to lie about academic progress to family and friends, activities that eventually backfire.

But obviously not all students will be good students. Such is the American grading system: if someone earns an “A” someone else must get a lower grade in order for the “A” to mean something. A discussion of a student transcript or a narrative of a student’s personal college experience provides a different perspective when viewing the larger landscape of American higher education. Looking closely at smaller images serves a purpose akin to providing insets in the large maps included in an atlas. It is great to see the continent but important as well to see the countries, counties, states, parishes, and small towns that make up the land mass. Since the larger landscape is constituted of the combined results of success or failure of masses of students, the interpretation of these pesky (and perhaps flawed) numbers drive college and university curricula, institutional reputations and funding levels, and most importantly affect the lives of students who attend, persist, succeed or fail, and ultimately graduate or not within certain time periods (McClanahan, 2004).

Critical decisions are made based on conglomerates of formulaic profiles that include weighted demographics, and these statistical data drive the financial mission of institutions. Higher education is bound by increasingly competitive business practices. Who comes, who stays, who succeeds, and who fails are some of the bottom lines for the corporate educational system in 2006. Institutions “have been focusing their energies on a...
form of competition based...on institutional prestige and revenues...and competition has been exacerbated by...an expanding array of college rankings by publications” (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004). Any measures that can predict success rates become the gold standard for the institution (Levitz, Noel, Richter, 1999). By taking a closer look, some discovery may occur about these phenomena.

Statement of the Problem

Since colleges and universities are compared and judged by such things as freshman to sophomore year persistence numbers and four and six-year graduation statistics, educators continue to address and refine “problems” by taking measures of the masses.

The issue of student retention and persistence has continued to grow in importance throughout the history of higher education in our country. Early studies (Astin, 1977) focused on the characteristics of those students who did not persist and such studies were used as evidence for higher admissions standards or more quality control of recruitment. However, beginning [in] the 1970’s the research began to focus on what were the reasons students remained enrolled and how colleges and universities could make changes or develop programs which would increase the retention of their students (Nutt, 2003).

As statisticians know well, averages include a range of numbers. So, within a persisting or graduating population, there is a wide spread in the range of student demographics, success predictors, and grade point averages. At most colleges and universities, including The University of Montana, each graduating class includes students who were not predicted to succeed; in each freshman-to-sophomore persistence cohort, there are students who fall below the C average that defines “good academic standing”; and in each population of students who have left the institution before graduating, there is a combination of those who left in good standing and those who left
due to academic dismissal (Hoyt & Winn, 2004). What accounts for this variability and how different are students who stay from their peers who leave?

Since the end goal of higher education is the completion of a course of study and the attainment of a degree, it is also a goal to keep students on track toward the degree, and to help students do well enough to earn the degree (Walsh, 2003). So, what is done with average or below average students? Who are they? What are the causes for their poor grades? What can be learned from students who struggle academically in order to help them do better and to help them succeed?

For all of the perceived accuracy of the transcript record of a student’s college courses, major, grades, and academic standing, there is a full, complete, and lived story behind each posting to that record. Students can tell us about that particular low or high grade in a course, they can tell us about the nature of an individual semester, and they can relate the life events that occurred during a specific time period. Qualitative methods “may be of particular value” in capturing the complexities of dynamic interactions and personal narratives in which “individuals report what happened and what was done in response” can provide important insights (Phinney & Haas, 2003). What individual students can tell us about their academic experience, both the good and the bad, gives life to it. This telling puts a face on the codes and symbols of the transcript and provides texture, substance, reason and depth to the context of academic life. What unfolds is a living and breathing drama that is the college student experience. It is the telling of this drama that is the subject of inquiry in this paper.

This study intends to listen to students who have experienced both ends of the grade continuum, both academic difficulty and academic success. In doing so, it is hoped
that the findings will contribute to the small amount of qualitative research on the personal dimensions of college student academic perseverance and persistence and also to the smaller amount of research devoted to academic failure and suspension (Rita Jr., 1998). This study seeks to discover what academic adversity feels like, what contributes to academic turnaround, and what students reflect after-the-fact about their experiences along the academic continuum.

**Rationale**

Most predictors for a student’s college success arise from academic records that include grades, grade point averages, class ranks, and preparatory curricula. Standardized achievement test scores such as assessments from ACT, the American College Test or the SAT, the Scholastic Aptitude Test, or the TOEFL, the Test of English Foreign Language also serve to predict first semester college success. Individual institutions also develop homegrown assessments (such as English, mathematics, and foreign language placement assessments) that categorize students according to ability. All these quantitative measures collude to pigeon-hole students into an identity, a rank, or in some cases, a “persistence index” as a way to classify them, place them in appropriate entry-level courses, and identify those who may be “at risk” in ways that might interfere with their continued college attendance (Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999).

In truth, if one could develop an accurate predictor for college success, one could retire a millionaire. In reality, beyond straight-A students, the majority of undergraduate college students of average or above average scholastic aptitude bring with them to campus a vast array of skills and abilities, limitations or difficulties, and their college experiences further bolster them, challenge them, or cause them to succeed and proceed
to graduation or to fail, drop out, transfer, or otherwise leave higher education without earning a degree (Higgins, 2003). It is well-documented in the literature on college students that there are no certain means of predicting which college-bound students will succeed or which students will fail, which students will drop-out or stop-out, and who will graduate and who will not. The fact is that many high school students with average grades come to college and do quite well while some very high-achieving high school students flunk out of college after their first term. Tinto (1987, 1993) reported that 85 percent of students who leave college depart voluntarily, even when academic performance is not a concern. Regardless of circumstances surrounding college student attrition, poor adjustment to college and to the specific college is at the root of decisions to leave and many studies have demonstrated nonacademic variables predict college adjustment outcomes more accurately than academic ability variables (Martin Jr., Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999). Hopefully, the qualitative data in this study of academic success and failure will offer insight into college student adjustment.

Students who experience college failure do so for many reasons and institutions of higher education are increasingly committed to identifying risk and other factors that contribute to students’ poor college adjustment. This study intends to discover what is present in a student’s daily challenges of academia, what a particular student experiences during academic struggle and failure, and what his or her reasons are for continuing to persist when other students leave.

Design of the Study

This research is presented in six chapters including this chapter, the introduction. In Chapter Two the researcher presents a review of the literature (much of which is
collateral) that is relevant to the research topic. This review includes an historical overview of trends in American higher education, the multiple values of a college education, predictors of college student success, factors that affect students’ continued persistence or result in their attrition, academic failure, and The University of Montana-specific retention responses.

Chapter Three includes a detailed description of the systematic phenomenological/psychological research methodology developed by Amedeo Giorgi (Giorgi, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1989). This process is used to examine participants’ self-reported experience of events relevant to a topic of study. Phenomenological research is discussed first in the context of the general realm of educational research and then as a type of the qualitative research paradigm that is the twin to, or complement of, quantitative inquiry. The phenomenological method is then described in terms of the details in this study including participant selection, the procedure to collect the narrative data, and the phenomenological reduction process used in the data analysis.

In Chapter Four are presented the results of the data analysis. This illuminates the participants’ perceptions of the phenomenon both individually and later collectively. The Level Four transformations of the participants’ individual protocols describe their individual but now more abstract psychological experiences. The Level Five fundamental description of persistent psychological themes is presented from across all participants’ consolidated protocols. Finally, the essential description, or core of the experience (Level Six), is presented and constitutes the ultimate achievement of the analysis.

In Chapter Five the participants’ perceptions are discussed at length and verified by “triangulating” the themes that emerged from the data. The themes are discussed in
comparison to the perspectives of other college students and college student experiences as explicated in the earlier review of the literature and whenever relevant, from the researcher’s personal and professional experience as well.

**Chapter Six** serves to identify the benefits and implications of the research for the participants, for educators and other interested stakeholders in higher education, and for professionals working in the field of college student retention and persistence.

The chapters are followed by a complete list of **References**. The **Appendices** provide copies of the research description, the demographic information questionnaire, the participant information and consent form, and the Levels 1-3 (verbatim transcripts, spontaneous meaning units, and narratives based on emergent themes) that constitute the raw data and the initial, individual data reductions for participants 1-6.

**Discussion of Terms**

The University of Montana in 2005

The University of Montana in Missoula is a mid-sized university with an undergraduate population of slightly under 12,000. The UM is located in an essentially rural state that includes under one million in population contained within 145,556 square miles. Montana’s population is predominately White, with between six to seven percent of its residents being American Indian. The population and geography of Montana conspire to create a quite small tax base for public concerns such as funding for and support of higher education. At UM, there are concerted efforts to predict accurately student enrollment in order to maximize access to the small amount of state funded support for resident students, to improve continually the student retention and graduation rates which are important to invested constituents as well as to the role they play in
continued legislative funding, and to foster diversity through increasing the number of minority and international students.

At UM, programs are offered to enhance the success of first generation and financially disadvantaged (Educational Opportunity Program, EOP), disabled (Disability Services for Students, DSS and Counseling and Psychological Services, CAPS), freshmen (Undergraduate Advising Center (UNC), the Freshman Year Experience program, FYE), and academically underprepared (Student Tutoring Students, STS, the Writing Center, and the Mathematics Learning Center) students. There are also service learning programs, clubs, and activities designed to engage students and there are student support programs for international students (Foreign Student and Scholar Services) and American Indian students (American Indian Student Support Program).

However, despite the plethora of programs to address student academic and social needs, the number of students placed on academic probation (1,100) and suspension (389, 165 of which were reinstated for the next term) at the end of Autumn 2005 was at an alarming, all time high. Part, but not all, of the reasons for the increasing number of students experiencing academic difficulty may be attributed to the University’s relatively open admission standards, and these will be discussed further in later chapters. There are other reasons that contribute to this trend, and these will also be discussed in further detail in later chapters.

**Academic Standing**

Academic guidelines, policies, and procedures are contained in the University catalog that is updated and reprinted each year. Academic standing is determined at the time grades are posted for a term. The UM students are in **good academic standing** when
their first term grade point average (tgpa) or subsequent overall cumulative grade point average (cgpa) is a 2.0, C average, or above. A student is placed on academic probation at the end of any semester if his or her term or cumulative grade point average drops below a 2.0, C average. Furthermore, a student will placed on academic suspension if he or she was placed on academic probation during the last semester of attendance and his or her cumulative grade point average is still below a 2.00, C average. An exception is made if the student earns at least a 2.00 grade average for the term without raising the cumulative grade point average to the required 2.0, C average, minimum.

The effect of academic suspension is that a student may not re-enroll at the University without academic reinstatement. In order to be reinstated, a student must receive the approval of the dean of the school or college in which he or she intends to enroll. A reinstated student is placed on academic probation. Probation will continue until either the student continues to earn grade averages below 2.0 (resulting in re-suspension), or the student’s overall cumulative grade point average returns to, at minimum, a 2.0 or C average, resulting in a return to good academic standing.

Other Retention Terminology

Students are considered to be at risk for various reasons, including: pre-college academic preparation does not meet the standards of the institution; inadequate college preparatory curriculum in high school; high school cumulative grade point average; insufficient minimum ACT or SAT scores; insufficient high school class ranking. Student persistence refers to a student enrolling in a continuous fashion until graduation; attrition refers to a student leaving the institution for any reasons. The term retention may refer either to persistent freshman to sophomore enrollment (usually reported in a
percentage rate of a matriculating cohort of first year, full time students) or retention to graduation (also called “throughput”) which is a reported percentage rate of the matriculating cohort of first year, full time students who persist to graduation in measures of four, five, six, and nine year rates. Withdrawal occurs when a student leaves the institution after the start of a semester and before the natural end to that semester and completes paperwork specifying reasons for leaving; otherwise, a student who leaves abruptly during a term is called a drop-out or stop-out (Hoyt & Winn, 2004).

The Researcher

The researcher has worked with college students who struggle to maintain or regain good academic standing for over two decades. She hoped to discover what students have to say about their initial college experience, first encounter with academic difficulty, their experience of being suspended academically and reinstated, and how their return to good academic standing was perceived. While the researcher has worked with many students in these circumstances, rarely has she been in the situation of “listen only” without the urgent need to provide advice, referrals, support, or options. The researcher, interested in the students’ experiences, was further interested in the psychological dimensions of the students’ perceptions. Participants were encouraged to describe life situations they had experienced and to explore what meanings these situations had for them. Through the phenomenological analysis process, the researcher expected to discover the psychological dimensions of their experience.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

A revolution appears to be sweeping the campuses of the nation’s colleges and universities, and it is based on a simple credo: The success of an institution and the success of its students are inseparable... The credo also has an important corollary: Student persistence to the completion of educational goals is a key indicator of student satisfaction and success. (Levitz, Noel, & Rickter, 1999, p. 31).

As late as the mid-1970’s in the history of American higher education, there was a common sentiment shared with new college students during their orientation programs, their convocations at the start of their first college term, and even as part of lectures in freshman classes. College enrollees were told,

Pay attention, you new college students gathered here today! You need to know that college is a serious enterprise that calls for the most dedicated students among you. Now, look to the person seated to your left. Then, take a good, hard look at the person seated to your right. By this time next year, only two of the three of you students will return for a second year of college. It’s up to you to decide if you are college material (D.L. Habbe, personal communication, April 13, 2005).

This sobering thought delivered key information to the uninitiated college student. An overt message was the fact that only two thirds of college entrants made it to the second year. A secondary message reflected the standard assumption that college was simply not for everyone. The last message delivered a clear belief that students themselves determined the outcome of their college life, by either graduation or premature exit (Astin, 1975). The latent message was that a college degree was bestowed upon those who were up to the challenge (Gordon, 1984).

Fast-forwarding thirty years, in a review of information delivered to new students today, a “sink or swim” message is completely absent. Since retention researchers across the last several decades have learned that collaborative efforts between the student and
the institution are not only more appropriate for college success (Gordon, 1984) but actually necessary to it (Tinto, 1987, 1993), prospective applicants and new students now hear all about an institution's competitive (or not) graduation rates, new student transition programs and first year experiences, the array of academic resources, and the vast portfolios of student engagement opportunities in the academic, social, community, co-curricular, and recreational spheres (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Gardner & Jeweler, 1985, 1992).

College students today are supported by the largest number and variety of support programs to encourage their academic success and timely graduation than ever before in the history of education in the United States (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Institutions of higher education are increasingly committed to recruiting, admitting, and keeping appropriate baccalaureate students and seeing them through to graduation (Tinto, 1993). The pressure on public colleges and universities to efficiently retain and graduate state-supported students is enormous.

One significant reason for this change in educational philosophy is that “the difference between public and private higher education has long since disappeared.” (Rossides, 2004, p. 4). Public institutions that were originally designed to provide access to higher education “by the nonrich and to further public purposes...began to charge tuition in the 1970s” (p. 4) and it is that tuition that forms a very significant portion of annual budgets currently (Rossides, 2004). Public institutions have gradually received less and less support from state government. Public universities are treated as businesses and engagement in consumer relations by charging for services as much as possible, entering into partnerships with developers (to build convention centers and research parks on public lands), and running huge, multi-million dollar fund drives (Selingo, 2003 in Rossides, 2004).

In addition to the financial changes that have affected the mission of public colleges and universities, access to higher education has increased, broadened, and diversified through state efforts and federally funded affirmative action and disability
legislation over the part forty years (Kinzer & Forest, 2002). Institutional growth and in some cases institutional financial survival are not the sole reasons for focused retention efforts (Tinto, 1987, 1993). But without a doubt, the financial and ethical underpinnings to student retention and timely through-put initiatives have provided the motivation for the systematic study of retention patterns and the identification of those factors and programs in a campus environment that help determine whether a student stays or leaves (Levitz, Noel, & Rickter, 1999). Students no longer compete with other students in order to remain in college; rather, colleges and universities compete with each other for a very precious and necessary commodity, students, in both bodies and tuition payments (Grayson, 2003).

What happened across thirty or forty years to transform American higher education? How have these changes affected the college experience? Which students, and how many students, return now for a second year of college? In 2005, what do educators do differently to meet the needs of a very different and diverse student body? How are campuses responding to the increasing size of entering classes? How has the curriculum adapted to accommodate the broad range of student abilities and interests? How are the students themselves different from their counterparts in 1960 or 1970? What motivates them, what are their interests, and what assistance do they need in order to succeed in college? Who stays, who leaves, and why? (Astin, Parrott, Korn, & Sax, 1997).

Historical Overview

Prior to the mid to late 1960s, the majority of American college students were members of the dominant Caucasian culture who hailed from the middle or upper socioeconomic strata (Rossides, 2004). It is an irony that while female college students
suddenly outnumbered male college students in 1944 for the first time, it was due to the impact of World War II and the placement of many American males in the military and at war overseas. After the war was over, male college enrollment swelled, with veterans taking advantage of federally funded college assistance. It would not be until 1979, when 11.6 million students were enrolled in higher education that more than half would be female. This gender shift and representation has since been permanent (Kinzer & Forest, 2002).

Several events conspired to set the stage for the evolution of American postsecondary education into the system that exists today. Rossides (2004) states “Awareness of the relation between class and education grew consistently in the twentieth century.” After World War II,

The booming economy of the post-1945 period accelerated the process of urbanization and suburbanization, in effect segregating residential and political districts by social class (mostly by the price of housing) throughout the United States. The inner city became blighted and black, and layers of white working, middle, and upper-middle-class suburbs grew around the decaying core city. In addition, an average of 1 million immigrants per year, mostly from depressed rural backgrounds, swelled our already overloaded working and poverty-class areas. What makes this overall process important, of course, is that residential areas are also the economic and political units on which America’s schools are based. Given the United States’ powerful tradition of political decentralization, this class-structured hierarchy of local communities deeply affects its education system; indeed it particularizes education by class so deeply that it is probably a mistake to speak of an American system of education at all (p. 670).

In an effort to amend class disparity, President John F. Kennedy created the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity by executive order in 1961 and “affirmative action” was referenced for the first time. In 1965, Upward Bound, a program designed to prepare academically under-privileged students for college was instigated as a joint venture of the Carnegie Corporation and the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity, and in 1970, the development of TRIO Programs to serve first-generation,
low-income, and minority students (and eventually individuals with disabilities) was undertaken. Ending a selective admissions policy, all graduates of New York City high schools were guaranteed admission to the City University of New York in 1970. The reauthorization of the Higher Education Act occurred in 1972, in which Title IX prohibited discrimination based on gender, marital, and parental status across a variety of venues including admission, career guidance, scholastics, and intercollegiate athletics, and the Act included the Basic Equal Opportunity Grant (renamed the Pell Grant in 1980) that affirmed a national commitment to the provision of equal educational opportunity for the disadvantaged (Kinser & Forest, 2002).

In 1969, more than eight million students were enrolled in colleges and universities in the United States, and for the first time in that year, Yale and Princeton accepted their first women undergraduates. By 1970, public institutions of higher education enrolled three times as many students as private institutions. By 1979, of the 11.6 million students enrolled in colleges and universities in the U.S., more than half were women, partially due to the end of the Selective Service draft deferment. While this started a permanent gender trend, it was not until 1983 that Columbia University enrolled women as undergraduates for the first time, making it the last Ivy League institution to adopt a policy of coeducation. Legislative actions beginning in the early 70s culminated in 1990 with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which opened doors and legislated further protection for increasing numbers of students with disabilities entering postsecondary educational institutions.

The consequences of legislation, political movements, lawsuits, and federal government actions across the past years have mandated equal access for all. This
includes the requirement of educational institutions to provide open access, entrance, support, and in appropriate cases accommodations, curricula, and developmental programs for students with physical or mental disabilities as well as those students who come from typically underrepresented populations considered to be most at-risk of dropping out. These efforts and the financial imperatives of current higher education have been instrumental to approaches that encourage college student learning and academic success. The impetus for responsibility has been firmly placed upon institutions of higher education to promote college student achievement, success, persistence, throughput, degree completion, and shorter time-to-completion rates as well as to support the research for such initiatives.

The demographic dynamic of college students in the 21st century is challenging for students themselves and challenging also for educators who must think differently about education. Educational practices now require inclusion that is conducive to student learning rather than exclusion that stratifies or separates. Rather than making the assumption that students who drop out are simply poor admissions decisions or too lazy to do hard work, faculty members must begin to ask hard questions about their own responsibilities. Much has been learned, for example, about how the brain functions and the variety of ways students learn. (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004).

Students themselves are empowered to think of education differently. The changing landscape of college campuses, increasing numbers of students enrolling in higher education, and standardization of published college and university statistics like retention, persistence, and graduation data further pressure educational administrators to pay attention to efficiency and effectiveness of student programs.
In summary,

The decades since the end of World War II have been a period of change and turbulence, generating new expectations of higher education. Shifting demographics, the movement from an industrial to a knowledge-based economy, new modes of communication, the rapid advance of technology, and the steady progress of globalization have heightened the demands on institutions to enroll a greater share of the population and to impart more knowledge and skills to students (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004, p. 1).

As institutions of higher education become increasingly more diverse and are held accountable for college student success and retention to graduation, there is increased necessity to identify and study the variables that contribute to the measures of student and institutional success. There are multiple and urgent reasons to refine interventions that improve completion rates for all students, and especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, since students with the highest family incomes are ten times more likely to have a bachelor’s degree by age 24 than those with the lowest. (Rossides, 2004).

**Why College is Important**

The benefits that accrue to both society and the individual as a result of successively higher levels of education are well documented. In terms of lifetime earnings, “...high school graduates earn an average of $1.2 million; Associate’s degree holders earn about $1.6 million; and Bachelor’s degree holders earn about $2.1 million (Day and Newburger, 2002, as cited in Porter, 2002, p.2). (McClanahan, 2004).

Those involved in higher education place vast importance on the value of education for its own sake. Few among us Americans would disagree about the importance of a college education in one’s chance at success in life, such as overall earning power, ability to climb the employment ladder, social standing, and community engagement. These are the more tangible rewards of a college education but for educators, the “partaking of an education” or education itself is tantamount to the justification for the college experience (Gardner & Jeweler, 1992).
However, most students and their parents focus on the more concrete, and less esoteric, benefits of the college degree. An educated person is a critical thinker; she has knowledge, skills, and abilities that improve not only her circumstances but those of her community. Educated people populate their own “city” by forming the local college or university. Universities provide much to the locale, in the way of attracting larger membership, contributing to the arts and culture of a region, establishing a regimented forum for ideas, creating an academic community of scholars, producing academic research to the betterment of a wide array of subjects (medicine, literature, the environment, and government to name a few), and perhaps more to the point, churning out scores of college graduates. An educated community provides a wholesome environment, promotes civic engagement, and supports the state and the country (Rossides, 2004).

State legislatures and the federal government have long been drawn into the aspirations of and financing for an enlightened, educated populous. In an address to members of the Missoula Area Economic Development Corporation, Montana’s governor Brian Schweitzer (Struckman, 2005) affirmed this stance in the local newspaper, the Missoulian, saying “Montana is one of the greatest places to start a business and raise a family… Families all across America aspire to live in communities like this.” (p.1). He continued by indicating his goal of partnering private enterprise with the state’s university system, reporting, “You show me a great university and I’ll show you an engine that brings the best new jobs to the community. I’ll show you economic growth.” (p. 1). Schweitzer also said that excellent schools attract a highly educated work force and Universities are the “engines of the future” (p. 1). Educated people sit on hospital
and bank boards, take places within city governance, and hold positions that can positively affect the community stability and development (Rossides, 2004).

At least equally important as the philosophical underpinnings and the community building aspects of higher education are the economic imperatives of a college education. There are at least three ways colleges and universities contribute to the economic base of society (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004). The first is solipsistic: institutions of higher education are huge employers. Hundreds of terminally educated doctors of philosophy are employed at each college or university. Twice the number of faculty is the number of employees that make up the staff and administration of schools, most of which are college graduates themselves. The faculty and staff of a mid-size university constitute the equivalent of a small town within the larger community.

Second, college employees participate and invest in the local economy. They purchase homes, buy materials, pay property taxes, raise children, and generally recycle their educational earnings back into the local economy. (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). With the current trend toward increased privatization of state-funded colleges and universities by state legislatures, university faculty and staff are bringing in increasingly more outside funding through grants, appropriations, and research awards. These funds also cycle through the state and local economies through wages earned, items and services purchased, and taxes paid. The university also earns a percentage of every grant award brought into the institution to cover the cost of infrastructure support for the grant-funded activities, and this money essentially contributes another source of outside support to the college coffers.
Finally, colleges and universities are intended to educate masses of undergraduate students. It is their premier mission to teach, support, promote, and finally bestow degrees upon college graduates. As mentioned previously, a college education impacts the individual, his or her family, and future generations; college graduates affect local, national, and global communities in vast cultural, social and economic ways (Gamson, 1991). The effects of having a college degree have long-range and long-reaching impacts and are essentially limitless. College educated people compete more successfully in an increasingly competitive job market. Sidle & McReynolds (1999) cite,

The changing demands of the workplace necessitate that a higher percentage of the population acquire the skills associated with a college education, including complex cognitive skills such as reflection and critical thinking (Student Learning Imperative, 1997). Students who have training in the arts and sciences are prepared to meet the challenges of this shifting work environment. People with college degrees continue to earn over 50% more than those who have finished only high school (Mishel & Bernstein, 1994)...this goal of earning higher wages often motivates students...to enroll in post-secondary institutions (p. 1).

While some wax poetic about what a college degree lends to a person, others assert that it is not the actual cognitive skills or knowledge that prepares the college student for the workplace, but rather the degree itself (Rossides, 2004). However, others assert that college affects students in a variety of ways and across many levels far beyond knowledge acquisition and critical writing, thinking or problem-solving but also in complexities of the psycho-social, developmental, relational, and familial spheres (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Regardless of operative effects, there is clear evidence that college graduates earn more money, have access to more opportunity, and get the jobs that require a college degree, for now. There is certain evidence that the market economy for college graduates is leveling off, at lower income levels, and that it is
inevitable that graduate degrees will replace baccalaureate degrees as a hiring preference (Rossides, 2004).

**The Economics of American Higher Education**

Tuition money exchanged for education is the fundamental principle upon which thousands of colleges and universities are based. In order for this trade, or business transaction, to be worthy, institutions must gain respect and offer programs of merit that “mean something” to the consumer. For a college or university to be successful, admitted students must meet certain standards and they must enroll in sufficient numbers, persist toward the degree at an acceptable rate, and graduate in a timely fashion in acceptable percentages. The foundation of every college is the annual entering cohort of new students and their fate is monitored, tracked, and publicly reported. This “report card” contributes to the institutional viability, along with its academic profile of disciplinary offerings, niche programs, acclaimed professors, and unique setting. The report card also contributes substantively to institutional reputation to various audiences different audiences, like prospective students and their parents, enrolled students and alums, the community, funding agencies, and finally and also to its own self. (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004). Colleges have been,

...forced to focus their energies on a form of competition based not on improving graduates’ skills and knowledge but on institutional prestige and revenues. That competition has been exacerbated by the rise of an expanding array of college rankings by publications like U.S News & World Report, The Princeton Review, and The Financial Times. (p. 6)

College administrators who are in charge of enrollment-driven tuition revenue must define retention in statistical terms. In the mid-1990’s, federal legislation formalized a requirement for colleges and universities to publish common statistics about college
graduation rates in percentages of students who graduate within four years and in cohort persistence rates such as freshman to sophomore return rates (Confessore, 2003). This consumer “right to know” policy also included the mandate to publish periodic safety reports about campus activities in an effort to give parents and students standardized information to compare, contrast and select the best fit (p. 118). Thus began an era of intense competition between and among higher educational institutions to jockey for rankings with their “peer,” or comparable institutions, to promote themselves as “niche” markets, and to become individuated in some way for marketing purposes (p. 120). Good press and publicity are considered to be akin to manna from heaven!

Colleges and universities must be very committed to being successful at predicting how many students will enroll, how many students will persist, which students may need assistance, what types of assistance is necessary, and what percentages, numbers, and rates must be attained to keep afloat. In these equations, each and every college student is important and college student success is not only an educational goal but a financial reality (Levitz, Noel, & Rickter, 1999). For example, student attributes such as class level, major affiliation, residency, and credit load determine extra fees applied to students and “head count” measurements (OBPA, 2006). An undergraduate student who enrolls in fifteen credits at UM is considered to be a 1.0 FTE, or full time equivalent student. The 1.0 FTE students fund the tuition formula for resident students at the highest rate, so there’s interest in increasing the number of credits each student takes. Those in charge of predicting how much money will be generated in a particular year place weight upon these various attributes and the budget is held accountable by shareholders to a reasonably close percentage of accuracy.
Enrollment management is currently how institutes of higher education go about “business” (Nutt, 2006). Total numbers of students, the right numbers of the right kinds of students (non-residents are highly desirable - but costly to recruit - because they pay 100 percent of their tuition costs), and the retention of said students is the beans to be counted in funding formulas. Student recruitment is quite costly also; so, if students are retained, enrollments are managed more efficiently and less expensively.

College student retention is not only important to students and institutions of higher education. Student success rates (i.e., persistence and graduation) are a measure of institutional and teaching effectiveness and therefore impact heavily faculty members, curricula, administrative decision-making bodies, the bestowal of college accreditation, and institutional reputation and stature (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Retained students not only contribute financially to the maintenance of institutional budgets via direct tuition, loans, aid and state-funded tuition support in the case of resident students (OPBA, 2006), but they are coupled with the results of new student recruitment and enrollment to determine an institution’s financial well-being from year to year (or biennium to biennium). Also, effective student retention reflects a level of overall student satisfaction and satisfied students attract the interest of other students.

The implications of students leaving college without obtaining a degree are many. Each student who leaves before degree completion costs the college or university thousands of dollars in unrealized tuition, fees, and alumni contributions. The decision to leave college is also frequently economically deleterious to the college dropout, whose decision to leave often leaves him or her in a position to earn much less over a lifetime of work (DeBerard, Scott, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004). Often, students have loans that
demand repayment whether or not the student completes the degree (this is like paying off a car loan for the car that was totaled on the freeway) and usually on wages that are at the lower end of the earning spectrum.

It is certainly in the interests of many that students who enroll in college stay in college through graduation. There are many worthwhile experiences to be had and there are also some experiences that must be endured in college. However, the American college student experience is not necessarily the best fit for every person.

The College Experience

The college experience is almost a stereotype in American culture. Books are written about it; movies are made about it; songs remind us of it; and it even holds court in our dreams and nightmares. For many, it evokes images of ivy-covered brick buildings, absent-minded professors wearing jeans and blazers, coeds basking on sunny days on the “commons,” imposing libraries, and pomp and circumstance. In reality, for those participating in the college experience as students, it is a mixed bag.

Thompson (2001) reported an excellent structure for understanding the forces in play for college students by citing the work of Noel, Levitz, and Saluri (1987) reported in Longman and Atkinson (1994). In their “Force Field Analysis of College Persistence” they noted external forces of a positive nature such as, “parental pressure, peer/friend pressures, cultural values, information about college, community exposure to college educated persons, teachers, counselors, and information about financial aid” (p. 20) and external forces of a negative nature such as, “lack of money, housing/roommate problems, transportation problems, academic skills, work demands and conflicts, social demands, discrimination, rejection, family obligations” (p. 20) that may affect the typical
student. Other forces affecting students include the bureaucracy of certain college requirements, programs of study, reading and requirements, examinations, research papers and other written work assignments, labs, and other course activities.

Noel et al also noted positive internal forces such as “academic skills, achievement motives, personal interests, career aspirations, enjoyment of learning, self confidence, college orientated values, identification with college educated persons” (in Thompson, 2001, p. 21) and negative forces like “procrastination, loneliness, not asserting needs and problems, self-doubt, fears of failure, success or rejection, value conflicts, career indecision, and boredom” (p. 21), that constitute responses and/or resources that belong to a particular student. These guidelines provide an essential backdrop of multiple and complex variables related to the college experience and students’ decisions to stay or leave.

**College Student Retention and Persistence**

Student retention involves the way students enroll, stay enrolled, complete their degrees, or drop out. It describes the flow of students through college over a discrete period of time. Retention is often described in two different ways: as degree completion versus non-completion, and as dropping out versus not dropping out. These approaches give somewhat different perspectives on the phenomenon and produce different results in some student subgroups. Student retention analyses consist of graduation rate analyses, examination of retention patterns, investigation of student attrition behavior, historical analyses that lead to an understanding of past trends, and insight into the psychosocial dynamics associated with retention (IRAP, 2006).

There has been much research done on various aspects of the college student experience. A common lexicon has been devised to provide a map to help us understand the significance of particular studies or ways to compare results from different kinds of institutions. What is common to community colleges is not necessarily applicable to four-year institutions. Curricula developed to solve problems at private institutions will
not necessarily work in public venues. There are size, regional, and mission differences among postsecondary institutions that must be understood when attempting to draw conclusions from particular research studies. For the purposes of this study, most applicable research has been drawn from studies on students attending four-year colleges or universities, focused upon research in publicly funded schools that are all facing similar stresses to bring in increased private or federal dollars to compensate for dwindling investment from state legislative bodies.

Astin (1997) is an authority on common terms used to identify the essential elements of postsecondary institutional effectiveness. He uses the following definitions to describe college student retention activities. The common numbers to which institutions compare themselves to their peer, or comparable type and size, institutions include throughput (meaning progress toward educational goal), graduation rate (the percentage of a matriculated cohort of students who graduate within a common stated timeframe which is usually four, five, six, and nine years at the bachelor’s level), persistence (percentage of students in a cohort who complete a designated period of time (i.e., freshman to sophomore persistence is defined as cohort enrollment in a fall term of one year with enrollment checked again in the same term the following year later), and attrition (percentage of students who do not return to campus in the predictable fashion of regular attendance from one academic term to another and/or one academic year to the next). There are also terms that are occasionally misused or misinterpreted. Terms such as “drop-out”, “stop-out”, “fail-out” and “kick-out” all seem to have apparent meanings but are generally terms for students who leave college in a voluntary or an involuntary way and for whatever reasons (Hoyt & Winn, 2004).
Institutional Measures. A “snapshot model” of retention is used by many institutions to report persistence or attrition data (IRAP, 2006). These data may then be compared to other educational institutions (called institutional cohorts) that have similar profiles. The two most common snapshots include freshman-to-sophomore persistence and graduation rates typically calculated for a cohort of entering (freshmen) students. For example, the enrollment status of an autumn term 1999 cohort of new students is recorded and compared to the cohort’s enrollment status one year later, in autumn term 2000. This type of calculation provides valuable trend data for an institution across multiple rate-years (i.e., one, four, six) and also for comparison to the trend data for comparable institutions. Cohort graduation rates are also measured in a standard way at four, five, six, or nine-year intervals. These measures lend a yardstick to data that would otherwise be difficult to interpret.

There are limitations to these retention and persistence data, though. Snapshots do not allow assessment of a student’s continuous enrollment pattern, but only if the student was in attendance during the last term assessed. So, for a one-year snapshot, we only know if a student attended both autumn terms, but not if the student was also enrolled during spring term. For a four-year retention rate, we only know that a student was either enrolled or not enrolled at the end of the fourth year. But these numbers can not tell us if a student might merely be taking a break or if the student has dropped out of the university that term or earlier and these are two very different things (IRAP, 2006). There has been much of the variety of data collected and analyzed.

It is important to keep in mind that the numbers or percentages that are measured and reported about institutional retention or success rates are statistical compilations: they
are aggregates for the purpose of describing a population of one sort or another. For example, a freshman to sophomore persistence rate informs us of the percent of the total number of students new to college who matriculated at the same time (i.e., a cohort) that were enrolled at the same time the following year. If there were 2,000 students in the cohort during the initial count (first semester, freshman year) and there were 1,000 students in the count taken in the first semester of the sophomore year, the persistence rate would be 50 percent. This number is lower than the national average of 68 percent (Astin & Oseguera, 2005), but it may be higher than comparable measures of peer institutions.

What floats behind all the numbers are the many hidden variables that conspire to produce the simple percentage and the multiple questions we may ask about the 50 percent rate. Did all 2,000 students enroll for all three semesters, or were there students who enrolled only for the first and third semester? What were the predominant reasons for 1,000 students to cease to enroll in the third semester? Perhaps a percentage of students were academically suspended. Perhaps another percentage of students, while not suspended, had performed below an acceptable academic standing. What is the percentage of students who performed well, or even quite well academically, that did not return for semester three? (IRAP, 2006). Was there something about the institution or the region that contributed to the persistence rate (e.g., the flooding in the mid-west in 2000 that closed colleges in South Dakota and Iowa or the forest fires of summer 2001 that affected fall semester enrollment in Montana colleges by students who were working the fire circuit?)
Stark numbers can also be troublesome in another way. Some factors that indicate statistically “at-risk” characteristics that may relate to attrition (e.g., first-generation in college, financial aid eligibility, disability, ethnicity, English as a second language), and other variables, can impact heavily student retention numbers. In some cases, these data are not easy to access, are simply unavailable, or are, frankly, unknown, placing students even more at risk of being overlooked by an institution that is not aware of and therefore cannot address a potential problem (R.S. Carlisle, personal communication, October 12, 2004).

The science of college student retention may be in the numbers, but the art of effective student retention lies in understanding the nuances that contribute to the decision of a student to stay or to leave. Students are served best only when their issues are actively addressed by programs or people at the institution. Typically only those students who complete formal withdrawal papers during a semester are asked to report their reasons for leaving. The reports of exit surveys are often grouped into forced-choice categories that are suspect to interpretation, but the major reason these students list for withdrawal is “financial” (A.R. Walker-Andrews, personal communication, April 10, 2006). Most attrition, however, consists of students who disappear and are simply absent when headcounts are done (W.A. Muse, personal communication, April 10, 2006).

For every one of the students who leave a college, multiple reasons contributed to their decision to leave and some have very legitimate reasons to leave. Many students transfer, some decide to work, some marry and move away, and some join the military. Statistically, it is possible that a few will turn into a Bill Gates facsimile; that is, fabulous
success, huge wealth, and no college degree. Attrition is not all bad, but it is not good if the student leaves for some of the following, disturbing reasons that have solutions.

**College Student Retention**

Retention is a monstrous topic. Many people have taken many different approaches to addressing the related issues in attempts to determine what influences and what fails to influence this phenomenon (Micceri, 2003, p. 1).

Researchers have been studying the college student experience for decades. Even before persistence and retention became such consuming issues in higher education, many social scientists applied themselves to the search for answers about everything related to the college experience. In the early 1970s, the explosive development of high-speed, accessible computers provided scientists with “an arsenal of quasi-experimental statistical techniques that allowed them to control for a variety of confounding variables, including the fact that people cannot be assigned randomly to ‘treatments’ but, rather, select themselves into all sorts of situations beyond the control of researchers. The new techniques allowed researcher to control for ‘self-selection,’ and to track the unique and shared influence of a number of treatments on certain effects” (Gamson, 1991, p. 2).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, motivated by decreasing student persistence rates and increasing financial costs of college, various lenses have been applied to the topic of student attrition, institutional departure, college student retention, and variables that affect students’ graduation rates (Micceri, 2003). Thousands of studies have been conducted on many variables across hundreds of institutions and millions of college students. So not only is retention a monstrous topic but it is a very complex topic. Why some students succeed and are retained and why others leave is difficult to predict, hard
to control, and dependant upon and complicated by an amazing array of variables. There are no simple answers.

For these many reasons, the research literature on college student retention and persistence is difficult to sort since retention can be studied from many different viewpoints, about many different variables, and using many different methods. For instance, we may want to research: variables that either predict academic success or relate to academic difficulty; variables that relate to academic adjustment or social adjustment; or, factors that contribute to student satisfaction and engagement. The categorization employed below applies to factors that impact student success positively or negatively, and covers such things as academic and non-academic influences, predictor variables, student types, college developmental stages, and institutional characteristics. The sorting system used is imperfect, but seeks to cover the many issues that have been studied by researchers to better understand the factors involved in keeping students in school.

Predictive Data. There is much good debate about predictors of college success, persistence, and retention (Gamson, 1991). Research has repeatedly demonstrated that “students with stronger academic credentials are more successful in college than are students with weaker academic credentials” (Opportunity, 2001, p. 4), and these credentials include high school grades, high school class rank, standardized test scores and specifically college admissions test scores like the ACT and the SAT (Opportunity, 2001). Research typically reports that the best predictors of college success (before a student completes a semester in college, at which point the student’s college record is the most predictive) include the historical evidence of academic ability. Reported in the National Dropout and Graduation Rates Report (ACT, 2001 in Opportunity, 2001), by far
the most important finding from collected data from 2500 colleges or universities across almost twenty years was the relationship between admissions selectivity and persistence rates; in 2001, individual rates ranged from 91.6 percent in highly selective institutions to 60.6 percent in open admissions institutions. Stated differently, average persistence rates across various institution types reflect this trend: “Institutions with the highest admission requirements (e.g., ACT/SAT scores, high school grade point averages, class ranking) had low attrition rates (13%) while those with the lowest entrance requirements reported high attrition (31%).” (Grayson, 2003, p. 5). There are many reasons why students display high or low academic credentials, however, and many of these reasons not only impact prediction of college student success, but also their persistence and retention.

There is a high degree of positive correlation between student academic credentials and their family incomes. Students displaying the strongest academics tend to have the highest average family incomes and students with weakest academics tend to report the lowest family incomes (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). There are multiple variables associated with income levels (ethnicity, first generation in college, socioeconomic status) that also are correlated to college success prediction and persistence. Differences in persistence rates among otherwise similar institutions are very important to consider as well (Opportunity, 2001; Astin, 1997).

Research on environmental factors that influence student persistence indicates that, “Students are more academically successful when they are integrated than when they are alienated” (Opportunity, 2001). Supported environments can be created in what are referred to as learning communities that focus on integration of students into the academic and social lives of the college community (Tinto, 1993). The variables that are
used to predict college student success that also predict their persistence and retention will be discussed below.

**Persistence and Graduation Data.** Alexander Astin has conducted longitudinal student persistence research for over thirty years through the Higher Education Research Institute and his most recent publication (Astin & Oseguera, 2005) reported persistence data on thousands of students who enrolled for the first time in college and universities in 1994. There were 262 institutions that participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program’s (CIRP) most recent national longitudinal study. Each institution completed a standard survey on their graduation rates at four, six and nine years. Institution types included six groups ranging from private, restricted admission colleges and universities, open admission secular schools, religious schools, and large venue public and private colleges and universities. Student variables included such things as academic potential and preparedness (high school grades and SAT scores), ethnicity, gender, and parental income and educational level. Much academic and demographic data are gleaned from Astin’s longitudinal view of college students and is summarized briefly here.

Astin reported an overall, four-year college graduation rate of 39.9 percent for the 1994 cohort. The highest four-year graduation rates occurred at selective, private colleges and universities, with selective religious colleges having the next highest rankings, and open admission, publicly funded universities falling lowest in ranking. The single most relevant variables related to college persistence was academic achievement and potential (that is, the higher a student’s high school grade point average and SAT scores, the greater the chance of four year graduation), and gender. Women are more likely than men
to earn a bachelor’s degree, regardless of time period (confirming results of Astin’s earlier national studies in 1971, 1975, 1982, and 1993).

There are “dramatic differences in degree attainment rates by racial group” (p. 7) and the results are important to quote,

For the six-year period, Asian American students show by far the highest degree completion rate (65.2 percent), followed by White students (58.8 percent). Puerto Ricans (41.8 percent) and American Indians (42.1 percent) show the lowest rates, although the rates for African Americans (46.3 percent) and Mexican Americans/Chicanas/os (46.0 percent) are also relatively low. These findings are somewhat troubling, given that all of these latter four ethnic groups are already substantially underrepresented among entering college freshmen (Perna, 2000). What these differential rates show is that the underrepresentation of these minority groups among entering college freshmen is being substantially exacerbated by their relatively low degree attainment rates during the undergraduate years. In other words, the undergraduate years represent a major leak in the educational pipeline for students from underrepresented ethnic/minority groups. (p. 6-8).

**Attrition/Departure.** In 1975, Tinto’s (1987, 1993) original student integration model was devised to account for student departure from college, which is why its discussion is placed here, although his later theoretical permutations relate more to persistence corollaries. Primary to the original model were the concepts of student academic and social integration, both formal and informal. The degree to which students are successful in their pursuits determines the degree to which they are committed to their career and educational goals as well as to the institution. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfe (1986) later referred to “...person-environment fit (as) the model’s conceptual core” (p. 156). Tinto’s (1987) revised theory incorporated certain rites of passage equivalent to separation, transition, and incorporation and “Tinto extends these stages to the process through which college students establish membership in the communities of a
college or university in general, and to the case of early student departure from college in particular" (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000, p. 252).

Tinto’s model included the description of institutions with effective retention programs as committed: to the students they serve, to education of all and not just some of their students, and to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Tinto’s further work (1993) led to the development of a longitudinal, explanatory model of departure that added the features of “…adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, isolation, finances, learning, and external obligations or commitments” (p. 112) to the original model. In sum, he proposed “…the stronger the individual’s level of social and academic integration, the greater his or her subsequent commitment to the institution and to the goal of college graduation.” (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolf, 1986, pp. 155-156). Tinto (1993) later identified different groups of students (i.e., at-risk, adult, honors, and transfer) that had unique circumstances that required specific retention attention and he also asserted that different types of postsecondary institutions (i.e., nonresidential, two-year, urban, and large public) also required different types of retention policies and programs (Habley & McClanahan, 2004). Tinto promoted the idea of learning communities as well as faculty-driven student interactions as effective retention programs and reported that “student academic performance and persistence was greater in collaborative learning settings than in more traditional learning settings, and that these gains were independent of student attributes (Tinto & Goodsell-Love, 1993).
Student Satisfaction/Institutional Engagement. Research at the end of the 20th century by Levitz, Noel, & Rickter (1999) and Kuh (2000-2001) in Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004 brought student satisfaction measures into the retention formulae, demonstrating that active student engagement in learning, service learning, community involvement and the importance of extracurricular involvement were also keys to student persistence. Promoting a “web of interlocking initiatives” Kuh (2000-2001, pp. 30-31) proposed cohesive institutional practices designed to cultivate student success such as sending clear and repeated messages about expectations of students, assessing educational practices inside and outside of the classroom, using consistently good teaching practices, intentionally tying experiences inside the classroom to outside-the-classroom experiences, and removing the artifacts of outdated pedagogy that are obstacles to student success.

Astin’s (1993) student self-assessment study focusing on student outcomes and how students are affected by the college environment reported findings broken into three broad categories: academic development, personal development, and satisfaction. In terms of academics, student involvement or “time on task” was positively related to most academic outcomes including such things as retention and graduating with honors, with the strongest effects being overall academic development and preparation for graduate school. Conversely, outcomes negatively associated with time spent studying were “hedonism, alcohol consumption, smoking cigarettes, the view that the chief benefit of a college education is to increase one’s earning power, and the goal of being very well-off financially (p. 2).
The most influence on undergraduate student’s academic and personal development is the peer group, followed closely by faculty. Student-student connections positively affected leadership and overall academic development, self-reported growth in problem-solving skills and critical thinking skills, and cultural awareness (negative effects were on feeling depressed, beliefs that the individual cannot change society, and the principal value of a college education being to increase one’s earning power) (p. 3). Faculty-student interactions most positively affected satisfaction with professors, overall satisfaction with the quality of instruction and the college experience, and positive correlations with every academic attainment outcome (e.g., college grades, degree attaining, graduate school). The one negative effect was on the belief that the principal value of a college education is to increase one’s earning power (p. 6).

Keup & Stolzenberg (2004) related a part of the student satisfaction story in a monograph that shares the results of a survey instrument, “Your First College Year” (YFCY) piloted spring 2000. The survey was collaboratively produced through the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) and the Policy Center on the First Year of College based at Brevard (which is an outgrowth of the National Center for The First-Year Experience founded in 1986 by John Gardner). The survey respondents included roughly 29,000 first-year students attending 131 four-year colleges and universities. The survey included measures of: students’ satisfaction with college and self-rated success; academic engagement and disengagement, pedagogy, and faculty/staff interactions; social networks and support systems; and social awareness and issues of spirituality and religion.
General findings indicated that first-year students rated their college adjustment regarding academics as “somewhat successful” but that their decline in GPA from high school to college would indicate that the transition has its challenges; they indicated lower levels of personal success in developing study skills and putting in the study time required; and many reported finding their first academic experiences “neither relevant nor engaging” (p. 59) which negatively impacted their class attendance. Regarding issues of social networks and support systems, students reported common adjustment issues such as meeting new people, feeling lonely or homesick, and having difficulty getting along with a roommates/housemates. Overall, the students reported feeling most successful developing friendships during their first year and feeling satisfied with the sense of community on campus, indicating that their positive social interactions come at the expense of academics. About fifty percent of the students indicated that “their social life interfered with their schoolwork” (p. 61).

A primary factor affecting college student satisfaction, adjustment and retention is the quality of interaction a student has with a concerned person on campus (Habley & Morales, 1998). Academic advising is one of the few ways in which a college can formally implement this type of interaction. Lotkowski et al (2004) reported that along with structured advising, freshman persistence efforts are enhanced by special block registration strategies that combine both academic and non-academic foci: having a smaller number of students enroll in the same courses and attend classes as a cohort makes students more likely to form bonds (peer networks) with each other and strengthens their connection to the academic community. These are essentially the learning communities referenced by Tinto & Goodsell-Love (1993).
College Student Adjustment

"While many students soon adjust, others have great difficulty in separating themselves from past associations and/or adjusting to the academic and social life of the college." (Tinto, 1993, p.163).

Freshman Year Experience. The freshman or first year is commonly understood to be a stressful transition for college students (Parker & Duffy, 2005), and freshman attrition rates that are commonly as high as 20-30 percent are greater than any other academic year (Mallinckrodt & Sedlacek, 1987). Since freshmen traditionally have the highest attrition rate, most resulting retention efforts have been focused upon freshmen programming, and the freshman year experience has been the focus of research and attention since the 1980s (Gardner & Jeweler, 1992). “One of the reasons for the focus on the first year as a critical time of transition is the developmental milestones students, especially traditional-aged college student, are encountering at this time.” (Skipper, 2005). Upcraft & Cramer (1995) noted issues facing college entrants that include developing feelings of intellectual and academic competence, establishing and maintaining relationships, exploring identity, making major and career decisions, encountering issues surrounding faith and spirituality, and developing civic engagement and personal responsibility. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) cite several studies that suggest academic self-confidence declines somewhere between the end of high school and the sophomore year of college, when students suffer negative feedback when encountering the more rigorous academic standards in higher education. Thus, there are many reasons for first year interventions and support programs and Barefoot (2000) outlined a number of objectives needed for a successful first-year transition program. These include student-student as well as student-faculty interactions, increased student
involvement and time on campus outside of classes, and linkage between curriculum and co-curriculum; institutional commitment must be paramount and programs must be established to assist students across the array of academic concerns they might experience (i.e., writing and learning centers, mathematics labs, and programs to help students who enter college with insufficient academic preparation).

However, despite the proliferation of freshman, or first-year experiences, persistence and graduation rates continue to remain relatively stable and attrition rates have not changed appreciably over the past several decades (Astin & Oseguera, 2005). Some of this is due to the changing demographics of college students but some is due to lack of institutional response to student needs, the increasing cost of college, and increasing numbers of students who must work in order to support their college attendance, to name a few. (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004).

First Semester Adjustment. Gardner (1986) highlighted the importance of programs that focus on the first few weeks of college when many students make the decision to drop out. During this period students feel increased personal independence and form habits and relationships that they will carry with them through their college careers. Gardner & Jeweler (1998) also noted that during this time, students make judgments about faculty and their major (although the latter is apt to change). Gardner's initiatives on the first year experience in general resulted in the establishment of a nationally known resource center based at the University of South Carolina in the 1980s.

Other recent research has pointed to the apparent importance of successful transition and adjustment during the first semester of enrollment and especially the first six weeks of the first semester of enrollment. It has been posited, in fact, that the forces
that shape student departure during the first six weeks are qualitatively different from those forces at later times (Woosley, 2003). In particular, “Initial social adjustment was linked to higher probabilities of degree completion” (p. 1) even when student pre-entry characteristics and their commitment to a college degree were included. Findings of studies on the positive relationship of initial encounters with the institution and persistence to a degree indicate that: there should be focused attention on social activities as soon as students arrive on campus; the most critical transition for freshmen is during the first two to six weeks (Levitz & Noel, 1989 in Woosley, 2003); and an especially important factor is establishing close friends, particularly during the first month of enrollment (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989 in Woosley, 2003).

First Generation in College. The high levels of stress and the vulnerability that are associated with college adjustment may be exacerbated by sociodemographic variables (Jay & D’Augelli, 1991; Merullo, 2002). There is ample evidence that first-generation college students suffer more college adjustment issues, may not receive adequate family support for attending college, and may know less about college life. The lack of knowledge about college and the lack of social, emotional, and financial support may increase college attrition rates in this population of students. Hertel (2002) compared similarities and differences between first-year students who were classified as either first or second generation and found first-generation students “reported significantly less parental income and social adjustment. On-campus friend support predicted overall adjustment better for second-generation students” (p. 3). Since parents who are college educated are more likely than less educated parents to expect their children to attend college, other sociodemographic factors like family characteristics, parental income,
socioeconomic status, and academic ability may contribute important influences to the 
educational attainment of sons and daughters (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). While 
academic, sociodemographic, and personality factors are implicated in all first-year 
college student adjustment, and academic and non-academic factors influence college 
adjustment, it appears that non-cognitive measures (e.g., interpersonal, financial, and 
social) appear to be stronger predictors of well being in first-generation and multiethnic 
students. “Social integration is especially important for students who are first-generation 
college attendees, have limited English proficiency, or are from a cultural or minority 
background.” (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004, p. 16). For some of these students 
who are excited and proud to be enrolling in college, there is a shadow over them: some 
of them have never been close to someone who lived in a college dormitory room, paid 
for textbooks, been left alone with a schedule of classes and a campus map, or been 
thrown together so intimately with thousands of strangers (Merullo, 2002).

Ethnicity. The student body in American colleges and universities has become 
increasingly more heterogeneous due to a dwindling traditional applicant pool and 
increasing interest in the cultivation of a more diverse student body (Gerdes & 
Mallinckrodt, 1994). Traditional measures of academic ability and/or achievement do not 
account for ethnic minority college success as well as other variables such as social and 
emotional adjustment (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994) and Martin, Swartz-Kulstad and 
Madson (1999) reported poor college student adjustment is correlated with low retention. 
Overall, students remain in college when they make a successful adjustment 
academically, socially, and personally (Tinto, 1987, 1993). As might be anticipated, a 
key feature to minority student adjustment to college involves a good person-
environment (P-E) fit, and for the ethnocultural minority student, especially those who attend colleges where the predominant culture differs from their own, there will be unique challenges in adjustment (Murtaugh, Burns, & Schuster, 1999). Since there are traditional experiences that affect all college students (e.g., academic challenge, relationship issues, financial concerns) that may contribute to poor college adaptation, the unique minority student stresses that contribute also to heightened feelings of not belonging and not being welcome on campus further affect persistence factors (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993).

Finney and Haas (2003) used a narrative approach to explore the process of coping among ethnic minority college students and found that coping-successful students expressed greater self-efficacy and did not perceive themselves to be lacking needed social support. The researchers focused on predominantly first generation minority college freshmen that were considered to face greater stress than their typical middle class student counterparts, including coming from low-income households, having greater financial needs, and needing to balance competing demands of a job with schoolwork (p. 709).

According to Elkins, Braxton, & James (2000),

As students enter college, they are required to disassociate to some extent from membership in communities of the past, such as families, friends, the local high school, and areas of residence. This constitutes the first stage of passage into the college career and may require some personal transformation and rejection of the norms of past communities. Separation may be particularly difficult for individuals, whose past communities seriously question the value of college attendance (Tinto, 1987, 1993). If a student fails to receive support for college attendance...then early departure...is likely...Moreover, some students may perceive that it is necessary for them to reject the values of their high school friends and family to remain...in college...Students willing to reject the values of their past communities are more likely to persist from the first to second semester of their first year in college (pp. 252-253).
Since ethnic minority and first-generation college students face greater stresses in college adjustment and are more likely to have difficulty separating from their family and community, these students are considered to be the most at-risk of dropping out overall (Grayson with Grayson, 2003). On an annual basis, the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) collects retention information from over 400 institutions. Its 1999 first-year cohort report (CSRDE, 2001a in Grayson with Grayson, 2003) showed the following attrition rates: American Indians (33%), African Americans (25%), students of Hispanic origin (24%), "Non-resident aliens" (22%), Whites (20%), and students of Asian origin (13%). “Minority status stresses can exert an indirect effect by compounding the episodic and chronic stresses faced by all students, due to the marginal social, political, and economic status of many minority students.” (Kessler, in Smedley, Myers & Harrell, 1993, p. 3).

(Zea, Reisen, Beil, & and Caplan, 1997) indicated:

Identification with the university was positively related and experience of disrespect was negatively related to commitment for all students. When students perceived the environment as unwelcoming because of race, ethnicity, or religion, their desire to continue attending college diminished. Ethnic minority students were more likely than White students to report experiencing disrespect (p. 150).

Among the most serious problems confronting American Indian educators and tribal groups is that Indian children achieve the lowest educational level in school and have the highest dropout rate among all ethnic minority groups in the country. (Bowker, 1992). Swisher & Hoisch (1992) confirmed low high school graduation rates across studies of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Astin & Oseguera (2005) reported that American Indian and Mexican American four-year degree attainment rates are the lowest (21.4 percent and 21.3 percent in 1998), that four-year retention rates decreased overall.
over the last decade but that African Americans and Mexican Americans have exhibited the largest declines, and that there have been huge increases in college enrollments for both Asians (101 percent) and Latinos (161 percent) in the last ten years.

**Psycho-Social Adjustment Issues.** Sociologists, psychologists, and social psychologists in the late 1960s were busy studying the college student experience from different viewpoints and using different methods. In 1969, Feldman and Newcomb published the results of forty years of studies on college students in *The Impact of College on Students*. Gurin and Newcomb were analyzing results of a large longitudinal study of undergraduates at the University of Michigan, and Feldman, Newcomb and Gamson were looking intensely at a single generation of students on campus (Gamson, 1991). These researchers were studying the effects of college and “interested in understanding how students experience college through their relationships with faculty members, students in classes and formal organizations, and, most importantly through college friends and peer groups” (p. 1) and saw colleges as “socializing organizations in which students, in varying degrees, come to accept normative attitudes and values by interacting with each other and with the faculty” (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969 in Gamson, 1991, p. 1). Back in 1970, Feldman and Newcomb looked mostly at how different college environments, majors, residential arrangements, faculty relationships, friends, and peer groups shaped students. Much of this work applies to current, continued investigation into the role of nonacademic factors that affect college student satisfaction, success, and persistence in college.

In fact, recent studies of college students have shown that nonacademic variables predict college adjustment outcomes more accurately than academic ability variables
(Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). "In general, these variables fall into three main categories: social (parental attachment/separation, social adjustment, external factors), personal-emotional (emotional adjustment, coping style), and institutional attachment." (Martin, Jr., Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999, p. 2).

Testing the psychosocial factors that predict college adjustment specifically for first-year undergraduate students, Martin, Swartz-Kulstand and Madson (1999) reported two primary and consistent contributors to overall college adjustment were measures of self-confidence and positive attitude toward the university. As well, they indicated that the overall importance of a total academic experience that stimulates personal, social, and academic development cannot be overstated.

In an earlier study, "Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) concluded that social isolation was the single most important predictor of student drop out, over and above the effects of academic performance (Martin, Swartz-Kulstand, & Madson, 1999, p. 2).

Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) reported that emotional and social adjustment rather than academic adjustment factors were better predictors of attrition: for students who were not struggling academically, the best predictors or persistence were measures of self-confidence and informal interaction with faculty coupled with satisfaction with courses; for students who were struggling academically, the best persistence predictors included satisfaction with non-academic activities, freedom from anxiety, and absence of thoughts of dropping out.

The mindset of college students is important,

Students who succeed in higher education come to college academically read to persist (McGrath & Braunstein, 1997). However, less than half of entering students have a clear sense of their future. According to Okun, Benin, and Brandt-Williams (1996), students with a strong commitment to completing their degrees
are more likely to stay in college. Moreover, students with a commitment to both the goal of a college degree and to the institution itself are more likely to persist in the specific institution...McGrath and Braunstein (1997) found that for first-year students, impressions of the college environment (e.g., course offerings, adequacy of financial aid, living arrangements, intercollegiate athletics, cost of tuition) were important predictors in a student's decision to remain at a university (Martin, Swartz-Kulstand, & Madson, 1999).

Much research has been done pertaining to the ability of individuals to “function effectively in dealing with life challenges...(and) has been carried out within a framework of stress and coping, largely on the basis of the seminal work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984)...the research on this topic is now voluminous.” (Phinney & Haas, 2003, p.707). Phinney and Hass (2003) investigated the process of coping in ethnic minority, first-generation college freshmen in a narrative, qualitative study. Their results indicated that students who have a perceived lack of support are more likely to report greater stress and lower academic performance and that coping-successful students expressed a greater sense of self-efficacy, or, “the belief in one’s ability to execute behavior that is necessary to achieve a specific outcome” (Bandura, 1997 in Phinney & Haas, 2003, p. 711) and did not perceive themselves to lack needed social support.

One of the adjustment tasks that college students face is the development of specific academic coping skills. Much research on coping has been done in the academic environment, where there are many situations that are fraught with stresses of deadlines, knowledge acquisition, examinations, grades, demanding assignments, and performance expectations. Students who are exposed to negative experiences in a prolonged way or who perceive them to be unmanageable can develop helplessness, depression, and anxiety which in turn can have adverse effects on students’ motivation and performance (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000). Struthers, Perry, and Menec (2000) determined that
“great academic stress covaried with lower course grades” (p. 581); however, students who engaged in problem-focused coping were more likely to be motivated and perform better than students who engaged in emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves thoughts, action, and strategies geared toward removing or diminishing a stressful event or its impact (and tends to operate when people believe that something can be done to alter their situation) while emotion-focused coping involves thoughts, actions, and strategies directed toward the management and reduction of distressing emotions associated with a threatening event and is involved when one perceives that a stressor must simply be endured (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980 in Struthers et al, 2000).

Although the study did not assess academic achievement per se, Chang (1998) compared college students who scored high or low in hope and reported that those low in hope employed more disengagement strategies (problem avoidance, social withdrawal, self-criticism) when coping with specific stressful academic situations, and “hope was an important predictor of both academic and interpersonal life satisfaction independent of coping activities.” (p. 953). Because procrastination is a “construct with direct relevance to degree of active engagement in tasks, (it) has also been identified as a potentially important predictor of academic achievement.” (Jackson, Weiss, Lundquist, & Hooper, 2003, p. 2). Because separate sets of studies suggest that hope and procrastination both affect college student academic performance, Jackson et al. (2003) investigated whether they were independent of one another. They also studied the impact of time investment in social and/or recreational activity, since other studies had not made clear the “extent to which poorer academic performance is due to needlessly delaying academic tasks (i.e., procrastination) or simply spending relatively more time in domains of activity other than
academic tasks (e.g., social/recreational time).” (p. 2). Their findings support the notion that multiple factors contribute to college student grade point averages (e.g., ACT scores), that lower levels of procrastination and less overall time engagement in social/recreational activities were related to higher grade point averages, and that gender (with females showing an advantage) emerged as a significant predictor of overall GPA. It was noteworthy that this study indicated that procrastination was not associated with social/recreational time and implies that those students who procrastinate are not merely substituting pleasant activities in lieu of unpleasant academic tasks, but they contribute independently to academic performance. These results suggest that time management issues are important to college success.

Lack of adjustment has many implications, starting with ostensibly mild cases of initial homesickness that can lead to serious grief and depression if a student cannot navigate new social relationships and situations (Beck, Taylor, & Robbins, 2003), a lack of real connection to the institution that further exacerbates feelings of loneliness and alienation (Woosley, 2003), and often, the standard response to stress, loneliness and social awkwardness becomes complicated by substance abuse issues (Musgrave-Marquart, Bromley, & Dalley, 1997). Most campuses have drug and alcohol policies and student conduct codes that spell out the consequences of substance-related behavior problems to students. At The University of Montana, programs to intervene in these situations have traditionally been “educational”, with an emphasis on working with students to teach them about the impact of the consequences of overindulging in substances, such consequences as reduced grades, lost scholarships, loss of residence hall
eligibility, health concerns, and trouble with the law (M. Frost, personal communication, April 17, 2006).

Disability Issues. Despite the integration of students with disabilities into higher education, these students are not faring well academically (Horn & Berktold, in Tincani, 2004). Even though the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Section 504 Amendments, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) removed barriers preventing students with disabilities from participating in higher education and with the proliferation of programs accommodating these students only 53 percent of students with disabilities attain a degree or vocational certificate within five years compared to 64 percent of nondisabled students. Tincani (2004) mentions several problems: many students with disabilities do not participate in on-campus programs; in college, these students are not systematically identified and provided individualized services; and the responsibility for disclosing and requesting reasonable accommodation rests solely with the student. In a nationally representative survey during the 1995-96 academic year, six percent of postsecondary students reported having a disability; the largest category (29 percent) were students with learning disabilities (Quick, Lehmann, Terry Deniston, 2003).

Palmer’s (2002) study of UM college student athletes with ADHD suggested that, for the student with a learning disability, there are multiple issues, not a single concern; of course, these issues are compounded with the responsibilities and demands of being a student athlete on top of it all. Palmer’s phenomenological examination suggested, in addition to the academic complications of a learning disorder, there are multiple psychological effects of disability. These included: feelings of: not being understood,
feeling the unfairness of having the disorder, and feelings of not being normal. As well, these students had difficulty balancing their priorities and dealing with medication issues (p. iv).

*Non Traditional or Adult Students.* Currently, most institutions and their faculty are ill equipped to address the diverse needs of their adult students, and when these programs are included, they are often treated as peripheral additions to the institution's primary programs (Thomas, 2005). However, despite this marginalization, enrollment numbers of adult learners have increased significantly. In 2002, the National Center for Education Statistics report estimated that more than 47 percent of enrollees in U.S. higher education institutions could be classified as adult learners (a standard definition being 25 years old or older). Adult learners are often part-time students who are financially independent of their parents, employed full time, and having dependants of their own (Anker, 2003, in Thomas, 2005).

Non-traditional students tend to do well in college, although there are conflictive data about this, some of which may be due to differences among institutional commitment to adequate services for this population. A recent report indicated that older students perform at a higher level, grade wise, in both developmental and college level courses than their traditional counterparts (Hagedorn, 2005), possibly because they do not suffer from the kinds of distractions that traditional-aged students face. However, adult students leave college at a higher rate than that of younger students, since the life circumstances of adult students are different from those of the traditional-aged students who are more often full-time students with fewer conflicting responsibilities (Grayson, 2003).
Transfer Students. Many students transfer. At UM, a transcript review of the graduating class revealed that transfer credits appeared on the transcripts of 50% of the spring 1991 graduates (Bilderback, 1992). Transfer students experience stresses similar to those presented during the freshmen year, but Bingham-Newman & Hopkins (2004) observed that transfer students tend to “act like” experts and do not seek help, do not ask questions, and suffer from situations that could have easily been resolved.

Undecided, Exploratory, Open Students. Students who have not committed to, selected, or otherwise declared a major comprise a sizable part of most college and university student populations (Slowinski & Hammock, 2003). Gordon (1995) defines the group of undeclared or undecided students as “unwilling, unable or unready to make educational or vocational decisions.” (p. x). From this researcher’s experience with undeclared students, they have many different reasons for their indecision: some have too many interests and are unable to narrow them down; some have too few interests, posing challenges in engaging them with curricula; and others are undecided suddenly after discovering the major they’d always expected to pursue is not sufficiently engaging, too challenging, or not what was expected. Since these students have indecision of disparate types, there is no one proven advisement panacea that works best with every open student. (Steel & McDonald, 2000 in Gordon, 1998). Undecided college students are at a much higher risk of college departure than students who have a goal, focus, or plan (Gordon, 1998). At UM, roughly thirteen percent of the undergraduate population is in a category of either undeclared or no major. These students exhibit a 53.6 percent “weighted” persistence rate among rates across all disciplines that range from 40 percent to 98.2 percent (OPBA, 2006). Undecided students,
Come from various age groups, backgrounds, and educational experience. Moreover, students enter higher education at various levels of undecidenedness. In fact, these students may be in a cyclical process; they will make a decision and then return to undecidenedness due to doubt, lack of information, peer influence, fear...(or) parental pressure. (Slowinski & Hammock, 2003, p. 1).

Indecision is difficult for students. Gordon (1998), who conducted a thorough review of the literature from 1977 to 1996 that yielded 15 studies on the multiple subtypes of undecidened students, postulated three general categories of decided students and four categories of undecidened students. These categories ranged from “very decided, somewhat decided, unstable decided, tentatively undecidened, developmentally undecidened, seriously undecidened and chronically indecisive” (p. 392) and related to various personality characteristics attributed to the subtype. The undecidened types experienced different anxieties, depending upon subtype membership, but in general, “being undecidened may cause anxiety because of societal or educational pressures to make a choice” (p. 397).

Gordon (1984) published a seminal retention study of undecidened students. Her report that the drop-out/stop-out rate of students without a declared major is at least twice that of students in declared majors is relevant today (1995) and her study launched a series of investigations into “at-risk” populations, not only undecidened students but students with different constellations of issues that relate to higher rates of attrition (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). Appropriate major choice is also problematic, as is the incidence of multiple major changes. An often-quoted average number of times students change majors is 2.5 (or two or three times on average), although there are no national figures. Reliable statistics come from studies done on individual college campuses but do not easily
generalize due to the variability of institutional types, how records are kept, and how major change is defined (e.g., is a switch from finance to marketing included as a major change?) (Gordon & Steele, 1992 in Gordon, 1998).

At UM across two semesters, autumn 2005 and spring 2006, the number of major changes were 1185; option changes were 377; second major changes were 282; and minor changes totaled 316 (L.C. Carlyon, personal communication, April 10, 2006). Using undergraduate enrollment (n=10,740 for spring 2006) as a touchstone, the number of major changes alone constituted 11 percent of the undergraduate population; taking this a step further, the combination of major and second major transactions (n=1467) constituted 13.6 percent of the undergraduate population. The sum of all transitions, 2,160, equaled twenty (20) percent, or one-fifth of the undergraduate student population! That is quite a lot of major, minor, and option changing activity. To put this in perspective, it is important to understand that the activity of changing majors is a part of the process of indecision (Gordon, 1998).

Institutional Factors. Researchers have studied institutions as part of overall retention correlates. Institutional “fit” is a term used loosely to describe the appropriateness or adequacy of the relationship of the student to his or her college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993). Because of the heterogeneous nature of the public school student, institutions of higher education and especially those with open (or relatively open) admission standards compete in the marketplace for prospective students. In this competition for student “bodies”, it is possible and even likely that students may be swayed by recruitment materials to an institution that doesn’t meet their needs for a variety of reasons. Even in what appears to be a good match between student
and college, there are many factors that contribute to a positive bond forming. Some of these factors are uncontrollable (such as roommate conflict or major choice issues), but more and more, institutions attempt to provide an array of programs, offerings, and resources to help students transition to the institution and minimize the risk of attrition due to institutional factors.

**College Retention Programs.** Because of the many factors that pose threats to college success, a number of college students will not succeed without support of resource programs, special advising, and other retention interventions. In order to provide adequate services to students who are most at-risk, such as the academically underprepared and the historically underrepresented, institutions of higher education have been working diligently to provide resources that ensure success of their students (Kluepfel and Roberts, 1994 in Thompson, 2001). As well, since there is much evidence about the importance of social support and institutional engagement, campuses offer a wide variety of venues to strengthen student-student, student-faculty, and student-institution bonds (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004).

At The University of Montana, there are academic advising programs geared toward at-risk populations. Freshmen are especially served via the Freshman Interest Group, which is a type of learning community that offers clusters of small-enrollment classes, loosely based around a theme, for about one-quarter (n=500) of the entering freshman cohort (M. K. Kriley, personal communication, February 27, 2006). Undecided, or undeclared, students are served by advisors in the Undergraduate Advising Center, where this researcher has over twenty years of professional experience. Eligible first generation, low-income, disabled, and ethnic minority students are served by a federally
funded TRIO program, the Educational Opportunity Program, has served students on campus for over twenty years (R. S. Carlisle, personal communication, April 13, 2006). Student athletes, considered at-risk because of the nature of their dual commitment to academics and athletics, have specialized advising and academic support coordinated through the Athletic Services Program (L. A. Hickey, personal communication, December 12, 2005).

Also at UM, there are academic support programs geared toward academically underprepared students such as developmental courses in basic English composition, pre-college mathematics, English as a Second Language, and study skills. For students who need extra help, there are a mathematics learning center, a Writing Center, and several tutoring programs. Programs designed to ease the transition of freshmen into college study include the FIGs that were previously mentioned and two other freshman offerings including Freshman Seminar, a one-semester course that focuses on the development of critical thinking and writing skills (M. L. Groom Hall, personal communication, May 12, 2005) and University Transition, a one-credit learning experience that eases students into college life one week before the start of the first semester of study (J. M. Spencer, personal communication, June 10, 2005).

The UM catalog provides information about programs that address the more social aspects of college adjustment are offered through Student Affairs at The University of Montana and include new student orientations, dormitory programming, and a large number of activities offered through the University Center, recreation center, and Outdoor Programs. Medical and counseling services, including mental health groups are offered through the health service and the Self Over Substance (SOS) program is an
intervention designed to combat the prevalent negative aspects of alcohol and drug abuse on campus.

To encourage student participation in clubs and the community, the UM student schedule planner, "Bear Facts", details campus groups such as Advocates (student recruiters), Peer Advising (student academic mentors), and various ASUM (student government and student government supported) activities. In addition, there are other opportunities for community service opportunities available to students through the Office of Civic Engagement and alternative learning opportunities through national and international exchanges.

The academic and social needs of underrepresented ethnic minority student, the bulk of whom is either international students (n=474), or American Indian students (n=523) who represent the largest minority group on campus and in Montana, are attended to by the Office of Foreign Student and Scholar Services and the American Indian Student Support Program, both offices that fall under the auspices of Student Affairs (E.T. Koehn & P. A. Weaselhead, personal communications, April 13, 2006). The Diversity Advisory Council, DAC, established in 1992, was charged with identifying, designing, implementing, and assessing interventions to increase campus diversity and to improve consistently the campus cultural climate (Dennison, 1992). The DAC sponsors some of the activities of the Kyi-Yo, the American Indian student group and its annual campus pow-wow and the International Student Organization (ISO) and its annual International Culture and Food Festival – both events that have become increasing popular for campus constituents and the Missoula community.
Academic Difficulty, Suspension, and the Phenomenon of Academic Turnaround

Educational researchers have been consistently and copiously studying measurable variables that may relate to college student success (Astin & Oseguera, 2005; Tinto, 1993; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000). Most studies involve the investigation of concrete, external, and numerical items such as student grades, academic preparation, and assessment scores or "pigeon-holing" demographic data that identifies discretely race, gender, financial standing, and family descriptions. Even student satisfaction studies generally report results from forced-choice or Likert-scale based surveys in quantified, or numerical ways (Erwin, 1991; Gay, 1996). These measures lend themselves to assessing large numbers of students and provide us with a starting place for closer investigation of less-researched, more sensitive topics.

The increasing heterogeneous nature of the college student population and a social concern for overall college student success places pressure on institutions to encourage continued enrollment of students who have experienced academic failure (Micceri, 2003). As Rita Jr. (1998) reports, "The readmission of the student who has failed academically poses a serious problem for the college administrator. There have been few reliable criteria on which to base the readmission decision. Research studies are sparse and spaced far apart across the decades" (p. 517). His study designed to predict the academic performances of students readmitted following academic suspension revealed that "for the population of academic failures characterized by average high school achievement and average scholastic aptitude, specific academic skills are important, past academic record seems unimportant, and a general factor called incentive seems important in the attainment of passing grades upon readmission" (p. 517).
Due to the paucity of studies on college student persistence post-academic suspension and reinstatement and because of the sensitive nature of the “failure” experience (Rita Jr., 1998), this study seeks to take an in-depth look into the personal experience of students who have persevered in college despite multiple suspensions. While this researcher turned up little recent studies of college student failure and very little of qualitative studies on the topic of college student retention in the literature, only several qualitative pieces were referenced in the writing, analysis and discussion in this study. The Phinney and Haas (2002) narrative study of minority student stress and coping and the two recent UM doctoral dissertations on college students (Parker, 2002; Thompson, 2001) were of particular interest.

Lebedina-Manzoni (2004) sought to discriminate between differences in perceived attributes, both internal and external, related to academic success and unsuccess by successful and unsuccessful students. The study is problematic in terms of generalizability, since almost all of the 115 students sampled were successful (n=90), female (n=104) Croatian college students. Hence, there are concerns about the study result applicability to unsuccessful, American, male college students. However, the study offers a recent treatment of failure correlates and is included here for that reason. Lebedina-Manzoni (2004) reported that students often develop specific secondary characteristics such as low self-esteem, poor motivation for long-lasting learning, tendency to give up and withdraw, and lack of interest in the acquisition of new learning strategies.

Report results indicated that most items identified by successful students as contributing to success come from inner factors related to the personal characteristics of a
student (personal responsibility) while assessments by unsuccessful students’ success measures depend on circumstances directed toward outside influences or things beyond their control (victims of circumstance). Two thoughts that discriminate the most between successful and unsuccessful students are related to a worry about parents’ reactions (“I shall disappoint them; what are they going to say?” and anticipation of failure (“I know nothing, for sure I will fail, I can’t do it”).

Summary

This literature review has investigated higher educational history, practices, and research that relates to the current obsession with increasing college student access, persistence, success, and timely graduation. We’ve come from a “sink or swim” mentality from forty years ago to a mission to make sure that anyone who wants to be in the water will be able to stay afloat.

Because a college degree is important for many reasons, educational researchers have studied a variety of the issues that confound college student adjustment, success, time-to-graduation, and persistence. While high school grades and standardized measures of academic achievement and aptitude predict college success best for those students who fall at the high end, social and emotional predictors identify with more strength the college adjustment of the “average” student and those students who are at risk of dropping out.

This literature review investigated such things as college transitions (freshman or first year; transfer; returning or adult learner), institutional variables, psycho-social adjustment issues, and issues related to student type (i.e., first generation in college,
ethnic minority, learning disabled). The plethora of retention programming was also discussed.

As a segue to the topic for research and discussion in this dissertation, the subject of academic standing, especially in relation to student academic difficulty and suspension was reviewed in the literature. Failure, as connected to an individual, is rarely reported in the literature: more often, failure is referenced to an institution or an activity. Therefore, relevant research on college student academic failure was sparse, which indicated a need for research such as is reported in this dissertation study.
Chapter Three
Methodology

Overview of Educational Research

Describing educational research, Gay (1996, p. 6-7) states,

The goal of all scientific endeavors is to explain, predict, and/or control phenomena. This goal is based on the assumption that all behaviors and events are orderly and that they are effects which have discoverable causes...Research is the formal, systematic application of the scientific method to the study of problems; educational research is the formal, systematic application of the scientific method to the study of educational problems...The major difference between educational research and other scientific research is the nature of the phenomena studied. It is considerably more difficult to explain, predict, and control situations involving human beings...

There are noticeable steps in educational research that parallel those of the scientific method (Gay, 1996, p. 7) and include:

1. The selection or definition of a problem.
2. The execution of systematic research procedures.
3. The analysis of data.

Looking deeper into the historical roots of scientific inquiry, Polkinghorne (1989, p. 41) states “The map developed for Western science during the past three centuries is based on the notion that reality consists of natural objects and that knowledge is a description of these objects as they exist in themselves” and the rigor of scientific study purposefully sets about to eliminate “the distorting influence of personal perspective and the subjective properties of researchers.” Early psychologists seeking an avenue to establish their study of human behavior as scientific “adopted the positivist, or the hypothetico-deductive model, often referred to as the received view of science.” (Giorgi,
There developed an urgent need for complementary models of inquiry into human experience that "involves the operation of active processes that encompass and constitute the various contents that become present to awareness. These contents include not only the objects of perception but also those of memory, imagination, and feeling." (Polkinghorne, 1987, p. 41).

Research studies are classified in a variety of ways, but a major distinction is made between quantitative and qualitative methods. An overview of these two distinct types of inquiry is helpful. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches are complementary components of the scientific method, rather like providing the duality of yin and yang within the universe of scientific inquiry.

Qualitative research involves primarily induction while quantitative research approaches involve primarily deduction. When hypotheses are involved, a qualitative study is much more likely to generate them whereas a quantitative study is much more likely to test hypotheses for viability or rejection. Qualitative inquiry involves the collection of extensive narrative data in order to gain insights into phenomena of interest, and data analysis includes the coding of the data and the production of a verbal synthesis. Examples of qualitative methods include ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology. These methods are clearly identified and have their own literatures and principles (Morse & Richards, 2002).

Quantitative approaches involve the collection of numerical data in order to explain, predict, and/or control phenomena of interest, and the data analysis is mainly statistical. Quantitative methods include descriptive statistical studies and correlational, causal-comparative, and experimental research (Gay, 1996).
Quantitative research described by Creswell (1994, p. 2) is “an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true.” Therefore, the researcher is an “unbiased” and independent observer who seeks to measure objectively those phenomena that occur in the external world. Studies that collect and collate numerical data in order to test hypotheses are referred to as quantitative and quantitative approaches are applied in order to describe current conditions or to investigate relationships, including cause-effect relationships (Gay, 1996).

However, quantitative research possesses limitations. Focusing only on the external world fails to take into account how psychological phenomena are, as Giorgi (1985, p. 1) says, “lived and experienced” by those who must deal with them. According to Cathy Jenni, “while quantitative data allow us to generalize from studying large numbers of participants, qualitative methods allow researchers to dig deeply and more thoroughly into specifically smaller numbers of participants to provide ecological validity, or a truth about whatever happens in everyday life” (class notes, September 26, 2003).

Qualitative research adds depth to the breadth of purely quantitative research. Creswell (1998, p. 15) states that qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.” According to Morse and Richards (2002, p. 5), “qualitative research helps us make sense
of the world in a particular way.” Qualitative research involves intensive data collection, that is, the collection of extensive narrative data on many variables over an extended period of time. The rationale behind the use of qualitative research is that behavior occurs in a context and a more complete understanding of the behavior requires an understanding of the context in which it occurs. Thus, qualitative researchers are not just concerned with describing the way things are, but also with gaining insights into how things got to be the way they are, how people feel about the way things are, what they believe, and what meanings they attach to various activities (Gay, 1996).

Quantitative and qualitative research serve both to study and to inform through the application of scientific methods and a dedication to academic rigor. The contrast between qualitative and quantitative approaches, as previously stated, can be summarized as the study of fewer variables across many cases with an attempt to eliminate researcher bias in quantitative research and the in-depth examination of many variables in few cases in qualitative research that also intimately involves the researcher’s subjectivity. Nelson & Poulin sum up historical differences between methods,

Social science research based on the hypothetico-deductive model must conform to the rules of hypothesis formation and disconfirmation. It relies on control of variation and utilizes statistical procedures that express human experience in terms of statistical values that can be used to conduct comparisons and make predictions, which will then be interpreted and generalized to whole populations….methods are designed to emphasize the rules rather then the exceptions. They are pointed toward the discovery of lawfulness (1997, p. 157-158).

Nelson & Poulin continue,

If one adopts the social constructivist perspective that knowledge about human nature is the product of social agreements regarding what constitutes the nature of experience, then the notion that lawfulness governs the domain of human experience is called into question. The positivist paradigm cannot provide an adequate window on human experience...(1997, p. 158).
Knowledge is increased from the application of both quantitative and qualitative lenses: quantitative data lends us the equivalent of a panoramic snapshot of a crowd while qualitative data provides us with multiple photographic shots, taken at very close range, of a few participants in the crowd. The importance of both methods cannot be discounted, for in the social sciences it is often important to discover objective information, gathered with minimum bias, that can be generalized to other populations. Without the subjective view of the qualitative researchers, however, valuable viewpoints are absent. Those missing viewpoints can reveal and celebrate individuation within participants, provide evidence of commonality and differences, diversity, and verifiable detail. The strength of one method of inquiry might be thought of as the weakness of the other method.

**Description of Phenomenological Method**

The phenomenological method falls under the category of qualitative research and is distinguished from other types of qualitative inquiry in several ways. Jenni (1990, p. 53) explained that the central objective of phenomenology “is to increase the range of experience and to understand human existence as it is lived.” The paradigm for phenomenological/psychological inquiry developed by Amedeo Giorgi (1985) provides a rigorous but sensitive structural approach to accessing inner, subjective, and affective dimensions of the human experience. The phenomenological philosophers Brentano, Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty inspired Giorgi’s work. Important concepts of phenomenology include an emphasis on examining pure experience, an attempt to personalize the experience by making meaning of it through the filter of existing mental structures, and an accounting of how each person exists in a social world (Morse & Richards, 2002).
Merleau-Ponty’s view that language and experience were inextricable has influenced researchers to examine personal narratives of research participants. Merleau-Ponty’s four components of phenomenological inquiry include 1) a naïve description of the experience, 2) a reduction or summary without including the viewpoint of the researcher, 3) a search for essences or essential structure through reflection and consideration of all possibilities, and 4) use of intentionality, in which the researcher looks for psychological meanings in the data (Nelson & Poulin, 1997).

However, phenomenological inquiry represents only one of several different qualitative research methods, so its idiosyncratic components must also follow the broader guidelines of all qualitative research. Cobb and Hagemaster (in Palmer, 2001) describe qualitative research using eight discrete principles:

1. There is attention to the social context in which events occur and have meaning.
2. There is an emphasis on understanding the social world from the point of view of the participants in it.
3. The approach is primarily inductive.
4. Major data collection techniques include interviewing, participant-observation, examination of personal documents and other printed material.
5. Procedures and tools for gathering data are subject to ongoing revision in the field environment.
6. The concern is primarily with description and discover, although verification is also possible.
7. The hypotheses are usually developed during the research.
8. Analysis is presented for the most part in narrative rather than numerical form. These general principles of qualitative investigation are relatively standardized (Morse & Richards, 2002), however, a specific definition for phenomenological, qualitative research is more elusive. Giorgi (1985) states,

The purpose of the method...is to do justice to the lived aspects of human phenomena, and to do so, one first has to know how someone actually experienced what has been lived. This means that a description becomes necessary when it is possible to get one...phenomenology is but one theory of treating descriptions (pp. 1-2).

Polkinghorne (1989, p. 41) indicates that “The phenomenological map refocuses inquiry, concentrating not on descriptions of worldly objects but on descriptions of experience.” He added that “The aim of phenomenologically informed research is to produce clear and accurate descriptions of a particular aspect of human experience” (p. 44) and “The purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the structure of an experience, not to describe the characteristics of a group who have had the experience. Rather than seeking to describe the mean and standard deviation of a group as it relates to the experience, the phenomenological concern is with the nature of the experience itself.” (p. 48).

Polkinghorne (1989, p. 46) described a three-step process of phenomenological inquiry as applied to a research question. The researcher first gathers descriptions in sufficient detail from people who have had or who are having the experience being studied (data gathering); then, the data must be analyzed to provide a understanding of the key elements that make up the essence of the experience; and finally, the researcher must write a report describing the experience so that a naïve reader would be able to “understand better what it is like for someone to experience that.”
An overview of the phenomenological method follows. First, the researcher develops a question to ask or a problem to solve. The researcher reviews available literature on the topic and, after personal reflection and introspection, identifies and conducts open-ended interviews and gathers description of the experience under investigation from people who have had the experience and are able to describe it richly and deeply. Pilot interviews conducted prior to the actual interviews may be helpful in developing the researcher's investigative process. All interviews are taped and transcribed in detail; the researcher reads, re-reads, and reads again the transcribed interview narratives, allowing time for the data to be processed and distilled, and for the researcher to participate in a process of "simply dwelling with the data" (Cathy Jenni class notes, 2003).

General themes emerge from the data through the process of focused and repeated looking, rather like finding the hidden picture in a three-dimensional poster by blurring one's eyes. Like peeling an apple skin in one long piece, the softer flesh is revealed: the researcher removes the top layers of skin from the participant to reveal deeper layers or levels and continues looking deeper and deeper until the concrete becomes abstract; essential elements or core experiences are finally revealed from experiences shared by all of the people interviewed. The researcher's lens searches below the surface of the lived experience and finds the central psychological structures that are common among those interviewed.

Over the past twenty-five years, there has been much quantitative research into and data generated about college student persistence and retention, but there is a paucity of qualitative research not only related to this topic but in research in general (Morse &
Richards, 2002). Additionally, and for obvious reasons, much of the persistence research has been focused upon the study of variables that relate to predictors of students' academic success, college retention, and persistence rates. More recent research involves the study of such variables as college student satisfaction, personality characteristics, and coping strategies with the majority of this research also being quantitative. Variables that are related to students' academic struggles and lack of academic success (or failure, a term that is not common in the literature) are more difficult to study (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000), especially those pertaining to the individual psychological, internal, and affective loci (Higgins, 2003; Nutt, 2003; Walsh, 2003). Due to the lack of this kind of data, interested parties either rely upon poorly correlated data or mere speculation to develop theories about students' struggles to persist in college and drive resource allocations in programs designed to treat the cause of student attrition. At best, the lack of research-based information about students' academic struggles and the common practice of their stopping out, dropping out, opting out, transferring out, and failing out lack differentiation (Hoyt & Winn, 2004). At worst, the issues that concern the very students who need assistance are unknown, ignored, or aggravated.

Much is known about the demographics of large groups of college students who stay or leave, but far less is known about the personal experience of college struggles. One recent study (Phinney & Haas, 2003) employed a narrative approach to study college coping skills among ethnic minority college students, an area of inquiry that includes voluminous research that typically employs designs "that can not capture the complexity" of the problem and that "has led to conclusions of limited theoretical or clinical value" (p. 708). Insights obtained from narratives in which participants recorded not only what
happened to them, but what they did in response provided “full and accurate descriptions of phenomenal wholes (Lazarus, p. 668)” that are as important as the search for causal variables (Phinney & Haas, 2003, p. 708).

There is little evidence of phenomenological research about the college student academic experience of any kind, although there are two dissertation studies from The University of Montana, also chaired by this dissertation’s chair, Dr. Cathy Jenni. One is on the topic of college student-athletes with ADHD (Palmer, 2002) and the other is on the topic of middle-generation Hmong students at UM (Thompson, 2001). It is hoped that this current study will contribute to the body of qualitative research on college student persistence in general, and to the small but growing body phenomenological studies.

University of Montana students who experienced academic difficulty, consequent academic suspension, resultant academic reinstatement, and a subsequent return to good academic standing were studied within a phenomenological framework in order to reveal the inner and personal experience of the outward manifestation of perseverance against adversity. It was hoped that the phenomenological method of inquiry, the type of qualitative research that lends thick and rich description from personal narratives, will contribute the students’ voice and experiences to the research base on college student persistence and retention. A phenomenological research method was employed in this study for the above reasons.

**Evaluation Criteria**

Quantitative research includes measures of reliability and validity as evidence of efficacy. Reliability refers to the level of consistency of the research as related to other research: were the findings consistent with the research findings in other studies and were
specific procedures followed? Validity refers to whether the research investigated what it intended to investigate. The goals of qualitative research, on the other hand, do not include measures of statistical significance or experimental replication. In qualitative research, measures of validity are more accurately referred to as “verification”: did the participants speak to the experience and was the data analysis focused on the experience of interest? Creswell (1998, pp. 201-203) listed the following eight verification procedures and indicated that “qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study” (p. 203):

1. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field.
2. Triangulation, or the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence.
3. Peer review or debriefing.
4. Negative case analysis, or the refining of the working hypothesis as the inquiry advances in light of negative or disconfirming evidence.
5. Clarification of researcher bias.
6. Member checks, whereby the researcher solicits informant’s views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations.
8. External audits by another person not connected with the study.

Looking at phenomenological findings in another way, Polkinghorne (1989, p.57) referred to “validity” of this method as a type of trust, measuring “whether or not the findings can be trusted and used as the basis for actions and policy decisions.” He asserted that the validity of phenomenological research derives more generally as a
"conclusion that inspires confidence because the argument in support of it has been persuasive." (p. 57). In essence, the validity of phenomenological research involves the question, "Does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural connections that are manifest in the examples collected?"

Polkinghorne (1989, p. 57) continued by listing five issues to be addressed:

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the participants’ descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the participants’ actual experience?

2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?

3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives and demonstrated why they are less probable than the one decided on?

4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcripts and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?

5. Is the structural description situation-specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations?

Applying the above verification procedures in a rigorous fashion, phenomenological research findings can be evaluated for usefulness and applicability. It was the intention of this study to follow these guidelines.
Rationale for Phenomenological Research

Placing the lens on the experience of students who have struggled academically, been suspended and reinstated, and subsequently returned to good academic standing adds depth to our information base in the research literature. It is exceedingly difficult to gather accurate information of a sensitive nature through the use of questionnaires, surveys, and other objective means. Students who have persisted despite academic difficulty have rich stories to tell about their experience and perhaps about the psychological resources that carried them through adversity (Palmer, 2002; Thompson, 2001).

Procedure

The Participants. Unlike quantitative research in which a large sample size is desirable and random selection of participants to provide adequate sample representation is important (Gay, 1998), Polkinghorne (1989, p. 48) noted that phenomenological research intends to "describe the structure of an experience, not to describe the characteristics of a group who have had the experience" and participant selection serves to cover a range of variation in order to provide richly varied descriptions and the researcher "needs to choose an array of individuals who provide a variety of specific experiences." A mistake to be avoided is the selection of participants that offer a too-narrow range of experience descriptions.

There are certain criteria for participant selection to be followed, however. Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that the appropriate selection of a participant as an informant involves two requirements, the participant must have "had the experience" (p.
47) that is the topic of research and the participant must have the ability to adequately and completely articulate the experience being researched.

Participants for this research were solicited in several ways. The initial plan approved by UM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) included the involvement of the assistant to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. The Dean’s assistant is responsible for student reinstatements in the College during the academic term and therefore has access to a database of reinstated students, as well as a record of their progress. The assistant had planned to mail letters of congratulations to those reinstated students who had recently regained good academic standing. Upon hearing of this study, the assistant agreed to include a letter from the researcher that described this study and solicited volunteers for an interview. Forty-six letters were mailed, but only two students responded to the interview invitation. Interview solicitation had to be reconsidered. An alternative plan was developed and approved by the Institutional Review Board. This plan involved the help of campus academic advisors to identify potential interview participants.

Students were then solicited via academic advisors. Since advisors knew the circumstances of their advisees and the solicitation letter could be handed to eligible students, this process gleaned seven more volunteers. The volunteers initiated contact with the researcher, not vice versa. All interview participants were previously unknown to the researcher.

All nine volunteers were deemed eligible for the interview. The two criteria for participant selection mentioned previously by Polkinghorne, above, were used and followed: of primary importance was the fact that each participant had had the experience
being investigated and that each participant was able to fully explore the experience in a conversation with the researcher. That is, all volunteers had had the experience that was the topic of the research and they all had the ability to provide full descriptions of the experience under examination. The volunteers who became the student participants in the research project were all quite eager to discuss their experiences with college adjustment, academic difficulty, academic suspension and reinstatement, and their return to good academic standing.

The interviews ranged in length from forty-five to sixty-five minutes. For the most part, the participants were able to speak without hesitation about their experience and seemed to know where to start without much prompting. The interview ended when the participant started to repeat him- or herself and realized that he or she had described fully the experience being investigated. Mostly through active listening and content reflection, the interviewer was able to get each participant to address all of the issues involved in the research: academic difficulty, academic suspension, the reinstatement process, and the return of the participant to good academic standing. The individuals who were interviewed seemed truly to enjoy sharing their experiences and being able to talk about them with the interviewer.

While nine participants were interviewed, only six participant interviews were included in this phenomenological study. Usually, the determination of which interviews to include occurs through a process called "saturation" a situation that gradually happens and is noticed by participant report redundancy (C.A. Jenni, personal communication, February 14, 2005). The researcher noticed report redundancy after the transcription of the third interview, but completed the verbatim transcription of all nine interviews.
Selection of the six interviews included in this study occurred naturally, as three of the participants interviewed during spring 2005 were not enrolled at UM the subsequent autumn semester 2005. This “natural selection” of interviews was carefully monitored by the researcher and it was believed that the three, unused interviews did not contain any data that was dissimilar from the other six interviews used in the data analysis.

Pilot Interviews. Conducting pilot interviews was carefully considered, but ultimately rejected. Due to the difficulty with the original plan for soliciting interview participants, the data collection timeframe needed to be adjusted. The researcher's many years of experience working with students in academic difficulty and a solid knowledge of the research literature made the researcher comfortable conducting interviews without going through the pilot interview process.

Characteristics of the Sample. Again, the participants included in this study consisted of The University of Montana college students who had experienced academic difficulty, academic suspension and reinstatement, and a subsequent return to good academic standing. While nine interviews were recorded and transcribed, six interviews were used in the study, as the other three participants interviewed did not return to UM in Autumn 2005.

Across the six participants, there were three male and three female students. The participant ages ranged from 21 – 35 years, with an average age of 24 years and a median age of 22. Five out of six of the participants were Caucasian and one participant was an American Indian.
When the participants were interviewed, one was an early sophomore (33 credits), one was a middle sophomore (47 credits), two were late sophomores (55 and 57 credits), one was an early junior (65 credits) and one student was a late junior (81 credits).

Participant majors included Undeclared but pursing Business Administration (1), Pre-Elementary Education (1), Social Work (2), a double major in Pre-Elementary Education and Social Work (1), and Native American Studies (1). Two students were from out of state and the other four students were Montana state residents; however, one of the out of state students completed the requirements for Montana residency.

Other distinguishing features in the participant population included: one participant reported having dyslexia and ADD; two of the participants were mothers, one a single parent of a pre-school daughter and the other a twice married mother of five; one participant was a student-athlete; one participant had a post-surgical disability resulting from radiation following the removal of a brain tumor as a pre-teen; four of the six participants relied on some form of financial aid (grants, athletic scholarship, loans) to attend college; four of the six participants worked at part time jobs in addition to their college work (pizza delivery, nanny, waitress, motel clerk); all six of the participants interviewed for this study had missed at least one semester of continuous academic-year attendance (either by withdrawal or stopping out) during their struggle with academic difficulty.

The academic characteristics surrounding the participants’ academic difficulty include: five of the participants experienced one academic suspension but one participant experienced two consecutive academic suspensions; of the five participants with one academic suspension, all of them returned to Good Academic Standing by the end of
their next enrolled term. Two of the participants earned a 4.0 cumulative grade point average the term after their suspension and one was posted to the Dean’s List the term following suspension. All of the students took time off post-suspension to sit out for a term or work full-time, or as the result of a mid-semester withdrawal.

Data Collection: The Interviews. In phenomenological research, the researcher seeks complete, rich, and thick descriptions of experience from the interview participants. To this end, the researcher inserts little other than setting a tone for an unstructured and informal dialogue, with the researcher’s dialogue coming in the form of requests for deeper explanation or clarification. The researcher wishes only to follow the movement of the participant’s consciousness. Polkinghorne (1989) describes this process,

The focus of the interview is on the life-world or experience of the interviewee and is theme-oriented, not person-oriented. The interview seeks to describe and understand the meaning of the central themes of the experience being investigated...The interview seeks descriptions of the experience itself without the participant’s interpretation or theoretical explanations...Rather than seeking general opinions, the interview focuses on specific situations and action sequences that are instances of the theme under investigation so that the essence or structure of the theme will emerge and show itself...The interview is a temporal process, and descriptions may become richer and clearer in the latter portions of the interview (p. 49).

Creswell (1998, p. 123-125) breaks the interview process into a series of the following steps:

1. Identify interviewees

2. Determine what type of interview is practical and will net the most useful information to answer research questions. For this study, it was one-on-one interviews.

3. Use adequate recording procedures.

4. Design the interview protocol.
5. Determine the place for conducting the interview.

6. Once arriving at the interview site, obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study. This may be done prior to the interview by way of a letter to participants asking for their participation.

7. During the interview, stick to the questions, complete within the time specified, be respectful and courteous, and offer few questions and advice.

The steps above were followed carefully during the data collection.

Regarding the interview process, Polkinghorne (1989) indicated:

It involves an interpersonal engagement in which participants are encouraged to share with a researcher the details of their experience... The focus of the interview is on the life-world or experience of the interviewee and is theme-oriented, not person-orientated... To keep the focus on non-theoretical descriptions of the experience, the interviewer takes care to remain open to the presence of new and unexpected constituents in the description and does not shape the questions as tests of ready-made categories or schemes of interpretation (p. 49).

As mentioned before, potential participants were solicited for participation in the study by a third party unaffiliated with the research. Each participant agreed to take part in the research by contacting the researcher privately, either by telephone or in person. A mutually agreed upon interview time was selected and all participants agreed willingly to be interviewed in the researcher’s private, professional office over several other suggested interview locations.

Prior to the beginning of each interview, the researcher welcomed the participant, provided a bottle of water for refreshment, and demonstrated the audio-recorder to be used to tape the interview. Then, the researcher-interviewer reviewed carefully the Participant Information and Consent form, which included information on the purpose of the study, the procedures, confidentiality, liability issues, the participant’s right to
withdraw voluntarily from the study at any point, and contact information for this researcher-interviewer and her faculty advisor, Dr. Cathy Jenni. All nine participants were informed about the interview transcription process and the fact that all identifying information (names, family names, locations) would be removed or changed for the publication, and that a copy of the transcribed interview would be provided for their review. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify the information included on the Participant Information and Consent Form before signing it. All participants were given a copy of the signed consent form.

After participants signed the consent form, the researcher-interviewer asked the few questions listed on the Demographic Information Sheet (see Appendix C). As participants were encouraged to participate in this study by the offer of either a twenty dollar Griz card donation or a UM Bookstore gift certificate, a final question about the participant’s preferred gift was asked. (All participants preferred the UM Bookstore gift certificate.)

The interview began with the researcher iterating the following short statement to each interviewee:

As you are a student who has persisted in college, please tell me about a recent time when you thought about the circumstances surrounding your initial academic difficulty in college, your academic suspension and reinstatement, and finally your eventual return to good academic standing. Please share these experiences with me.

In responding to this statement, most interviewees started explaining immediately their academic experiences. In a few cases, there was initial hesitance and questioning about where to begin or how to start. The researcher encouraged the participants to start however they wanted and to respond to the question however they wished. All
participants were able to describe adequately their experiences as the interview proceeded.

After completing the interviews, the researcher transcribed them verbatim and completely. Each participant was provided with a copy of his or her interview and asked to review it for removal of any identifying information. Participants were also given the opportunity to clarify, modify, delete, or otherwise change any of the material on the transcript. There were no modifications requested.

The Interviewer. The researcher in this study is a doctoral student in the department of Counselor Education in the School of Education at The University of Montana. The researcher herself was never placed on academic probation and was never academically suspended from college. However, she was a high-achieving high school student who experienced lower-than-expected first year college grades, resultant negative feelings, and some surprisingly avoidant behaviors. In short, she was able to relate personally to the experiences of high school-to-college transition and academic struggle. The researcher’s subsequent career in higher education academic advising, academic assistance, and college student retention programming contributed to an interest in college student success in general and academic difficulty in particular.

The researcher’s own college experience, professional work in the area of college student retention, and doctoral research in college student persistence contributed to certain preformed biases about what might be expected from the sample population. In fact, the researcher has listened to and worked with many struggling and suspended students. It was the researcher’s fervent intention, however, to perform a thorough
literature review to inform this study. The researcher was determined to set aside her biases during data collection, data analysis, and the reporting of findings.

However, qualitative research does not exclude the subjective role of the investigator, so the researcher looked through her particular lens and filtered the data in a way that will leave an idiosyncratic impression upon the findings, conclusions, and implications for further research. The reverse process also occurred and the researcher was impacted by the truths revealed by the experiences of the study participants.

Limitations

Some of the limitations of the study that concerned the researcher prior to the study are included below. Limitations that emerged as the study progressed are also discussed.

Representative Sample. Prior to the study, the researcher was concerned about the sample being skewed in one demographic or another. For instance, of the roughly 11,500 undergraduate students who attend The University of Montana in 2006, fifteen percent are incoming freshmen. There are 361 American Indian undergraduate students, or about three percent of the UM population. It is atypical and rare for late junior or early senior students to experience academic suspension. About fifty percent of all students who graduate from UM present over twelve transfer credits. The incidence of non-traditional aged students is slightly under 30 percent. Also, as research on college student persistence and retention reports, there are more undecided students who experience academic difficulty as a by-product of indecision about a major and uncertainty about goals.
Descriptive Research. The nature of the data collection, through participant description and topic exploration, used in this study renders a deepness and richness to the explanation of the participants’ experiences. This type of data collection is represented minimally in the educational and psychological literature on college student experiences, so there are few referents to use for comparison to the data gleaned from this study.

Another consideration is that the results of qualitative research in general, and phenomenological inquiry in specific, are not considered to be “generalizable” to other populations as are results of large population samples that are reduced quantitatively. The results generated from qualitative inquiry should be assessed for their “verifiability.” This means that the findings of this study are valuable to the extent that they resonate with or are consonant to reports of other students who have experienced the same phenomenon as the participants interviewed for this study.

Reward Effect for Participation. A decided concern of this researcher was the effect of offering interviewees a monetary reward for participation, which might entice otherwise indifferent participants to participate. However, of the nine students interviewed, only five collected their gift card. This may make the case that the participants, while perhaps initially interested in the reward, became more interested in the interview that they originally supposed.

Delimitations

In the best of all possible worlds within the authority of phenomenological research, the participants bring their own consciousness and being-in-the-world to find eidetic meaningfulness in the experience of the phenomena. Although the researcher has

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had much relevant work experience and had done extensive research about the college student experience, it was the naïve and ingenuous aspects of the participants' perspectives that charmed the researcher and that she hoped to capture in this study.

The researcher determined to remain open and be as objective as possible during the data collection and analysis, while still entertaining new possibilities, interpretations, or ways of thinking about the material. In truth, and in order to seek a standard minimum of detail about the topics included the research question (academic difficulty, academic suspension, reinstatement, and return to good academic standing) from each participant, the researcher discovered that, among the participants, different aspects of the research question were more or less important. For example, the researcher expected that the participants would all commonly report something about the reinstatement process, either a sense that it was uncomfortable to be put on the spot, to have to request permission to return to school, or at minimum, a general statement describing the process. However, this part of the research question seemed to produce the least amount of data and presented minimal depth, meaning, or personal reflection for the participants.

Data Analysis: A Description of Phenomenological Reduction

Once the interviews are completed and transcribed, the research process moved from data generation to data analysis. It is not disingenuous to report that the transformation of the collected transcripts into the end result of the phenomenological description was “a complex and difficult process” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 51).

The interview transcripts provided the raw data for the phenomenological analysis. Unlike the chemist in the sterile setting of the laboratory, the phenomenological researcher is more like the oenologist who starts out with luscious, sun-kissed grapes
from the vineyard that are intended to become some form of tasty, heady wine. The multiple-step fermentation process slowly applied to the grapes includes working out the seeds and dealing with the skins, softening and mashing the meat, applying multiple procedures to reduce the grapes into liquid, distilling the product after each procedure, and adding touches of other flavors, culling artifact, loading the product into barrels for the aging process, and finally decanting the final product into wine bottles with artistic, specialty labels. The product is always wine, but the results vary in all sorts of measures including clarity, quantity, quality, and taste to name a few. So it is with the distillation of the raw data from the interviews. The raw data are transformed by the phenomenological distillation process and reduced into an essence that contains the most common of all the materials.

The data analysis is essentially a six-step process, explained variously among researchers (Giorgi, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1989):

**Level One:** This step involves the tape recording of the interview, its complete and verbatim transcription, and repeated readings of the transcribed interviews by the researcher.

**Level Two:** The researcher reads critically each interview with the intent of “discriminating ‘meaning units’ from within a psychological perspective and with a focus on the phenomenon being researched” (Giorgi, 1985, p. 10). Meaning units are restated in the third person, identified by the shift in the participant’s focus of attention, and retained in the participant’s original language.
Level Three: Reduced statements, or Meaning Units, are judged for inclusion; those that do not contain inherent or experiential description are discarded after careful consideration. Original language is mostly retained.

Level Four: The analysis moves from the concrete to the more abstract. The participant's original language is modified by the researcher's larger understanding of its psychological meaning, although some original language is retained. Giorgi (1985) states that this transforms “the participant’s everyday expressions into psychological language with an emphasis on the phenomenon being investigated” (p. 17).

Level Five: At this stage, all interviews that have been distilled through levels one through four are commingled to form a discrete entity. The psychological descriptions of the common experiences shared by all participants form a unity, and any perspectives that are representative of only one or two participants are eliminated after careful reflection.

Level Six: At this last stage, the researcher moves into a final layer of abstraction. Situational aspects are eliminated and essential descriptions of the experience under investigation are sought. The final distillation of meanings represents the key finding of the phenomenological study. Polkinghorne (1989, p. 55) describes this final stage by noting, “The construction of the general structural description ...centers on those aspects of the experience...that are transsituational” or descriptive of the phenomenon in the most general of terms.
Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Results

The phenomenological position is that the sphere of experience appears at the intersection of person and world. This sphere has common features that structure the person-world interaction so that contents, not buzzing confusion, appear, and these contents appear as meaning something. Experience is not indistinct and unstructured chaos; it appears as differentiated and structured. Phenomenological research is the search for those processes of consciousness that give the objects that appear in awareness meaning, clarity, and discrimination (Polkinghorne, in Valle & Halling, 1989, p. 51).

The individual interviews of six University of Montana college students who had been suspended, reinstated, and subsequently returned to good academic standing constituted the data for this phenomenological study. The researcher-interviewer collected the data during the spring of 2005. Each of the six participants (P1 – P6) was asked to respond to the prompt “Please think about a time when you thought about your experience of having been suspended academically, of being reinstated, and then of your return to good academic standing and describe your experience.” The prompt was intended to provide information about college students’ perceptions of academic difficulty, failure, and eventual return to good academic standing at The University of Montana in 2005.

All participants were encouraged to respond without the imposition of specific questions by the researcher. The participants were asked to look inside themselves and to share what was meaningful and important about their experience. All interviews were audio taped so that the researcher was able to refrain from taking notes and could pay exclusive attention to each participant’s story.

The researcher transcribed all interviews. After transcription, the researcher analyzed each interview individually in the first four levels of data analysis, for each
participant at each level. In other words, once the researcher had transcribed all six interviews (Level One), the Level Two analysis was completed for all participants before the researcher moved to Level Three analysis.

The reader is directed to the Appendices for the complete set of verbatim transcriptions of the interviews and for the spontaneous meaning units (Levels One and Two), and for the narratives based on emergent themes (Level Three). Excerpts from the interviews and Levels Two and Three analyses are included in this chapter, as are the complete data analyses for all six participants at Levels Four, Five, and Six.

A schematic of the phenomenological/psychological reduction that is adapted for this study from Jenni (1990) is included on the next page. A description of each level of the data analysis procedure will follow.
The Phenomenological/Psychological Reduction

Level One: Verbatim Transcriptions (Individual Protocols)
Verbatim transcriptions of individual interview protocols are read and re-read to get a general sense of the interview.

Level Two: Spontaneous Meaning Units (Individual Protocols)
Spontaneous meaning units of each verbatim transcription (Level One) are identified according to shifts in the focus of attention and meaning in the description of the experience. The researcher identifies and examines all meaning units, and restates them in the third person, retaining the participant’s original language.

Level Three: Emergent Themes (Individual Protocols)
Meaning units (Level Two) revealing each participant’s experience of having been a University of Montana college student who had been suspended academically, reinstated, and subsequently returned to good academic standing are grouped by theme, reorganized according to topic, and presented in narrative form. Original language is retained. Meaning units not addressing the phenomenon are discarded after careful consideration.

Level Four: Transformation (Individual Protocols)
Meaning units (Level Three) are transformed into language expressing the psychological meanings of The University of Montana college student’s experience of having been suspended academically, reinstated, and subsequently returned to good academic standing. The researcher’s understandings elucidate the meanings of the participant’s descriptions.

Level Five: Fundamental Description (Combined Protocols)
The fundamental description is a narrative that results from reflection on the combined Transformations (Level Four) from all participants in which the persistent psychological aspects of the phenomenon are included. Perspectives that represent only one or two participants are discarded.

Level Six: Essential Description (Combined Protocols)
The essential description is the final level of the Phenomenological Reduction in which the situated aspects of the Fundamental Description (Level Five) recede to allow articulation of essential structural features of the phenomenon.
The Phenomenological Reduction demonstrated below uses excerpts taken from the interview with Participant One (Mattie) to describe the first four levels of analysis.

**Level One: Verbatim Transcriptions (Individual Protocols)**

Verbatim Transcriptions of individual interview protocols are read and re-read to get a general sense of the interview.

Level One of the phenomenological reduction consisted of multiple readings of each verbatim transcription from the audiotaped interviews conducted by the researcher. The transcription process was laborious but produced such rich narrative data that the value of the experience was worth the effort. The researcher listened to the interviews many times for clarification and to gain a sense of the bigger or more complete picture of what the speaker was communicating about his or her experience of the phenomenon. What story was the participant telling? Which subjects did the speaker select to share? What was the overall impression that was communicated? The Level One data are of primary importance and inform the rest of the analysis procedure.

The following example from one of the transcriptions provides a description of P1's (Mattie’s) early college experience.

**An Example of Level One (Verbatim Transcription)**

P1: Okay, well, when I was on probation was a hard period. When I was a freshman, I lived in Jesse Hall and I kinda wasn’t really into school. I was an Elementary Ed major at the time. So then, kind of as a punishment, my parents wouldn’t let me live off campus until I got my grades up so I had to live in the dorms again as a sophomore. That was when I was put on academic suspension, because the dorm people were all partying and stuff and being a freshman that I just was and I was not all that into my classes. I mean, I tried, but in the back of my head the whole time, I was thinking “You’re going to get kicked out of school if you don’t get your shit together.”

**Interviewer:** Oh?
P1: Well, that wasn’t enough and I remember, near the end of that fall term when I was in the dorms, checking with all my teachers, like what am I getting, what grade am I getting? Just to make sure that I was going to make that level and it was all good, and it was all okay and I was all "great". I barely slipped by with a “C” in a couple classes.

Interviewer: So...?

P1: I go home for much of the break, thinking that I’m fine, I’ll be fine. I had checked everything. Well, then I checked my grades and it said “academic suspension” and everything kind of hit a wall. I was like oh my god, this can’t be happening...

Level Two: Spontaneous Meaning Units (Individual Protocols)

Spontaneous Meaning Units of each Verbatim Transcription (Level One) are identified according to shifts in the focus of attention and meaning in the description of the experience. The researcher identifies and examines all meaning units, and restates them in the third person, retaining the participant’s original language.

In Level Two, each verbatim transcription (Level One) was re-read and the appearance of transitions in meaning were identified and marked. These “meaning units” represent shifts in the focus of attention in the participant’s description of the experience. The researcher numbered the meaning units for easier accessibility and examination, restated the meaning units in the third person while retaining most of the participant’s original language, and kept them in the order the participant presented them. At Level Two, all statements, even those that seemed to be meaningless, were retained.

Since the researcher had imposed minimal external structure on the original interview in order to allow the participant’s, and not the researcher’s, perceptions to be expressed, the researcher now searched the entirety of the transcription in order to identify the meaning units within the participant’s statements. Level Two constitutes the first stage in the data analysis of the meaning units.
As an example of Level Two analysis, the same passage quoted above as an example of Level One, Verbatim Transcription, is used. The researcher numbered and placed each spontaneous meaning unit on the right side of the page.

**An Example of Level Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)**

*(Verbatim Transcription)*

P2. 1. Okay, well, when I was on probation was a hard period./ 2. When I was a freshman, I lived in Jesse Hall and I kinda wasn’t really into school. I was an Elementary Ed major at the time./ 3. So then, kind of as a punishment, my parents wouldn’t let me live off campus until I got my grades up so I had to live in the dorms again as a sophomore./ 4. That was when I was put on academic suspension, because the dorm people were all partying and stuff and being a freshman that I just was and I was not all that into my classes./ 5. I mean, I tried, but in the back of my head the whole time, I was thinking “You’re going to get kicked out of school if you don’t get your shit together”./ 6. Well, that wasn’t enough and I remember, near the end of that fall term when I was in the dorms, checking with all my teachers, like what am I getting, what grade am I getting? Just to make sure that I was going to make that level and it was all good, and it was all okay and I was all “great”./ 7. I barely slipped by with a “C” in a couple classes./ 8. I go home for much of the break, thinking that I’m fine, I’ll be fine. Well, then I checked my grades and it said “academic suspension” and everything kind of hit a wall. I was like oh my god, this can’t be happening.

*(Meaning Units)*

1. P2 went through a hard period being on probation. 2. As a freshman, she lived in the dorm and wasn’t really into school. She was in elementary education. 3. As punishment for being on probation, P2’s parents wouldn’t let her move off campus until she brought her grades up, so she was in the dorms again as a sophomore. 4. P2 was suspended because of partying in the dorm, from having recently been a freshman, and not being into her classes. 5. Always in the back of P2’s mind was the worry about being kicked out of school because she didn’t have her act together. 6. At the end of fall semester in the dorms, she checked about her grades with her professors, trying to meet the level that was okay. Things seemed okay, “great”. 7. P2 barely slipped by with a “C” in a couple of her classes. 8. P2 went home at break thinking that she’d be fine. When she checked her grades and saw “academic suspension”, everything hit a wall. She couldn’t believe it was happening.
Level Three: Emergent Themes (Individual Protocols)

Meaning units (Level Two) revealing each participant's experience of having been a college student at The University of Montana who was academically suspended, reinstated, and subsequently returned to good academic standing are grouped by theme, reorganized according to topic, and presented in narrative form. Original language is retained. Meaning Units not addressing the phenomenon are discarded after careful consideration.

In Level Three, the restated meaning units from throughout the transcription identified in Level Two were examined and re-grouped according to themes that may have recurred at different points in the open-ended, unstructured interview. The themes were reordered and rewritten, for the first time, in narrative form. The participant's original language was still retained, but meaning units not clearly addressing the phenomenon of college student's experience of academic suspension, reinstatement, and subsequent return to good academic standing were discarded after careful consideration.

The narrative below illustrates how various themes emerged from meaning units from Level Two: P1 (Mattie) felt disconnected from and unmotivated by her course studies; she felt powerless to engage in or improve her work; and she felt shocked by and in denial over the news of her actual academic suspension.

An Example of Level Three (Narrative Based on Emergent Themes)

Mattie went through a hard period when she was placed on academic probation at the end of her first year of college. As a freshman, she lived in the Jesse Hall dorm and was a major in elementary education. She wasn't really into school then. There were many reasons why Mattie failed as a student when she came to college. She was put on academic suspension because of the freshman partying going on in the dorms. It was hard to study and Mattie wasn't all that into her classes, since she wasn't enjoying her studies in elementary education which made it hard for her to keep going.
Always in the back of her head, she was thinking that if she didn’t get her shit together, she was going to get kicked out of school. At the end of that fall semester in the dorms, she checked with all her teachers about the grades she was getting to see if she would meet the level that was okay. Things seemed great but she was barely slipping by with a “C” in a couple classes. She thought things were fine when she went home at semester break. Then, she checked her grades. It said “academic suspension” and everything hit a wall for Mattie. She couldn’t believe this had happened, because she had checked everything and knew she had just slipped by.

Level Four: Transformation (Individual Protocols)

Meaning units (Level Three) were transformed into language expressing the psychological meanings of The University of Montana college student’s experience of academic suspension, reinstatement, and subsequent return to good academic standing. The researcher’s understandings clarified the meanings of the participant’s descriptions.

At Level Four, the participants’ situated experiences receded slightly and the researcher’s understanding of the underlying psychological constructs, or meanings, assumed a more important role. A major transformation of the meaning units occurred, in which the researcher illuminated the psychological underpinnings of the participants’ descriptions. In the example, the specific illustrations have receded and the underlying psychological constructs of alienation, frustration, fear, and denial are identified.

In Level Four, the researcher interacts with and transforms the data, explicating the participants’ narratives that have been concrete and rendering them into more abstract, psychologically-based descriptions. This is one of the most difficult levels of the analysis. The researcher must consider and reflect on the situated descriptions and attempt to understand the emotional and psychological values and assumptions that underlie each situation. The researcher attaches new psychological labels to the situated details used by the participant. At this level, material from various parts of the interview may be combined if they share the same psychological structure.
The following example illustrates how the researcher transformed PI’s (Mattie’s) description to reveal underlying emotions. Alienation and frustration, for example, were detected in Mattie’s early college experiences of dormitory life and her uncertainty about a major. Additionally, even though Mattie felt inadequate in relation to the tasks required of college freshmen, she was surprised and scared when she realized that she had been suspended.

An Example of Level Four

In the three semesters that led up to her academic suspension, Mattie felt disconnected from academic life and the elementary education curriculum. She felt frustrated with dorm life, unmotivated by schoolwork, and distracted. Mattie felt incapable of doing the kind of study required in most of her classes, such as many reading assignments and keeping up on class lectures. When Mattie realized she had been suspended, she couldn’t believe it. She was very scared.

Transformation (Level Four) analyses follow for all six participants. They are preceded by narrative descriptions of background information provided by the participants from a brief oral questionnaire (see questions in the Interview, Part I: Demographic Information located in the Appendix).

Level Four for All Six Participants

Participant One (Mattie)

Background Information. Mattie is a 21 year old Caucasian female from a suburban area of a mid-western state. She is the youngest child of three. Her sister is four years older and her brother is between her sister and her. Mattie’s sister recently graduated from college and her brother will soon graduate; both of them attended college close to home. Both of Mattie’s parents have MSW degrees and they own their own, private therapy business. Mattie’s mother is the therapist and her father manages the business.
Level Four: Transformation. In the three semesters that led up to her academic suspension, Mattie felt disconnected from academic life and the elementary education curriculum. She felt frustrated with dorm life, unmotivated by schoolwork, and distracted. Mattie felt incapable of doing the kind of study required in most of her classes, such as many reading assignments and keeping up on class lectures. Grades were assigned mostly from two exams and a final. Since her classes were very large and roll was not taken, Mattie’s class attendance suffered. Also, having ADD and dyslexia, Mattie has felt different from most other students ever since grade school.

When Mattie realized she had been suspended, she could not believe it. She was very scared, because she knew that her parents would be strict about consequences. She rather impotently kept emailing the instructor who had given her the bad grade, but was never able to contact him. When Mattie’s parents finally found out, she was embarrassed and ashamed because her parents do not set unreasonable standards but ask that she simply do the best that she can. She knew that she was at fault, even though she could justify her academic difficulty by a lack of direction in her major. However, the suspension did force her to admit that she wasn’t doing well and she wasn’t happy, either. Now, she had to face it.

Mattie was very secretive about her situation. Once her parents knew the truth, they wouldn’t support her return to school but helped Mattie develop a plan to return to Missoula to work for a semester on her own. But she kept the details about her actual academic suspension from most of her friends.

The day-to-day grind of working and barely making enough money to live was very difficult. Mattie had little spending money, so she had to miss quite a few
adventures with her college friends who were being supported by their parents. Mattie only slipped up on the rent once and was surprised and delighted when her parents came through and supported her. Mattie is proud of the six-months when she supported herself. Though difficult, Mattie felt empowered that she had been able to manage on her own. This experience gave Mattie the hope that she could return to college and be successful.

Mattie learned more about social work as a major and she became motivated by this new direction. Her first class experience with a new social work instructor was inspiring and made Mattie hopeful. This class experience ignited her interest in college and connected her to the major. Getting an “A” for the first time in college helped Mattie confirm her major choice and gave her a well-needed shot in the arm after returning to college from suspension.

Mattie feels changed by her experience. She revisited the use of medication for ADD, which helped her change her study habits. Mattie has developed a strict study plan that helps her focus, eliminates distractions, and balances her schoolwork with social opportunities. Mattie has developed self-motivation: she finds that she does best when she works for herself and not for others. Now she is dedicated to schoolwork first and recreation comes last. Because she is interested in so many volunteer activities, Mattie has had to learn how to make careful choices about how to spend her spare time. She very excited for her future.

Participant Two (Jenae)

Background Information. Jenae is a 22 year old Caucasian female who is a single mother of a young daughter. Jenae is a native of the local area where she attended and graduated from high school. After taking a semester off, Jenae started UM during spring
semester 2002, majoring in elementary education. Jenae selected The University of Montana in order to remain close to her parents and siblings. She is the oldest of four daughters and is the only one in college. Jenae’s parents are both high school graduates.

**Level Four: Transformation.** Even though Jenae had taken a semester off between high school and college, she was eager and excited to start school. She found college overwhelming at first and it took her awhile to figure out the basics of college life, like learning the names of buildings, finding her way around campus, and getting to know the lexicon. Jenae’s academic trouble began when she discovered that she was pregnant at the beginning of the second month of school. Her morning sickness was unusually severe and it lasted until the day her daughter was born. The combination of the daily illness, the usual freshman transition, and the adjustment to motherhood created much stress for Jenae. Also, trying to make a life with the baby and the baby’s father was difficult financially and emotionally; the additional stress of college caused Jenae to be confused and frustrated. Her parent’s strong support and belief in her kept her going through the truly dreadful times. In Jenae’s early college experience, with her illness and subsequent motherhood, she had not had the opportunity to connect with the University very well, either through her instructors and classes, helping resources, or her classmates and other students.

Academic suspension scared Jenae to death. She has a very strong commitment to getting her college degree and believes that it is essential to success in life. Jenae was motivated to continue in school despite the academic setback and her early motherhood. She looked at the suspension as a problem to solve and it also motivated her to pay closer attention to the rules about financial aid. She became aware of the importance of being
eligible for aid, since she would not be able to attend college without a grant. This pressure encouraged Jenae to be more responsible.

While Jenae’s academic and financial aid suspensions were very stressful, she recognizes that she learned much from the experience. As a suspended student, Jenae was assigned to a “retention” advisor who helps her learn a lot about the system and who helps Jenae plan a good schedule around her other obligations as a mother and a nanny. Through this adversity, Jenae has learned creative ways to be successful. Because she feels different from her college peers, being a young, single mother with obvious responsibilities, Jenae feels good about herself and how she has learned to adapt to college life in her own, unique way.

Jenae still gets stressed out with the responsibility of motherhood and college, but her experiences across the last several years have made her feel like a different person. She is motivated to look more to the future than the immediate, since she has plans for herself and her daughter. Jenae is learning to make difficult choices and accept responsibility. Compared to when she was new in college, Jenae now feels more certain about who she is and what she wants to have in her life.

While Jenae knows that she will continue to have daily problems to solve and little stresses as well as bigger ones, she gets a good feeling from her grades and the respect she gets from a good mark on a school project. She likes it when others marvel at all she can do well, and this motivates her to focus on being more successful in college.

Participant Three (Noah)

Background Information. Noah is a 22 year old Caucasian male who grew up in an historic Montana mining town. He has an older brother who is attending graduate
school in the southeastern United States and a younger brother who is still in high school. Noah’s mother and father are divorced. His father lives on the west coast and does computer work, although he never quite graduated from college. Noah’s mother has a college degree in nursing but, due to a back injury, does not work outside the home any longer. Instead, she is a foster mother for a group of children whom Noah refers to as “my other brothers and sisters.” He laughingly refers to his family as “weird.”

Level Four: Transformation. In many ways, Noah’s brain cancer at the early age of eleven impacted his early college career. Noah was once a child prodigy in mathematics, but the radiation after his brain tumor surgery negatively affected his mathematic abilities and memory. This loss was not immediate, but when his peers caught up to him in math in high school, this frustrated and discouraged him. This essentially changed how Noah saw himself. He was no longer the smartest kid, a fact that had always made him feel special. His confidence was affected and his approach to his studies suffered.

Even though Noah experienced this shift in high school, he still believed that he would excel in college. Noah felt forced to pick a major, since Vocational Rehabilitation funded his college tuition, so he selected mathematics and computer science. Although there was early evidence that this was a bad choice for him, he did not believe that he could change his mind. This situation only gave Noah a bad attitude and certainly did not encourage him to bond with the department or the other students in his classes.

At the end of Noah’s second semester, he failed two classes. He had never failed or even gotten a “D” in a class ever before. Noah was shocked and he did not know what to do. Also, since he had never had any trouble before, Noah had never needed to talk to
a professor outside of class. He felt estranged from his professors and it felt foreign to approach them. Noah had difficulty accepting his grades and he was embarrassed. He did not contact Voc Rehab, either, as he was afraid of what would happen. He worked, as usual, that summer at a camp, but did not return to school in the fall.

When Noah finally contacted Voc Rehab in the late fall in order to return to school, he was given another chance. However, since he stayed with the math and computer major, he just missed the required “C” average that term. He was suspended at the end of spring semester. Noah returned to his summer camp job and reviewed his life goals. He made a conscious decision to change his major. Noah realized that he was unhappy in computer science but working at the summer camp made him happy.

While Noah was too embarrassed to tell his family about his poor grades and academic suspension, once he switched his major to elementary education and got straight “A’s” his first semester back in school, he quickly reported his grades to everyone. Noah had met with Voc Rehab and they worked with him to modify his educational goals. He secured an extra year of funding to pursue the elementary education major. Noah’s good grades and positive class experiences in elementary education have motivated him to study hard, stay focused, and aim toward success.

Noah’s experience with academic suspension forced him to face the facts about his abilities. He acknowledged that the support and encouragement of his best friend and his girlfriend helped motivate him to change. He accepted responsibility and proved that he could succeed in a different discipline in college. It is with surprise and delight that Noah will one day be able to make a difference in the lives of young students. Noah is proud of the way he turned himself around and looks forward to being a teacher.

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Participant Four (Jasper)

Background Information. Jasper is a 21 year old American Indian male with blood roots of Aztec, Crow, and Cheyenne. His mother is Crow and his biological father was Cheyenne and Hispanic. However, Jasper's mother married a Blackfeet man, thus situating the family on a reservation in northwestern Montana. Additionally, Jasper has relatives in several disparate locations in northwestern and southeastern Montana. Jasper is the youngest in the family of five siblings. He does not know much about his biological father, other than the fact that he has been in and out of prison often.

Jasper's passion in high school was sports and he attended and played for a high school in a town that is about twenty-five miles from his home. Jasper was recruited to play his sport by several schools, but he chose The University of Montana because it is closest to home. Jasper's mother is a very important person in his life and she helped him with his college decision. She continues to help him as he encounters life's obstacles. Jasper believes that his mother has a high school education but he is uncertain about the educational level of his biological father. P4's stepfather did not complete high school.

Level Four: Transformation. When he came to college at UM, Jasper felt unprepared academically and socially. He came to college after attending two Indian reservation schools in northeastern Montana, schools that are infamous for low-ranked academics. Jasper felt more unprepared for the college lifestyle than the academic challenge though, since he had lived all of his life in very different cultural, language, and social environments on the reservation. As well, Jasper played collegiate sports his first year of college, which required a lot of his time for workouts, practices, meetings, and
games in addition to his academic responsibilities. This heavy load caused Jasper to be burned out on both sports and academics by the start of his second year.

When Jasper first came to college, he felt comfortable with his teammates but never had anything in common with them. Jasper did not associate with anybody else, except for some reservation friends living in Missoula who were not attending college. Jasper felt awkward socially around anyone but his reservation friends, so he spent a lot of time partying with them. But, unlike them, Jasper was supposed to be in classes the day after the party so he dug himself into a hole doing this. As well, Jasper was initially uncertain about an academic major and consequently did not get very fired up about the general classes. He was scared about English and mathematics courses, having had minimal exposure to what he referred to as “the core classes” in the reservation schools.

Jasper’s early college experience was tougher than anything he had encountered in life before and he became overwhelmed. He felt pressured academically and this impacted his confidence in the sport in which he had always excelled. He started to party heavily as an outlet. It was convenient for him to use the excuse that he was from a “really horrible background” as evidence for his lack of academic discipline, but he really just did not know what to do. Partying led to missing classes and assignments and sleeping through appointments and practices. Jasper’s behavior led to academic suspension, the loss of his athletic scholarship, and suspension from the team.

Jasper felt guilty that his mother, who does not have much, had to help him pay for school while he worked to gain back his academic standing and his athletic scholarship. This forced Jasper to reflect upon the causes of his misfortune and to choose carefully his future. He felt placed in a corner. He would either have to get motivated or
he would be forced to leave school and return home to the reservation. Jasper decided to accept help from his mother, his coaches, and various college resource programs. Jasper forced himself to change: he started attending all his classes, made himself take better lecture notes, and he got into a relationship with his professors. He shifted priorities and adopted other outlets for his stress by choosing to date a girl who doesn’t drink and who likes to study. Jasper chose to reflect a better self, not only for himself, but for his teammates and his coaches. He felt a responsibility to many: his mother, his coaches, and his girlfriend. He knows that what he does “shines on” many others.

Jasper’s deliberate selection of different priorities changed many of his habits. He now spends time studying with his girlfriend rather than drinking with his non-college friends. His new study habits and extra effort in classes paid off: Jasper has regained his athletic scholarship and eligibility to play his sport again. Jasper recently chose to major in Native American Studies and this has further engaged him on campus, since he hangs out at the NAS building and has met many new college friends, with whom he has much in common.

When Jasper looks back, he feels that he used his reservation background as an excuse to slack off. It amuses him that when he had a full athletic scholarship and a car, a cell phone, credit cards, and everyone willing to help him, he completely “blew it” in school and in sports. Now that he is taking responsibility, even though he can not afford anything, he is doing better in all areas of his life; his coaches do not have to call him to tell him to go to class, his mother does not have to support him, and Jasper is looking forward to more education after college.
Jasper is a changed man. He has a girlfriend and their families have a lot in common. Jasper feels more mature than when he was a freshman entering college. Now, his immediate goals are mostly academic. He plans to make steady improvement in school, since his long-term goal is law school. Jasper is proud that school is more what he’s into now and that athletics are secondary. Jasper sees himself in a very different way.

**Participant Five (Rita)**

**Background Information.** Rita is a Caucasian 35 year old female college student who quit high school in the middle of the 10th grade. She was pregnant at age 14 and she married the father of her child. They tried to stay enrolled in the school they attended in their small town located in western Montana. Both Rita and her husband wanted to obtain their high school diplomas but that proved to be too difficult since the rules of conduct governing the high school student body were geared essentially to unmarried, childless people. Rita and her husband had three daughters together but later divorced in 1999. One of Rita’s daughters is herself a mother of a new baby; the younger of the other two daughters is in middle school and the older is in high school.

Rita’s parents are both college graduates. Her father received his bachelor’s degree from a college in Arizona and her mother’s degree is in music. Rita has one sister who is younger than her by several years. Rita and her sister maintain close ties via telephone conversations since her sister lives in the Midwest. Rita reports that all the females in her family, including her mother, sister, Rita herself, and her oldest daughter, are all “driven” and they want it all: marriage, children, and a career outside of the home.
Rita earned her GED in 1988 at the age of 18. Then, in 1990, she started the medical transcription program at the UM College of Technology. She completed that program in 1993, but this employment avenue was not satisfying for her. After her divorce, Rita started college at The University of Montana in the fall of 1999. While her parents had always encouraged her college attendance, P5 had a difficult time transitioning to college. Much of the difficulty involved the financial stress of managing a household for herself and her three children while attending school.

Rita left college in the middle of her second semester at UM without knowing the proper procedure for withdrawing from classes. She was determined to find employment to ease her financial strain. Initially, she took whatever jobs she could find but eventually she pursued employment working as a detention center officer, a job that she hoped would provide her with a decent career path.

Rita returned to UM after she married her current husband, with whom she has two children under the age of four, and when she became disillusioned with her detention center job. She now has the financial support of her husband, which makes her attendance at college possible without having to work. However, Rita has a “traditional” marriage, in the sense that her husband expects her to manage most of the household and childcare responsibilities on her own. Rita’s second attempt in college is way more successful regardless, since she learned about many resource programs when she was reinstated. These resources, and coming to a better understanding about how the University operates, has helped her succeed in college this time.

Rita’s two children with her second husband are both diagnosed with autism. Rita’s youngest child requires several therapies and Rita takes her to daily occupational,
speech and language, and behavior therapy appointments. Rita derives the greatest satisfaction from her children but their needs require continual management and arrangements. This sometimes puts her and her husband at odds but they work this out and manage to resolve things most of the time.

Level Four: Transformation. Rita’s initial college experience was overwhelming, depressing, and frustrating. Her lack of financial stability caused her to leave school for a series of unfulfilling and ultimately dead-end jobs in order to support her family on her own. Part of Rita’s inability to think through her college plan stems from the fact that she dropped out of high school in the 10th grade to have her first child. Rita felt inadequately prepared as a result and this, coupled with being a 35-year old mother of five, makes her feel very different from her classroom peers.

During Rita’s hiatus from college, her work experiences were disappointing and re-confirmed her resolution to return to college to get her degree. Rita’s self-esteem is dependent upon her finishing school and getting into a career and she feels badly about it taking her so long to graduate. Sometimes, she gets overwhelmed by all of her responsibilities in school and with her children. Her husband, whom she married within six months of leaving UM, sometimes makes her feel guilty by saying that she spends her time on college or the kids but not him, but he supported her decision to return to college and provides the financial wherewithal for her to this without having to work outside of the home. Rita and her husband work hard on working things out and their children are the world to them.

When Rita returned to college, she had to deal with her academic suspension. When she had gotten the suspension notice, Rita was scared and she felt awful. Even
though she knew that this happens to many other students, Rita had to talk herself into putting this negative experience behind her and moving forward. Once back in school, she plugged into support networks that she hadn’t known about during her first college attempt. The experience of returning to college made Rita feel more confident about herself as a student and she realized that since she was in a different place in her life, she could be successful.

Rita’s life is quite different now from when she first started college. The three children she was supporting on her own are mostly grown although Rita and her second husband have two children of their own. The demands of these young children make Rita’s life far more complex and her schoolwork time more limited by her family obligations than her college peers. But, Rita returned to college very carefully, taking a reduced course load even though it bothers her that it will take her longer to finish her degree. Sometimes she has to fight feelings of being overwhelmed. However, Rita has the ability to see the bigger picture and this maturity helps her when she faces academic adversity. She is amazed at all the helping services and resources that are available, programs that she was completely unaware of during her first attempt at college.

While it was difficult for Rita to justify her academic problems related to her suspension when she was reinstated, she has come to understand that many other students have similar, negative academic experiences. She feels good about her ability to pick herself up, get over the past, and move forward. Rita is eagerly looking forward to her new life in a career of her choosing.
Participant Six (Ian)

Background Information. Ian is a 23 year old Caucasian male who graduated from high school in Georgia. He is the younger brother to his sister who will graduate this year from a law school in the Midwest. During Ian’s childhood, the family moved around a lot, resulting in his attendance at grade schools in Montana and Washington, middle schools on the east coast, and high school starting with the 10th grade, in Georgia. Ian speaks with the occasional hint of a southern accent. He calls himself “a mutt” from having lived in quite a few, varied locales.

Ian’s father is a college graduate and his mother is a high school graduate. It was a foregone conclusion that Ian would go to college since he always placed in a variety of “gifted” classes in school. As well, Ian’s mother planned for both of her children to attend and graduate from college, something that she did not do and that she regrets.

Level Four: Transformation. Ian did not do too well during his first couple years of college in Georgia, so he quit and worked for a while. He soon learned that, without a college degree, his earning potential would be limited. When Ian decided to return to college, he wanted to change the venue, so enrolled at UM.

At first, Ian was overwhelmed with the amount of paperwork and activities required to establish residency in the state. These things impacted the start of his first semester. He was also restricted to taking only six credits as part of his residency. Almost as if he were on a lark, Ian capriciously decided to switch from the business-type degree he’d always thought he’d get and try the medical field. Ian started his second college experience by taking organic chemistry.
Ian very quickly encountered difficulty understanding the concepts in his chemistry class. He knew it was because of his poor math background, from having moved around so much in grade school and high school. It really bothered him, though, and he felt stuck in college again, a feeling he had had when he left college the first time. Ian developed a bad attitude and his class attendance suffered. He finally gave up. This was the first class that he could not manage to earn at least a "C" grade in.

Ian admits that he did not do the work, did not attend all the classes, did not seek help from the instructor, or do anything proactive about passing the chemistry class and he walked out of the second chemistry class during the first week. His grades in these two classes caused his suspension, since Ian had not bothered to withdraw from the second chemistry class during summer session.

Ian knew about the consequences of walking out on a semester but he felt incapable of caring. He pretended to not care about school, because if he didn’t care, he didn’t have to be bothered by the failure. Ian usually prides himself for his hard work but at this point in Ian’s life, he seemed to be lost. He did not know what he wanted to do, but he knew he did not want to be in college. So, he focused on his work as a bank teller.

When Ian received the suspension notice in the mail, it bothered him. He threw the letter in the trash immediately. The letter forced Ian to look at the fact that he had screwed up, something he knew but did not want to think about. During this time, Ian worried about the mess he had made of himself; he wondered what people thought about him; he regretted what he had done, even though he did not feel that he could do anything about it.
After a year, Ian started paying attention to the clock. He was hearing from some
of his buddies back home about their upcoming college graduation. He compared
himself and his circumstances to theirs. He was certainly glad for them but sorry for
himself because he did not want to be the guy who never got the degree. This self-
analysis motivated Ian's return to school. He knew that there was nothing preventing him
from succeeding in a business major except his attitude and motivation. He decided he
would return to college and succeed this time.

Ian felt good about his meeting with the dean for reinstatement. He admitted what
he'd done wrong and told her what he would do differently. With a more positive
attitude, Ian returned to school. He stopped drinking; since he continued to work full-time
and take a full course load, he has little time to waste on a hangover. As well, Ian
convinced his girlfriend to re-commit to college, so they are doing it together. Both of
them, now, keep their eyes on the future, toward graduation and the good jobs they'll get
with their college degrees. Ian already has an angle with a company that his mother
works for, a privately owned computer firm in Philadelphia.

Ian feels that he has now taken responsibility for his life. When he was really
screwing up, his parents totally supported him, perhaps even when they should not have.
Now that he is doing well in school, Ian is proud to be paying his own way. The only
thing his parents give him is a credit card for his gasoline. Otherwise, Ian is fully self-
sufficient, although he does have loans to cover his tuition. This debt motivates Ian to
keep moving forward and attaining the degree.

Ian feels incredibly lucky to be in the position he is in right now. He is getting
closer to graduation from college and moving forward in his life. His mother, in
particular, has been a huge supporter and motivator for Ian. She has always been the one who taught him that life is not about “can or can’t”. Life for Ian is about whether he “will or won’t.” Lately, Ian is proud that he is willing to put in the effort for his college degree.

**Level Five: Fundamental Description (Combined Protocols)**

The fundamental description is a narrative that results from the reflection on the combined Transformations (Level Four) in which the persistent psychological aspects, across participants, and of the phenomenon, are included. Perspectives that represent only one or two participants are discarded.

When first coming to college at UM, P. felt initially overwhelmed by and unprepared for the campus experience. There were a lot of new things to figure out and P. felt very different from the other college students.

It was easy to feel disconnected because of uncertain academic goals and P. made some poor choices about class attendance. Also, P. had academic, social, and financial issues that interfered with the ability to focus and be motivated to succeed.

P. perceived to have had an inadequate academic background when facing the tasks required in college classes. P. also admitted feeling stuck or immobilized when facing problems and “didn’t know what to do” with some early negative feedback.

Rather than facing up to the problems encountered during the first several semesters in college, P. became frustrated, confused, and anxious. P. was unaware of resources, but also unmotivated or unable to take responsibility.

When faced with academic suspension, S. couldn’t believe what had happened. P. was shocked and “scared to death” over the consequences of being suspended from college. Embarrassed and ashamed, P. didn’t want anyone to know and became secretive about the situation. P. felt guilty about letting down various supporters like parents, friends, and family.

P. really didn’t know what to do and wound up taking time off from college. While away from school, P. had plenty of time to reflect on the situation and review life goals. Being away from school was dissatisfying but P. had not been happy in college, either.

P. reflected considerably about the future. P. resolved to return to college and make a commitment to success. P. is keenly aware of the importance of a college education and the fact that “going back home” or working at a dead-end job is not an option.

Making a conscious choice to change, P. returned to school with new habits. P. made a commitment to attend classes, focused on taking better notes, and established good study habits. P. accepts responsibility now and has made hard choices about necessary adjustments in class or major choices that reflect a more informed match of interests and abilities.
P. has been proud of better grades and the return to good academic standing. There is no longer a need to be secretive, so P. happily shares grades and success with supporters. Getting good grades motivates P. to do even better.

Now that P. is doing well, there is a feeling of connection to the campus, other students, and P's major department. P. is inspired by the progress made and feels “like a different person.” P. is proud of the turnaround and the ability to put the past behind in order to move forward.

P. feels good about taking responsibility and notices that self-motivation is much stronger than the motivation to perform for others. By being careful and balancing priorities, P. feels self-confident about succeeding in college to graduation.

Even though the experience of academic difficulty and suspension was scary, unpleasant, and difficult, the situation forced P. to look at life goals. Put in a corner, P. had to decide whether to drop out and to discover the changes that were necessary for college success. The decision to change made all the difference. P. now looks forward to classes and looks forward to the future. Rather than regretting the past or feeling badly, P. looks to the future rather than regretting past mistakes.

Level Six: Essential Description (Combined Protocols)

The Essential Description is the final level of the Phenomenological Reduction in which the situated aspects of the Fundamental Description (Level Five) recede to allow articulation of essential structural features of the phenomenon.

UM students who experienced academic suspension and an eventual return to good academic standing were initially overwhelmed in college by all they needed to learn, felt unprepared for the challenges of campus life, and perceived themselves to be different from their peers when starting college. An uncertainty about academic goals coupled with uninspiring, poorly chosen, or large freshman classes negatively affected their motivation to attend classes and do the work required on a regular basis.

When facing problems or issues, these students believed that their inadequate academic background or individual circumstances were to blame. They admitted to being at fault about taking responsibility and were not able to seek help. These UM students experienced frustration, confusion, anxiety, and eventually shock and fear over the consequences of their failure. Academic suspension finally forced them to face the facts they’d tried to deny or ignore. Feeling cornered, the suspension forced them to reflect on their reasons for being in college and make a different kind of commitment to the change in habits that are necessary for them to succeed in school.

Returning to college with a new resolve to turn their academic record around, the college students applied different study habits, committed to attending classes, and sought out appropriate majors. A good grade, an inspirational professor or class, and support from family and friends motivated the students to further success. These students felt pride in their work and felt changed by their experience. When doing poorly, they had felt guilty, stressed, and apprehensive; doing well, they felt motivated, responsible, and self-confident. Now, they are all looking toward their future with hope.
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Chapter Five

Discussion

The phenomenological method of inquiry used in this study produced vast amounts of complex data. These data were distilled by a methodical, six-step process and reduced into ten essential psychological themes. The ten themes comprise the students’ common and collective experience of academic difficulty, academic suspension, academic reinstatement, and an eventual return to good academic standing.

The psychological themes related to the students’ initial college experience included: feeling overwhelmed by college, feeling inadequate when faced with problems, and perceiving themselves to be different than other college students; being unmotivated due to uncertainty about goals and college; and eventually becoming disengaged from the college experience.

The themes attached to the college students’ experience of academic difficulty followed by academic suspension include: feelings of frustration, confusion, and anxiety; feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and shame; feelings of shock, fear, and denial when facing academic suspension; and feeling cornered and being forced to reflect on life circumstances.

Themes identified from the college students’ experience of academic turnaround and their return to good academic standing include: making a conscious decision to change and developing different habits; feeling empowered and changed by success and support; and being hopeful and looking to the future.

All of the essential psychological themes identified will be discussed individually in this chapter, but it is important to note that the themes are neither simple nor discrete.
While discussed in isolation, in reality the themes weave together to make a fabric of the complete experience that is far richer and more complex than the individual themes alone. The various aspects of the themes will also be discussed here in a dialogue with the relevant literature.

**College Transition and Adjustment**

**Feeling Overwhelmed, Inadequate, and Different From Their Peers.** *UM students who experienced academic suspension and an eventual return to good academic standing were initially overwhelmed in college by all they needed to learn. They felt unprepared for the challenges of campus life and when facing problems or issues, these students believed that their inadequate academic background or individual circumstances were to blame. They perceived themselves to be different than their peers.*

The college experience is well documented in the research literature. Descriptions of this experience are commonly broken down to mark the obvious developmental stages in the experience, and include jargon such as the “freshman” or “first-year experience,” the “sophomore slump,” and “senioritis.” College transition commonly includes initial student reports of feeling overwhelmed by everything (Parker & Duffy, 2005). New students have to master basics such as learning the campus geography, common building abbreviations, and where services are located. The academic details of college life must also be navigated and students are faced with intimidating and seemingly distant professors, huge reading assignments, a variety of homework tasks with multiple deadlines, and large classes filled with a great many unknown, fellow students. Jenae recounted:

...it’s kind of, it’s a little overwhelming at first, the classes and things like that...the thing about it is, too, is that there’s little things, you know, little things
like... when I first came to college, I had no idea even, I mean, what a syllabus was... or like, for the exam you need a scantron, like what is a scantron? I had no idea (Jenae).

Classic freshman transition issues have received much study because persistence during the first year (and the first semester in particular) is keenly important since first year students are generally believed to be the most at-risk for dropping out and freshman class attrition rates are typically greater than any other academic year (DeBerard, Scott, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004). The most recent University of Montana retention rate after the first year was 69.4 percent (or 30.6 percent attrition) reported for the 2001 freshman cohort (OPBA, 2006).

Students enter college with variable characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, academic aptitude and academic achievements, family socioeconomic background, and parental education levels as well as different commitments to the institution, and a host of idiosyncratic personality and psychosocial traits. All of these factors contribute to the stress of college adjustment at different times in college for different students (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000). College transition stresses may negatively impact student persistence. These stresses include dormitory adjustment, homesickness, geographic or cultural adjustment, learning “the system,” inappropriate or improper major choice, career indecision, class sizes, class attendance, study skills, health, disability issues, financial concerns, and even learning the language of academia (Bigger, 2005).

Typical freshman transition issues are can be more complex and infinitely more overwhelming for a student who belongs to an ethnic minority. Language and cultural challenges add to the list of possible adjustment issues. Homesickness can be extreme and depending upon cultural affiliation, minority students often have more familial
responsibilities and expectations (Phinney & Haas, 2003). Certain student populations are at greater risk of adjusting to college than others and these populations include ethnic minorities (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994) and students who are the first generation in their family to attend college (Merullo, 2002).

American Indian students constitute the largest ethnic minority population at UM. There are slightly under 500 American Indian students on campus, constituting 3.8 percent of the student body (P. S. Weaselhead, personal communication, October, 10, 2005). This is a very small number of minority students walking around the very White-dominant campus. Recognizable ethnic identification adds pressure to an already packed freshman agenda in both external and internal ways (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). For Jasper, being a student athlete in addition, compounded the external and internal complexities of his initial college experience. Jasper stated:

So I mean... it was tough, too, socially I mean coming from the reservation. I mean being raised with Native Americans your whole life, I mean we guys live a whole different lifestyle socially and language wise and everything in common and you get here and it can be tough... Well, I felt welcome to campus as far as my team and my coaches, obviously because of that but I never really had a lot in common with them and as far as the whole other student body, I just didn’t associate with anybody (Jasper).

While Jasper weakly denied feelings of alienation and isolation in his own college experience, he was not unaware of this experience for others. He said, “I didn’t really feel scared but I know that it’s affected a lot of other Native Americans...as far as in emotionally and they get frustrated and in that they don’t come back the next year...I was just like all the white-colored freshmen.” The cultural climate of a campus has a lot to do with a minority student’s experience in college (Zea, Reisen, Beil, & and Caplan, 1997) and minority students exhibit the highest attrition rates from colleges and
universities. American Indians have a 33% attrition rate followed by Blacks (25%),
students of Hispanic origin (24%), “Non-resident aliens” (22%), Whites (20%), and
students of Asian origin (13%) (Grayson, 2003).

Another minority, albeit a growing one on campuses, is students with either
physical or emotional disabilities. There are roughly 800 students at The UM who are
registered with the Disability Services for Students (DSS) office (J. S. Marks, personal
communication, March 13, 2006). There is the assumption, however, that for every
student with a disability who registers with DSS there are potentially two or three more
students who do not register for services. While The UM is considered to be forward
thinking and acting about physical accessibility, physical and emotional disabilities are
enormously varied, complex, and difficult to address (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003).

The psychological barriers surrounding disability issues are also problematic,
such as the student with ADHD who is in denial about the diagnosis or who does not
want to be treated differently than any other student. Mattie reported having ADD and
dyslexia both, but had never registered with DSS, stating that she did not “have test
anxiety or need extended test times.” Since she never investigated their accommodations,
Mattie did not know the range of services DSS offers: it may be the case that books on
tape, scribes, note takers, and the use of sophisticated recording technologies may have
helped her in the larger classes that she identified as “difficult for her learning style.”

Noah is registered with the DSS office, but he reported that he still has trouble
believing that he has a disability or that his college troubles are actually a result of that
disability. Noah said:

When I was 11 years old, I had brain cancer and the post...they tell me that the
post-cancer treatment of radiation has destroyed parts of my brain, particularly
with memory and my ability to learn past a certain point on mathematics and stuff like that. Beforehand, I was like this intelligent student, the type of young child who never missed a day of school because they enjoy it so much and then, after... I mean I never struggled, and after it, everyone started to match my ability and... They always told me that it would happen, but I always disbelieved them because I was doing just fine in junior high and the later years of elementary school and then to have it happen so suddenly, with trigonometry especially (Noah).

Another part of the disability problem involves the fact that, once in college “Students change from being educational service recipients to managers of their postsecondary support” (Tincani, 2004). This requires a shift from passive to active participation, something that is not necessarily taught or reinforced, but also a shift from being a passive recipient of services developed by others to an informed consumer of services who must go after them (Quick, Lehmann, & Deniston, 2003).

Non-traditional aged students have their own set of college transition issues. While they often do much better in college than traditional aged students because they have already matured, tend to be more goal-oriented, have stable lifestyles that include marriage and family, and know why they are in college, the older adult learner may have childcare issues, work conflicts, competing time constraints, and learning or memory issues, to name a few (Hagedorn, 2005). The length of time they have been away from formalized educational settings and the type of work they’ve been doing (e.g., little formal writing tasks or mathematical calculations) also impacts their transition. Many non-traditional students come to campus tentatively, wary about being the only older person in a college classroom. Rita found, “Mostly it’s been really overwhelming but, um, and sometimes very depressing and it’s hard to fight through it all, um because I’m not like every one of those younger kids who might have more time...”
At UM the number of non-traditional or adult students is difficult to assess. The term “non-traditional student” is used here and defined by its usefulness in Regents’ reports and includes students who are either age 21 or who have been out of high school for three years upon admission. This number, then, does not include transfer students who are over 21 (students like Ian) and it does not include older students who return to college after a hiatus (students like Rita). Variation across types of non-traditional students complicates the issue, since non-traditional students range from those who left high school early for whatever reasons and eventually earned a GED to those students who did not do well in school, who never planned to attend college, or those who dropped out of high school due to academic problems. The first type of student may excel in college with little assistance and the latter type of student may need extensive remediation and resources in order to succeed (Gardner & Jeweler, 1992).

Transfer students have their own constellation of issues. Like freshmen, they must become familiar with a new locale, different academic expectations, and a new institutional lexicon, except transfers often believe that they have already managed their college transition at their first institution. This presumption on their part can result in poor academic choices, especially course placement in areas such as mathematics and English or upper level courses, since institutions differ on expectations and pre-requisites. As well, transferring from community colleges, tribal colleges, and vocational programs that offer more individualized attention and smaller classes into the larger four-year college or university venues is tricky business. Large classes, intimidating professors, and inadequate advising may lead to alienation and isolation (Clump, Bauer, & Whiteleather, 2003; Toth & Montagna, 2002). Credits may be lost in the shuffle and students may take
heavier course loads in order to minimize the tuition damage, something that may not work out for the best (Friedman, Rodriguez, & McComb, 2006).

Transition into an institution can affect students' academic success, especially during their first semester and student retention literature is clear that the first six weeks of a student's first semester on campus is most critical. This transition can be difficult for students no matter if they are new or seasoned students transferring to a new campus (Higgins, 2003). Transfer students may have a better-refined sense of purpose but still may have difficulty with new environments. Although more knowledgeable about college, transfers still must deal with new surroundings, policies, procedures, and academic expectations, as well as begin building relationships within the new setting. These realities can challenge academic success and progress (Higgins, 2005). Ian suffered from a multiple whammy of transfer transition, the bureaucracy of the new system (i.e., establishing residency), the limitation of part-time enrollment, and an ill-informed major change from business to pre-med; therefore, this suffering prevented Ian's early bonding with the institution and forming a social network – some of the factors that keep students engaged regardless of academic or financial difficulties (Tinto, 1987, 1993).

Feelings of being overwhelmed are connected to feelings of inadequacy, either from one's academic background or individual circumstances. Students are compared continually to each other in the classroom, in discussions, and by grades, so it is natural for them to compare their personal circumstances to those of their peers. All the current study participants expressed various concerns over their academic performance related to their academic preparation or background, disability issues, or college study skills.
By feeling overwhelmed and inadequate, the students in this study perceived themselves to be different from their peers. What's wrong with me? Why am I so overwhelmed? Why does everyone else seem to be passing me by? The college life is stressful and unpredictable things happen to interfere with staying on track. For Mattie, her first year of college evoked memories and feelings from her grade school experience that set her apart. “Even through grade school, I’ve always had a really low self-esteem when it comes to grades and school...I have ADD and...when I was younger...had a really hard time with spelling and I was dyslexic.”.

Once on campus, students encounter other students from a variety of different social, geographic, and academic backgrounds. Early classroom experiences, homework assignments, and feedback may resonate pleasantly or frighten severely the tentative new students. Jasper became aware of how his academic preparation had been very different:

Um, academically it’s not really that, um, it wasn’t really that tough. Granted, I grew up on a reservation and the academics, as far as being prepared academically or socially, I wasn’t prepared at all. Yeah, academically as far as English and I think just the core classes...I mean, the core like English and mathematics, I was really unprepared coming from (the reservation)...just the fact that our academics are the lowest in the state (Jasper).

While all of the students in this study were admitted fully, The UM’s admission standards are quite lenient. At the University of Montana a freshman must present either a minimum high school cumulative grade point average of 2.5 (4.0 being an “A”, 3.0 being a “B”, and so on) or a minimum high school class ranking at the 50th percentile or a minimum ACT score (or SAT equivalent score) of 22 and evidence of college preparatory courses taken in high school. There are exceptions allowed, however, to all of the minimum qualifications. Each year, there are roughly one hundred students in the
entering freshman cohort who do not meet any of the entrance requirements. These students are accepted in a “provisional” category.

There were four “freshman admission” students in the participants included in this study (n=4). Only one of them met or exceeded all three of the minimum requirements (Noah), one student met two out of three of the requirements (Jasper) despite reporting a “horrible academics on the reservation,” one student was admitted based upon high school grade point average alone (Jenae), and one student was admitted in the exception pool (Mattie). Rita presented a GED for admission as a non-traditional student (there are only two admission requirements for non-traditional students, either presentation of a high school diploma or a GED) and Ian met the only requirement (a minimum 2.0 cgpa) for transfer student admission. Looking at the academic profiles of this study’s students, there is compelling evidence for them to have been overwhelmed and feeling inadequate in college and, these students reported strongly their concerns in their interviews.

**Being Unmotivated Due to Uncertainty About Goals and College.** It was easy to feel unmotivated because of uncertain academic goals and this uncertainty also eroded their personal investment in and commitment to college.

There is common lore in higher education about the incidence rate of indecision about major in college students. One factoid often bandied about is an average number of major changes transacted by college students, with this number varying from three to six changes across a college career. Many students change their mind about their chosen major between the time they apply to college and when they report for their new student orientation. As many as thirty percent of the students attending a summer orientation program at UM last year changed their major during the three day program and over a
quarter of all new freshmen listed their major as "undeclared" or undecided (J. A. Granvold, personal communication, Sept. 27, 2005).

Being undecided about a major is not all bad. Most colleges and universities encourage students to explore disciplines and have in place a set of core requirements that all students complete during their first few semesters. However, remaining undecided for too long is troubling, not only for the student without a strong educational goal or plan, but also for the institution: undecided students leave college at the greatest rate of all students between their first and second year of college (Slowinski & Hammock, 2003). Imagine the mind-set of the students who leave college prematurely to go back home and rethink their future. Whether leaving college was forced by academic troubles or not, there will remain lingering doubt about their capabilities and their choice always (Gordon, 1998). Worse, indecision is tough on the student who is experiencing it (Keup & Stolzenberg, 2004). Without a goal, a student has difficulty understanding how a particularly difficult (or boring) course makes sense in the bigger scheme. Motivation to do well is impacted and grades suffer, as does academic esteem and general self-confidence. Without an identified purpose, the college degree seems distant and the college experience has no apparent form or design (Gordon, 1998). Mattie, although initially enrolled in an elementary education major, found "being a freshman...I was not all that into my classes...so the fact that I didn’t have a goal direction gave me...an excuse."

A poor major choice can also negatively impact college students and students often make major choice decisions on a whim rather than on information. At the end of the first semester at UM, there is mass exodus of students from the hard sciences such as
pre-med, pre-pharmacy, forestry, and wildlife biology when the reality of the chemistry and calculus requirements intersect with the romance of the perceived occupation (Gardner & Jeweler, 1992). For a student who dreams of a job driving around in the mountains in a pick-up truck, counting trees or grizzly bears, the reality of the daily 8:00 a.m. classes in organic chemistry, biology, and statistics does not exactly fit the fantasy. Ian mentioned, “I jumped into a chemistry class...I found out very quickly why I’ve always moved toward the business aspect and stayed away from the sciences.” There are other students who are forced into majors, either by their well-intentioned parents, the requirements of a particular scholarship or award, or even misinformation regarding a funding program. The wrong major can, at minimum, make a student disengaged or miserable and at most, get a student in academic and financial trouble. Noah explained, “All I remember...is being unsatisfied with my major but being forced into deciding...I was a 19 year old kid...(not in a) position to make that decision...I definitely couldn’t complete it in computer science, I just wasn’t interested.”

External pressures or variables have as much impact on the college experience for Noah, Ian, and Jasper as internal variables. For Noah and Ian, poor major fit contributed to their college distress. In Jasper’s case, in spite of his poor academic preparation in high school on the reservation, he reported doing “okay” in his classes but that he lacked his own motivation to attend, something that can be a contributing factor in persistence (Le, Casillas, & Robbins, 2005). No one was watching out for him, encouraging him, or even caring if he was in class and these social supports also play a key role in keeping students engaged (Toth & Montagna, 2002). This certainly affected Jasper:

And even then, it was still tough. It wasn’t the academics, I wasn’t having trouble in my classes, they weren’t too hard, they were just generals and stuff, but it was
just...really it’s just a matter of me showing up and getting motivated...it was just hard to get motivated to go to class when you come fresh out of high school and you don’t have someone waking you up in the morning. No one’s taking roll at class (Jasper).

**Being Disengaged from the College Experience.** Academic, social, and financial stresses negatively impacted the students’ choices about class attendance, affected their ability to focus, and ultimately disengaged them from the college experience.

Because of the many, enmeshed variables that can affect college student persistence, a small issue can tip the balance from persistence to attrition. As discussed in the previous section, major choice impacts a student’s college experience and success. A student in a major that is a bad fit, for whatever reason, will encounter difficulty. Academic struggles are rarely isolated and they bleed over into daily life in social, emotional, and even financial arenas. Students who encounter academic failure take a hit in self-confidence and this impacts fundamentally how they look at themselves, the institution, and their commitment to college (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Many give up on it.

Ian shared:

Um, but, so that first semester I was here, you know, and I took that chemistry class and after the first two weeks, I just couldn’t understand it and it was whoa, it was really bothering me and I just gave up. I mean I still went to class and I still did, I still tried minimally, but I was just going into it with a bad attitude (Ian).

Ian was at another decided disadvantage, he was restricted to taking six credits while he was establishing Montana residency. This isolated him from the campus and his peers. Grayson (2003) reported “institutions with fewer than 10% part-time students reported attrition rates of 15% while those with more than 20% part-time students had attrition rates averaging 27%.” (p. 5).
It may be as simple as one ill-advised course selection that will drive a student away from the institution, but it is usually a combination of things that conspires to disrupt progress or success. For Jenae, an unexpected pregnancy in her first semester changed her college experience forever. Despite having stable major goals and a strong commitment to getting a college degree, her pregnancy and illness, the challenges of motherhood, relationship issues, and financial stress pulled Jenae in many different directions away from college life. It is not difficult to imagine that Jenae’s attention span and focus in the classroom was mitigated greatly by morning sickness, fatigue, thoughts of having left her baby in daycare, worry about paying the bills, anguish over relationship difficulties, moving out of her parent’s house, and the challenges of being a new parent. It is more difficult to imagine what could possibly have engaged her in the face of all this.

For Jasper, being involved in activities that took away from his academic participation eventually snowballed and forced him into a circular, downward spiral. As a student athlete, he had many expectations placed on him. He had athletic workouts, daily practices, a game schedule, and meetings to attend as well as the demands of class attendance, homework assignments, and examinations. Falling behind in his athletic responsibilities affected his scholarship, yet falling behind on his academics affected his ability to play his sport. Bound together in this way, a failure in one area necessarily impacted the other area. Many stresses (including minority specific stresses) and inadequate coping strategies contribute to a whole array of academic, psychosocial, and behavior problems (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Hutz, Fabian, & Martin, Jr., 2005; Phinney & Haas, 2003) Unable to succeed in sports or school created an untenable situation for Jasper:
...so I mean it’s tough, doing all that. Trying to stay motivated to do it all academically plus, you know, knowing you’re not going to be able to play (sports) with all this work and all and all these work-outs, it could kinda make you feel worse...It was hard to stay motivated, I guess I have to say....I don’t know, that first semester or, you know, the second year, it was sometimes, it was kind of I don’t know, I’m not playing (sport), and I kind of got somewhat depressed, I guess, you know...I had nothing keeping me back from partying around and being lazy and I wasn’t really going to school. It really felt that I wasn’t going to be doing anything to help myself there (Jasper).

If one believes that it is human nature to strive to be successful, for students who are not successful at first in college, it is important to find other ways of being successful outside of academics. By Jasper’s own admission, he got an “A+” in partying. He is not alone. One need only go to the bars downtown any night of the week or visit with the director of Residence Life to discover how many party incidents are reported in the dormitories on the week-ends. As might be assumed, significant negative correlations have been found between grade point averages and substance abuse (Musgrave-Marquart, Bromley, & Dalley, 1997). Regarding the incidence of alcohol use among college students, one must only consult the local newspaper on an occasional basis to understand that alcohol is a fixture at college student functions.

At UM, there were 516 students who got into notable trouble on campus with alcohol in 2004-2005. This number is expected to have increased substantially this current 2005-2006 year, as the rules governing MIP (minor in possession) were modified. Previously, only after a third MIP would a student be referred to the SOS, Self Over Substance program for intervention. Of referrals, over 80 percent of them involve alcohol abuse (17 percent involve marijuana). About fifty percent of the SOS participants reported that their substance intake affected their ability to do homework or study for a test and almost the same percent reported that their alcohol intake had resulted in
fighting, acting badly, or doing mean things (M. Frost, personal conversation, April 17, 2006).

Students enter higher education with a variety of backgrounds and educational experiences. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) cite the major factors that contribute to academic adjustment such as peer culture, academic major, college environment, faculty contact, work, career choice, personal motivation, organization, study habits, quality of effort, self-efficacy, and perceived control and the dimensions of these factors can include positive and negative elements. For instance, having a job can be a complement to a student’s academic and career interests or it may be seen as a competitor for a student’s available study time (Higgins, 2003).

Pursuing non-academic goals is not necessarily bad. When Mattie was struggling with academics, she found solace in new friendships and the Montana outdoors. The engagement that was lacking in her large general classes, where no attendance was taken, was provided by hiking and camping opportunities with new friends. The problem for students is that missing classes is associated with lower grade achievement and lower grades encourage further absenteeism and this can turn into a predictable downward spiral (Gump, 2005; Jones, 1984).

Part of the college experience for students is, by necessity, learning how to adapt to different pedagogy, balance academics with other responsibilities and opportunities, and study effectively. Included in this tricky balance is figuring out how much time should be allotted to school work, figuring out how to study and avoid procrastination, and making sure that, while socializing and recreation are good things in moderation,
non-academic activities need to complement and not replace academic activities
(Brownlow & Reasinger, 2001).

Adaptation to college life is negatively impacted in many ways and by many
things, but experts agree that the primary reason most students report for leaving school,
or being forced to leave school, is money (Cuseo, 2003). Financial problems or stress
about money can distract and disengage students from college, although in many cases,
money problems serves as a legitimate reasons for dropping out when there are other,
more personal reasons to blame. Rita reports:

...I had financial aid and all, but with my kids, I mean, I didn’t tap into too many
resources, like I’d done in the past but I just couldn’t do it financially...I also
think that the idea of maybe getting a job and just having things be easier. Just my
kids and a job, no school. Which is funny because I really want to be in school
(Rita).

The Experience of Academic Difficulty and Academic Suspension

Feelings of Frustration, Confusion, and Anxiety. In their downward academic
spiral, these students became frustrated, confused, and anxious.

A couple years ago, I’d wake up and like bummer, there’d be those things I’d be
worried about like I gotta get this paper done and I’d be like way behind and the
coaches would be calling me and saying “hey, what are you doing?” and “why
didn’t you show up for this class?” and stuff like that. My freshman year, pffew,
sophomore year too, I just did a lot of partying and stuff (Jasper).

For Jasper, the frustration of not being eligible to play his sport and having to sit
on the sidelines at the games, his confusion over his academic goals and what to do to fix
his academic problems, and the stress and anxiety about his continued downward spiral
was only ameliorated temporarily with alcohol. The day after, all the frustration,
confusion and anxiety would come pouring back, but coupled with depression and the
paranoia of a hangover. What eventually happened to Jasper was that the alcohol that was originally intended to relieve his anxiety and frustration started to compound it.

Noah’s disability issues served in a similar way to confuse and frustrate him, and cause him anxiety. He’d never before encountered his academic limit, despite being informed of some certain radiation-effect by-products from his cancer. Along with the garden-variety freshman issues with large, anonymous classes and tentativeness in regard to contacting professors about problems, Noah was finally forced to confront reality when he earned a very low grade point average at the end of his second semester. He was not only confused over how he had managed such poor grades, but he was anxious over and confused about taking steps to fix the situation. His funding status with Voc Rehab was uncertain also. Together, these things percolated a bottom-line frustration. Noah reported that he had “never gotten a “D”...I understand that I didn’t go to class as often as I should have, but I still...I was a little confused... I gave up and just decided not to go back to school in the fall.”

Noah and Jasper’s situations were different but the end result was the same: they didn’t know what to do about their academic problems, so they gave up. When Ian transferred to UM and changed his goal from business to pre-med, he was frustrated about the residency requirements that limited his class load to six credits and at his lack of ability to engage in or succeed at the chemistry class where he focused his attention. Confused by the course and anxious about his failure, Ian drowned his sorrows in the bottle when he turned 21. The partying may have unconsciously given him an excuse for his disturbing failure in chemistry. By telling himself that he did not care what happened and that school was not for him, he was able to reduce the fear that he could not succeed
in college. But the anxiety was too high for him to remain in school. Ian reported that, “I just didn’t care. I just, I got to the point where, I just didn’t care...I didn’t care what happened and I was just saying school is not for me. And so it doesn’t really matter if I fail out, it’s horrible, maybe but I’m never going back.” At this juncture, the obvious academic failure motivated Ian to “disidentify” with the university as a primary defense. If he just “didn’t care” and claimed that “school is not for me”, his disengagement from UM solved that problem. One cannot be a failure when one is not a participant.

The academic environment provides many situations that are fraught with the stresses of deadlines, knowledge acquisition, examinations, grades, demanding assignments, and performance expectations. In the competitive world, “facing failure is virtually inevitable. However, how people deal with failure varies.” (Grewel & Lafreniere, 2003, p. 101). Students routinely face the fear of failure and some who experience it become discouraged, depressed, or even drop out while others persist and find the motivation to do better in the future. Some of the differences in approaching problems can be attributed to coping skills and coping styles.

Much of the coping research is based on the work of Lazarus & Folkman (Phinney & Haas, 2003). Coping is essentially the process that individuals use to manage demands that are taxing their resources and abilities and coping style refers to the way individuals deal with stressful situations. Three main coping styles have been identified that employ cognitive and behavioral strategies: task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance-oriented coping. Simply put, one can use task-oriented coping strategies to actively pursue solutions to problems and academic coping strategies would fall under this type of coping style. Where one perceives to be experiencing a stressor that has no
apparent solution, emotion-oriented coping strategies (i.e., talking with friends, seeking social support) are helpful in ameliorating distress. Avoidant coping sounds like what it is, and that is the kind of coping strategies that Jasper, Noah, Rita, and Ian employed when facing their academic situations: they drank, overslept, avoided class, disidentified, gave up, and otherwise dropped out of college.

Many freshmen have to develop academic specific coping skills, even those who come to college more academically and socially prepared. But, the students in this study suffered from multiple risk factors, so their stressors were overwhelming and students who are exposed to negative experiences in a prolonged way or who perceive them to be unmanageable can develop helplessness, depression, and anxiety, adding other dimensions to their coping paradigm (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000). Since academic stress alone covaries with lower course grades these students were facing enormous pressures.

Feelings of Guilt, Embarrassment, and Shame. Unaware of or unable to access helping resources, they felt guilty, embarrassed and ashamed of their situation.

Students who flunk out of college often tell no one about their situation. It is relatively easy to keep this secret, since a student’s grades are confidential and for their eyes only. Crafty parents refuse to pay future tuition without access to grade reports, but friends, relatives, and not-so-crafty parents may never know what’s on a particular transcript. Keeping one’s grades a secret may alleviate embarrassment and shame, but the guilt of keeping a secret, especially from the parents, can be as bad as the embarrassment of the actual situation. Mattie initially handled her suspension with secrecy:
...I didn’t want to tell my parents. This just isn’t going to happen...I kept saying “no, I haven’t gotten (my grades) yet, sorry”... I was embarrassed. I was so like, ashamed. I couldn’t believe that I’d done this. I knew it was my fault, my grades. (Mattie)

Often, the parents never know. It may depend upon the kind of relationship that the student has with the parents or it may depend upon the family history. For Noah, coming to terms with the impact on his intellect by the post-cancer radiation has not been easy. Once a gifted student in mathematics, Noah’s failure in college must have been devastating to him. He also alluded to the effect his diagnosis had on his grandparents and his mother, possibly increasing his interest in keeping his troubles to himself:

Well, it was fairly traumatic...to have something so young. I remember the drive back from Helena where I first saw the neurologist, I just remember both my...grandmothers were there and my mom. It was kind of silent and traumatic but it wasn’t until I saw all three of them crying at the same time and I was just like...I was eleven years old...I was just immature and not understanding what it meant at all (Noah).

How could an eleven-year old child deal with this? As an adult, Noah certainly had his own trouble dealing with his uncertain academic future. Perhaps he also hid his college grades from his family in order to protect them from another bad thing. This is an example of avoidant coping, but it may also be the case that Noah was suffering from inadequate social support on campus (Woosly, 2003), familial estrangement (Beck, Taylor, & Robbins, 2003), and features of the sophomore slump (Graunke & Woosley, 2005) that are other pieces in the persistence puzzle.

Ian’s experience of the embarrassment, shame and guilt took the form of regret. In an out-of-character way, because he comes across as an anti-hero in certain parts of his interview, he started comparing himself to others and worried about what people were thinking about him. This is hardly the musings of the fellow who reported confidently on
his successful high school basketball days or who speaks assuredly of his business acumen. It seems, in his darkest days away from school, Ian was hiding in his job, fearful that he might turn out to be “the schmuck who didn’t get the degree”, the one out of all of his friends who did not graduate from college. Ian may also feel as badly as he does because of his mother’s unwavering faith in him:

...you know my mom’s always been, she’s always been a big believer in me. She knows that I can, she knows that it’s never a “can” or “can’t”, it is always the “will” or “won’t” with me so...she’s always had good faith in me and she just stuck with it for a while (Ian).

This holds true for Jasper as well. His success in high school athletics would have made his mother very proud. She would have been very proud of a kind of success that is rare on Indian reservations. Then, for Jasper to have squandered his athletic success, lost his scholarship, and failed in college not only would have hurt his mother but publicly embarrassed and shamed Jasper in his hometown community. Additionally, he felt guilty because he had to rely on his mother financially in order to earn his way back into college and onto the team. He is also concerned about what others think about him, worried that he’s going to be on campus long enough to look pitiful. Jasper shared:

...and...there was that guilt...because my mom was helping me foot the bill considering I wasn’t on scholarship no more because of I was suspended....and my mom, my mom helped a lot too. Financially, she can hardly pay for any (pause) other (pause) thing (pause)...I don’t want to be on a seven-year plan or nothing like that...I don’t want to make myself look like an ass by being here for seven years (Jasper).

Feelings of Shock, Fear, and Denial When Faced with Academic Suspension.

Academic suspension shocked and scared these students but finally forced them to face the facts they had tried to deny or ignore.
When anything bad happens to someone, there’s the likelihood of encountering some or all of the stages of grief in the process. In the famous Kubler-Ross grieving and loss paradigm, the acronym for the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (DABDA) seems to fit the reports of the research participants. Mattie demonstrated great denial, along with shock and fear, “I checked my grades and it said “academic suspension” and everything kind of hit a wall. I was like oh my god, this can’t be happening...so, I was scared, I was so scared...it totally freaked me out.”

Noah couldn’t understand how or believe that he’d gotten some of his grades:

...when I looked at my grades...I’d only passed five of my 13 credits and...I had failed two classes and I’ve never failed a class. I’d never gotten a “D” ...and I just didn’t think I deserved an “F”. I understand that I didn’t go to class as often as I should have, but I still...yes, attendance was a part of the grade but ...I was a little confused...(Noah).

Noah’s academic situation also unnerved him and he reported, “...I didn’t want to go to Voc Rehab and explain what had happened. I was afraid of what would happen.”

For Ian, it was more difficult to ignore the role he played in his suspension, since his poor grade in the first chemistry class and his attendance for only one day in the second chemistry class was behavior that was too overt to deny. Rather, his anger at the suspension letter, causing him to toss it into the trash immediately is a classic example of misplaced responsibility. In Ian’s words:

Yeah, like you are on suspension and you will not be allowed to do this or that, this and this, and that. It hit the trash the minute I opened it...I mean, I don’t need someone telling me, I already knew about that...when I opened up that letter, it was like yeah, I know. You screwed up, yep, I know, thanks, I appreciate this, okay and if I want to come back, I’ll talk to you guys then (Ian).

Current literature does not reveal much active study of college failure or poor academic achievement. “Early studies (Astin, 1977) focused on the characteristics of
those students who did not persist and such studies were used as evidence for higher admissions standards to more quality control of recruitment” (Nutt, 2003). However, a 1998 study provided a useful review of earlier literature on the topic. Rita Jr. (1998) reported:

The readmission of the student who has failed academically poses a serious problem for the college administrator. There have been few reliable criteria on which to base the readmission decision. Research studies are sparse and spaced far apart across the decades. Boyd et al. (1994) invited readmitted students who were academically dismissed to participate in a summer retention program that emphasized study skills and career exploration. Although the program participants had higher average rates of academic persistence than did the control group, the difference did not reach statistical significance. Paulsen and Stahmann (1973) studied the characteristics of high-risk students readmitted after a semester of probation. The group who graduated had a desire for upward mobility and financial success. These graduates also changed their study habits and study skills in order to succeed (p. 517).

Early 1960s studies reported conflicting evidence about discriminative attributes of unsuccessful students. Several studies reported significant relationships between overall grade point average (GPA) prior to dismissal and GPA after readmission; another study reported little or no relationship between achievement measures and performance after readmission. Other reports included: the grades of students who engaged in constructive activities during their absence from college improved more than grades of students who did not; there is no clear-cut relationship between length of absence and improvement; students who completed between 30 and 60 units tended to be successful;
and students who worked more than 20 hours a week were less successful than students who worked 11-20 hours a week (Rita Jr., 1998).

In the recent and rare study of student “unsuccess” (p. 699), Lebedina-Manzoni (2004), two thoughts that discriminate most between successful and unsuccessful students relate to worry about parents reaction (“I shall disappoint them; what are they going to say?”) and anticipation of failure “”I know nothing, for sure I will fail; I can’t do it”). There are several ways to think about a failing student’s concern about disappointing a parent. Parental support is positively associated with college student persistence predictors, so students who are concerned about losing this support may be motivated to change poor academic or other habits in order to keep the support (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). It may also be the case that, since parental support is an external motivator, once a student takes the responsibility to stay in college, there is a shift from external to internal motivation, the latter being the stronger of the two (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000).

A student who may have ignored or avoided warning signs of impending academic crisis and who is suspended is suddenly placed into the position of having to do something in order to continue on in school. At The UM, students who are academically suspended receive written notification that includes the statement “students will not be considered for reinstatement until at least one semester or an entire summer term has passed” (Anonymous, 2005, p. 21) and the student’s next semester’s courses are cancelled which prevents enrollment without action. Despite this, about one-third of the students who are suspended at the end of each term appeal for immediate reinstatement.
For an older student and a mother who probably sets academic expectations for her children, Rita was wrenchingly mortified when talking about her academic suspension. In her language, she distanced herself from her situation, referring to herself as "you" rather than "I". In other words, she made an anonymous statement, distanced the experience, and disidentified. Sometimes, distancing is unintentional, but Rita is a social work major and has most likely studied this kind of thing. In any case, she reported that she hadn’t put her best foot forward and that she could pick herself back up. These are both statements in the code language of that tough, western way of “bootstrapping” and “getting back in the saddle”. Rita’s words were:

It was scary...oh, awful, yeah, awful...Oooaaaauuuuuuuhhhhh. Um (hardly audible) I guess you just have to know that this happens to a lot of, and you have to get past that to know that you are better than that. You didn’t put, you didn’t put your best foot forward or whatever for what ever, I mean they don’t know whatever your reasons and you just pick yourself up and you have to get past it and don’t take it personal (Rita).

Implicit in academic suspension is the fear of not being able to come back to school. It is one thing to be unsuccessful, for whatever reasons, but it is quite another to be shut out. Jenae went directly there, “I mean, I was scared. Scared to death...I wonder(ed) if they’re going to take me back” (Jenae).

Feeling Cornered and Being Forced to Reflect. Being cornered, the suspension forced them to reflect on their reasons for being in college and to discern the changes in their behavior necessary for college success.

The college students interviewed for this study all came to a point when they felt compelled to make a decision about their college attendance. Despite Jasper’s
reservation background and perceived academic inadequacy, his simple explanation of his moment of reckoning carried no excuses. Jasper reported:

...but (the coach), I mean he just more or less laid it on the line for me and he kinda told me you haven’t done academically well and it doesn’t just shine up on you it shines up on the whole program...and he said you’ve either got to do it or you’ll be done if you want to stay here and continue to play with the program and the University...when you’re kind of in a corner like that you are either going to get motivated or you’re just going to bomb off the edge... (Jasper).

Retention research reports the positive effect that mentors can have on student persistence and the importance of social support and connection between the person and the environment (Habley, & Morales, 1998; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1987, 1993). In the coach’s message, Jasper understood that his choices could make him a part of the team or could isolate him.

When Noah felt “in a bind” over losing the financial support of Voc Rehab to fund his college, he was finally able to employ task-specific, or academic-specific coping strategies (Struthers, Perry, & Menec, 2000) to help him deconstruct what was wrong with his college effort. Noah recounted:

...I started to realize that I needed to change and it wasn’t going to happen...because I realized that I just didn’t enjoy the aspect of working in front of computers for eight hours a day without human interaction. So, I looked at my life goals and realized that I needed to make a difference, especially in children’s lives. I spent the last two summers working with children and it is a real rewarding experience...so I made the switch to elementary education (Noah).

In what could be called a male version of the ticking biological clock, Ian’s return to school was prompted by his increasing awareness that he not only was not getting any younger, he was not getting any closer to a college diploma. He’d recently been hearing about his buddies graduating from college in Georgia, which further spurred him to return to school. In what could be construed as a reversal of procrastination and the deliberate
making of a commitment, Ian matter-of-factly referred to his moment of decision as “sink or swim time”:

...I took a year break...and then I had residency established. Once I got my residency established I had kind of decided that I was going to try school one more time and we’ll see...It’s a sink or swim type of thing, which, is...honestly, that’s pretty much my whole life. If it’s sink or swim, I’ll swim. But, if it’s sink, swim, or you’ve got some more time to do it, I’ll take some time to do it. Yeah. That’s what it basically comes down to. So now, it’s sink or swim time (Ian).

Part of what Ian talked about can simply be called “maturation”. He realized that he’s 23, ergo, not a kid anymore. So it is with Jasper, who, in a tense moment in a conversation with his coach, hears that “he’s a grown man now”. That was most certainly a bell ringer moment. Jasper stated:

...my mom was kinda saying well, what are you going to do? You can’t stay here, you’ll have to come home. I talked to Coach about it and he said, well, we’ll have to see about this, you’re a grown man now (Jasper).

All of these students experienced a range of emotions through their struggle with academic difficulty and eventual academic suspension. It is difficult to isolate a factor or even several variables that impacted these students enough to push them back on track and away from failure. One thing that these very different students had in common, however, is that they all took a break from college post-suspension (for whatever reason) and they all reported that they reflected on their situation. Perhaps this time to reflect was related to a discovery or re-discovery of their academic purpose. As Rita Jr. (2003) reported about the characteristics of the suspended students he studies and who later returned to success, “specific academic skills are important, past academic record seems unimportant, and a general factor called incentive seems important in the attainment of passing grades upon readmission.” (p. 517).
Academic Turnaround

Making a Conscious Decision to Change and Develop Different Habits. These students returned to college with a new resolve after having made a conscious decision to change and they developed different study habits, attended classes regularly, and sought out appropriate majors.

After academic suspension and the other forces that placed these students into a corner and forced them to reflect on their college intentions, each made a conscious and deliberate decision to return to college. Along with this decision, these students reported being able to identify the factors that contributed to their academic suspension and to rectify them by developing other habits more conducive to college success.

The interesting, but problematic study by Lebedina-Manzoni (2004) reported, …to what students attribute their academic success and unsuccess…the differences between successful and unsuccessful students in attribution of academic success and unsuccess…relate to automatic thoughts…(as) a discriminative function (p. 703).

Successful students identified items contributed to their success to be inner factors related to personal characteristics, like personal responsibility. Unsuccessful students identified items that contributed to their unsuccess to be outside influences or things beyond their control (e.g., being victims of circumstances). These particulars of the Lebedina-Manzoni study resonate with the reports of the participants of the current study. While sharing the experience of their academic difficulty, each of the six participants made statements about taking responsibility for their academic suspension and also some concomitant statements about an overall belief in themselves. Their general sentiments acknowledge personal responsibility. For instance, Ian stated, “it’s never can or can’t, it’s will or won’t”; Rita indicated, “I knew I could get good grades”; Mattie asserted,
"Granted, I messed around all of freshman year...so the time off got me focused on what I really wanted to do...and could do"; and Jasper ratted himself out, "My priorities like I say weren't where they should be...I just wasn't disciplined academically."

For some of the students, a change in the circumstances that once contributed to their academic struggles and attrition now improved their chances at success and persistence. Rita's initial college experience ended when she was a single parent and the financial pressure became overwhelming. Since she's remarried and her husband provides her with financial support, her circumstances are dramatically different. She reported, "I suppose you could say it's the opposite...I mean, with having a partner now and with his financial support and all being taken care of."

Changing bad habits is helpful as well. Both Jasper and Ian countermanded their college stress by not accepting responsibility and by using alcohol. Ian reported on the changes that he put in place when he decided to return to college and be successful:

Effort is always the question. That's always been my question. Throughout my whole life, it's never been whether I can or can't, it's whether I will or won't and most of the time I chose what I can do and that's the easy way but that's how it was...I'm back in the business program, and uh, I don't drink anymore. I just quit that altogether...I do my homework at work and I go to school and show up to classes. You know, it's a whole lot easier when you do that (Ian).

Jasper very easily explained his new college success plan vis-à-vis his partying:

It was, well, I don't know, I guess I just really picked...sort of bad outlets when stuff was...I guess the only outlets I did have was going out and partying and stuff like that...I just had my priorities all out of whack...

Forming new habits and sticking to them helped Jasper:

...part of it is just knowing what to do academically...probably the biggest thing that helped was just showing up to classes every day...Every Day. And I then started taking a lot better notes and...the biggest part was...just having a relationship with the professors. I just forced myself to go in there...and talk to them, making a point to get in there and get in a relationship (Jasper).
Also, for Jasper, the support from and affiliation with family makes it feel foreign for him to be without. He actively remedied this situation:

Probably one of the biggest things is I got a girlfriend...last semester...all she does is study and she don’t drink...and she more or less has helped me (Jasper).

After Mattie returned to college, she was still concerned about the kinds of daunting reading assignments and assessments in large classes. She eventually learned how to accommodate her learning disabilities within these classes. As well, she discovered a better major for her, a match that incorporated more of the kind of learning activities at which Mattie can excel. She reported:

So, I got focused and centered. I set goals, like before, it was just “school” was my goal and it was too big, like go and get this done. But, I did well, I got off probation and... No going back. My study habits are a lot different...I can’t study in my own house...So, I go to the library or...Liquid Planet...by myself in just a place where I can have...water...a computer and my books. Nothing really specific, other than I turn my cell phone off and try to eliminate my distractions and I try to focus as much as I can (Mattie).

Jasper also figured out how to eliminate the distractions that once consumed him in his early college life. Jasper humorously recalls:

Yeah, it’s a funny thing. I had a car. And I had a cell phone, a credit card, I was pretty much rolling my freshman year. But now that I don’t have a car, I don’t have a cell phone, I don’t have a credit card, I can’t hardly afford to pay for anything. I’m doing a lot better academically (Jasper).

It sounds simplistic, but what contributed to the academic upswing for the students in this study were the polar opposites of the things that contributed to their academic struggles and suspension. If one left for financial reasons, improved financial support enhanced renewed efforts. If one partied, drank, and skipped classes on the downward slide, socializing in moderation, drinking tea, and attending classes impacted positively future success.
Feeling Empowered and Changed by Success and Support. A good grade, an inspirational professor or class, and support from family and friends motivated the students to further success. Now, they are proud of their school record and their academic achievements. Fueled by the decision to return, early successes empowered these students and reinforced their commitment to college and success.

The positive effects of peer and parental support, being committed to a college degree and having an educational plan, and making a positive connection to the campus are items that all associate with college retention (Tinto, 1987, 1993). Since college transition involves increased stress levels in students, one possible buffer for stress is social support, and social support may be crucial in a successful adaptation to the college environment (Martin, Swart-Kulstand & Madson, 1999). The opposite is also true: Gerdes and Mallinckrodt (1994) reported consistent evidence that low perceived social support was related to non-persistence. The students in this study visited both ends of this spectrum during their college experience: they reported low levels of support when they were having difficulty and also reported improved social engagement when they began their return to good standing.

Many reports point to the positive and multiple affects on persistence and retention of students’ level and quality of interactions with faculty and staff (Astin, 1977, 1999). Tinto (1987) lists poor integration with the college community and isolation as factors related to students dropping or stopping out. The participants in the current study reported feeling unconnected to the campus, disengaged from classes, and feeling different from their peers when they were experiencing academic difficulty. When the participants had turned themselves around academically, they expressed more positive
sentiments about their reactions to college. Mattie talked about the first class and
instructor who inspired her in the Social Work department; Ian talked with great
enthusiasm about his Economics instructor who “was a heck of a nice guy”; Jasper found
a department connection as well as a social connection in the NAS program; and Jenae
gets encouragement from class members on her projects.

Finding the right major was key for Noah and Mattie and it didn’t hurt to get
some good grades, either. Noah’s major change and good grades, “gave me a push, a
motivation to succeed…making the Dean’s List…was very rewarding. I remember
prancing around the house, showing all my family and relatives my report card” (Noah).

In Jasper’s case, positive reinforcement may not be as important as negative
reinforcement. In other words, avoiding the coaches’ wrath and not getting homesick are
as rewarding as getting good grades. Family is very important for Jasper. His coaches are
his family now and he has made a home in Missoula with the school and with the team.
Jasper stated:

A couple years ago…the coaches would be calling me…and now, it’s just the
phone is never ringing and I think that’s a good sign…and I don’t ever get
homesick now. I used to get so homesick then. This is more my home now, I
mean, I go home now and in three days, I’m ready to come back here, you know.
That helps a lot (Jasper).

Mattie’s semester off from college was an important time for her. She had a
tough time being away from school and her friends, and making enough money at her
waitress job to live on. Yet, succeeding in this venture gave her the confidence to not
only know that she wanted to return to college but it made her feel successful as a person.
Mattie reported:

…for about a six-month period of time…I supported myself…it was very
empowering to me and at the same time really difficult…so I think that the
combination of finding a good major...and literally being on my own for a while did the trick, it was huge (Mattie)....

**Being Hopeful and Looking to the Future.** *The UM college students feel changed by the experience of academic difficulty and suspension, and their return to good standing. Self-confidently, they are looking toward the future with hope.*

As might be imagined, the students who experienced the range of emotions during their trials with academic difficulty and suspension were wary about making grandiose statements, academic guarantees, or overly proud announcements even after they had made an academic comeback. Always the jokester, Jasper declared:

"Um, uh, my goal is to, well, right now, it is to just keep up and be able to get through next week (laugh) (Jasper)."

However, all of these students arrived at a point in their college experience when they had to make a conscious decision to persist and to change. Now, with the additional experience of having attained good academic standing, their vision is set on the future. Before, they struggled and failed to improve. Now, those struggles are in the past, having been replaced by more recent experiences with good grades and academic success. The contrast effect had made a huge difference, making Jasper optimistic and hopeful:

"But, really, I want to... get my NAS degree and my anthro degree, that's what I'm trying to push... in the next two... years that I have left.... push academically and... make really good improvements. By the time I'm a senior I want to be pulling all "A's" and "B's". Then, I want to get into law school (Jasper)."

A surprise admission from Jasper reveals just how much success he has had at The University of Montana. One might have predicted that the athletic success that brought him to college in the first place would be the goal for his future. This is not necessarily so:
I, I would, I’d like to, um, try to play professional (sports) but, you know, I mean, it’s a goal, and I’ll work for it but, I mean, it’s really the law side is a goal of mine...I kinda think of the school thing as more, my, um, it’s more what I’m doing now...well, I think I plan to have school with me now (Jasper).

In the not so recent past, Rita was more concerned about how many courses she could handle in a semester. Now, she is thinking about what she will be doing two years from now and said, “I’m happy now and I’m going to focus on that.”

As a young single parent who’s had to work very hard for everything that she’s earned, Jenae reflects about her future and the kind of changes she’s already noticed about herself. She compares herself to the young woman who started college several years ago, overwhelmed about everything she did not know. Now, she sees herself very differently:

...having a daughter, I’ve kind of figured out better where I want to go, what I want to do and I’m thinking into the future more...I’m thinking ahead...It’s kind of like I’ve figured out who I am more (Jenae).

As a transfer student, Ian has been working toward his degree for longer than he cares to remember. As he gets closer to it, he is philosophical about his path and his reasons for wanting to get to the finish line:

My girlfriend is in school...We...talked about all this...we’re not going to be able to do anything without...this piece of paper. With this piece of paper, the skies...if you don’t come out of it with a piece of paper, you’re just another poor schmuck who couldn’t make it in college...so, I’m trying not to be that guy, I’m trying to be that other guy. Plus, I just want to make my mom happy (Ian).

Theoretical Model

The chambered nautilus is an animal, a cephalopod mollusk, which is most closely related to the cuttlefish, squid, and octopus. During prehistoric times there were about 10,000 different species of nautilus and the nautiloid varieties that are now extinct were dominant marine predators before the rise of fishes; today, only several nautilus
species survive (e.g., Nautilus pompilis, N. macromphalus, and N. belauensis). (Waikiki Aquarium, 2006).

The beautiful, mother-of-pearl shell of the nautilus has inspired poets and puzzled scientists for centuries and the nautilus is valued now as a living key to the processes that shaped marine life millions of years ago. Little changed over the past 500 million years, they are considered by some to be “living fossils” and paleontologists, ecologists, and physiologists study this fascinating mollusk in hopes of gaining insight into the workings of ancient life forms that are now extinct. Ammonites, in fact, are the fossilized remains of the many varieties of extinct nautilus species and their spiral shape is easily identified (Sea & Sky Organization, 2006).

The shell of the nautilus is comprised of many individual chambers. The strong shell provides protection and support for the soft body of the animal that resides inside. When a young nautilus hatches from an egg, it is about an inch in diameter and has a shell of four chambers. As the nautilus grows, it adds new chambers to its shell and each new chamber is a little larger than the last one, allowing the opening of the shell to grow continually larger. An adult nautilus shell has 30 chambers (Monterey Bay Aquarium, 2006).

The external shell of the nautilus is produced by mantle tissue (calcium) as in its distant cousin, the snail. Unlike snails that are not usually compartmented (so that the body extends back to the smallest part of the spiral shell), the spiral nautilus shell is divided into compartments or chambers and the animal occupies only the outer-most “living chamber.” (Waikiki Aquarium, 2006, ¶3). The animal can, however, retreat or withdraw completely into the shell and close the opening with a leathery hood.
As the nautilus grows, its body moves forward in the enlarged shell and produces a wall to seal off older chambers. Each individually sealed chamber contains an amount of gas that compensates for the weight of the animal’s tissues and shell. The shell’s most important function is providing the swimming animal with neutral buoyancy so that it neither sinks nor floats and can move about freely in the water.

The nautilus regulates its density by either injecting into or removing fluid from the chambers through a system of tubes, called siphuncles. Nautilus swim in a see-saw motion, generated by jet propulsion from water pulled into the mantle cavity in the shell and blown out of the muscular siphons beneath the tentacles. By directing the jet of water with the flexible siphon, the nautilus can swim forward, backward, or sideways. The nautilus, like most cephalopods, can attain speeds of over two knots! (Sea and Sky Organization, 2006).

Like many animals that live in open water, nautiluses display a form of camouflage coloration called countershading: the upper surface of the shell is darkened by irregular stripes that mask its outline when viewed from above, and the light underside of the shell blends with the water surface when viewed from below. However, unlike their squid and octopus relatives, nautiluses have poorly developed vision since their simple eyes contain no lens. It is believed that the nautilus detects light and dark, but it is unknown if their eyes can form images. They probably detect prey or danger using chemical cues, as do many deep-water organisms (Waikiki Aquarium, 2006).

Nautiluses spend their daylight hours at depths of 600 to 1800 feet and, at night, they rise up to a 300-foot depth, traveling to coral reefs to feed. The life and habits of the nautilus are still largely a mystery since it spends most of its time in deep water. Of
particular mystery and wonder is the fact that, as the nautilus continually creates new
and larger rooms, each one is exactly 6.3 percent larger than the last. This is a noted
mathematical effect - a Fibonacci sequence - that is a kind of symmetry found in the
nautilus shell and repeated in leaves, seeds, petals, pinecones, and sunflowers. It is "a
growth pattern similar to that of the human embryo" and "its mathematically perfect
proportion reminds us that growth is part of nature's path." (John Templeton Foundation,
2006, ¶ 1).

Similar to the nautilus that travels up and down, navigating the rough seas in its
spiral cage is the journey of the college students who were investigated in this study. The
path that these students took was like the propulsion of the nautilus with its ups, downs,
and sideways motions that responded to the external forces; the curved, spiraled shell of
the nautilus is like protective outside defenses of the students that covered their
innermost, soft, and tender core selves. As well, initially their college experiences forced
them in a downward spiral and later, their choices and responses rebounded them in an
upward spiral.

**Overview.** A discussion of the college student experience of academic difficulty,
resultant suspension, and eventual return to good academic standing is essentially a piece
of the human development process. An excellent overview to frame the discussion of the
students' academic process or path comes from Michael Mahoney's (1991, p.333)
discussion of expansions and contractions, and their essential organic representation
across the spectrum of human experience.

There have, of course, been many previous acknowledgements of oscillative
tensions in experience: the yin and yang (Tao) of Asian philosophy; the dialectics
of Zeno, Socrates, Plato, Hegel and Marx; the historical cycles of Giambattista
Vico and the developmental spirals of T.S. Eliot; the dynamic conflict between
instinct and social influence of Sigmund Freud; the moving toward and against of Karen Horney; the “escape from freedom” of Eric Fromm; the “loosening and tightening” of George Kelly’s constructs; and the boundary conflicts of modern self psychologies (to name a few). Despite the extensiveness of their acknowledgement, however, their renderings and interpretations have been legion.

Mahoney reports that “the experience of change is commonly recognized to involve conflicts, tensions, and...resistance...and human change processes have to do with the dynamic nature of development.” (1999, p. 332). So it is with the participants in this study who (like the swimming nautilus) were pushed and pulled, oscillating back and forth in their process of academic development and social maturity.

The Downward Spiral. In general, the downward spiral is defined by those characteristics from the phenomenological reduction that appeared in the first few stages of the college students’ experience that were circumscribed by feelings of being overwhelmed, inadequate, isolated, unmotivated, uncertain, and disengaged. As the experience of failure compounded, students became frustrated, confused, anxious, embarrassed, ashamed, and afraid.

The students’ journey began with their college entrance and all of them came to this transition with baggage from their prior school and life experiences, carrying with them their various academic backgrounds, high school grades, potential, at-risk characteristics, and family profiles. During the early weeks of the first semester, the students were overwhelmed by the variety of transition issues and greatly challenged by college level academic expectations. Through large class venues, distant professors, uncertain goals, and multiple other stresses, these students started to feel anonymous, isolated, and disheartened.
As college continued, and with the experience of some academic failure, it became easy for these students to skip classes, miss assignments, and have trouble focusing on homework. In certain cases it was preferable to select competing activities such as socializing, recreating, hiking, drinking, or working over their college tasks. Other priorities surfaced, such as financial difficulties, illness, and childcare and these students were uncertain of helping resources, unable to seek help, and eventually disinterested in or unwilling to participate.

As these students experienced increasing academic difficulty, challenges continued to confirm the failure spiral and failure was compounded by various negative emotions. These students became ashamed and embarrassed, secretive, closed off, anxious and depressed, withdrawn, guilt-ridden, and finally disengaged from their life in college. The disidentification with being a college student would later be centered in the transformational pivot, as, in order to change directions and regain academic ground, these students had to re-engage and re-identify with a college student identity. But, at the core of these students' failure, at the bottom of their downward spiral, the negative emotions conspired to identify themselves as losers at the academic competition.

Transformational Pivot. In the space between the downward spiral and the upward spiral are the reasons, motivations, or explanations that effected the "sea change" that not only kept these students persistent in college but that also pushed them from failure to success. As with the nautilus where movement occurs like a see-saw, there is a pivotal point that is reached where the downward motion ceases, and direction changes upward. So it is in the transformation point with these students who were suspended.
At the transformational pivot, in the place between the downward spiral and the upward spiral, the students felt cramped, trapped, cornered, and pressured as they were forced to reflect on the meaning of college to their lives. At this point, Jenae started looking at her situation as “more of a problem to solve” and Jasper realized that if he didn’t take responsibility and invest in the opportunity to be a member of a team, he’d have to go back home to the reservation. Ian compared himself to his friends who were graduating from college in Georgia and knew he did not want to be the one who had not gotten the degree.

All of these students came to UM with the belief that they could succeed in college. The combination of failures that they experienced put them in a tight spot that squeezed them into making a move, sort of like the nautilus that has outgrown a chamber and is forced into the next, larger compartment. These students made a decision to relocate themselves as well and they moved into a different space at a pivotal moment. This different space included the possibility for developing a new core identity. For some, this involved changing majors; for others, it required leaving bad habits behind; and for others it meant a longer-term commitment to the belief in the power of education to further other career goals. Mattie and Noah switched majors, Jasper and Rita developed more focused career path goals, and Ian and Jenae started thinking about the possibilities in “the piece of paper.”

At the pivot, these students initiated their upward success spiral by asserting their own self-efficacy. Believing that “I can do this”, their focus changed from the external pressure to do well (from parents, coaches) to an internal-based motivation that was much more under their own control. Although these students needed parental support and
benefited from support from others, without their own internal motivation to be successful, their college experience had been neither rewarding nor successful.

**Upward Spiral.** The first step on the path toward success started with a step up for these students. Each successful step up the path rewarded that success, so that the old habits left behind were replaced with new ones that included more focused study habits, closer contact with instructors, and better class attendance. Grades were shared with friends and family, not kept secret and shameful. Each experience of success pushed the students further up the path and away from the pivot. As these students' relocated their educational identities from failure to success, they became more and more distant from that tight, uncomfortable spot they had gotten themselves into through the process of academic suspension.

The spiral upward mirrors the downward spiral, but going down, the spiral tightened into a tiny, scary point. Striving upward, the spiral starts from the pivotal point and becomes ever more expansive. The ocean floor is hard and impenetrable; the water in the ocean and the atmosphere in the skies are limitless and infinite. These students determined to look up, look forward, and look to the future.

There are millions of ammonites in the world, the fossilized remains of those types of nautiluses that stopped moving and went extinct. These students determined to remain vital and they, like the remaining, living nautiluses, are buoyant and supported. They will go up and down, backward and forward again, but they will stay afloat.
Chapter Six

Implications

Across the past twenty to thirty years, much research has been conducted on the myriad of demographics, factors, and variables that are related to college student success, retention, and persistence to timely graduation. The largest mass of this research has been conducted through quantitative inquiry, meaning that researchers sort and classify students into groups, arrange institutions by type, apply interventions, measure results, and report on variables and factors from large samples with the belief that what we discover to be true about the large sample will generalize, or apply, to smaller samples. In this kind of research much has been learned about the college student experience.

However, of this research, there has been less recent attention directed to the topic of academic failure (Nutt, 2003). Now, if it shows up at all, failure appears in the shadow of other topics or the periphery of larger themes. Academic failure is artfully disguised or referenced obliquely in discussions of the dynamics of college transition, adjustment, stresses, coping, or attrition. What really intrigues researchers, educators, and the other parties interested in academia are the variables related to successful learning, the factors associated with keeping students in school, and those things that colleges can offer to encourage students to stay on task and graduate on time. These are worthy issues, especially in the face of continually increasing college expenses and it makes sense to spend effort and time to define the attributes most related to college success.

However, in most colleges, with the possible exception of those with very particular admission standards or the most exclusivity, a certain percentage of students just do not fare well in school. Of these, some struggle to maintain a minimum “C”
average, others fail all their courses, and still others experience multiple academic suspensions and reinstatements. Some students leave at the first whiff of failure while others persist and persist, failing over and over until they also eventually leave college. What must this mean for these students? How does this affect their sense of self and their relationships? How does this experience mark their future? How does the memory of failing and dropping out of college affect their children?

What we also know, from studies of large samples of college students, is that of those students who leave college prematurely, some of them leave because they were not successful, but successful students leave too. Because most students who leave college do so without telling anyone, much of what we know about students' reasons for leaving college come from survey information gathered from withdrawal data. This is the one occasion when most institutions gather data from a captive audience, from students who must leave prematurely and who hope to minimize grade damage.

While there is little quantitative research into the guts of academic failure, there is very little qualitative research on college student experiences in the educational or psychological literature in general; there is less of this kind of research into failure; and there is hardly any research of the phenomenological variety of qualitative inquiry. This study's current investigation into the internal, lived experience of college students who have encountered academic difficulty, suspension, and reinstatement prior to the eventual attainment of good academic standing provides material that jumps into this void in the research.
Implications for the Participants

It is the fervent hope of the researcher that the participants interviewed gained some insight into their circumstances by being able to talk about it. By sharing their experiences, they had the opportunity to be listened to, to have their story recorded and presented as data, and to be encouraged to reflect upon their college and academic circumstances. Of the six participants, four of them came back to the researcher for a copy of their interview transcription. Jenae reported that she was surprised to “see what I said about myself” in the interview, almost as if she was hearing herself for the first time or in a new way. Jasper inquired how his story would be used in the project. He seemed initially nonplussed when he learned that the complete interview transcript would be included in the research write-up. The researcher reassured Jasper of his anonymity, but that was not his concern. Saying, “well, that’s kind of cool”, Jasper’s reaction seemed to the researcher to reflect pride in his participation and pride that his story would be useful to others. Eventually, he was excited about his involvement. No participants requested changes to the transcript.

In the course of the interviews, and because the subject matter called for discussion of both the participants’ academic struggles as well as their eventual academic turnaround, it was apparent that each of the participants were able to contrast the positive experiences of their return to good standing with the negative experiences of academic difficulty and suspension. At the Level Four analysis for each participant, there evinces the awareness that “this is who I am in the present (successful) and that other me (who struggled) belongs to the past”. Jasper, with his classic deadpan humor, recalls how his phone was ringing constantly when his coaches were monitoring his class absences and
how happy he is now that his phone hardly ever rings, a quiet telephone being the evidence of his good progress.

Jenae is proud of the person she’s become, even though she recognizes that she will continue to have little, and not so little, daily challenges because she wears at least three hats as a student, a single parent, and a nanny. Rita, although frustrated at her slow progression toward her degree, now takes comfort in the fact that she is back in college and on a deliberate track. She recognizes that the life circumstances that slow her down in school are also those that give her the most joy, her children and her second marriage. Despite the fact that Ian is ready to be done with school, but is not quite there yet, he is focused on “not being the schmuck who didn’t get the degree” by continuing to move forward and looking to the future.

Demographic Data. A triangulation of the evidence of each of the participants’ academic progress at this point, one year after the interviews, revealed that of the six students, only one is still struggling. A post-hoc review of the participants’ college entrance data is also interesting to review in comparison to the other data.

Mattie placed at the 33rd percentile of her graduating high school class (411/615); she demonstrated a 2.49 hsgpa; and she presented an ACT composite score of 21 (UM average entering student ACT composite is slightly over 22). After Mattie was suspended, she took a semester off to work at the café and support herself. Upon her return to UM, she earned a 3.25 grade point average and returned to Good Academic Standing at the end of her first semester back. She has remained in good standing since then. Mattie is graduating at the end of this semester. Not counting her final grades from this semester, Mattie has a B- cumulative average.
Jenae's college predictive data placed her at the 35th percentile of her graduating high school class (164/254) with a high school cumulative grade point average of 2.73; her ACT composite score of 20 placed her below the slightly-above 22 UM average composite for entering freshmen. Jenae's UM record indicates a pattern similar to Mattie's. Once she returned to school after academic suspension and a subsequent semester off, Jenae earned a 2.53 grade point average her first term back in school and this returned her to Good Academic Standing immediately. Jenae has maintained good standing ever since. Due to competing family responsibilities, Jenae has often taken a less than full-time credit load. At the end of this spring semester 2006, she will have earned 85 credits, five credits shy of senior standing. Jenae also has a B- cumulative grade point average.

Noah placed at the 80% percentile of his high school graduating class (58/296) with a 3.47 cumulative grade point average. Predictive assessments placed him slightly above UM's entering freshman average ACT. His composite ACT was 23, but his mathematics ACT was 29 and his English ACT was 18. Following Noah's semester off between academic probation and academic suspension, when he returned to UM autumn semester 2004, he earned a 4.0, "A" average and he returned immediately to Good Academic Standing and has remained there since. Noah is currently a senior and, from his transcript, it looks like he will be student teaching during autumn 2006 and is slated to graduate in December. Noah's cumulative grade point is currently close to a B, 3.0 average.

Rita was accepted to UM as a non-traditional student and presented a GED for admission; subsequently, there are no high school grade averages, class rankings, or
standardized test scores in her record. Despite the fact that Rita did not attend the last two years of high school, once she returned from a three year hiatus after her academic suspension from UM-M, she earned a straight “A” average (4.0 cumulative grade point average) the semester she returned to college and she immediately returned to Good Academic Standing. She has remained in good standing ever since and currently has a 3.09 cumulative grade point average. Because Rita brought in 63 vocational-technical credits, her cumulative 122 credits appear to put her closer to graduation than she is. Of her vo-tech credits, Rita may petition to apply ten of them toward her bachelor’s degree. Therefore, Rita has 49 more credits to complete her Social Work degree. Since she has competing family responsibilities like Jenae, Rita most probably will take four or five more semesters to graduate.

Since Ian came to UM as a transfer student, his predictive data (ACT or SAT scores) and high school grades/class rankings were also not a part of his record. However, after Ian’s academic suspension after taking his first two, six-credit terms (spring and summer, 2003 in order to work toward establishing Montana residency) and his subsequent year long hiatus from college, he returned to UM in autumn semester 2004. The results of that semester returned Ian to Good Academic Standing with a 3.72 term grade point average. Ian has remained in good standing ever since. At the end of this spring semester 2006, he will have earned 93 credits. Ian has close to a B average and should graduate in Business Management by this time next year.

Of the participants, Jasper continued to struggle academically. His high school predictive data is more difficult to interpret since, according to his own report, the academics on the reservation were “horrible” and although his class ranking was at the
69th percentile, part of the reason for this is the fact that he graduated 24th out of a small class of 78. Jasper’s high school grade point average was a respectable 2.67. His ACT composite was not that much lower than the other students in this research study, his score of 18 falls at least one standard deviation below the average entering UM freshman composite that is slightly over 22. Jasper’s ACT English score of 16 and his ACT mathematics score of 17 are also deviations below the mean and resonate with his concern over success in the “core courses like math and English”.

Jasper continued to struggle after his original academic suspension, although immediately after suspension, he attended summer session and earned a 3.50 for the term, which placed him back in Good Academic Standing. Following summer session, though, Jasper withdrew from autumn semester and took a break. Upon his return in the spring, he experienced a bad semester and Jasper spent the next three semesters rectifying it. Subsequent term grade averages now place Jasper’s cumulative at a C average. After the completion of this spring semester 2006, Jasper is poised for his fifth and senior year of college. Jasper has up to five years of athletic eligibility and it appears that, just like he predicted, he will not wind up “being an ass and taking seven years to complete the degree”.

The completion of college is in sight for all of the research participants. The researcher has no doubt that all six students will graduate from The UM, alongside their fellow students, some of whom have similar, worse, or better academic records.

**Implications for the Institution**

At UM, there are three measures of institutional success: freshman to sophomore persistence rates; graduation rates that are measured in four, five, six, and nine year
increments, with the four and six year rates used for inter-institutional comparisons; and
head count, or the cold-blooded calculation of the “number of the right kind of students”
needed to supply tuition revenue sufficient to keep the University’s economic wheels
turning each year. The head count of “number of the right kind of students” is, simply
put, a highly sophisticated enrollment prediction that is determined by a complex
formula. All three measures of success contribute to the economic status of the
institution: if too few students persist to graduation, the state legislative body looks
critically at future funding levels; if persistence and graduation rates are comparatively
low, new student recruitment efforts falter and future enrollment suffers; if the head
counts are off, there is not sufficient tuition revenue to support the faculty, staff,
programs, and grounds of the University. This is where education and corporate America
intersect in 2006.

With this in mind, it is interesting to look at UM’s Office of Budget, Planning,
and Analysis report on retention and graduation rates (retrieved on March 27, 2006; last
updated January 23, 2003) to see how the interview participants measure up. Only four of
our six participants were eligible for inclusion in the persistence calculation, since Ian
was a transfer student and Rita was not a first-time student at matriculation. Only one
participant (Mattie) out of the remaining four would have appeared in The UM’s
freshman-to-sophomore persistence calculation, a rate that averaged about 70 percent
(69.4%, the most recent calculation from the 2001 cohort of 1,764 students). The research
participants’ persistence average was one in four, or 25 percent comparatively. None
(zero percent) of the interview participants will appear in UM’s four-year graduation rate
of 19.3 percent (most recent calculation from the 1998 cohort of 1,604 members). If
nothing prevents Mattie from graduating this spring or summer 2006, she qualifies for inclusion in UM's five-year graduation rate of 38.2 percent when last reported for the cohort of 1,711 students in 1997. Again, the interview participants' comparative graduation rate would be one out of four eligible students, or 25 percent. Comparing persistence and graduation rates from the large UM cohorts to this research cohort is not particularly legitimate, but it does point out some of the challenges with persistence and retention data, enrollment projections, and funding formulae for higher education.

The results of this study, from both the interview data and the triangulated student records data, highlight the many complex issues involved in college student success, persistence, and retention to graduation. They reaffirm the importance of overall institutional commitment by constituents such as educational administrators, faculty, advisors and counselors to curricula, interventions, and the variety of programs designed to help students of all types make their way through college. At UM, like at many other universities, there are coordinated efforts to address services for the whole student. Fundamental programs include scholarships and financial aid, residence life, fitness and outdoor recreation, mandatory undergraduate advising, and undergraduate research. In addition, specific efforts are directed at student retention and engagement across a broad spectrum.

**Retention Programs.** At UM, there are programs and curricula designed for specific groups of students to ease freshman transition (First Year Transition Program, Freshman Seminars), provide learning communities (Freshman Interest Groups, FIGs), develop study and critical thinking skills (Learning Strategies for Higher Education), accommodate disability issues (Disability Student Services program), provide a
welcoming campus climate for minority and foreign students (American Indian Student Support program and Foreign Student and Scholar Services), enhance the college experience for first generation students (Educational Opportunity Program), support cultural adjustment (Transition to the U.S. course), help students select appropriate course schedules and majors (Undergraduate Advising Center and Career Services), improve basic skills (developmental composition and mathematics courses), provide academic assistance (STS tutoring program, the Writing Center, the Mathematics Learning Center), and to provide support for college student athletes (Academic Services Coordination for Student Athletes).

Engagement Opportunities. Many programs are in place to encourage students to participate in out-of-class activities to embellish their in-class educational activities and include: leadership programs (Peer Advising, Ursa Major, Advocates), peer counseling (Peers Reaching Out, Peer Mentoring for foreign and American Indian students), community service (Office of Civic Engagement, AmeriCorp), work experience (work-study opportunities, Internship Services), student organizations and clubs (over 70 ASUM-sponsored clubs such as student government and language clubs, the International Student Organization, and Kyi-Yo American Indian club), and religious groups and political clubs.

Gaps in Services. Evidence from this study suggests that, despite many programs and services, students can feel overwhelmed when starting college, isolated for various reasons, and disconnected and uncertain of helping resources. The students included in the current study were all at-risk in some way or another but UM did not identify these students as such. There is no early identification program currently in place on campus,
nor is there an “early alert system” to contact students who are experiencing difficulty early in their first semester or at least well before they are placed on academic probation or suspension, a time when it is often too late for intervention for students who may have already been disheartened enough to decide to leave (Cuseo, 2003). Research points to evidence that new students who encounter academic adversity often do so in the first six weeks of the semester, a time that might be critical for intervention (Barefoot, 2000; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Tinto, 1993; Woosley, 2003).

For freshmen and sophomores, there is much evidence about the benefits of small classes and the disadvantages of large, anonymous lecture classes (Toth & Montagna, 2002). Attendance, often not taken in large freshman general education courses, sends a message that attendance is either not required or optional. Currently, there is little follow-up on students who leave campus and there is evidence that students are impressed if someone contacts them during their temporary or potentially permanent hiatus from school. Several of the students in this study referenced not being aware of helping resources, not knowing how to approach professors, or being unaware of policies and procedures such as withdrawing or accessing advising. How can we change those things?

For Ian, a transfer student who came to Montana from a very different part of the country and who attended part time in order to establish residency, there was no institutional connection forged. There are no specific transfer programs at UM. As well, for Rita and Jenae, having parental responsibilities prevents them from participation in some of the more standard student engagement activities and UM does not have a program or programs to address their isolation needs. The Phoenix program used to be a campus program designed to advocate for UM’s non-traditional students and this
program should be resuscitated or reinvented to provide engagement opportunities supported by childcare availability. Outreach to academically at-risk students, such as those who enter college with GED certificates or who come to campus from tribal colleges, vocational-technical schools or reservation backgrounds need at minimum an advisor or advocate who is aware of their special needs and, even better, an academic support program aimed at critical deficiencies. Academic programs designed to intervene well before suspension are desirable but programs that at least do intervene upon suspension are integral to the future of students at risk academically and socially.

Implications for Academic Advisors and College Counselors

The data collected from the six students who reported their experiences in this study have rich implications for both academic advisors and college counselors. For students who have multiple academic and personal problems, issues do not surface all at once and their resolution calls for multiple interventions from differently skilled sources. For a student in academic difficulty, issues appear in the same way that things play out in a car wreck and the immediately apparent problems are the more external items, like the body damage from dents, broken glass, and air bag implosion. So too it is with the academics issues that form the external experience of student difficulties, such things as bad grades, issues with teachers, faulty study habits, poor class attendance, lack of balance between the social and the academic life, and time management problems. For advisors, the students in this research presented classic academic struggles that fill the research literature about college student persistence and retention barriers and include: freshman transition and sophomore slump; transfer problems; uncertainty over major and educational goals and/or dissatisfaction with major or curriculum; inability to contact
faculty or access helping services; inadequate academic preparation; isolation in large classes; disengagement from campus; lack of support network; disability concerns; and unfamiliarity with policies and procedures. These are all areas where advisors can help, teach, support, and make a difference. It is very important for advisors to remember that there are many reasons why students need help and also to remember that all students need help of different kinds at different points in their college experience. Possibly the strongest link in college retention programs is the human one (Sidle & McReynolds, 1999).

Academic concerns evince in the financial arena as well, in things such as lost scholarships, loan burdens, increasing debt, problems with financial aid eligibility or athletic eligibility. It is important to realize that students are probably not asked in great detail about all the issues that concern them in relation to their academic difficulty. It is important for advisors to remind themselves to take to the time to ask, the time to listen, and the time to work with a student to develop a comprehensive plan that solves immediate concerns and works to develop a long-range plan for meeting larger educational goals.

Using the car wreck analogy again, it is only later that the more internal damage is noticed: the oil is leaking from the crankcase, there is overheating in the radiator, the tires are going slowly flat, or the chassis is showing evidence of being badly bent. Counselors help students bring their internal difficulties to the surface. The participants in this study who experienced difficulty encountered a range of emotions and adjustment situations that either contributed to or precipitated their academic problems, including: homesickness; anger and frustration; grief and depression; shock and denial; detachment
and isolation; feelings of being different and inadequate; guilt, shame, and embarrassment; stress and pressure; uncertainty; and feelings of being different and alone. Counselors need to attend to by-products of difficult academic situations that quickly bleed over into other arenas. For a student who is struggles, the damage is rarely discrete. Students may not have well-developed coping skills and problem-solving abilities; they may, as Jasper did, “pick poor outlets” to relieve stress such as drinking too much, going it alone, being avoidant, or developing a poor academic self-image. The psychological and emotional effects of poor academic performance are endless and overwhelming.

Implications for Instructors

In many ways, instructors get to know the academic core of their students better than any others on campus and, therefore, can have a much more powerful effect upon how college students think and feel about themselves and their academic performance. Teaching styles, feedback, and grading are all important and, with the variety of student types and learning needs, instructors must be open, responsive, and alert to student concerns.

Mattie, Jasper, and Rita expressed evident fear about mathematics; Noah and Jasper expressed concern over basic writing abilities; Mattie and Noah have disability issues that require alternative formats for best comprehension; Rita and Jasper felt disadvantaged and self-conscious about their poor or lack of academic preparedness for college tasks; Mattie, Noah, and Jasper all expressed dismay about their large, general lecture classes; Mattie felt overwhelmed by large reading assignments and the few, objective exams that represent often the total grade in a class; Jasper and Noah expressed
an inability to connect with faculty members; and all the students shared common feelings of confusion and isolation when first coming to the college setting.

Faculty can address many of these concerns by developing strategies to welcome students into their classrooms, explicate better the requirements of the course, use multi-modal learning strategies, establish learning communities and study groups, and put course notes on the internet. Being accessible is paramount: posting of and keeping to regular office hours not only encourages student questions but also sends a friendly message to even the most tentative students.

Faculty often know first if a student has disengaged from the classroom and if the student is not participating in the class experience by missed assignments, poor test grades, and a lack of involvement in discussions. A well-directed comment from a concerned and invested faculty member makes a primary connection between the student and the institution (Tinto, 1995).

Implications for College Retention Programs

The students interviewed in this research study breathed life into the common language in the persistence and retention literature. By sharing their trials of college transition, difficulty with academic and social adjustment, experience with a variety of “things that can go wrong and do”, and the many at-risk factors that they, as a group, presented in the interviews, the study participants fleshed out greatly the “failure” experience in college.

Mattie drew a very colorful picture of the pitfalls of the freshman year experience, from the unbalanced social life, to the frenzy of dormitory partying, to the uncertainty
over class progress and grades, to the difficulty transitioning from small high school classes into the anonymity of huge college lecture courses with no attendance policy.

Noah makes it important for administrators to remember that even those students who appear to be certain of academic goals, this may not be true. Ian’s and Rita’s stories provide convincing evidence that transfer students and adult learners have needs that are as real as, but different from, those of younger, freshmen students. Jasper demonstrated that minority students and students who have work or other obligations that compete with academics could benefit still from outreach and engagement opportunities with faculty, staff, and student groups. Rita’s and Jenae’s family obligations need to be acknowledged, perhaps through alternative course scheduling or access to other sources of financial aid, day care, or support groups. These students’ stories demonstrate that institutions are not doing enough to investigate student issues or student progress.

Of key importance is the fact that all of the research study participants were suspended before there was an intervention. It may be the case that these students received a warning letter about their probation and they ignored it, but the clear evidence of the heavy emotional burden on every one of these students makes the institutional outreach even more of a priority and of greater importance. The question to ask is: could we have intervened with these students earlier and made a difference in their academic history, emotional growth, and more timely progress toward their educational goals. I think the answer is a resounding yes.

One overwhelming fact seemed evident from the responses of the research participants. They were all at-risk. All students are at-risk and deserve attention.
Need for Further Research

The findings of this study indicate the need for further investigation. Despite the prolific amount of research on college student experience, there are decided gaps. This study represented an attempt to address the small amount of qualitative research from the college student perspective, and findings from this research have yielded a set of themes that surround the experience of academic difficulty, failure, and reversal of academic fortune. Like much research, it has generated many more questions than it has answered about the phenomenon. This section will attempt to list some of the unresolved issues and suggest possible directions for future research.

All of the students interviewed for the current study talked about a point when they were compelled to make a decision or a commitment to continue to pursue their degree. The current research does not provide details about this decision, rather, simply that the decision was made. In the theoretical model from Chapter Five, the “transformational pivot” refers to the moment or situation in which these students were pushed into action, and this pivot is worth more study. Perhaps closer investigation would produce useful information about how the decision was made, what types of information contributed to the decision, whether participants made the decision alone or in consultation with others, and questions along these lines. As well, what might students tell us about interventions in this process that would help other students make similar decisions or earlier decisions.

While the research on coping is fertile, this researcher is intrigued by more research on academic-specific coping strategies that are demonstrated to be effective for various and specific college tasks and that could be useful in retention interventions with
at-risk students. Much of the college persistence literature references things that students do not know or skills that students do not have at certain junctures in their academic development. Specific academic coping strategies seem to be some of these absent skill sets that research could study, identify, and make available.

Another potential research area involves the study of the emotional damage related to failure. In most cases, the student participants in this current study referenced continued concern and uncertainty about future educational endeavors. It is as though the specter of failure remains behind, long after the reality of it has faded. Failure is one of those nasty things that most of us encounter at some point or another, but we do not like to talk about it, think about it, or even acknowledge it. How then, do we rid ourselves of its latent effect?

A penultimate implication for future inquiry is related to the unique and specific college preparation, transition, and adjustment circumstances encountered by certain sub-populations of students. In particular, Jasper faced issues that the other participants of this research study did not. He, in effect, is not "just a normal White freshman" but rather, he is a member of a minority population in the state of Montana and on the campus of The University of Montana. In order for Jasper to survive and succeed at UM, he had to find a niche for himself that the other study participants did not have to do. More research is needed to tease out and address specific stresses that impede the college progress of minority students.

Finally, this researcher must pitch the case for increased research of the qualitative variety as applied to the college student experience. The stories of the participants in this study provided a new frame for a relatively seasoned educator. It is
hoped that the next time she visits the literature, there will be more student voices included in the data on the experience of the American college student.
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Appendices A – C

Forms for Interviews
Appendix A

Explanation of the Research Study to Participants

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study. The purpose of the study is to investigate what it is like to be a successful college student who previously experienced academic difficulty. I am trying to learn about your internal experience of external factors that you have encountered during college. I am interested in hearing what experiences are meaningful and important to you in either a positive or negative way.

I will begin the interview by asking you some background information and a few questions about your academic history prior to coming to college. We will then begin the research interview. I will audiotape this interview and later transcribe it word-for-word. My research method involves analyzing your interview closely to identify themes that are important to your experience. In total, I will interview and analyze the interviews of about six study participants. I will finally pull the themes found in all interviews together, to see if there are experiences that all of you have had regardless of differences such as age, gender, or other variables.

I will review and explain a consent form and ask you to sign it as an agreement to participate in the study.
Appendix B

Participant Information and Consent Form

Title: Dissertation Research Study on Undergraduate College Students' Experience of Turnaround following Academic Suspension.

Doctoral Student Researcher: S. Melanie Hoell, a doctoral student in the Department of Counselor Education, is also the Director of the Undergraduate Advising Center, Lommasson Center 283, at The University of Montana, Missoula 59812. Telephone: 406.243.4005 and email HoellSM@mso.umt.edu

Special Instructions to Potential Participants: This consent form may contain words or expressions that are new to you. If you read any words that are not clear, please ask the person who gave you this form to explain them to you.

This form indicates consent to participate in a research study that will examine the experience of successful students who previously experienced academic difficulty at The University of Montana. Once the experience has been analyzed and essential themes or structures have been identified, the findings will be compared to what is known about college student experiences that are published in the current literature.

Understanding of the following facts is required prior to your participation in the research project:

Procedures: Participants who agree to take part in this study will be asked a few background questions and agree to the researcher's review of their academic records. They will then be asked to complete an interview about the experience of being a successful student who previously encountered academic difficulty in college. The interviews will be audio-taped and transcribed in their entirety, excluding all identifying information. To insure confidentiality, all study participants will be asked to review a copy of their completed interview transcript and make any changes or corrections necessary for anonymity. Any or all parts of interviews may be quoted in published reports of this research.

The study will take place at mutually acceptable location for the interviewer and the participant. The entire process, including the interview will last for 60 to 90 minutes. Transcribed interviews will be combined and examined for common experiences or themes to describe college student success following academic difficulties. Conclusions will be reported and compared to findings in current literature on the college student experience.

Benefits: The benefits of this research study may provide us with a deeper understanding of the experience of college student success after academic difficulty in specific and factors that may relate to college student persistence and motivation to succeed in general. These findings may have ramifications for professionals working in the fields of
education and counseling. A benefit to research participants is a $20 UM Bookstore gift card for participation.

Risks/Discomforts: The researcher is bound by professional ethics and by law to report any evidence of danger or harm to self or others as a result of this research study. Depending upon the content the participant chooses to discuss, participation in this study may be disturbing to some individuals. Should this happen, there are several avenues for assistance at The University of Montana. Consult the Student Health Service (406.243.2122), or Counseling and Psychological Services (406.243.4711). Although we do not foresee any risk in taking part in this study, the following liability statement is required in all University of Montana consent forms:

"In the event that you are injured as a result of this research you should seek appropriate medical treatment. If the injury is caused by the negligence of the University or any of its employees, you may be entitled to reimbursement or compensation pursuant to the Comprehensive State Insurance Plan established by the Department of Administration under the authority of M.C.A., Title 2, Chapter 9. In the event of a claim for such injury, further information may be obtained from the University's Claims Representative or University Legal Counsel."

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal: Your decision to take part in this research study is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw consent or to discontinue participation from this project at any time without penalty. The $20 gift certificate to the UM Bookstore or Griz Card “Bear Bucks” is awarded regardless of withdrawal from the research project.

Questions: You may wish to discuss your participation in this study with others before you agree to take part. If you have any questions about the research now or during the study, contact Melanie Hoell at 406.243.4005. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board through The University of Montana Research Office at 406.243.6670.

Participant’s Statement of Consent: “I have read the above description of this research study and been informed of the risks and benefits involved. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that future questions that I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form”.

____________________
Participant’s Signature

____________________
Researcher’s Signature

____________________
Date
Appendix C

Demographic Information Sheet

In the first few minutes of the research interview, the following demographic information will be collected. It will not be used directly in the data analysis. The information will be “bracketed,” or set aside, during the interview so that it will not bias the study. This information, as well as other print information about the participants’ academic history at UM such as transcripts, academic preparation, and ACT or SAT scores may be used to “triangulate” (provide common threads, support evidence, offer a different view) the data collected during the interviews.

1) Name (initials only)

2) Age

3) Gender

4) Ethnicity

5) High school background

6) Why selected UM

7) Parent’s educational level

8) Parent’s influence/support for college endeavors

9) Brief employment history

10) Academic interests

11) Other
Appendices D-I

Data Analyses, Levels One-Three
Appendix D

Participant 1, Levels One-Three
P1, Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

Take a minute to think about a time when you were pondering your academic situation, the experience of academic troubles as well as your turning yourself around and back into good standing. Please share your thoughts and feelings about this experience for me.

P1: 1. Okay, well, when I was on probation was a hard period. 2. When I was a freshman, I lived in Jesse Hall and I kinda wasn’t really into school. I was an elementary ed major at the time. 3. So then, kind of as a punishment, my parents wouldn’t let me live off campus until I got my grades up so I had to live in the dorms again as a sophomore. 4. That was when I was put on academic suspension, because the dorm people were all partying and stuff and being a freshman that I just was and I was not all that into my classes. 5. I mean, I tried, but in the back of my head the whole time, I was thinking “You’re going to get kicked out of school if you don’t get your shit together”. 6. Well, that wasn’t enough and I remember, near the end of that fall term when I was in the dorms, checking with all my teachers, like what am I getting, what grade am I getting? Just to make sure that I was going to make that level and it was all good, and it was all okay and I was all “great”. 7. I barely slipped by with a “C” in a couple classes. 8. I go home for much of the break, thinking that I’m fine, I’ll be fine. I had checked everything. Well, then I checked my grades and it said “academic suspension”. 9. I went through a hard period being on probation. 10. As a freshman, she lived in the dorm and wasn’t really into school. She was in elementary education. 11. As punishment for being on probation, P1’s parents wouldn’t let her move off campus until she brought her grades up, so she was in the dorms again as a sophomore. 12. P1 was suspended because of partying in the dorm, from having recently been a freshman, and not being into her classes. 13. Always in the back of P1’s mind was the worry about being kicked out of school because she didn’t have her act together. 14. At the end of fall semester in the dorms, she checked about her grades with her professors, trying to meet the level that was okay. Things seemed okay, “great”. 15. P1 barely slipped by with a “C” in a couple of her classes.

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suspension" and everything kind of hit a wall. I was like oh my god, this can't be happening, like which teacher, because I checked everything, I knew everything and I had just slipped by. 9. I tried emailing my profs, I didn't want to tell my parents. This isn't just going to happen because my brother and sister both had academic difficulty and I was younger at the time and didn't see it quite like they did.

She couldn't believe it was happening. P1 wondered which teacher? She had checked everything.

9. She tried emailing her professors because she did not want to tell her parents. P1 didn't want this happen to her because when she was younger both her brother and sister had academic difficulty.

My brother, he just kind of chose to not go to school for a while, it wasn't because of his grades. My sister, she wasn't doing well and she took some time off, my parents cut her off. I remember talking to my sister and having it be a really stressful time for her. So, I was scared, I was so scared. So I was emailing my teachers. Like, I probably didn't tell my parents for a week./

Her brother chose not to attend school for a while, not because of grades. Her sister wasn't doing well, took some time off, and the parents cut her off. It was a very stressful time for her sister.

10. I talked to my sister and I said “what can I do Nancy?” like oh, my God, it totally freaked me out. Because I’m going to school so far away. My sister went to school in the Midwest, near home, so that isn’t too far. I thought I have so much time invested here and I don’t want to leave (UM), I don't want to go back home./

P1 was quite scared. She kept emailing her teachers but didn’t tell her parents for a week.

So, you’re at home and your parents are there, wondering about your grades?

P1: 11. Yeah, I kept saying “no, I haven’t gotten them yet, sorry” and I’m continuing to email teachers and no one is emailing me back, it’s winterbreak./

11. P1 kept putting her parents off, telling them that she hadn’t yet received her grades. Emailing professors wasn’t paying off, as it was winterbreak.

12. What I think happened is that my mom walked in on me while I was emailing a teacher and was like what’s going on and I just broke down. So I told her and I told her I’d found out last week./

12. P1’s mother found out about her grades when she caught P1 emailing a teacher. P1 broke down. She told her mom that she’d found out her grades for a week. 13. P1 was surprised that it bothered her parents that she hadn’t consulted with them about her grades and had tried to

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surprised that I’d never approached them with it, I’d tried to hide it, tried to go around it and tried to fix it before I came to my parents./

14. They said to me that I could have come to them from day one, but not really, I didn’t want to.

Is that different from how you normally would act?

P1: For the most part. Ever since I got out of the rebellious teenage thing, I tell my parents the problems that I have and they’re good./

What was it about this academic situation that made a difference?

P1. 15. I was embarrassed. I was so, like, ashamed. I couldn’t believe that I’d done this. I knew it was my fault, my grades./

16. My parents have always been like, not like they have high standards. They just always want me to do well, do the best that I can. They have never had a grade level that they expect, because they had lots of difficulty in school, too. So they are always just like as long as you do your best, take pride in your work./ 17. But, before, when I was in elementary ed, I wasn’t enjoying it as much as I thought I would, so it was really hard for me to keep going./ 18. When I didn’t tell my parents, the first thing that surprised me is that I thought I would get yelled at and then maybe we’d be okay about working something out. But my mom was, she, I don’t know if she felt bad or sorry but she was like “you didn’t tell us”. That sort of set the tone for how they were after that, because they were so supportive of me./ 19. We talked about this, about what grades I thought I had and this one grade that I thought I had was actually a “D” and not a “C”.

hid or fix the problem on her own.

14. P1 had not wanted to come to them with her troubles.

Since her rebellious teen years are behind her, P1 normally shares her problems with her parents and they are good about it.

15. This situation was different because of P1’s embarrassment. She was so ashamed of her grades and she was at fault.

16. While they don’t expect a certain grade level, P1’s parents always want her to do the best that she can and to take pride in her work. Her parents had difficulty in school also.

17. P1 was not enjoying her study in elementary ed, which made it hard for her to keep going.

18. P1’s parents surprised her with their reaction when they found out. She was expecting to get yelled at and then work something out. P1’s mother felt bad or sorry that P1 hadn’t confided in her and P1’s father. This set the tone for their supportiveness.

19. P1 discussed her grade situation with her parents. One “C” grade she expected was actually a “D”.

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What class?

P1: It was an African American Studies course and the professor told me I was going to get a “C” and he actually gave me a “D”. To this day, I’d tried and I’ve tried to contact him about this grade, but he never got back to me.

P1: 20. I mean, I never tried to contact him in person, but there’s no way I should have gotten a “D”. But either way, I was not doing well in school and I wasn’t happy, so, whatever.

Going back just a bit, you said that you were in Jesse Hall your first year. Were you then in a different dorm the next year?

P1: 21. Yeah, then I was in this other girl was kind of in a similar situation and we just partied way too much, we didn’t do any school work and we were rooming together. We were in Duniway.

22. That dorm had single rooms that got doubled up so we were like close quarters and it had its fun parts and it had its bad parts, but like.

23. I did the freshman year and I just didn’t want to do it again. I’d call my friends and they were like, well, it must be some rowdy fun, but I was like no. Everyone was just leaving their parents’ house and just coming out here. It was aggravating, you know? Fireworks going off when I’m trying to study and jeez.

24. I didn’t have a car, so I couldn’t get to my friends’ houses off campus or anything like that, so that was frustrating.

25. It just really wasn’t a very good time for me. Me and my roommate who, we were friends, but living together we were in such a small area, so I mean, I tried.

26. This is right around the time that I

P1’s African American Studies professor told her she had a “C” but he gave her a “D”. She tried multiple times to contact him by email, but not in person, about the grade mishap but he never responded.

20. While P1 doesn’t believe she should have gotten a “D”, she admits that she wasn’t doing well in school and she wasn’t happy.

21. The semester of P1’s suspension, she lived in Duniway with a roommate in a similar situation. They partied too much and didn’t do any of their schoolwork.

22. The dorm had single rooms that were doubled up so P1 and her roommate were in close quarters. It was good and bad.

23. P1 had already experienced her freshman year and didn’t want to do it again. It was too rowdy, aggravating, loud, and not a good place to study.

24. P1 didn’t have a car so she was frustrated that she couldn’t visit her off-campus friends.

25. It was not a very good time for P1. Even though she was friends with her roommate, their living area was so small, but she tried.

26. Around this time, P1 started working
started working at a local cafe, too. Working helped me structure my time, it helped so much, it did wonders for me, but it wasn’t enough regardless. So, um, what happened then? 27. So my parents, they were kind of like, well, same as your sister, we are not going to support you, monetarily support you, if you’re not in school. So, you can come home and take classes, do whatever. They were very supportive of the options: you either pay your own rent and support yourself, do your work or you come home and we work things out, you know you make money and save money, like that. And from the beginning, I was like I don’t want to be at home. This isn’t a point in my life where I want to live with my parents again./

28. And of course if I were being back home, all my friends would know that I got kicked out of school because they’d know that I wouldn’t just come back for no reason.

It would be public information.

P1: Yeah, yeah. And I was very secretive about this at first, very, very. I think only one of my friends out here knew and only four of my really close girlfriends at home knew. For everyone else, I was like, well, you know school’s getting a little rough, I’m just going to take some time off. I had the line right, like they’re all your parents are letting you do that? And I’m like yeah, you know, like I’m just going to hang out. I’m going to pay half my rent and my parents are going to pay half. I totally made up this whole fabrication and after awhile, it came so easy I started to believe it. So my girlfriends at home knew and my sister knew, and I kinda got back here and I was like “yeah, and school was getting really tough so I’m taking semester off” but one of my friends was like “really?” like he kind of disbelieved me and then later, he was like “yeah, I knew all along”, but to everyone

at a local cafe. Although working helped her structure her time, that wasn’t enough.

27. P1’s parents dealt with her situation by treating her the same way as her sister. She had the options of either moving home and working or, if she returned to Missoula, of working and supporting herself on her own.

P1 was certain that she didn’t want to live with her parents at this point.

28. If P1 moved back home, her friends would know that she had been kicked out of school.

She was secretive about her circumstances. She told very few of her friends at home and only one of her college friends.

P1 fabricated a story line about taking some time off after a rough time in school, about how she and her parents would split the cost of her rent while she hung out in Missoula but did not go to school.

Her story came so easy that she started to believe it. Only a few of her girlfriends and her sister knew the truth.

Once she returned to town she told everyone that she was taking the semester off, needing the time to ponder her major. Even when faced with a friend’s disbelieve,
else, I would just say I needed time, like I wasn’t sure about my major and regardless my parents would rather have me take time off to figure out my major and where I wanted to go, rather than keep going in the wrong direction...I kind of just made up all this shit./ 29. Some of it is partially true though, because I did really use that time to look at what I did really want to be doing. elementary ed is what I started out in but it wasn’t really where I wanted to go.

So, you came back here in that Spring?

P1: 30. Yeah, it was the Spring of 2003...that I took off.

So, what did you do then?

P1: 31. So, I came back out here. Before I went home, I had made arrangements with a kind of a friend of a friend that her roommate had moved out and actually, it’s kind of funny, I actually took her job at Food for Thought. I knew her and I thought I'm moving into your room and I'm taking your job. She was going to New Zealand for a couple months. Margaret, the friend of mine who’s also from back home who I knew from a mutual friend, I moved into her house. I had dropped my stuff off there before I went home from college for Christmas./ 32. So I came back and it was really exciting because my parents were really supportive, even though like money, we’re not going to help you unless it’s an emergency./ 33. So, I was excited but scared because I’ve never supported myself before and not even close to it. I’ve never even paid my own cell phone bill (laugh). So, excited, nervous. I talked to my boss about working full time at the cafe and possibly would pick up another job. So, there I was. Margaret...I didn’t know her roommate as well./ 34. Margaret’s roommate was a Social Work

she stuck to her story.

29. Though fabricated, some of P1’s made up stuff was partially true. She did use the time off to look at what she wanted to do about a major. Elementary ed wasn’t it.


31. Before break, she had made housing arrangements. P1 thought about how she was taking the room and the job of her friend Margaret’s former roommate.

When she came back, she moved into Margaret’s house where she had dropped off her belongings before Christmas break. Margaret was a friend of P1’s who was also from back home.

32. It was exciting to be back. Her parents were supportive even though P1 was expected to manage her own money unless there was an emergency.

33. P1 was excited but scared and nervous because she’d never supported herself before. She’d never even had to pay her own cell phone bill.

She asked for full time hours at the cafe and planned to pick up another job as well.

34. Margaret’s former roommate had
major, about to graduate. She had gone through kind of similar...she took off a year in her sophomore year. I don't know what she did, I know that she lived here and she worked a bit. I didn't know if her parents had supported her or not, but she ended up graduating in four years because she doubled up on some of her credits./ 35. But, between talking to her about her time off and her Social Work I kind of found my niche, that I wanted to go into social work which was awesome./ 36. By supporting myself, by going through...at the time I was getting paid like $6.25 an hour and my rent was the highest I ever paid in Missoula – it was like $395 a month with about $100 in bills. I was literally...like...it was like I had nothing. (laugh) You know?

Yeah?

P1: 37. I remember this one month. I don't know what happened, if, like I would get a six-pack of beer every once in awhile or like, if I had an extra $10 I’d go to the bars. But I remember one month, I was writing my rent check, looking at my balance and I was like $60 short. I was like what happened!? I was like oh my God. That was about three months into it and at this point, I was really proud of myself. Almost like “Mom and Dad, I’m doing this!”/ 38. But, at the same time, my sister and I, who’ve been really close all our lives, me and her had started to grow apart at this time. She had just graduated, she was kind of moving out and working 9 – 5. I knew she didn’t really have the time, but I really wanted her support through this because she had done it. Initially, when I first found out that I’d been kicked out of school, she was like “Don’t worry, I’ve done this and you can do this – it’s not impossible”. And, at that time she, well, it’s not that we weren’t getting along, we weren’t exactly clashing gone through a situation similar to P1’s. She had also taken time off in her sophomore year. P1 didn’t know the details but knew that she had graduated in four years despite the time off by doubling up on credits.

35. By talking to her about the experience during her time off and about her major, P1 found her niche. She decided to major in social work.

36. P1 went through a lot by supporting herself on not very much money. Paying high rent and expenses, she had very little left.

37. After proudly supporting herself for about three months, P1 found herself $60 short in rent. She was upset and didn’t know how that happened.

38. At this same time, P1 was growing apart from the sister she’d been really close to all her life. Her sister had just graduated from college and was starting a 9 – 5 job. P1 knew her sister was busy but she really craved her support. Her sister had gone through the same experience. She was initially encouraging to P1 and told her not to worry, that things were not impossible. Later, P1 wasn’t getting the support from her sister that she wanted.
but she wasn’t supporting me the way that I wanted her to. 39. So I was trying not to lean on my parents at all, because I’d already messed up even though I could have. I’m sure that I could have talked to them but they’re, well, I kinda grew up with a “tough love” philosophy from them. Like, well, (they’d say) it’s bad, but you know it could be worse than this – like you have a job and you’re able to do this, you know, blah, blah, blah. And, I really got close to my brother, who before that, me and him, we’d always pretty much butted heads, you know. So I talked with my brother and he really supported me, like emotionally, he said don’t worry, you can do this. He’s like you can talk to Mom and Dad and they’ll help you out with this rent money, you know. He was a huge influence, the fact that we were just then forming a bond, when I was really in need. Because none of my friends knew that this was a forced thing. So, who could I talk to? You know? To I talked to my parents and told them you know I just don’t know what happened this month and they sent me the check right away, like it was no big deal and they were like now you gotta watch your money, you gotta manage your money and you’ve gotta take this step first and you can play later. 40. So yeah, for about a six-month period of time, oh, yeah, about six months I supported myself by doing that work thing. 41. It was very empowering to me and at the same time really difficult. Like I really couldn’t see the value of it until my parents were helping me out again. Cause that was like WOW, I did it! 42. So many of my friends come from very wealthy families and so they wouldn’t have ever had to think of this, like, I’d be all well I can’t do this because I’ve gotta pay rent tomorrow and they were all like “what?” and I’d say remember I’ve gotta do this and they’d be oh yeah, is that really hard? And I’d be all like “yeah, of course it’s hard”. It’s
Oh.

P1: 43. Yeah, so let’s see, I went home for that summer. Yes. I had talked to my friends periodically at home but they were kinda caught up in their college lives too and they would be like how are you doing?

44. and if I ever talked to my sister and she offered to send me money if I needed it, but I almost wanted to reject that offer because she, I don’t want to say that she left me high and dry because she would never just leave me but I feel like I would call her a couple times and be upset about like stuff and she didn’t call me back and I kind of felt little bit betrayed...

Oh?

P1: So, and I know that she had a ton of things going on, like she was starting a new job, like all that stuff...

In retrospect, what comes to mind about this for you?

P1: Well, considering how close me and my sister are, I’m a little bitter about it still. I mean it’s since like ever since I was little, I’ve always looked up to her. She’s four years older than me so right as I’m getting into high school, she’s leaving and just as I’m getting into college, she’s leaving. So I kind of like just keep missing her stage, the stage that she’s going through and we still kind of have a tiff about it. I’ve told her that she like, when she called me when she was upset, I would call her back in a second, regardless of what I’m doing. But, when I called her upset and this is even still like in the last year and I don’t get a phone call. Maybe an email like a week and a half later,

P1: 45. but I like brought it up to her and
she’s said that “I never meant to leave you like that” blah, blah, blah. Even just recently I’ve talked to her about, uh, telling her that I understand that we are in two different spots in our lives right now and this is how it’s going to be and like it would be the last thing that you need is someone else to be like...needing your attention or needing you with this and this stuff. So we kind of have an agreement right now, but either way, I mean, I’m living the college life and it’s pretty much I have time and she’s in Chicago working a really hard job..../

What does she do?

P1: 46. Uh, she is like an assistant manager at like a, it’s just a small business but it’s like a walk your dog business thing and so, she is like not the top dog, she’s the second one down and she has lots, she has a big plate and she’s also teaching special rec classes, like swimming classes, special ed classes at a rec center three times a week and she also has to work out and she has a boyfriend, and she goes to bed at like 10:00 every night. So, she just on a totally different schedule than me, so I understand that about her but if I had been in her position I would done things differently./

Big sisters should come with some kind of wiring.

P1: 47. Yeah, definitely! (laugh) Yeah! And I actually just wrote her an email that says I understand that you’re doing this but I’m still upset that we aren’t as close as we used to be, but I’m sure that will change when I get my 9 - 5 job and we have the same schedule, so, either way, I just don’t think that it takes that much effort for a phone call, but whatever./

Yes.

P1. Yeah, so....

her sister. Her sister told her that she didn’t mean to leave P1 like that. P1 understands that her sister is busy and not able to respond to P1’s neediness.

P1 and her sister agree that they are in two different spots in their lives and it’s just going to be that way. P1 is living the college life and her sister is busy with work.

46. P1’s sister is an assistant manager in a small dog walking business. She also teaches recreation classes for special education students, she works out, and she’s busy with her boyfriend. P1’s sister has a different schedule due to her job.

Regardless, P1 would have done things differently if their roles were reversed.

47. Regardless of her sister’s work and schedule, she’s still upset that they aren’t as close as they once were. She thinks her sister could have made more of an effort.
I think I got you off track...so you went home this past summer?

P1: 48. Yes. I worked at (undecipherable) and I worked at the rec center where I’ve worked years before and everybody was all “How was your semester off?” and I was like “Great” you know? I told them that I’d gotten everything all figured out, although at that point, I wasn’t certain that I was going to be a Social Work major but when I knew I was headed back to school, my roommate was going to Thailand, she graduated and was going to Thailand for nine months to do AIDS relief work and so/ 49. I got one of the last emails from her before she left and it was really just like, well I got it right after I got off work like at 4 and there wasn’t much for me to do, I mean I didn’t have homework and because my friends were still at work and stuff so I talked to her a lot about her work and her career and stuff and if she was getting stressed out without her family./ 50. It was like social work is pretty much about wanting to help people, like my drive to go into elementary ed had been because I love working with kids, I want to help kids because/ 51. I have ADD and I figured that when I was younger and had a really hard time with spelling and I was dyslexic and so many teachers put me down when I just did not, I mean that was the worst thing for them to do. So, that kind of was my drive, to be a good teacher./ 52. So now, I really just want to help people and maybe that, I want to work with kids at some point but kind of like my drive to work with people and some of the classes and projects she had going were just so interesting and seemed like so really inspiring to me./ [Pause to blow nose due to cold] 53. So, like, I don’t think realized that I

48. P1 returned to her previous summer jobs and reconnected with friends. She reported that she’d gotten things figured out, even though she wasn’t yet certain about her eventual Social Work major. 49. P1 and her roommate connected over email when the roommate was preparing to go to Thailand. P1 had time on her hands after work and no homework and the roommate was stressed out about her post-college transition. 50. From the roommate P1 learned that social work is about helping people. P1 had picked elementary ed because she loves working with children and wants to help kids. 51. P1 wanted to be a good teacher because many of her teachers put her down when she was younger. She was a poor speller due to ADD and dyslexia. 52. The roommate’s explanation of her social work classes and projects interested and inspired P1. She may work with children at some point but just wanting to help people is now her goal. 53. P1’s interest in social work didn’t gel

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wanted to do social work until like a week or two before I came back to school in late August. I came back early because I wanted to float the river a couple times...

Oh, yeah?

P1: 54. Yeah, so that was very interesting. So the whole time I’m thinking “I’m doing what my Mom does…” (laugh)/

Yeah, so how did that feel?

P1: 55. I, uh, well, that was really shocking. Because I never really thought that...

She probably didn’t really put pressure on you?

P1: 56. Oh, not at all, not at all. And if anything, she was never one to bring her work home. So, we’d hear every once in awhile about some case or we’d hear her office phone ringing in the middle of the night. But it was never like, yes, I’m a social worker and own my own business and no big deal. But when I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do and I realized that it was basically social work, I was like WHAT? (laugh)/

That is funny. When we’re kids and being rebellious, we think we’ll never be like our parents and there’s that moment in like when we look around and say “I might actually be like my parents”....

54. It was humorous to P1 that (with social work) she was going to be doing what her mother does.

55. It was shocking because she’d never thought about that.

56. Not only had P1 never been pressured into this area, her mother kept her business relatively separate from her home life.

57. When P1 told her mother about her interest in social work, her mother was surprised at first. She thought that it made some sense, though, given that P1 is a caring, people-person.
PI. Totally. Yeah...

We do have some of their genetic material...

PI: 58. It might make sense, like definitely. So that was humorous, slash, ohmygod do I really want to do this?/

(laugh) Yes!

PI. 59. So, it was interesting and it was scary starting again./ 60. I had moved into a house without, with these three people I didn’t know because, well, my other house that I had lived in it was kind of random and it worked out great. This next house, it was kind of a friend of a friend and I moved in with these three people who I didn’t know very well. They had just finished their freshman year and so I was in a house again, great, everyone just got out of the dorm and they were all rowdy, like, wonderful. I actually had met a couple of them when I was living in the dorm like that first semester (of my second year) and I was not into getting to know anybody because I was just there to do my work and get the hell out. And, well, it didn’t work that way but I just remember like two of them, great, like being the rowdy, rowdy people in my dorm. Like great./ 61. But I was kind of in a better stage, where I was happy, happy to be back in school because I had been out of school for like, uh, six or seven months by now. Those people I lived with then, well I’m still really close friends with.../ 62. there was some clash about “could you so not have people over right now?” because I was doing work. Although, I can’t really do my work in my own house, anyhow, I get too distracted./ 63. But I remember trying to impart upon them like I’m a year ahead of you, and like I really need to focus on this and they were like whatever, whatever! And I told them that in a year, they’d be telling 58. The whole thing made PI laugh, pause, and question her decision. She thought it might just make sense.

59. It was scary for PI to start back. 60. She moved into a house with people she didn’t know because her previous, random living arrangement had worked well.

PI was concerned that her roommates had just finished their freshman year and could be rowdy.

She had met a couple of them the last time she’d lived in the dorm. She remembered them as being quite rowdy. She wasn’t sure that was going to be a great thing.

61. But PI was in a better place. She was happy to be back in school, having been away from it for six or seven months. Despite some clashes, she remains close friends old friends. 62. PI figured out that she is too distracted to do schoolwork at home, so it didn’t matter that her roommates would invite people over.

63. PI felt that she had wisdom to impart to her younger roommates. She told them that they’d need to learn to focus, that the third year gets harder.
this same thing to me. And it happened last year and they were like, yeah, third year is getting kind of hard and I'm like yep, I know.

64. But, um, I think like eventually, like last year, about half way through I started telling people, oh, you know, I actually got kicked out of school and a couple people, like my friend Owen who kind of didn't believe me the first time, he was just like, oh yeah, (laugh) you wouldn't just drop a semester all of a sudden and I said oh, yeah, I kind of had to... / 65. but, looking back on it, it was The Best Thing. Like, kind of putting me out there, supporting myself, just completely on my own made me think about myself, you know, I'd lost downtime to really think about what's got me to this point? What could be done to change it to get me back to where I want to be, to be going back to school because when I was working for how many ever hours a week at the cafe and I was getting these paychecks that were barely even getting me by because they pay so little. I talked to my dad about it and I told him I don't want to be a waitress for the rest of my life. He was like, you know, my grandmother, his mom waitressed for 45 years to support our family, blah, blah, and he said what do you think she would have done with a college degree? / 66. And I'm like, totally, I don't want to give up another semester of my life, I totally want to go back to school. It gave me such motivation to be, like, in a direction too, because before I was like yeah, I guess I'll just be like in elementary ed and now it's like I want to do THIS. / 67. I want to do well, because I hadn't done well in school for most of college and even through high school. / 68. I had never been an “A” student, but once I started taking Ritalin as a freshman or sophomore in high school, that really helped me out a lot. / 69. Even through grade school, I've always had a really low self-

64. Eventually, P1 started telling people about having been kicked out of school. Her friend Owen and a couple others hadn't believed her to begin with. It was okay that she had to make up a line.

65. In hindsight, it was a good thing that P1 had to put herself on the line. It allowed her the downtime to think about her options.

P1 pondered the reasons that got her to this point and she thought about what changes she needed to make to go back to school. She realized that her work paid her barely enough to get by. She figured out that she didn't want to be a waitress forever. Her father supported her thoughts about this, as his mother had worked as a waitress for many years and he wondered how her life would have been different with a college education.

66. P1 became convinced that she didn't want to waste even one more semester of her life. She was also motivated by having actively selected a major, rather than just guessing that she'd be a teacher.

67. She was also motivated to do well this time, since she hadn't done well for most of college or high school.

68. P1 recalled that taking Ritalin as a freshman in high school helped her.

69. P1 has low self-esteem surrounding grades and school. She's covered this up
esteem when it comes to grades and school. I was just kind of getting by, joking about it, like if I failed or if my friend and I, we had a class together and I’d be all like so what did you get on the test? And if she got a “B” and she’d say so what did you get on the test, I’m be all oh, so you got a “B” and I’d go I got a “B-“ when I’d gotten a “D” or something, you know?/ Yeah.

P1: 70. My academic esteem was not good at all and it never was. So the fact that I didn’t have a goal direction gave me like, a…./

Uh huh.

P1: 71. And then, being kicked out of school gave me a huge kick in the butt, like get your shit together. It was frustrating, working and supporting yourself, I was like, I’m 19 and I don’t want to be doing this. I mean parts of it were fun, like I didn’t have any homework and once I got done with work I was done. It was some things were good but you can’t just miss a day of work like you can miss a class, so there were the good and bad parts of it but overall, it was really, really, really hard. And I mean trying on more levels than just getting up every day and going to work, it was dealing with it and having my friends who were still getting the paychecks, or still getting the checks from their parents and them not even having to have a job and like them, they’re carefree and whatever and I’m like, I don’t have that anymore and I’m 19 and I don’t want to do this forever. 72. And so that’s motivation and the support from my parents started coming, I mean they were always really supportive but kind of like the back burner. When I called them and I’d be telling them that I was really having a hard time and I was doing this and this and they’d just be all by making jokes and telling white lies about test grades.

70. Since she didn’t have a good feeling about herself as a student, not having a strong direction gave her an excuse for not doing well.

71. Being kicked out of school forced her to take stock in her life. The experience of supporting herself was frustrating. She knew she didn’t want to be working like this in the future. P1 admitted that it was nice to not have homework to do once she was done with work. There were good and bad aspects, but overall, her experience was really hard.

Not only was the day in/day out work hard to manage, but she had friends who were being supported by their parents and not even having to work. She couldn’t be carefree like them. P1 realized that she didn’t want to do what she was doing at 19 forever.

72. Support from her parents was very important for P1. When she would report having a hard time, her parents just repeated that this is what she needed to be doing right now.
“you just gotta do it, you gotta do it, you’ve got to keep going, there’s nothing else you can do at this point.” Or, they’d ask me just what did I want to do at this point and I would say that I wanted to be back in school. You know, my mom really wanted me to take a year off after high school and I didn’t want to, I just wanted to get out of here because I knew Montana would be just great. I don’t even think I would take a year off, by going back and thinking about it and my mom is like I think you should have and I’m like what would I have done? I woulda sat here in your house and we would have gotten into more fights, and yeah, I would have made some money, but....I would not have been happy...

You still would not have had a frame of reference, or what you were missing, or...

P1: 73. Definitely, and I’m still glad I didn’t take that year off. Granted, I messed around all of freshman year but I met some wonderful people who I’m still good friends with and it was the experience that...I remember talking to my parents during my freshman year and telling them oh, we went camping here and we went hiking there and they’d say but what about your classes?

Yeah, are you going to school?

P1: 74. Well, yes, I’d get into fights with them about well don’t you care about anything else and they were all yes, we really do care about how much money you’re putting into this school/ 75. Yeah, we got into a couple of really heated fights because my freshman year was really hard on me because in October I lost a friend of mine and I couldn’t go home to the funeral because it was so expensive and even after that I think it was something like 11 people

P1 told her parents that she wanted to be back in school.

Her mother had encouraged P1 to take a year off between high school and college. P1 didn’t want to do that.

Even if she could go back in time, P1 still doesn’t think that taking a year off between high school and college would have made her happy. She was ready to leave home for a new life in Montana.

73. P1 is glad she didn’t take a year off. Despite messing around her freshman year, she met great people she’s still friends with and she had good experiences outside of the classroom.

74. Her freshman year, P1 and her parents differed about what she should be doing in college. She cared about having fun; they cared about the cost. 75. In addition to several heated arguments with her parents that year, P1 suffered much loss her freshman year. In October a good friend died back home and she couldn’t afford to come home for the funeral.
in my home town died freshman year.

Wow.

P1: My grandfather was one of them and I had slight connections to another couple of them, like an old babysitter or my friend’s older sister. But this, my one friend Josh, that really hit me hard so it was just like what ever. Like, we don’t know when we’re going to die so we might as well have fun, so that was good and bad and I definitely wasn’t into school, but I tried./

Um hum.

Yeah.

Well, let me ask you....during your freshman year and that one semester of your sophomore year...

P1: Yes?

Did you go to your classes most of the time, dealing with some of the things you’ve mentioned, or....?

P1: 76. Yeah, well most of them. Well, I’d skip sometimes./ 77. Another hard thing that I had to deal with was that all my classes were two exams and a final and that’s not my learning style. I mean, I need to keep on top of the game and do regular assignments and so after six weeks of classes, there’d be this test and I was supposed to read 200 pages to try and cram for this? That wasn’t going to happen. And the classes were all so general, and so big and they never took attendance, so why should I go? Or I’d leave halfway through, I mean, I probably went to like 75% of my classes. I remember my sister telling me, about college, she said just go to your classes...GO to your CLASSES even if you don’t do anything else, pay attention and go

The death of her grandfather and other friends was tough. The loss of her friend Josh prompted P1 to think about living and having fun. This interfered with her schoolwork.

76. P1 admits to skipping some classes.
77. All of P1’s classes had two exams and a final for the grade. This was difficult for her, as she does better with regular assignments. She was expected to read on her own and prepare for an exam that covered six weeks of work.

P1’s classes were all general. They were big classes with no attendance requirement. She estimated that she attended about 75% of the time.

P1’s sister had advised her to be sure to attend classes if nothing else.

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to your classes and get your work done there, you know. I listened to that for the most part but for some classes, I was just not going to go. So, again, I went to most of them but paying attention-wise and like doing the work and all but even now, like I have to take Biology this summer and it will be two tests and a final and I still don’t have the self-discipline to read 10 pages every night...so that was a major part of why my grades were so bad. I can’t blame it on the instructors, it was just how the class was, it was like for where you are when you’re 18 and coming to college for the first time and granted it is entry level classes you kind of have to do it because they’re so huge, it was just so hard, to try to keep yourself, it required a lot of discipline. I mean all your friends are like meeting all these new people and doing all these new things in a totally new place and that type of studying every night was just impossible for me. So that didn’t really happen.

Yeah, when you, um, were reinstated? Do you remember that process? Were you nervous?

P1: 78. Yeah, I was reinstated. I think all I had to do was go and talk to two different people.

78. The reinstatement process was easy. P1 talked to two different people.

Probably an advisor and some Dean?

P1: Yeah....and actually, I remember her because she came out of her office and was looking for someone and I said hey, you go to the café where I work all the time and she recognized me then, from there. So like I’m getting reinstated and so she was checking to see if I’d stayed away from school for at least a semester or more and I had stayed away from spring and then summer./ 79. Oh, and at the time, I had asked my parents should I get residency? And they were all like no, just push through, push

P1 remembers meeting the Dean. They recognized each other from the café where P1 worked.

The Dean confirmed that P1 had stayed out of school for a term.

79. P1 had conferred with her parents about establishing residency but they were eager for her to push through to
through and now they’re all like we really should have had you get residency. (laugh)/80. But, yeah, so I talked to two people and got the papers signed and I was reinstated. Getting the major changed was a different thing and finding a new advisor and all that, well, that was more like things to do but, yeah, it was pretty easy./

**After reinstatement, did you have any apprehensions about how you would do once you started back to school?**

PI: 81. No, I wasn’t. Because I was like I know I am. Like, I was just like I struggled so much and I had such a new perspective on money and schoolwork and on goals in life.../

**You are the poster child for taking a semester off!**

PI: 82. Yeah, oh my God it did wonders for me. It Did Wonders For Me. Since I hadn’t done well and I knew I didn’t want to be in elementary education but I didn’t know what else I wanted, the semester off was the thing that saved me. It did wonders for me, and the fact that I supported myself and the time off got me focused on what I really wanted to do. I don’t know what I would have done if without my roommate in social work, I wouldn’t have been exposed to it, the environment and what it would have been like, so yeah, that was like a good thing too. So, I got focused and centered. I set goals, like before, it was just “school” was my goal and it was too big, like go and get this done. But, I did well, I got off probation and I didn’t start to take the bigger, because I’m still taking lower level classes, like 200’s and stuff like that/

PI: 83. except that this one class, I think it was Social Work 200. The teacher, well, it was his first semester here too and he, his class really inspired me a lot because completion quickly, a decision they now regret humorously.

80. All in all, reinstatement was easier than processing her major change and finding a new advisor in her department.

81. PI was not concerned about how she’d do when she came back to school. She had a new perspective on the importance of money and schoolwork. She also had goals.

82. PI clearly admits that taking that semester off did wonders for her. Prior to that, she had been floundering in school, she didn’t know what major interested her, and the working life renewed her interest in a college degree.

PI was lucky to have been exposed to social work through her roommate.

Her time away from school helped her get focused and centered. PI learned to set achievable goals. She stuck with lower level classes and got off academic probation.

83. A class that she took from a new instructor really inspired her. It was her favorite class because of the instructor and the fact that it was a discussion class.
although it was still lower level, but it was the only class I really wanted to go to and it was like we had this big circle. We just discussed things. I'm a talker in class, I mean it just drives me crazy if I can't talk, because I have so many comments about stuff. So yeah, so that class really got me, like it was my one social work class, so I was like YES./

So, was the first class that had ever really....?

P1:  84. Oh, yeah, ignited me? Or whatever? Definitely, I really enjoyed that class, like I don't even remember what else I was taking, like econ or something, but either way, this was THE class that really, well, I was thinking about social work from talking with my roommate and this was my first class and wow, this was great, this was it, I could get this workin' for me.

Uh huh.

P1:  Yeah, this is what I want to do and I got an “A” in that class which was huge for me.

Yes.

P1:  I've always done pretty well in things that I've liked, but it was all the other subjects that I didn't like or that I was horrible at that, well, but yes, I really liked that class. It was in my major, so like YEAH./

So, your first semester back...did you...how did that turn out?

P1:  85. I think I got an “A”, probably like two “B’s” and a “C” or something like that..../

How'd you feel then? Your

This class hooked P1 into her major and confirmed her choice in a positive manner.

84. This social work class was the first class that really ignited P1 in college. It made her feel great.

P1 got an “A” in this course. That was a big deal.

P1 does pretty well in courses that she likes and this course confirmed her major selection.

85. P1 did pretty well her first semester back, getting mostly “A’s” and “B’s” and one “C” for grades.
parents...your brother...your sister...?

P I: 86. Well, my sister wasn’t, she was still kinda (wishy-washy sign). Yeah, she’s been really busy doing her own thing and I can’t really blame her for that. Water under the bridge or whatever. But my brother was really proud of me, like he said “oh good job, cool” and my parents were really happy, and they were like, “okay now from here....you gotta keep going up and doing like this” and so, yeah, that was really good./

So you had a complete turnaround after your time off.

P I: 87. Oh, yeah, complete. No going back. My study habits are a lot different, like./ 88. last semester, cause I hadn’t been taking my Ritalin for awhile, it just wasn’t doing for me what I wanted it to be and so I was, cool I grew out of it, you know. It was the end of last year, I just didn’t take it as much and then, all through the fall, I didn’t take it. Like, this last semester was really hard, really challenging, but I got my best, the best grades I’ve ever gotten in college./

Sounds like you work well under pressure?

P I: 89. Yeah, so yeah, I’ve always sort of done well under pressure so that’s really good and this semester has been a lot, has been really challenging also and/ 90. I haven’t been able to deal with the stress as well as I have done in, well, before, so I started taking, um, I talked to my doctor at Curry and they decided that Adderol might be a little better for me versus Ritalin, because Ritalin is really for a younger population. So I started taking Adderol and that’s really helped me out over the last couple of weeks, because I was like, well, I don’t know what wasn’t clicking with me

86. P I’s success is still hampered by relationship issues with her sister but she’s letting that go. Her brother was proud of her grades and her parents were happy and encouraging.

87. P I is a changed student with different study habits.

88. She had stopped using Ritalin for a while because it wasn’t doing what she hoped. She was pleased to think that she’d outgrown her ADD.

89. P I reports that she can often do well under pressure. This semester has been really challenging.

90. She hasn’t been dealing as well with the stress lately, so she met with a doctor and decided to try Adderol. It is a Ritalin equivalent medication that works better for adults.

Taking Adderol has really helped her out. She’s clicking better than in the first part of the semester.
the first part of the semester but it just wasn’t, I mean I wasn’t doing well at first. I mean, somethings I was doing well in but yeah, I’ve been taking that, the Adderol, the last couple weeks and I’ve been doing better. Yeah.

You ever ask for help with this, here, perhaps extra...

P1: 91. No, I never have registered for disabilities, like for extra time. You know, it was never like test taking, I guess I get a little anxious when it comes to math, that is one thing that, like I would rather eat something totally disgusting than take a math class (laugh)...if I had that option, I would. But, uh, I don’t have much anxiety during tests. It is just getting me to sit down and study, like actually quality, like not just sitting and staring and not actually reading anything. So studying was really more my issue more than test taking, so I never, I probably should have, you know, registered with Disability Services because they have some good benefits but uh I never did.

So when you think about your study habits, what do you think works best for you?

P1: 92. For me, I’ve kind of got, well, I can’t study in my own house...like pretty much in social work is like writing papers or responses, whatever. So, I go to the library or like Liquid Planet. I pretty much need to go somewhere to study by myself or if I study with someone, I really have to be like “don’t talk to me”, but maybe like talk for a second, but for the most part I go somewhere and study by myself. It doesn’t have to be quiet or anything, but just a place where I can have, like, my water or something to drink, a computer and my books. Nothing really specific, other than I turn my cell phone off and try to eliminate

91. Despite her learning disabilities, P1 has never registered for disability support program. She doesn’t need extra test-taking time.

92. In order to focus, P1 doesn’t study at her own house. She goes to the library or a coffee shop and studies by herself.

Math is a concern for her. P1 doesn’t have test anxiety.

Her biggest issue is getting quieted down and focused for studying.

She admits that it would probably have been a good idea to register with Disability Services because of their benefits. But, she hasn’t registered with them.

She can sit with a friend to study, but there’s no talking.

Usually, P1 studies by herself in a place where she can have something to drink, access to a computer, and her book. Her study place doesn’t have to be quiet, but she turns her cell phone off and eliminates distractions.
my distractions and I try to focus as much as I can.

Sounds like you've figured the studying thing out. How about the social thing? You'd mentioned all your rafting and hiking – the recreation of your freshman year.

P1: Well, no, uh (blows nose from cold virus) ... I bet that will sound great on your tape recorder (laugh)

Ha ha ha.

P1: 93. Well, I've always liked to, we've always done like camping and hiking and like that as much as we could but I feel like, this last fall, we did a lot of football games more - I'd never been to a Griz game until this fall. So, I mean like all my friends have work and stuff and so, I mean sometimes there's a pull, like if it's someone's birthday or something like that, but it is really my own discipline and if I have time. Like sometimes, I say oh, I can do that tomorrow morning and I'll go out or I'll go on a hike or play with the dogs instead, but I really try to balance it as much as I can. I know I can't do everything. But, boy, freshman year, everything was so new I just wanted to do it all. / 94. Like I've never done that hike and I mean I've never lived anywhere near the mountains, and then with the deaths, like Josh passing, I just wanted to be outside/ 95. and school was not a priority now that I look at it./

P1: 96. But, yeah, it's really my own balance right now, what I can do, and now I feel like I'm so swamped that I really can't go hiking or anything as much as I want to. It's like I have so much work, I have so much school,/ 97. and I'm starting Big Brother and Sisters this week - I mean there's so much to do I would like to do all those things but, you know, oh well./

93. P1 has learned to balance her social life. Rather than hiking and camping, this fall she and her friends attended the football games.

Sometimes she's tempted to participate in a friend's birthday but only if she can spare the time.

She works her play into her schedule.

P1 has learned that she can't do it all. During her freshman year, everything was so new that she wanted to do everything.

94. Being new to the mountains as a freshman, she loved to hike. Also, being in the outdoors was a comfort during the string of losses that year.

95. When P1 reflects, school was not a priority her first year.

96. P1 takes responsibility for balancing activities now and she is so dedicated and has so much schoolwork that recreation comes last.

97. She wants to participate in so many activities that she realizes she has to choose carefully. She's going to devote some of her spare time to volunteer
Yes, I know. Well, I think I have the picture. Anything else, when you think back to that time, that you haven't mentioned?

P1:  98. I don’t think so. Obviously, my parents were supportive and my brother and sister were supportive…but, like, I think that the shameful part, like the fact that I was so embarrassed about it I kind of outgrew because no one really knew about it. My close friends knew, so I wasn’t too embarrassed and then once I got back into school and did well, I had the esteem to say, like, “well you know, you remember that semester I took off…it wasn’t my choice” and a couple of my friends were all, like “really?” People were surprised that I can be so carefree about it and I’ve now told all my friends that it was the best thing that ever happened to me, when I got kicked out of school, I had to see that I had screwed up and what if I had just slid by and he hadn’t given me that bad grade...I’d probably still be in elementary ed or like something worse could have happened later if I’d gone farther in school and then, if I didn’t want to do that, I would have had to start all over again. The fact that I started over when I was only a year, year and a half into school, well, I’ll only now have three more years./

You could go find that professor and say “hey, thanks for the bad grade”...

P1:  99. (Laugh) Yeah, oh right, like. Yeah, it sure sucked at the time but it was a good thing, good things came out of it. Definitely it was the best thing that could have happened./ 100. I mean, I feel bad because I know that one of my old roommates, she really wanted to take a semester off. She was just like “I need time to think and I just don’t want to do this”. She sounded just like me and her parents

98. P1 summarizes her college experience. She mentions the importance of her parents’ and siblings’ support first.

She outgrew her shameful embarrassment because she initially kept her suspension from most people. Coming back to school and doing well gave her the esteem to tell people the truth.

The carefree way that she speaks about her rough time surprises others, but she recognizes the positive effects of her suspension.

Getting that bad grade resulted in P1’s inability to just slide by in school and forced her to look for something to motivate her.

Without suspension, she might have continued her mediocre experience until something worse could have happened when she was further down the road.

99. P1 can laugh about the bad grade now, since good things happened as a consequence. The best things happened.

100. She has a former roommate who’s in a place similar to P1 back then. She wants to take some time off but her parents are not supportive of that.
were so anti...and I was just like “I’m so sorry”...I mean, my parents were dealing with this forced thing and they were like “you screwed up” definitely, but, like I’ve talked to them since and we’ve discussed it and it was the best thing that happened to me and my parents just look at it like (laugh) “well, you shouldn’t have gotten kicked out of school...” but I mean, that’s how they’re going to be about it. It’s just my parents./ 101. But in the last year, since I’ve gotten ten times closer to them and all I talk to them about is school. They’re like “hey, how are you?” and I’m like “there’s this project and this project” and my dad, when we talked to each other about a week ago, he asked me “remember when you only talked about your friends? And now, all I hear you talk about is school” and I told him that, well, it’s important to me now. It’s what I want to do./

**It is a choice.**

P1: 102. Exactly. Like before, it was do well for them, I mean I wanted to do well, but it was for my parents and so they wouldn’t be at my back, or to keep me being out here, but it was never doing it for me. That is the huge difference. They still get on my back sometimes, they are just like “do this, and this” and I’m like “I KNOW” and I tell them you know I’m not doing this for you anymore. That’s what I was doing before and that drove me crazy, because I was never doing good enough. Now, I’m doing this for me and my expectations are even higher. So they don’t need to tell me to do these things. I know what I need to do now and it gets frustrating because if I get a bad grade and it disappoints me, that’s way more harmful because it kicks myself in the butt way more. This is so important to me that I’ll be upset if I don’t do well on this and they never saw that about me./ 103. So we’ll have these little fights about them not

Even though she and her parents were forced into a situation, P1 believes it was the best thing. Her parents still joke that she shouldn’t have gotten kicked out of school.

P1 realizes that she thinks differently about her situation than her parents.

101. Her experience has brought her much closer to her parents. She talks to them about school way more than anything else.

102. P1’s motivation to do well in school has changed. Before, she wanted to do well to keep her parents off her back or to be able to stay here.

Now, she’s motivated to succeed for herself and that is hugely different.

Now, when her parents interfere or try to tell her what to do or how to do it, she tells them that this is her life, her responsibility. When she was trying to perform for her parents, she felt that it was never good enough. Now that she’s self-motivated, her expectations are even higher. Consequences are more disappointing and harmful now that they are her consequences.

103. P1 and her parents are having a happy struggle to define roles.
needing to tell me these things and my mom says that she’s so far away that she feels that she still needs to tell me these things. PI: 104. I tell her that I know and yet it’s crazy I have so much pride now in my work. Like before, it would be just get the paper done and turn it in and now, I tell myself that this isn’t the kind of paper I want to turn in. Now, that isn’t good enough, that’s not what I’m worth./ 105: It’s bizarre (laugh) because I never thought I’d have that type of...school...that I really want to do well in this.

Yes.

PI: 106. So I think that the combination of finding a good major, you know, and literally being on my own for a while did the trick, it was huge.

All right, I think we’re done here.
PI, Level Three (Narrative based on Emergent Themes)

PI went through a hard period when she was placed on academic probation at the end of her first year of college. As a freshman, she lived in the Jesse Hall dorm and was a major in elementary education. She wasn’t really into school then. There were many reasons why PI failed as a student when she came to college. She was busy meeting new people and new things in a new environment. Being new to the mountains as a freshman, coming from Chicago, PI loved to hike. She remembers talking to her parents during this first year, telling them about going camping here and going hiking there. PI’s parents would wonder about PI’s classes. PI’s parents wanted her to be more interested in classes since they were spending so much money on her schooling.

Even though PI’s sister had advised her to be sure to go to classes, if nothing else, PI just did not attend some of her college classes. All of her classes were general and paying attention and doing the work was difficult. They were mostly big classes with no attendance requirements. PI figures that she attended about seventy-five percent of the time. Also, the type of study required every night was impossible for PI. Most of her classes had two exams and a final for the grade. This is difficult for PI, as she does better with regular assignments, but instead, she was expected to read on her own and prepare for an exam that covered six weeks of work.

In addition to several heated arguments with her parents during her first year of college, PI suffered much loss as well her freshman year. In October of her first semester, a good friend died back home and PI couldn’t attend the funeral because it was too expensive. She also lost her grandfather that year. There were about eleven deaths of people she knew in her hometown her freshman year. The loss of her friend, Josh, really hit her hard. PI started thinking that we don’t know when we’re going to die, so we might as well have fun. This was good in some ways, but bad for PI’s schoolwork. Being in the outdoors was a comfort for PI during this time.

As a punishment for being on probation and until she could bring her grades up, her parents wouldn’t let PI live off campus, so she had to live in the dorms again as a sophomore. So, she lived in Duniway Hall with a roommate in a similar situation. They lived in very close quarters in a single room that was doubled up. They partied too much and didn’t do any school work. She was put on academic suspension because of the freshman partying going on in the dorms. She had already had her freshman year and didn’t want to do it again. The dorm was aggravating and loud. It was hard to study and PI wasn’t all that into her classes, since she wasn’t enjoying her studies in Elementary Education which made it hard for her to keep going. She didn’t have a car either, so it frustrated her that she couldn’t visit her off-campus friends. It was not a good time for her. Around this time, PI started working at Food for Thought. This helped her structure her time, it really did wonders that way, but it wasn’t enough. Always in the back of her head, she was thinking that if she didn’t get her shit together, she was going to get kicked out of school.

At the end of that fall semester in the dorms, she checked with all her teachers about the grades she was getting to see if she would meet the level that was okay. Things seemed great but she was barely slipping by with a “C” in a couple classes. She thought things were fine when she went home at semester break. Then, she checked her grades. It said “academic suspension” and everything hit a wall for PI. She couldn’t believe this
had happened, because she had checked everything and knew she had just slipped by. PI started emailing her professors because she did not want to tell her parents. She didn’t want this to happen because both her brother and sister had had academic difficulty in college when PI was younger.

PI knew that her brother chose not to go to school for a while, but not because of his grades. PI’s sister hadn’t been doing well, so she took some time off and the parents cut her off. PI had talked to her sister about this and remembered it being a really stressful time for her. All this scared PI; she was very scared. She kept emailing her teachers but didn’t tell her parents for probably a week. PI did confide in her sister because she was so freaked out since she was going to school so far away from home. Unlike her sister who had gone to school in Iowa, which isn’t too far from Illinois, PI thought she had so much time invested that she didn’t want to leave UM to move back home to Chicago.

Even though PI kept telling her parents that she hadn’t gotten her grades yet, none of her teachers were emailing her back since it was over the winter break. However, PI’s mom walked in on her when she was emailing a teacher. PI just broke down. She told her mom that she’d found out her grades the week before. It surprised PI that it bothered her parents that she hadn’t approached them with her problem and that she’d tried to hide it or fix it on her own. Her parents said she could have come to them from day one, but PI hadn’t wanted to do that. Since the end of her rebellious teen years, PI normally shares her problems with her parents and they are good about things.

But, this situation was different for PI. She was embarrassed and so ashamed of what she’d done. She knew her grades were her fault. PI has always had low self-esteem surrounding grades and school. She has covered this up by making jokes and telling white lies to her friends about test grades. PI’s parents never set grade expectations since they had lots of difficulty in school, too. But they always wanted her to do the best that she can and to take pride in her work. However, PI had found it really hard to keep going in school, since she wasn’t enjoying the elementary education major as much as she thought she would. Since she didn’t have a good feeling about herself as a student, also not having a strong direction gave her an excuse for not doing well.

But, her parents surprised her. She thought she would get yelled at and then they’d be okay and work something out. Instead, it seemed that PI’s mother felt bad or sorry because she hadn’t told them about her grades. They were just very supportive of PI when PI discussed her situation with her parents. PI’s African American Studies professor had told her she had a “C” but he actually gave her a “D”. She tried to contact him by email, but not in person, about the grade mishap but he never got back to PI. Even though PI doesn’t believe she should have gotten that “D”, she certainly wasn’t doing well in school and she wasn’t happy.

PI’s parents treated her the same as her sister. They were not going to support her if she wasn’t in school. She was given the options of returning home to take classes or work. Or, she could pay her own rent and support herself otherwise. PI was not at a point in her life where she wanted to live with her parents again. She also knew if she moved back home, her friends would know that she got kicked out of school.

PI was very secretive about her suspension at first. Only one of her college friends knew and only four of her really close girlfriends at home knew. She told everyone else that she was taking some time off since school was getting a little rough.
She made up a whole fabrication about how her parents would pay half of her rent and she’d pay the other half and just hang out. The story became so easy that she even started to believe it. So, really only a few of P1’s girlfriends and her sister knew the truth. Even when questioned by a disbelieving Missoula friend, she stuck to the story that she wasn’t sure about her major, that her parents would rather have her take time off to make some decisions rather than heading in the wrong direction. Despite the fabrication, P1 did use her time off to look at what she wanted to do since elementary education wasn’t where she wanted to be.

P1 returned to Missoula in spring 2003. When she came back, she moved into her friend Margaret’s apartment where she had dropped off her belongings before winter break. It was really exciting to be back. While P1’s parents were supportive, they were not going to help with money unless there was an emergency. P1 was excited and scared because she’d never supported herself before, never even paid her own cell phone bill. P1 asked for full time hours at her job as a waitress at Food for Thought; she thought she could pick up another job as well.

P1 started getting to know her other roommate, Hillary, who was a Social Work major almost ready to graduate. As P1 and Hillary got to know each other, P1 learned that Hillary had also taken some time off school when she was a sophomore but she ended up graduating in four years anyway because she doubled up on some of her credits. In Hillary’s description of the Social Work major, P1 learned that it is about helping people. P1 had selected the Elementary Education major because she loves working with children and wants to help kids. P1 was motivated to be a good teacher because of her experience with ADD; many of her teachers put her down because she had a hard time with spelling and was dyslexic. Since some of Hillary’s Social Work classes and projects sounded interesting and inspiring, P1 decided that she wanted to go into Social Work as well. She felt that she found her niche and wanting to help people is now her goal.

But, P1 was barely supporting herself. She earned $6.25 an hour and after paying rent and expenses, she literally had nothing left. One month when P1 was writing out her rent check, she realized she was sixty dollars short. She couldn’t understand what happened. Every once in awhile she would get a six-pack of beer or, if she had an extra ten bucks, she’d go to the bars. At this point, P1 had lived on her own for about three months and she was really proud of herself. Also about this time, P1 wasn’t getting the support from her sister that she wanted and she was trying not to lean on her parents at all, knowing that they would use the “tough love” philosophy on her. Even though, in the past, P1 had always pretty much butted heads with her brother, she talked to him about this problem. He was a huge influence since they were just then forming a bond and she was really in need. She couldn’t talk to her friends about this because none of them knew the real story about her situation. P1’s brother convinced her to talk to her parents. They sent her a check right away, while reminding her about managing her money.

At this same time, P1 was growing apart from the sister she’d been really close to all her life. Her sister had just graduated from college and was starting a nine to five job. She knew her sister was busy, but she really craved her support since her sister had gone through the same experience. Her sister had initially been encouraging, telling P1 not to worry about her situation and that things were not impossible. But later, P1 wasn’t getting the support that she wanted from her sister. She didn’t have much contact with her and she felt betrayed because she called her sister a few times but her sister didn’t call her
PI is bitter about this time with her sister. She has always looked up to her and felt that they were close despite the four-year difference in their ages. PI was always just missing the stage her sister was going through when they were growing up. When PI was entering high school, her sister was leaving; when PI started college, her sister graduated. PI feels that she supports her sister during difficult times regardless of what’s going on but her sister didn’t support her when it mattered.

PI’s relationship with her sister continues to be a sore spot. She recently brought her feelings up to her sister and her sister told PI that she didn’t mean to leave PI like that. While she can understand that her sister is very busy with her new career, her boyfriend, and her other pursuits, PI would have done things differently if their roles were reversed. PI is still upset that she and her sister are not as close as they once were and she still believes that her sister could have made more of an effort.

PI is very proud of the six-month period of time when she supported herself doing the work thing. It was empowering and difficult, both. PI really couldn’t see the value of the experience until her parents were helping support her again. Then, she was thrilled she’d done it. Many of PI’s friends come from very wealthy families, so they would not have even had to do something like this. There were times when PI could not do some things with her friends because she needed her money for rent. It was not easy.

PI went home that summer and worked at the recreation center where she’s worked before. Everybody asked about her semester off and PI said that it had been great, that she’d gotten everything figured out, even though she wasn’t certain about being a Social Work major yet. PI and her roommate Hillary had communicated over email in the time after Hillary had graduated and before she went to Thailand to do AIDS relief work. They talked a lot about the Social Work major, some of Hillary’s classes and projects, and her career interests. This information was interesting and inspiring to PI.

PI’s drive to go into Elementary Ed had been because she loved working with kids and she wanted to help kids. Also, she herself had ADD and dyslexia and had had a hard time with spelling. So many of PI’s teachers put her down, which was the worst thing for them to do. This also was behind PI’s drive to be a good teacher. Since she learned from Hillary that a major in Social Work is pretty much about wanting to help people, which is similar to teaching, and PI had not been happy in her Elementary Ed classes, she began to consider Social Work for her major.

PI’s interest in Social Work started to gel the week or two before she came back to school in late August. The whole time she was thinking about it, PI would think “I’m going to be doing what my mom does.” This was both funny and shocking. PI’s mother was never one to bring her work home with her, even though the family would hear about some case once in a while or they’d hear the office phone ringing in the middle of the night. But, there was never much attention drawn to the fact that her mother was a social worker who owned her own business. It was no big deal. But, when PI was trying to figure out what she wanted to do and realized that it was basically social work, she told her mom. After her initial surprise, PI’s mom thought that it made sense since she knew that PI was a caring person and liked being with people.

It was interesting for PI to have a major in mind and it was also scary starting back to school again. PI’s academic reinstatement process was easy. She talked to two different people and remembers meeting with the dean. They recognized each other from Food for Thought, where PI had worked as a waitress. The dean confirmed that PI had
stayed out of school for one term. All in all, reinstatement was easier than processing her major change and finding a new advisor in her department.

Back in school, P1 moved into a house with some people she didn’t know well since her other house living experience had worked out great despite it being kind of random. An early concern was that a couple of her roommates had been the rowdy, rowdy people in her last stay in the dorm. But, P1 was in a better stage. She was happy to be back in school, having been out for six or seven months by then. Although there were some early clashes about having people over when P1 was doing schoolwork, these roommates are still P1’s really close friends. She even tried to impart upon them, since she was a year ahead of them in school, that there’s a real need to focus on studies and sure enough, the next year they understood about the third year getting hard.

Eventually, P1 started telling people that she had gotten kicked out of school. A couple people, and especially her friend Owen, hadn’t believed P1 the first time. He knew she wouldn’t just drop a semester all of a sudden, but P1 kind of had to make up a story. When P1 looks back on the experience, it was the best thing. Being completely on her own and supporting herself gave P1 the downtime to really think about what had gotten her to this point. She thought about what could be done to change things back to where she wanted to be in school.

P1 had talked to her dad and told him that she didn’t want to be a waitress for the rest of her life. Her dad asked P1 what she thought her grandmother, her father’s mother who’d worked as a waitress for forty-five years, would have done with a college degree? P1 had decided that she wanted to go back to school and didn’t want to give up any more time.

Once P1 started getting motivated to return to school, the support from her parents started coming. When P1 first told her parents that she wanted to be back in school, her mother reminded her that she’d encouraged her to take a year off between high school and college and P1 hadn’t wanted to do that. If she could go back in time, P1 still doesn’t think that taking that year off would have made her happy, since she was ready to leave home for a new life in Montana. She’s glad she didn’t take a year off, despite messing around her freshman year. P1 met great people she’s still friends with and she had good experiences outside of the classroom.

P1 was greatly motivated by having social work as her new direction. She wanted to do well for the first time. Through grade school and into high school, P1 had always had low self-esteem when it came to grades. She got through by joking about test grades and sometimes lying about them to her friends. In college, the fact that she didn’t have a strong direction had given her an excuse for not doing well. When she was kicked out of school, P1 was forced to take stock in her life. Even though parts of her experience working and supporting herself had been fun, like not having homework and being done once work was over, it was trying to have to get up every day to go to work and not being as carefree as her friends who were getting checks from their parents.

Back in school, a class that P1 took from a new instructor really inspired her. It was her favorite class because of the teacher and also since it was a discussion class. They would sit in a big circle and just discuss things, and P1 loves to talk up in class. This social work class was the first class that really ignited P1 in college and it really connected her to her major. She got an “A” in this course and that was a huge deal for
her. PI tends to do pretty well in courses that she likes and doing well in this course helped confirm her major selection.

PI is a changed student with different study habits now. She has taken Ritalin from time to time for her ADD. She first took Ritalin as a sophomore in high school and it really helped her. PI had stopped using Ritalin for a while recently, because it wasn’t doing what she hoped and she was pleased to think that that she’d outgrown her ADD. PI didn’t take Ritalin even through last fall and it was a very challenging semester. She got her best grades then. While she can often do very well under pressure and this semester has been really challenging, PI has noticed that she’s not dealing as well with stress lately, so she’s decided to try a different medication, Adderol. It is a medication like Ritalin that works better for adults. Taking Adderol has really helped PI out; she’s clicking better now than in the first part of the semester.

Despite her learning disabilities, PI has not registered for the disability support program although she admits that it would probably be a good idea because of their benefits. But, she doesn’t need extra test-taking time nor does she have test anxiety. Math is of concern to PI. Her biggest issue is getting quieted down and focused for studying. To do this, PI doesn’t study at her own house. She goes to the library or a coffee shop and studies by herself. She can sit with a friend to study but there’s no talking. Usually, PI studies by herself in a place where she can have something to drink, access to a computer, and her books all around her. The place doesn’t have to be quiet, though she turns her cell phone off and eliminates distractions.

PI has also learned to balance her social life. Rather than hiking and camping, this fall, she and her friends attended the football games. Sometimes she’s tempted to participate in a friend’s birthday but only if she can spare the time. PI always schedules her play into her schoolwork schedule and she’s learned that she can’t do it all. During her freshman year, she got into trouble because everything was so new that she wanted to do it all. Now, she takes responsibility for balancing activities and PI is so dedicated and has so much schoolwork that recreation comes last. Since she wants to participate in so many activities and is going to devote some of her spare time to volunteer activities, PI knows that she has to make careful choices on how to spend her time.

PI can easily summarize her college experience. She acknowledges the importance of her parents’ and siblings’ support for her first. PI outgrew her shameful embarrassment over initially keeping her academic suspension from most people. Coming back to school and doing well has given PI the esteem to tell people the truth. The carefree way that she now speaks about her rough time surprises others but PI recognizes the positive effects of her academic suspension. Getting that one bad grade resulted in P1’s inability to just continue to slide by in school and it forced her to look for something to motivate her. Without suspension, she might have continued her mediocre experience until something worse could have happened when she was further down the road. PI laughs about the bad grade now, since good things happened as a consequence.

PI’s parents still joke that she shouldn’t have gotten kicked out of school and she realizes that she thinks differently about this situation than her parents. This experience brought P1 much closer to her parents. She talks to them about school way more, now, than anything else. Her motivation to do well in school has been changed from wanting only to keep her parents off her back and be able to stay here to being motivated to succeed for herself. That is a huge difference. Now, when her parents interfere or try to
tell her what to do or how to do it, she reminds them that this is her life and her responsibility. When she was trying to perform for her parents, P1 felt that it was never good enough. Now that she’s self-motivated, her expectations are even higher and consequences are more disappointing and harmful now that they are her consequences. P1 is bizarrely surprised that she is as invested as she is in her schoolwork and the quality of her work.

The key to P1’s college success is a combination of finding a major and having to make it on her own for a while.
Appendix E

Participant 2, Levels One-Three
P2, Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

Can you describe a time when you were thinking about your college experience, the low points and then the return to good standing, and talk about this for me?

P2: (laugh) Okay, do you want me to give you my name and all that stuff?

No, oh, no. I've got all that. Thanks. I just want you to talk about your experiences at the University...

P2: Okay.

...your academic difficulty and then your turnaround.

P2: 1. Okay! Ummmm, probably, I’ll go ahead and start with my first semester, when I was just starting out./ 2. Probably, like all students when they are first starting out, you’re kind of eager to get in there and, because it’s brand new and you’re excited and stuff. At least that’s how I felt./ 3. Um, then about, well, I was doing fairly well, um, obviously it’s kind of, it’s a little overwhelming at first, the classes and things like that....

Did you come to college right out of high school?

P2: Yes, uh, NO, I took a semester off and I came in at spring./ 4. So, uh, and then, um, I think about...about a month into school and I (very softly) found out I was pregnant. And so, um, that’s pretty much where the trouble began! (laugh)...was when I got pregnant because I was extremely sick. Um, and, I know, most women just experience like a little

1. P2 begins by talking about her first semester, when she started college.
2. Like all students starting college, P2 was eager to get going and excited at the new experience.
3. While initially doing fairly well, college was a bit overwhelming at first, despite having delayed college entrance by one semester.
4. P2 discovered that she was pregnant about a month into the school term and she started having trouble due to severe pregnancy illness. P2 was living at home with her parents and experiencing terrible morning sickness up until the day she gave birth. She threw up most of the time. The medications prescribed...
morning sickness and things like that but I had it really bad, um, really badly and it was even until the day I gave birth And, I mean, I lived with my parents and so, I mean, I was just sick all of the time, just throwing up all the time, I couldn’t, most the time, my doctor, well I had a nurse/mid-wife, and she would recommend like just taking, like, um, medications, but because the medications for the nausea, well, the side-effects were sickness, were nausea and vomiting, so it’s like, what’s the point? (laugh) So, mostly I just took like sleeping pills and stuff like that and I slept most of the time and if I wasn’t in class, I was sleeping because that was the only way that I could get away from it./

5. But the best time of day was right in the middle of the day, around lunchtime, I was okay just for a few hours in there and um, I had, most of my classes were in there and I did okay in some of the classes but, like, it was a little bit hard just because of...let’s see I was in English 101, which, most, like, officials in the School of Ed and all like that, they really look at your English comp grade – and I got a “C” in there, which, I was, I was actually pretty close to failing, but, the teacher, you know, he was pretty....I mean, he still pushed me but he was understanding and we worked some things out so I ended up with a “C” in there. But, my problems really started from there because I ended up with....um...I ended up with an “F” that semester, which, um.......

In what?

P2: It was, uh, er, oh, I can’t even remember what class it was, it wasn’t even a class in my program, it was just something that I had to take to fill out my credits and luckily, I went and talked to that teacher and because I was really sick and I never went to his class, he just made

by her nurse/mid-wife were ineffective. Sleeping medication allowed P2 to get away from the ceaseless vomiting, so she slept much of the time except for a few hours in the middle of the day when the vomiting abated.

5. Most of P2’s classes were scheduled midday, so despite struggling with an English composition course, she managed to do pretty well. She failed one course. She talked to the course instructor about her reasons for lack of class attendance and he changed the “F” to an administrative “NF” so she could drop that grade. She chose to come back the following fall semester even though she was quite pregnant by then.
it (the grade) an “NF” so I could just drop it. So, things went OK but not great that semester and then, um, that fall, um, I chose to come back and I was still pregnant and I did fairly, I still did fairly okay and I think, um, a lot of times, it’s kind of like, um, kids in elementary school, when they have, when they’re having a lot of family problems or problems in their home life./

P2: 6. Like, they tend to come to school and they don’t do very well? I think, uh, um, a lot of it, my life then, it was a little bit on the rocks but towards my later pregnancy I can really see that, why I did really good that semester, um, because, I had like just “A’s” and “B’s” and like one “C”. I did fairly well, being like nine months pregnant that semester – that’s pretty crazy! But, my home life was really good. My daughter’s father and I were living together, we were living with my parents and we had my parent’s support to help us when we were, um, having our personal problems and things like that and I had them to support me, too, because I was so sick, and... That summer, they said, you know what, we want you to stop working. We want you to come live with us and so I did and they were supporting me, which that help and that support in my family life made it a lot easier to focus just on school. So I wasn’t working at all, I was just focusing on school. And then I had, my daughter’s father and I were really close and things were going really well. I could see my grades were super good and it was great! And then.....kinda that spring after my daughter was born....I took the next semester off after my daughter was born and then that summer I went back and that, um, that time period in there, that summer and that fall were my worst because, well, having a new baby and adjusting to motherhood! /

7. That was my downfall with school, my academic downfall was, well a little bit of when I was pregnant and

6. Her fall grades were surprisingly good and P2 explains that, just like kids in elementary school whose behavior often reflects what is going on in their home life, P2’s home life during fall semester was quite good. She and her unborn child’s father were living with her parents and her parents helped mediate when her boyfriend and she would struggle. P2 got help and support from her family during her physically exhausting pregnancy and finally, her parents insisted that P2 quit working so that she could focus better on her schoolwork. All these variables contributed to the positive outcome of her second semester.

7. When P2 delivered her baby, she took the next semester off but returned to college in the summer. She credits
being sick but then mostly after my baby was born I was adjusting to her. Things were really stressed between her father and I and that made it really difficult. We moved out from my parents into our own place, which, so then we had more financial stress, we had more personal stress and we weren’t having that extra support from my parents to kind of keep us together and keep us, you know, it’s like we’d fight and my parents would calm us down and they’re really, they’re not, they wouldn’t side with me at all and they sit us down and remove all the fuss and help and, well, be like a mediator, basically...

Yes, right, that’s gotta be helpful...

P2: 8. In all relationships, kids bring a lot of stress into your life and we had her and then living on our own, it was financial stress, it was our stress and school and I was just, that summer, all that stress I wasn’t into the books at all, and so I was on, totally confused, but I was on probation and suspension and all that because I dropped a class. 9. I know that you’re advised to drop if you’re doing really bad, but if you get financial aid, then, you’re in trouble there and (sigh) but, those summer courses, it was way too much to try to take...and those were the first summer courses I’d taken, too! So, there was...

Summer is a whole different ballgame.

P2: 10. Exactly! So much more information, such a shorter period of time...and I mean, my new experience with that and I didn’t have...like right now, you know, because I’ve had academic suspension and all that and I have, um, now since autumn, P. as my advisor, she’s more, and, uh, because she’s a special advisor, she’s very knowledgeable about classes, the stress of the pregnancy as well as the subsequent adjustment to motherhood as contributing factors in her academic career. P2 and her boyfriend also moved out of her parents’ house and the additional financial and personal stress and lack of her parent’s influence affected P2’s schoolwork.

8. During this time period, P2 was so distracted by the stress of making a home for herself and her boyfriend, adjusting to motherhood, and trying to manage financially that studying and homework took a backseat.

9. P2 made a mistake by dropping below the number of credits required for her financial aid package during summer school that resulted in financial aid suspension in addition to academic suspension.

10. P2 learned how difficult summer session can be during her first experience taking summer classes. More information is covered in a shorter amount of time, making summer classes quite challenging. Summer session coupled with motherhood and relationship issues was very stressful.
about problems.

11. She informs you about future things, things you should think about for the future. The advisor I had before was just a peer advisor and I know that they can only do the best that they can and I'm not complaining or anything but I didn't have somebody that I have now, who's like I mean you have a child and you've got to really think about the overload this semester and you've got to think how your classes are really compacted – you've got lecture classes for which there'll be a lot of reading and there's a lot of reading in some of these history classes and I wasn't really knowledgeable about any of that. I didn't know, so here I loaded on like three classes in one summer and that's a lot when you've got a brand new baby! And you've got your family problems and you've got all this reading....

Did you ever consider not keeping on going to school, um, when you had the baby? You were just thinking that you were going to have a family and need to pursue a career, sort of full steam ahead?

P2: Yeah, for me.

For you, okay.

P2: 12. And I know that not all women think that way when they have a baby and they have a family, they are maybe more likely to give up their, you know, their college and just, or for awhile and just take care of the baby...

But you wanted to keep going?

P2: Yeah, I sure did.

How about the baby's father? Is he a

11. One good thing that came out of P2's summer experience and resultant academic and financial aid suspensions was her assignment to a new advisor who knows about resources, appropriate course and credit scheduling, and is aware of the challenges of being a mother.

12. Despite the challenges and stress, P2 was committed to continuing her college education and did not consider taking time off to devote herself to being a mother only.
student as well, or...

P2: He’s not, no he works.

Okay, alright, keep going. I just wanted to clarify that part of...

P2: 13. Yeah, yeah, I know. That’s kind of weird but I do have a pretty strong will as far as school.

Yes, it sounds like you do. I’m getting that picture.

P2: 14. Well, I mean, that might not be very informational because (laugh) you’re (laugh) trying to understand how people are, or why they do it or whatever, I mean I don’t know why I... I just have this strong... I want to get done and I want to have that underneath me. I don’t want to ever, I mean, these days, I just see how it is, you know, it’s just kind of coming about in our generation how you see how if people don’t have that experience (college) they can be old and have nothing, I mean, be old and be on the street (laugh).

You know the value of an education and you were intent on...?

P2: Exactly.

Okay.

P2: 15. Exactly, so um, that’s kind of where I started to fall apart and a little bit that fall, too. It was, just... all that stress, but (sigh) then I’m not really sure, just, um, I think it definitely helped having, um, a more, um, experienced advisor now, because she kind of, um, I mean she’ll just make me aware of problems that might come up or she gives me more realistic goals. Especially, because she has kids, she has TWO so she knows...
(laughter)...(faintly) all about all that stuff.....Um, so that helped. And then also just knowing that.....I had her on time and...um, I mean...you can’t keep screwing up, you’ve got to...I mean, you make a mistake...but if you want to strive, if you want to strive for something, they’re willing to know that you made a mistake and that’s okay, uh, something happened in your life, but all you can do is get up and try over again./ 16. Because if I kept, if I kept things as they were, I mean, I wouldn’t get my financial aid, I wouldn’t be able to keep...you know what I mean? So, I know what I have to do.../

Um hum. So let me see if I’ve got this straight? You, uh, you went on academic probation at the end of summer or were you suspended at the end of summer? Do you remember?

P2: I, um, er, I’m not sure I really remember (faintly)...

Okay, well, let’s, let’s, you know, that doesn’t actually really matter. Whenever you were suspended, let’s go there and ponder that moment. How did you find out and what did you think about then?

P2: (pause)

Maybe you got a letter in the mail....

P2: 16. Yeah....I think I got a letter. Oh, I’m bad at remembering this (laugh).

That’s okay. You opened the letter and read it and you sort of remember thinking?

P2: I just thought that, like, I screwed up, and that I was going to get kicked out of school because I don’t know how

16. P2 knew that if she didn’t take active and appropriate measures like seeking academic reinstatement and appealing for financial aid, she would not be able to continue to pursue her college degree.

P2: 16. I just thought that, like, I screwed up, and that I was going to get kicked out of school because I don’t know how...
everything works, so I honestly just thought that I screwed up, I wouldn’t be able to come back, and I wouldn’t be able to get financial aid...

I see.

P2: 17. And the thing is, really, is that if I don’t get financial aid, then I can’t go to school. I mean, even if I didn’t get all of it and I had to put in a little bit, that probably would be okay but the fact that they pay, that the Pell Grant pays for such a large chunk...there’s no way! Like, I can barely do it, just go to school, as it is, let alone have to pay for it, too.

**Having to work or whatever to support it?**

P2: Right, exactly. And for a while, then, my daughter’s father and I split up and we live separately, oh, in the past couple...two years...oh, almost a year and a half now. We lived together for about six months after my daughter was born and then we got separate, we’ve been separate since then and, um, during that time when we were separate, um, my student loans went to things like RENT and things like that. There was a little while in there when I wasn’t working when we lived together. He was working and supporting me while I went to school and so that’s how I did it. So there’s no way (laugh). But, definitely, when I found out, I thought “okay, this is it...I don’t have a chance” but...(sigh)/

**What did you do?**

P2: 18. I...well once I found out and I called and figured out what I had to do....

For things like reinstatement? Is that when you were assigned your new advisor?

17. P2 realizes fearfully that in her circumstances, receiving a financial aid Pell Grant is the only way that she’s able to attend college.

18. Once P2 faced her fears, she was moved to action. She made some calls to find out what she needed to do to return to school.
P2: Um, I'm not sure if that's when they gave me to her, like, right away...or, no, I think, uh, I think right when I first got on academic, er, is it probation?

**Academic probation is the first step...**

P2: 19. Yeah, academic probation. So I was on probation first because of my grades, um, and then I think they reinstated me...and everything was okay, and then I think, I believe it was that fall again, and I'm not exactly sure if...I was either in trouble because...I think it, I don't think after that point there was any trouble because of grades, I think I just, I would...I dropped a class and that put me two credits too short, which, then I got into financial aid trouble...

**Right. Got it.**

P2: So, you know, I thought if I'm doing bad just dump a class, but then, you know, if you go below 12 credits, then you're in trouble with financial aid.

So then....

P2: So then I had to get reinstated for financial aid, I had to do that too. And that was that fall, I believe.

**Okay, okay.**

P2: 'Cause I knew there were like two semesters, I think it was that summer and that fall...I think it was just that summer and that fall where I got into trouble. First it was with my grades and, um, then second was with, when I was dropping below...even though I was doing well...and, um, so I think after that, I was given to P. (new advisor)./

**Okay.**

19. P2’s early troubles were over grades. Later on, she got in trouble with financial aid for a failure to meet the minimum credit requirement. As a result, she learned about the University system and minimum requirements for good academic as well as financial aid standing. She went through both academic and financial aid reinstatements in order to return to college after the two semesters, summer and fall. Something good came from her struggles. She now has an excellent advisor to help and support her.
P2: 20. The thing about it is, too, is that there's little things, you know, little things like “NF's”! You just go pay ten bucks and get that off...I mean, how are you supposed to know that? (laugh) I mean, I just used to think oh, I got an “F” and I'm screwed, but you can...

Chalk it up to part of what you learned in college (laugh)!

P2: Yeah (laugh), no kidding. I mean, when I first came to college, I had no idea even, I mean, what a syllabus was, I mean, I'm like “a syllabus?” I had no idea, a syllabus (laugh). I mean, little things like that or like, for the exam you need a scantron, like what is a scantron? I had no idea (laugh)./ It is sort of like moving to a different town and having to find your own way around.

P2: 21. Exactly! (laugh) I didn't know that and then P. (advisor) and I...what helped is that I repeated a psych class...in the summer, I guess is was that summer of, I guess it was the next summer that I repeated that class that I had done bad in...oh, I'm sorry, you know what, that psych class was in the very first semester, when I was really sick. And, it was a night class.

Oh, no, your first semester?

P2: And that's why, I mean, I was terribly sick and I couldn't go. So that was the only one, the other ones that were in the middle of the day I was okay with, but that night class, that wasn't. The “NF” which I dropped, so I took care of that and then I had that “F” which she just told me I could repeat and then pay the $100 fee to replace it.

21. P2 suddenly remembered that in her first semester, when she was so sick, she had gotten two “F's”. One was an “NF” which she found out she could drop completely off her transcript by paying a $10 fee. The other “F” was in a psych class (a night class she missed a lot due to her pregnancy illness) that P. advised her to repeat and replace the grade by paying $100. This grade replacement effectively returned her to good standing.
the grade and that brought me back up and I've done that. So, did okay with those and then, of course, as far as financial aid, um, I just can't go for only those 12 credits. So, if I'm kind of experimenting I need to go beyond 12 credits and then I can maybe drop a class that's rough for me or you know, something like that./

Correct, yep.

P2: 22. So, there's other versions.

So, do you feel like you’ve figured out some of the...well, to recap, it sounds to me like your college troubles, the “rough patches” you mentioned, haven't really been due to academic issues as much as your pregnancy sickness and your adjustment to motherhood, having issues in a relationship, and, um, those kinds of things keeping you from being the student you know you can be and now you feel you've got a more stable situation going as well as more experience in college ways like where to get the blue books and scantrons and keeping the right credit balance for financial aid?

P2: Yeah, yeah, I'm comfortable this year. 23. I mean, I think just like everybody else that even wants to do good, I think it's still challenging and, especially being a mom is really challenging...and being a single mom is really hard, I mean. I mean, I know that, yeah, we get extra help so in a sense, you know, probably other students...I know I have friends who say “yeah, but you’re really lucky, you don’t have to work and you have school paid for” and I know there’s that but think about this, that after school every day you have to go home and you have to study for a test. Well, I don’t have that luxury of just going home and studying for the test, I mean,
yeah, if it’s a big test, you’re right, I have the support. I can say hey mom, I have this big test coming up and can you watch her but not for every little thing, every piece of homework or every time I have to come on campus to, I mean, I don’t have a computer at home so if I have do something and I need the library, I can’t just bring my rowdy little two-year old into the library (laugh) and start working away on the computer. All those little distractions like that.

Yeah.

P2: 24. And I do have support, you know, like my mom watches my baby anytime, um, you know, and I have friends who will watch her if I have big things. But I save that for the big things, you know, when I have a big study day or finals or midterms or whatever but not on an everyday basis and they do pretty much expect you in college to do, put in some effort at home every day of class. But that’s not, that’s totally unrealistic...like I can’t, like my daughter is impossible sometimes and not to mention that I’m exhausted. I mean, I get up and fight with her every morning... (laugh) I mean, she doesn’t want to eat breakfast, she doesn’t want to wear that, she wants to wear a dress or she wants to wear her pajamas and we have to fight about that (laugh). By the time I get her off to school, I’m late for class...every....day, if I have eight o’clock classes. Which sometimes is the only way it fits if I have to nanny too./

Right, right.

P2: 25. So, I definitely have those little problems on a daily basis.

So, how do you do it? How? How do

24. P2 realizes that other’s help and support are crucial to her continued success in school and she recognizes that she has to pick carefully when she solicits help. As a result she’s got more distractions to manage if she has assignments due or computer work to be done on campus. P2 admits that she cannot spend the daily amount of time required by some classes because of the demands of her daughter and the judicial use of her support network to help provide relief.

Due to her daughter’s school schedule, P2 is late is 8:00 a.m. classes which sometimes interferes with taking required courses as well as her schedule as a part-time nanny.

25. Due to little problems every day, P2 reports that she is barely able to cope sometimes. She cries. Her mother helps by taking the baby.
you....cope?

P2: (laugh) I don’t.............
(whisper)...(laugh)...

Yes?

P2: I cry! I cry (laugh) and I call my mom and say “boo hoo hoo...can you take the baby?” (laugh).

You’re not living with your parents, you’re on your own?

P2: Um hum. Right. Um (sigh). I think, well, my daughter’s father and I are together, we just don’t live together. Because, we want to get healthy and happy in our relationship before we add another part. 26. So, other than that, um, I definitely have more support and that’s just recent, like in the past two months. So, I guess I can tell that there’s a lot less stress in the last two months because he helps with her, like he picks her up from school and helps with a lot of that. But I’m telling you, if you were just a single mom and you had absolutely no family or like the man, the father wasn’t in your life, I don’t know how you could do it. Especially if you have more that one child! But, you know, if I didn’t have that....and you know, I do. I have my parents and him and they’re only encouraging me to go to school and making me feel good as a mom. They give me a lot. And I think having that is great. I think people who don’t have that support, well, I don’t know how they do it, I mean, what’s the point?/

26. P2 reports that things are improving. She has her own home with her daughter. Things are improving in her relationship with her daughter’s father and they are working on a healthy, happy relationship. He’s helping out with the daughter. She feels tremendous support from him and her parents. They encourage her school attendance and make her feel like a good mom. P2 is keenly aware of the need for this kind of support and encouragement and wonders what people do without it.

Do you think your experience of what you’ve gone through in school, having had academic stress and having to figure out the financial aid stuff and having had to figure out how to be a single mom...well, what do you think that’s
done to your life?

P2: 27. I'm like a different person. Definitely.

How do you think you’re different?

P2: 28. I'm, er... I'm definitely... well, it's kind of funny actually. If I bring it up or something with my mom and she told me that I'm not more mature and more grown up just because I had a baby but like actually just like in the past two years, I mean it's not being pregnant and giving birth, it wasn't that. It was actually when you're adjusting to a child or dealing with a child. I think, I mean I'm not saying that everybody grows up when they have a child but I know for me, my mom said it's not just my being pregnant and my having given birth but it's just in the past year and a half or so that she’s really seen me just grow up. And, I have. I have. It's really funny. It's like I have a totally different outlook on... you just become more knowledgeable about what you want in your life because you have to figure it out. I know everybody goes through that but I feel like I have it figured out! This is what I want to do with my life: I want to go to school and I have these goals and I’ve kind of set more of a plan. 29. Not like when you first enter college and you're kind of like well I don’t really know what I want to do and I’ll just start going and we'll see where it goes from there (laugh). But I know having a daughter, I’ve kind of figured out better where I want to go, what I want to do and I'm thinking into the future more. Like, well if I become a teacher then this will work out good or I'm looking at social work too because I'm sort of interested in the counseling aspect as

27. P2 thinks she’s a different person. Not the physical pregnancy or birth, but the adjustment to a child and the daily dealings with a child have matured her. P2’s mother has commented that she’s really seen her grow up.

28. P2 reports having a different outlook on life because she’s had to figure things out, about what she wants to do with her life. Her daughter has made her think into the future more about where to go and what to do.

29. P2 compares herself now to when she first entered college, not knowing what to do and being pretty relaxed about waiting and seeing what happens. Now, she knows what she wants, she has goals, and she’s set more of a plan.
well, so, I’m just kind of thinking ahead you know. And I don’t know, just me as a person, you know, like my beliefs./ 30. Without getting too deep, it’s kind of like I’m starting to think about what I want or more like what I expect to have in my life and in a relationship. It’s kind of like I’ve figured out who I am more, so...

You seem to be pretty well pulled together as a young woman.

P2: (laugh)

When you got that nasty letter in the mail that said we’re kicking you out of school, think back to that moment. What effect did that message have upon you as a person? Bother you? Or did you just think that here’s a problem to solve?

P2: Yeah, more like a problem to solve. I mean, I was scared. Scared to death./ P2. 31. But, I mean, I’m a little, I’m pretty laid back. I’m one of those kind of people where yeah, if I have a problem, I’ll cry or maybe I’ll get mad and scream but for the most part in life, I’m...my personality and all that, as a mother, as a girlfriend, as a friend I’m very relaxed. If something comes up, I’m like yeah, it sucks, but what can you do? All you can do is go take care of it and see what comes out, what is meant to be is meant to be and that’s just how I am as a person so...so I mean I was scared to death and I was oh my gosh and I wonder if they’re going to take me back and, but, I thought all I can do is call and see what I can do to fix it and I thought, you know, because I’m pregnant, I mean, I think they’ve got to give me some sort of help. I mean I have a doctor and I’ve been to the doctor and I could get a doctor’s note. Things like that. So I knew it wasn’t the end of the world and I could fix it. (laugh).

30. P2 says she’s figured out more who she is, what she wants, and more about what she expects to have in her life and her relationships.

31. Despite getting the suspension letter in the mail and being really scared about being kicked out of school, P2 reports that she’s pretty confident and relaxed with her way of handling problems. She faces them straight on and she expects that most anything can be fixed. She believes that some things are meant to be and all you can do is try your best.
Do you remember when you went in for reinstatement? You must have talked to somebody in the dean’s office...in the LA Building?

P2: 32. Um, yeah, I believe, uh, yeah, exactly. I talked to a man.

Do you remember being nervous about that meeting or were you of that same mindset about whatever is meant to be?

P2: Um (pause), well, uh, not really, I mean. I was just, well, I truly believed that the dean isn’t out to kick you out of school. He’s out to make sure that you’re making progress in school, that’s all. And I knew that whoever I had to talk to had to understand that I was and had been very sick and I had gone to my doctor several times to get the kind of medication that could help. And my doctor was really helpful, she was my doctor on campus and she wrote me a note and said that she would talk to them if they needed more information./33. But, you know, he was really nice about it and I thought, you know, if I go in there, because I think that people are really appreciative if you are really personable and honest, and so I thought if I go into meet with the dean and I really tell him about my feelings and how my life is going, I think he really appreciated that I went in there and was really honest about my personal problems and I was honest about my pregnancy and I was really honest and personal.

Sounds like it was a pretty positive experience.

P2: Yeah, oh yeah!

Did taking a semester off come up as an

32. P2 remembers talking to a man in the dean’s office for reinstatement. She wasn’t nervous since she believed that a dean would want her to do well, improve, and make progress. Her pregnancy and medical history was evidence for another chance.

33. P2’s attitude about asking for another chance involves the belief that being personable and honest is the best path for seeking help.
option?

P2: 34. Yeah. I thought about it. (sigh). It's just that... I thought about it but the thing about it is, I don’t know I’m just not one of those who can not, it just kind of bothers me that, I mean I just like to, I mean even this semester, I don't like having problems but it's just, I did really good last semester and I almost got straight "A's"...

Congratulations!

P2: I had all “A’s” and one “B” and then (big sigh and pause)...oh, that’s not entirely correct, I also had a P/NP grade but that’s not included in your grade point, so anyways. This semester I’m not doing so great but... but I didn’t take a break because I was feeling like it would be a waste of my time and I want to get, I want to move forward. It just seems like I’ve been a freshman for EVER and I’ve been a sophomore for EVER and now that I’m just finally (laugh) a junior, it seems like I’ve got so far to go (laugh). And I mean if you aren’t in school, and like your friends are in school and they’re all like I’m taking finals and I’m like it’s over already?? It flies by when you’re not in school. Time goes by so quick and when you’re in school, it seems to drag by a little slower because you’re putting in all that effort and working but I was just like there’s so much time and so many credits and time off would be time that I could be completely things and the faster I’ll be getting out of school (laugh).

So you’re close to applying to the School of Education?

P2: Yes, P. (advisor) and I have been working on that aspect and there’s ways of having my application accepted sooner than I thought, so that’s good.
Very good. Very good. So, you’ve been very helpful. Thank you. Is there anything else about your experience that you want to share with me or do you think we’re done?

P2: 35. I don’t think so….I had some problems and I still have daily small problems but I think I’m definitely a stronger person than the person I was before I became challenged with those problems, I mean, I’m very strong now because I’ve been through so much emotional…and I’m an extremely emotional person. I’m telling you what, I mean I know women are emotional but I am so emotional I’m ridiculous (laugh). I mean, I’ll cry and cry and my mom will say, okay, you got it out, now breathe and let it go (laugh). I’m very emotional. So, I think it definitely made me a stronger person becoming a mom but I think as far as school, I think I’m a little bit more knowledgeable and stronger too, to where I can say “you know what? That’s really all you can do – just try to do the best”. And definitely a big part of not (undecipherable) too, would be that support./

Yeah.

P2: 36. Especially now, that I’m doing well. I rely, I rely on my family, and my friends, and on my boyfriend…I rely on him to keep it going. It is sort of that feeling, like when you put a lot of work into a school project and you get a good grade and you feel like just wow! It is that same feeling that I get, when I have the support and I do well. I have people come up to me and tell me what a good job, whether it is in school or class, or as being a mom or a friend. And people say wow, you do all that AND you’re a single mom? And you go to school? And you work?

35. In summary, P2 recognizes that despite the daily hassles and other eventual problems, she is a much stronger person from the adversity she’s encountered. Even though her character is to be emotional, she’ll cry and get it out and then continue. Being a mom has made her stronger and she feels more knowledgeable about being a student, like knowing when to say she’s done the best she can. She acknowledges the importance of a support network.

36. Doing well in school and as a mother has given P2 a strong sense of pride. She appreciates that others recognize how difficult being a single mom and a student is and this helps her keep feeling like she can do it. College has been a very good experience.
They just can’t believe it and it makes me feel like “yes, I can do this?”

Superwoman!

P2: Yeah, it feels very good.

Super. It’s been a good experience for you, all this work.

P2: Yeah!

Well, good. I think our work here is done. Fabulous.
Like all students starting out in college, P2 was eager to get in there because it was brand new. Though doing fairly well, all the classes and stuff were a little overwhelming at first, despite the fact that P2 had taken a semester off and started school in the spring.

P2 found out she was pregnant about a month into school, which is where her trouble began. P2 was extremely sick with her pregnancy and, unlike most women who experience a little morning sickness, P2 had it really bad, even until the day she gave birth. She was throwing up all the time and the medication her nurse-midwife recommended had side effects of nausea, so P2 found relief in sleeping pills. To get away from the morning sickness, P2 slept most of the time when she wasn’t in class. Her best time of day was the few hours around lunch time, which is when most of her classes were.

In P2’s first semester she struggled with the English composition course but her instructor was understanding and, while he pushed her, they worked some things out so she got a “C”. P2 failed one course but spoke to the teacher about the reason for her absences and this grade was change to an administrative “NF” so that she could drop it. So, things went okay, but not great, in P2’s first semester.

P2 chose to come back in the fall. She was still pregnant but, because her home life was really good, she ended up doing good. That seemed pretty crazy to her, but P2 compared her experience as similar to kids in elementary school who don’t do very well in school when they’re having problems in their home life. Even at nine months pregnant, P2 did really good that semester because her home life was really good. She and her unborn daughter’s father were living together with P2’s parents. They had her parents’ help and support when they were having personal problems and they supported P2 because she was so sick. In addition, that previous summer, P2’s parents wanted her to live with them and stop working, which she did. So, she wasn’t working at all and that support in her family life made is a lot easier to focus just on school. Also, P2’s daughter’s father and she were really close and things were going really well. Her grades were super good, which was great. It also helped to have the baby on time.

The early spring after P2’s daughter was born, she took the next semester off. She went back to school in the summer. That time period, that summer and that fall, were P2’s worst because of having a new baby and adjusting to motherhood. P2’s academic downfall was a little bit of being sick with the pregnancy but then mostly the adjustments after the baby was born. Things were really stressed between the baby’s father and P2. They had moved out from her parents into their own place, so they had more financial and personal stress and weren’t having that extra support from P2’s parents to calm them down and be like mediators when they’d fight. With all the stress, P2 wasn’t into the books at all and she was totally confused that summer and fall.

Along with the adjustment to the baby, the personal and financial stress, and her own confusion, P2 was on probation and suspension because she dropped a class in the summer. Common advice is that if you are doing really bad in a class, drop it. But this gets you into trouble if you have financial aid. It was P2’s first experience with summer courses and she found that there is much more information to learn in a shorter period of time and she took tried to take way too much. One good thing right now is that, because of her academic suspension, P2 has an advisor who is a retention coordinator and who’s
very knowledgeable about classes, problems, and things to think about for the future. Now with a child, P2 needs someone who can help her really think about classes. During that summer, she had taken three classes with a lot of reading and since the classes are more compacted, she was overloaded with them, the brand new baby, and the family problems. That summer and a little bit that fall, P2 started to fall apart. But, it definitely helped having a more experienced advisor now, one who makes her aware of problems and who gives P2 more realistic goals. Her advisor has two kids, so she knows all about it.

P2 knows that some women who have a baby and a family are more likely to give up their college for a while to just take care of the baby, but she sure wanted to keep going. P2 has a pretty strong will as far as school, even though this may not help explain how or why struggling students finally succeed in school. P2 doesn’t know why, but she has a strong wish to get done with school and have than underneath her. In these times and coming about in this generation, P2 just sees how if people don’t have college they can be old and have nothing.

P2 knows that it is okay to make a mistake, to have something happen in life. But to strive for something means that you can’t keep screwing up; you’ve got to get up and try over again. P2 knew that if she kept things as they were, she wouldn’t get her financial aid and she wouldn’t be able to keep being in school. While P2 had difficulty remembering the details of her suspension, she remembers thinking that because she didn’t know how everything works, she was afraid that her screwing up would keep her from coming back to school or getting financial aid. The reality is that if P2 doesn’t get aid, she can’t go to school. As it is, her Pell grant pays a large chunk and P2 can barely just go to school, let alone having to pay for it.

P2 remembers being really scared, almost scared to death over her suspension. She didn’t take it personally, but more like a problem to solve. She figured that all she could do was see what she needed to do. She figured that, with having been pregnant, she could get a doctor’s note or something like that. P2 figured that it wasn’t the end of the world. P2’s personality is pretty laid back. If she has a problem, she may cry or get mad and scream, but she knows that all one can do is go take care of things and see what comes out. She thinks that what is meant to be is meant to be.

P2 talked to a man in the dean’s office for reinstatement. She truly believed that he wasn’t out to kick her out of school, but rather he was out to make sure that she was making progress. She knew he would understand about her sickness and medication and P2’s doctor was helpful about writing her a note. The dean was very nice about it all. P2 thinks that people appreciate someone who is personable and honest and that’s how she was when she met with the dean. Even though suspended students are encouraged to take a semester off, P2 thought it would be a waste of time. She has so much time and so many credits to complete that time off would not move her forward.

Along with academic suspension, P2 was also suspended from financial aid when she dropped a class that put her two credits too short. P2’s new advisor has helped her with some of the things that college students need to learn about college, things like how to replace a grade or petition for financial aid. These things have helped P2 return to good academic standing. She’s also learning “other versions”, other ways of being successful in college. Things like picking courses and credit loads carefully and knowing better the requirements of financial aid make a big difference.
P2 is getting more comfortable with being a college student and single mom. She has different challenges than her single friends who aren’t eligible for financial aid, and more and different distractions because of her commitment to her daughter’s care. P2 faces multiple, little problems every day, such as being exhausted and having to fight with her daughter about what to eat for breakfast or what to wear to school. P2 is often late to class after getting her daughter to school. She recognizes childcare help from her mother and some friends is crucial to her continued success in school, but most days aren’t easy and some days she cries and has to call her mom to take the baby.

Things continue to improve. P2 and her daughter’s father are together, but not living together. They want to get healthy and happy in their relationship before adding another part. In the last two months, her daughter’s father has helped out more with the baby, like picking her up from school. P2 feels strong encouragement from him and her parents for going to school. They make her feel good as a mom. P2 doesn’t know how other single moms or people without family support can do it.

P2’s experiences over the past several years have made her feel like a different person. Her mother told her that she’s not more mature and grown up just by having a baby or by being pregnant and giving birth. She’s more mature because of the actuality of adjusting to a child and dealing with that child every day. P2 has a totally different outlook on life and she’s more knowledgeable about what she wants in her life because she’s had to figure it out. She knows what she wants: she has goals, and she has more of a set plan. Compared to first starting college, not really knowing what she wanted to do, and kind of waiting to see what would happen, P2 has figured out where she wants to go and the thinks into the future more. Without getting too deep, P2 is becoming clear about her beliefs and she thinks more about what she expects to have in her life and in a relationship.

Right now, it feels like P2 has been a freshman forever and a sophomore forever; she feels that she’s got so far to go now even that she’s finally a junior. P2 has had some good semesters with almost straight “A’s” and some semesters where she’s not done so great, but she’s working with her advisor on ways of having her application into teacher education accepted earlier, so that’s good.

P2 reflects that her problems and her continued small, daily problems have challenged her to be a stronger person. She sees herself as a very emotional person, so emotional that it is ridiculous, but being a mom has made her stronger. Being in school has made her more knowledgeable and stronger too; she has learned to accept that just trying to do the best is really all she can do. A big part of P2’s strength comes from the support from her mother, actually both of her parents, her friends, and her boyfriend. She relies on this support to keep going. P2 gets a good feeling when she puts a lot of work into a school project and she gets a good grade. It is the same good feeling that she gets when people are amazed at what she does in school along with the fact that she’s a single mom with a job. This helps P2 feel like “yes, I can do this!”
Appendix F

Participant 3, Levels One-Three
P3, Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

[Statement of research question.]

Okay, let’s set forth.

P3: 1. I guess the place when I really realized I was in a bind was when I had to pay for a semester of college on my own because I get Voc Rehab, uh, because of, um, post-cancer treatment that caused me to have some learning difficulties./ 2. So, last fall I ended up losing Voc Rehab (funding) because of academic suspension and, uh, for two semesters in a row, and I also took the fall before that off./ 3. I started to realize that I needed to change and it wasn’t going to happen. At that time, my major was math and computer science. And, the change wasn’t going to happen with that because I realized that I just didn’t enjoy the aspect of working in front of computers for eight hours a day without human interaction./ 4. So, I looked at my life goals and realized that I needed to make a difference, especially in children’s lives. I spent the last two summers working with children and it is a real rewarding experience working with children, so I made the switch to elementary education./ 5. That gave me a push, a motivation to succeed. So, last semester I worked extra hard and ended up making the Dean’s List, which was very rewarding. I remember prancing around the house, showing all my family and relatives my report card, er, essentially I printed off my transcript to show them that I got a 4.0 (gpa) last semester./ 6. I felt like I, since I was a freshman in high school, I’ve never achieved that before./

Hmmm. Tell me a little bit more, if you

1. P3 realized he was in a bind when he lost his Voc Rehab college funding for post-cancer learning difficulties and had to pay for a semester of college himself.

2. P3 lost funding due to academic suspension. He missed three semesters of college.

3. He realized a need for change and knew that he wasn’t going to be able to change anything with his math and computer science major. P3 wasn’t enjoying full days of computer work without human interaction.

4. P3 reviewed his life goals. He wanted his work to make a difference. His two summers of rewarding experience working with children helped P3 decide to switch his major to elementary education.

5. Changing his major motivated P3 to succeed by working harder. As a result, he was rewarded by making the Dean’s List and showed his 4.0 grade point average to family and relatives.

6. P3 hadn’t done so well in school since he was a freshman in high school.
feel comfortable, about your cancer...

P3: 7. When I was 11 years old, I had brain cancer and the post...they tell me that the post-cancer treatment of radiation has destroyed parts of my brain, particularly with memory and my ability to learn past a certain point on mathematics and stuff like that. 8. Beforehand, I was like this intelligent student, the type of young child who never missed a day of school because they enjoy it so much and then, after...I mean I never struggled, and after it (cancer), everyone started to match my ability and.../

Oh..

P3: 9. ...and I started to get discouraged.../

When was that?

P3: When they started to match my abilities?

Yes.

P3: 10. About my sophomore year of high school when I started to see people coming up to where I was, um.../

How, er, what, uh, what did you think or feel about that?

P3: 11. Well, I kind of was upset because I was always the smart kind.../

Smart kid or smartest kid?

P3: 12. The smartest kid, I was always the smartest kid and to see everyone catching up and passing me, especially in math, which is my pride and joy, and not understanding why.../ I got discouraged and started relaxing in my studies and not...
really caring about education anymore./

When you say you didn’t understand why, was this before you understood about the side effects of the radiation...

P3:  13. They always told me that it would happen, but I always disbelieved them because I was doing just fine in junior high and the later years of elementary school and then to have it happen so suddenly, with trigonometry especially. Part of it, I think, was that my teacher was not a very good trig, trigonometry teacher so it was harder for me to grasp the concepts from him, um, also calculus in high school, the teacher was not very good so the concepts were new to me, whereas in geometry and algebra, well, I’d been working on them in grade school because I was so advanced in math./ 14. Um, English has always been a hard part, and I was really surprised over the last two semesters getting “A’s” in both ENEX 100 and ENEX 101 because they are the most difficult classes for me so...

How do you think you brought that about?

P3:  The “A’s”?

Yeah.

P3:  15. I think a lot of it was class participation because we discussed in class what we were supposed to read the night before./ 16. Also, just being open in my writing and apparently I’m a fairly decent writer and I was surprised to learn that because I always understood myself to be a horrible writer./

From high school teachers?

P3:  17. They were very negative in the

13. P3 had been told what would happen to him academically but he hadn’t believed it. He’d continued to do well in school until he suddenly noticed changes during sophomore year. He could still justify his trouble grasping trigonometry and calculus because his teachers weren’t very good and the concepts were new. Prior to these courses, everything he studied in math, like geometry and algebra, he’d studied in grade school because he was so advanced in math.

14. Although English has always been more difficult for P3, he is surprised that he’s been getting “A’s” in the past two semesters in college composition courses.

15. P3 attributes his recent “A” grades in writing courses to his participation in the in-class discussion of reading assignments. 16. Perhaps being open in his writing makes him a decent writer even though that surprises him. He always understood himself to be a horrible writer.

17. P3’s high school teachers focused on
aspect of, you need to work on that, or you need to do this better, instead of, hey, good job with the thesis. 18. So both of my last two TA’s or graduate students who’ve taught the classes here were very supportive instead of the “you need to work on this” or “you need to do this.” They would comment to me on a good description and I really like that better, that learning, that helped me learn better. 19. And that’s one of the reasons why I changed to education because I felt that I could give a positive light on it especially in the elementary years and keep children enthusiastic about the subjects.

So, when you first came to school here as a freshman, you were enrolled with Voc Rehab?

P3: 20. Yes.

Because you might have needed some extra help due to the residual effects of the brain tumor treatment…?

P3: Yeah, and because I needed money to pay for school.

And, okay….so tell me about your freshman year?

P3: 21. Boy, it’s been awhile. Two years ago, I guess. This will be the end of my third year out of high school, so even though I’m 22, I started school at 19…my birthday is in January…./ 22. I guess my first year as I look back at it and all I remember about it is being unsatisfied (sic) with my major but being forced into deciding what I wanted to do… kinda by Voc Rehab because of the way that their program is set up. You have to name what your goal is well in advance and work towards that, whereas, I was a 19 year old kid and I’m like I don’t really know…I
guess I’m interested in computers and math, so I made that my goal. And, I don’t feel I was in a position to make that decision but I was forced to make it./

23. For the first two years of college, that’s what I had to deal with and it was my understanding that I couldn’t change it…/

Oh, yep…

P3: 24. Um, so after I ended up getting on academic suspension and having to pay a semester on my own, I changed it (major) and told them that I still could use their help but that I definitely couldn’t complete it in computer science, I just wasn’t interested. So, we started a new plan and hopefully I’ll graduate in fall of 2007./

Tell me more about your working with Voc Rehab…I’m assuming that they did some testing to determine your...

P3: 25. They never really did tests on my educational ability or anything. They took it from the medical records because I’d done countless tests to see what the radiation had done to my ability to learn. So they took that information and went off from there./ 26. The main thing that they did the second time was we created a new plan, a new agreement, and really was only authorizing an extra year of Voc Rehab (funding) because now I have to take an extra year in college because I’m so behind in the elementary education coursework./

Did your advisor help you put together your elementary education plan, or how did that happen?

P3: 27. She wasn’t my advisor at that time. I didn’t officially switch to elementary education until just before last fall, so I’ve only met with her twice, I
Okay, all right. Can you talk a little about the point at which you got the letter informing you about, or about the time that you realized that you were sinking into academic probation or when you saw your grades and went “ow”...

P3: 28. The (laugh) first time I realized I was sinking was spring 2003, when I looked at my grades and realized that I’d only passed five of my 13 credits and that I had failed two classes and I’ve never failed a class...

never failed...have you ever gotten below a “C”?  

P3: 29. I’d never gotten a “D” and that was a huge surprise, especially my COMM 111 class, that’s intro to public speaking, because I did speech and debate four years in high school and I just didn’t think I deserved an “F”./ 30. I understand that I didn’t go to class as often as I should have, but I still...

Was attendance part of the grade?  

P3: 31. It WAS a part of the grade but I did everything above average on the speeches and so I was a little confused, especially since I later retook that class and put just a small amount more effort in and I got an “A”. So, I questioned whether or not I deserved that or whether or not I earned that “F”./ 32. The other “F” was in calculus which ... surprised me and didn’t surprise me. I should have probably started with applied calculus, the 150 class instead of the 152, just to get back into the swing of math because I didn’t take math my senior year because I’d already completed all the levels of math that I could in high school.

32. The other “F” in calculus was more or less expected. P3 thinks he should have started in a lower class, the 150 instead of the 152 for a bit of review, as he hadn’t had math since his junior year of high school. He had completed all possible high school math courses but P3 speculated that he might have taken a calc course at Montana...
school. I guess I could have taken a calc
course up at Montana Tech. / Did you take our mathematics placement
exam?
P3: 33. Yes, and it placed me in 152... /
Did you, when you discovered yourself
struggling, did you talk to your teacher,
look for a tutor, or...?
P3: 34. I, well, it was really foreign to
me at the time because the first semester
was pretty easy and laid back and I didn’t
need to go talk to anyone./ 35. I also kind
of felt a big distance between the
professors and myself./ 36. They were hard
to approach and I really didn’t learn to
approach them until my ENEX 100 course
and she was very approachable and then
they... /
That’s a small class...
P3: 37. Yeah, a small class, that’s... in
looking back on it, that’s one of the things
that I regret about my decision to come to
such a large college, the large classes./ 38.
If I made that decision now, I’d probably
go to a smaller, out of state college, just to
get the classes no bigger than 30 people.
That kind of atmosphere./

Right.
P3: 39. I guess back to when I realized
that I was getting a .05 gpa for that
semester, it was (pause) it was just a hard
thing to accept and realizing that I’d
probably have to start paying back on my
student loans that I’d had to take out and
probably lose Voc Rehab./ 40. I went
away for the summer and worked at the
summer camp and I gave up and just
decided not to go back to school in the fall

Tech and avoided the “F” in calculus.

33. P3 did take the college math placement
test and placed into the calculus course he
took, 152.

34. Having had an easy and laid back first
semester, P3 hadn’t needed to talk to
anyone and it felt foreign to him.
35. He felt a big distance between his
professors and himself.
36. Because he found them hard to
approach, he didn’t learn to do this until he
discovered his ENEX 100 instructor was
very approachable.

37. When P3 looks back, he regrets his
decision to attend a large college with large
classes.
38. If he made that decision today, he
would go out of state to a smaller college
with classes of no more than 30 people.

39. Thinking back to the semester when he
got a .05 gpa, it was a hard thing for P3 to
accept. He realized that he’d have to pay
back his student loans and lose Voc Rehab
funding.

40. P3 gave up. He worked at summer
camp and because he didn’t want to explain
what happened to him to Voc Rehab, he
didn’t go back to school in the fall.
because I didn’t want to go to Voc Rehab and explain what had happened./ 41. I was afraid of what would happen./ 42. So I went and I visited with them in late November? They agreed to take, er, give me one more chance. In the spring of 2004./ 43. And so I did it one more time and I ended up only getting a 1.96 (term gpa) and I needed a 2.0 to continue being on…at that time, I was on academic probation and then I went on academic suspension./ 44. So, over that next summer I was also at the summer camp and I decided that then was when I really needed to change./ 45. I went back (to Voc Rehab) and they told me that they couldn’t pay for my fall tuition, so I took out a loan, borrowed some money from my dad, and worked 24 hours a week at Papa John’s to pay for everything else/ 46. and I just studied hard and stayed focused and ended up pulling things together and realizing that I was in the right place./

How did you do that semester?

P3: 47. That was the semester I got the 4.0…ahem./

Wow.

P3: 48. And (ahem) that brings us to the current semester which I anticipate making the Dean’s List or just missing it, perhaps a 3.4…/

Is the Dean’s List a 3.5?

P3: 49. Yes, it’s a 3.5…it depends on if one of my professors is using plus or minus grades or not (laugh). I’m taking 13 credits right now…/

Still working?

P3: 50. Yes, I’m working at Pizza Hut 50. P3 now works 20 hours a week at
now. It’s better pizza and a better place to work. It’s less corporate, more friendly to the consumers and the workers.

How many hours do you work?


Okay, well let me ask you this. When you got the letter of suspension or when you realized that things were sort of “tanking”, sounds like there was sort of a, like you had the summer to sort through things...one summer you decided not to come back to school the next semester, you took a break and then the next summer, you decided to take the bull by the horns and actively do something.

P3: Yeah.

How did you make those various decisions? Do you have someone you talk to?

P3: 51. Um (pause), well, I don’t really have someone I talk to, my mom doesn’t even know that I took a semester off, she doesn’t know that I basically failed out of school...

But your dad knows? Didn’t he pay...

P3: No, not even, I (laugh), I (laugh)...

Okay, what was your cover story, I want to hear this (laugh)?

P3: 52. (laughing) ...okay, my story was that, uh, that basically my student loans did not cover my tuition and I didn’t make enough for the summer. I probably shouldn’t have worked at a summer camp (laugh).
Yes, but you are getting used to the educator’s salary (laugh)

P3: 53. Yeah. I only needed to borrow like $600 from him. That wasn’t a big deal for him./

53. P3 only borrowed $600 from his dad, which was not a big deal for him.

Do your parents ask how you’re doing?

P3: 54. Generally, yeah, my dad knows if I’m calling him it is (laugh) usually a call for money./

54. P3’s parents know about him in a general way and his father knows if he’s calling, it’s for money.

So who’s your champion in life?

P3: 55. My champion? Like, what do you mean by that, just…?

55. Mostly, P3 is pretty much on his own.

Who? What’s it all for? Who’s it all for or do you feel that you’re pretty much on your own?

P3: Yeah, for the most part./ 56. I strive and work more for the future goal in my life, to be an educator, to be successful, to have a good family and that’s another reason why I chose education is because family is very important to me. I know I’m going to want to have children and even though I know it’s not going to be great amounts of money to raise children with, I feel that the time spent with children is more, you’re more able to do that as an educator than compared to a computer science major./ 57. Um, I also do a lot of it and work really hard to…one of my big motivators is my best friend Shannon who (pause) just is this all around great girl who can do anything and I get motivated by her success and her belief in me and so, she helps me through a lot of it and I guess the person I do talk to would be her and she understands that I, you know, I didn’t go back to school because I basically failed out./

56. P3 is motivated and works for the future. His goal is to be a successful educator and family man. Family is important to P3 and he knows he as an educator that he won’t have a lot of money but he’ll have more time to spend with his kids than if he majors in computer science.

57. His best friend Shannon also motivates P3’s hard work. She’s great and can do anything. Shannon’s belief in P3 and her success motivates him. She is the one person he talks to and she understands that when he didn’t go back to school, it was because he basically failed out.
You told her and she knew...

P3: 58. I told her and my girlfriend at the time who is my girlfriend now, so, and, um, the reason why I decided to take that semester off was just I really felt like I needed that year off of school to get motivated to do it again. 59. Um, and the reason why I decided to take the bull by the horns was, this last time was, that I knew if I proved to myself that I could do it and that I would be more successful in this major, that the next four years or three years of college would be more successful and easier, too, to sit down and complete everything that I need to complete.

Tell me a little about Shannon...is she here at UM?

P3: 60. No, she’s in Lewis and Clark in Portland, Oregon.

Oh, so she’s a high school friend.

P3: 61. Uh, huh.

How about your girlfriend.

P3: 62. She’s in Spokane and I met her through the camp that I’ve worked at the last two summers.

Gonzaga?

P3:  Whitworth.

So you’re here in Missoula pretty much alone?

P3: 63. I live with five or four other people, in a house down by the Albertson’s on south Russell...

Oh, yeah, there’s a lot of apartments around there. That’s a good living.
situation for you?

P3: 64. No, no, not at all, not at all. I don’t really know any of them very well at all. I’m an introvert in a way. I keep to myself unless I am in a group of friends that I’m very comfortable with and uh, I just need to live in a situation where I’ve been friends with the people first so that I don’t stay in my room and do homework 24/7 to the point of where I don’t need to do anything./ 65. Um, I need to be more sociable and it’s just too hard to do that in the situation I’m in and they also have a lot of, they hit a lot of my pet peeves that I unfortunately…like the freshmen who...66. first off, the house is owned by the grandparents of two of the roommates and they don’t pay anything, understandably, but they also weren’t very understandable that this is my house too because I’m paying $300 a month./
P3. 67. The freshman leaves a lot of notes around the house that if she finds something that she doesn’t like, she’ll leave a note instead of coming and talking to the three other people in the house and saying like hey, you know, um, would you guys clean your bathroom this week because my mom’s coming. She’ll kind of leave a snooty note and it’s just kind of like, you know./ 68. Before that, I lived in a fraternity. I lived in Phi Delta Theta. Um, and that’s how they would deal with things, but then again, there was 13 guys living in that house and it was hard to go tell everyone./

So, where do you spend your time?

P3: 69. I pretty much spend all my time in my room. We have wireless internet that I installed because I didn’t want to have to be in a central location, I wanted to be able to hunker back in my room and avoid them because I’m just that uncomfortable living

64. P3’s living situation isn’t very good. He doesn’t know any of his roommates very well. He is an introvert who keeps to himself unless he’s in a group of friends he’s comfortable with. He needs a living situation with friends so that he doesn’t stay in his room and do homework 24/7.

65. P3 needs to be more sociable, but it is hard to do in his current situation. His roommates hit on his pet peeves.

66. The house P3 rents is owned by the grandparents of two of his roommates. They don’t pay rent, understandably, but they aren’t understanding that he pays $300 a month, and it is his house, too.

67. The freshman leaves notes for the other roommates if she finds something she doesn’t like, rather than talking to them. She leaves a snooty note, telling them to clean up because her mother is coming for a visit.

68. Before this, P3 lived in Phi Delta Theta fraternity. They would deal with things the same way but there were 13 of them, making it hard to go tell everyone.

69. P3 spends all his time in his room. He installed wireless internet so that he wouldn’t have to be in a central location and could hunker in his room. He avoids his roommates and is uncomfortable living there.
So, will that be something that you’ll be working on?

P3: 70. Yes. I am definitely moving out right after this semester and I’m moving in with a friend of mine that I lived with in the fraternity. We’re going to go visit a place here in the next hour or so after this.

Good, great. I almost get the sense that you were an only child?

P3: 71. No, I have (laugh) a weird family. I have an older brother, a younger brother, a younger adopted sister, and they all live in Butte. And then I have a sister who lives in Seattle with my dad and step-mom and my mom is also a foster parent and so I have a lot of siblings that aren’t siblings that I consider siblings because they’ve lived with us for a long time. Um, they are like my foster siblings. 72. I’m the second oldest, even of all the foster kids. 73. And, ever since college me and my older brother have been great, we’re really good friends. He was a senior here when I came freshman year. We had a lot of fun, he kind of introduced me to a lot of people, a lot of things on campus. 74. Uh, he’s in grad, uh physical therapy graduate school down in Florida right now and I’m hoping this summer to make it down there to visit him. If not, he has an internship in South Bend and we’re both Notre Dame Fighting Irish fans and he has an internship in November and there’s three Notre Dame home games so I was going to go down then and go to a home game with him.

Oh good, did you say there was also a younger brother?

P3: 75. A younger brother, yep, he’s 15

70. After this semester, P3 will move in with a friend of his from the fraternity. They are visiting a place after this interview.

71. P3 has a weird family. He has an older and younger brother, and a younger adopted sister all living in Butte. He has a sister living in Seattle with P3’s dad and step-mom. His mom is a foster parent, so he has others he calls siblings because they’ve lived together for a long time, like foster siblings.

72. P3 is the second oldest, even of the foster kids.

73. Since college, P3 and his older brother are really good friends. His brother was a senior here when P3 was a freshman. He introduced P3 to a lot of people and things on campus.

74. P3’s older brother is in physical therapy graduate school in Florida now and P3 hopes to visit him this summer. If not, they’ll visit when his brother is on internship in South Bend and go to a Notre Dame home game together.

75. P3’s younger brother is a 15-year old
and a sophomore in high school./

Sounds like you mother is pretty much into kids.

P3: 76. Pretty much her work is foster parenting. She injured her back a long time ago, about ten years ago, while working at Rivendell, which is a psychiatric hospital and so she can't really do any physical lifting anymore. It's hard for her not to be able to do any physical work./

Hmmm. When you were first diagnosed with your tumor, this is really jumping around so please forgive me...

P3: Okay.

I wanted to follow up on this....what did your, what was the effect of your illness upon your family?

P3: 77. Well, it was fairly traumatic. My dad had cancer just after I was born, so it was not something new to all my relatives but to have something so young./

78. I remember the drive back from Helena where I first saw the neurologist, I just remember both my grandparents were there, both my grandmothers were there and my mom. It was kind of silent and traumatic but it wasn't until I saw all three of them crying at the same time and I was just like...ummmm.../

You were young.

P3: 79. I was eleven years old, so my only question to my mom when I found out – we were big fans of, uh, Rescue 911 – (laugh) at the time, and I said does this mean I get to be on Rescue 911? (laugh). I was just immature and not understanding what it meant at all./

76. P3’s mom works as a foster parent. She injured her back about 10 years ago while working at a psychiatric hospital in Butte. She can’t do any physical lifting anymore, which is hard for her.

77. P3’s illness was traumatic. His father had cancer right after P3 was born, so that wasn’t new to the relatives but having something so young was.

78. He remembers driving back from the visit with the neurologist in Helena. It was silent and heavy until P3 saw both of his grandmothers and his mom crying at the same time.

79. P3 was young, only eleven. He wondered if his illness would mean he’d get to be on Rescue 911, since his family was big fans. He was immature and didn’t understand what it all meant.
Oh.

P3: 80. I had surgery about 24 days after I was diagnosed, no less than that, 14 days. I was diagnosed on the 9th and I had surgery on the 22nd, so about that long. The surgery was in Seattle. We flew out to Seattle, to the Children’s Hospital./

Uh huh.

P3: 81. I had surgery and then radiation, my cancer doesn’t respond to chemo so I had six weeks of radiation./

Relatively short. Prognosis good?

P3: 82. Good. It is a very good type of cancer to have if you have to have cancer. My first symptoms were I started to minutely seize like not grand mal but petit mal seizures where I was just out of it for 10-15 seconds and I couldn’t remember anything. / 83. My step-dad actually caught the seizure and we went and had EEGs and it was very funny because the neurologist diagnosed me with epilepsy first and she was like “we just have one more test, there’s less than a one percent chance” and so (laugh) I’m a less-than-a-one-percent-chancer (laugh) and so I, they did the MRI and discovered that it was a brain tumor that was right up here (points) and I’m still bald right there from the radiation and there’s the scar./

Wow. You seem pretty resilient about this.

P3: 84. I guess I am, I guess I just did what I needed to do./

Okay, well, do you think I’ve got enough of your information now?

P3: Pretty much, yes, I think so.
Great, well thanks a bunch.
P3, Level Three (Narrative Based on Emergent Themes)

P3 had brain cancer at age 11 and his illness was very traumatic to the family. P3's step-dad caught him having a seizure, the first symptom of the problem. He first started to have petit mal seizures that lasted 10-15 seconds after which he couldn’t remember anything. The neurologist in Helena first diagnosed him with epilepsy but gave him one more test. P3 had a less than one percent chance of having a brain tumor, but the MRI showed a brain tumor. P3’s type of cancer is good to have if you have to have cancer. He recalls being diagnosed on the 9th and having surgery on the 22nd at the Children’s Hospital in Seattle. P3 still has a scar from surgery and is bald near where the radiation was.

While his father had cancer right after P3 was born, the relatives were familiar with cancer but troubled with P3’s young age. P3 remembers driving back from the visit to the neurologist in Helena. The news was traumatic and everyone was silent until P3 saw both of his grandmother and his mom crying at the same time. He was young and immature, and he didn’t understand what it all meant. His family was fans of “Rescue 911” and P3 wondered if his illness meant that he’d get to be on the program.

The post-cancer radiation treatments destroyed the parts of his brain than affect his memory and his ability to learn mathematics past a certain point. Before the cancer, P3 was very bright and he loved school. After the cancer, he became discouraged as his peers started to match his abilities. In the sophomore year of high school, he saw everyone catching up and passing him. This upset him because he had always been the smartest kid, with math especially being his pride and joy. He started not caring as much about education and started relaxing in his studies.

Even though P3 had been told what would happen to him academically as a result of the cancer treatments, he hadn’t believed it since he continued to do well in school until the sudden changes he noticed his sophomore year of high school. He could still justify the trouble he had in trigonometry and calculus because his teachers weren’t very good and the concepts were new. Before this, everything in math he’d studied in grade school because he was so advanced.

When P3 started college at 19, about two years ago, he was enrolled with Voc Rehab. They helped fund his college due to the residual cancer treatment effects based upon his medical records and previous tests. When he looks back upon his first year of college, P3 remembers being dissatisfied with his major. He felt forced by Voc Rehab to pick a major to satisfy the educational goal requirement of their program. Since he was interested in computers and math, he picked that for a major. During his first two college years, P3 dealt with the math and computer majors as he didn’t think he could change them. Looking back now, he doesn’t think as a 19 year old he was in a position to know what major he wanted.

P3 first noticed that he was sinking when he saw spring 2003 grades. He failed two classes that semester. He’d never failed a class before and had never even gotten a “D” before. P3 was especially shocked by one of the “F’s”. It was in a public speaking class, and in high school, P3 had been active in speech and debate. While attendance was part of the grade and P3 didn’t go to class as often as expected, he was still surprised when he retook the class, put in only a little more effort, and earned an “A”. He questioned whether that “F” was deserved. The “F” in calculus was more expected, since
P3 hadn’t had math since his junior year in high school. He thinks he should have opted for Math 150, for a bit of review, rather than Math 152 even though his college math assessment placed him in Math 152.

Since P3 had an easy, laid back first semester in college, he hadn’t needed to talk to anyone. When he got his first “F’s”, he felt a big distance between his professors and himself. It felt foreign to him to approach them. The .05 grade point average that P3 earned spring 2003 was hard for him to accept. He realized that he’d have to pay on his student loans and lose Voc Rehab funding.

P3 spent that summer working at a summer camp. He didn’t return to school that fall, since he didn’t want to explain to Voc Rehab and he was afraid of what would happen. When he visited with Voc Rehab in the late fall, he was given one more chance at college in spring 2004. His 1.96 term grade average barely missed the 2.0 requirement. P3 went on academic suspension. He returned to his job at the summer camp and made the decision to change.

P3 was placed in a bind when he lost Voc Rehab funding for college after he was suspended. During this time he missed three semesters of college, two semesters due to academic difficulty and suspension, and a fall semester he took off before that. During this process and his second year working at summer camp, P3 reviewed his life goals. He realized that he needed to change, but knew the change wasn’t going to happen because of his major in math and computer science. He had realized that he didn’t enjoy working all day on a computer without human interaction. He reviewed his life goals and knew he wanted his work to make a difference. P3’s summer work with children helped him decide to switch his major to Elementary Education.

After the academic suspension, P3 took out a loan, borrowed $600 from his dad, and worked 24 hours a week at Papa John’s to pay for college himself. He changed to an Elementary Education major and P3 worked again with Voc Rehab to put together a new plan that will result in graduation in 2007. The new plan requires an extra year of Voc Rehab services because of the extra coursework in education.

P3 studied hard, stayed focused, and realized he was in the right place. This change motivated him to succeed. He worked harder and was rewarded by making the Dean’s List. He showed off his 4.0 grade point average to his family and relatives. P3 hadn’t done so well in school since he was a freshman in high school. P3 anticipates making the Dean’s List again this semester, with perhaps a 3.4. It depends upon whether his professors grade with a plus or minus.

P3 is surprised that he’s been getting “A’s” in the last two semesters in college composition courses. He attributes some of this to his participation in in-class discussion of reading assignments. P3 thinks that being open in his writing makes him a decent writer even though it surprises him. He always understood himself to be a horrible writer. His high school teachers focused on the negative aspects rather than praising things he did well. P3’s college writing teachers have been supportive. They make comments on things he does well and he learns better this way. Having this experience with supportive teaching also contributed to P3’s decision to major in education. He thinks being positive will keep his students enthusiastic about subjects.

Neither P3’s mom or dad know that he took a semester off or that he failed out of school. When he borrowed money from his dad, he just told him he needed it because his summer camp work and student loans didn’t cover his tuition. His parents only know
about him in a general way: his father knows if P3 is calling, it’s for money. The $600 loan was not a big deal, though. P3 considers himself to be pretty much on his own and his motivation if for the future. His goal is to be a successful educator and family man. A family is important to P3. He knows that as an educator he won’t have a lot of money, but he’ll have more time to spend with his kids than if he stayed in computer science.

P3’s best friend motivates him. She is a high school friend who is in college at Lewis and Clark in Portland, Oregon. She is great and can do anything and her success motivates P3. She is the one person he talks to and she knows that he didn’t go back to school because he failed out. He had told her and his girlfriend, who attends school at Whitworth in Spokane, that he needed to take a semester off to get motivated again. With encouragement and during the semester he took off, P3 took the bull by the horns one last time. He needed to prove to himself that he could do it; he knew if he proved he could be more successful in a new major that the next few years of college would be more successful and easier to complete what he needs to.

P3’s current challenge is a living situation that isn’t very good. He’s an introvert who keeps to himself unless he’s comfortable with a group of friends. In his current situation, P3 knows that he needs to be more sociable but stays in his room doing homework 24/7. His roommates hit his pet peeves, like leaving snooty notes rather than talking about things. Previously, P3 lived at a fraternity where they would also leave notes, but there were 13 of them; there are only five roommates now. P3 installed wireless internet so that he can hunker in his room and not have to be in a central location because he now avoids his roommates in this uncomfortable living situation. After this semester, P3 will move in with a friend of his from the fraternity and they are visiting a place today.

P3 has a weird family. He has an older and younger brother and a younger, adopted sister all living in Butte. He has a sister who lives with his dad and step-mom in Seattle. P3’s mom is a foster parent, so he has other foster siblings whom he’s lived with for a long time. His mom suffered a back injury about ten years ago while working at a psychiatric hospital in Butte. P3 is the second oldest of all the kids. Since college, P3 and his older brother are good friends. When P3 was a freshman, his brother was a senior and he introduced P3 to a lot of people and things on campus. This older brother is now in a graduate physical therapy program in Florida and they plan to visit there or when his brother goes to Indiana for an internship in the fall. P3’s younger brother is a 15 year-old high school sophomore.
Appendix G

P4, Levels One-Three
Tell me your thoughts on your experience here in college at UM, academically and whatever else you think is connected to it.

P4. 1. Um, academically it’s not really that, um, it wasn’t really that tough./ 2. Granted, I grew up on a reservation and the academics, as far as being prepared academically or socially, I wasn’t prepared at all./

Academically?

P4. 3. Yeah, academically as far as English and I think just the core classes. I mean, the other classes, you can more or less wing it, you know as far as watching TV and you can do other stuff and it’s not really hard, those other classes. But I mean, the core like English and mathematics, I was really unprepared coming from the reservation/ 4. ...just the fact that our academics are the lowest in the state.

Is that right?

P4. Yeah, the reservations./

P4. 5. So I mean and it was tough, too, socially I mean coming from the reservation. I mean being raised with Native Americans your whole life, I mean we guys live a whole different lifestyle socially and language wise and everything in common and you get here and it can be tough./ 6. And, on top of that I play athletics too and I have practice to go to and a, just... a whole lot of things./ 7. It was, well, I don’t know, I guess I just really picked, I guess, sort of bad outlets when stuff was like...I mean I guess the
only outlets I did have was going out and partying and stuff like that, I mean./  
P4. 8. My freshman year I actually did OK, I did OK, it wasn’t really that bad….I more or less passed all my classes and maybe just had to drop one, but it was my sophomore year that I fell, uh, well, I didn’t come to school one semester, I dropped out mid-semester and the following semester, I don’t even think I passed one class./  
9. It was just ‘cause I wasn’t, I guess, uh, disciplined myself academically and stuff like that, priorities and whatnot. I just had my priorities all out of whack./  

How did you spend your time?  
P4. 10. U h….early I was playing ball and working out and all that, yeah. I played ball and I played the whole season my freshman year and stuff like that. The following year I didn’t, uh, I didn’t play ball that first semester…/  

Of your sophomore year?  
P4. 11. Yeah, yeah. And I came back and started practice again that second semester and I don’t know, just, I don’t know, it was like I was burnt out on basketball and academics, I don’t know, it was just, I don’t know what it was…and on top of that I was, I guess you should say I was partying a lot and my priorities like I say weren’t where they should be and I actually guess you could say I just was not disciplined academically, I guess, coming from a really horrible background…it’s hard to…I mean part of it is just knowing what to do academically but I just, um/  
12...went to summer school after that second year and just kind of started looking back at that year and wanted to stop partying and, uh, just….Probably the biggest thing that helped was just (laugh) showing up to classes every day. That stuff.

8. His freshman year wasn’t too bad. P4 did OK as a freshman, passing all his classes, perhaps dropping a class. His sophomore year fell apart. He didn’t come to school one semester or he dropped out mid-semester. P4 didn’t pass even one class the following semester.  
9. P4 attributes his sophomore year troubles to not being academically disciplined and his priorities being out of whack.  
10. Early in his college career, P4 busied himself with playing ball and working out. He played the entire season his freshman year. The first semester of his sophomore year he didn’t play ball.  
11. The second semester, sophomore year, P4 came back and started to practice but he was burnt out on both athletics and academics. He was partying a lot, his priorities were not focused on college and he was academically undisciplined. Due to his horrible background, he didn’t know what to do academically.  
12. P4 returned to school during the following summer school. During that time, he reflected back upon the previous year and decided that he wanted to stop partying. A big thing that helped him in summer school was
And yet, I mean granted, I didn’t miss a lot, but I mean I just made myself force myself to make it every day…Every Day. And then I started taking a lot better notes and I, you know, the biggest part was, I think, was just having a relationship with the professors. I just forced myself to go in there, whether I needed to, and talk to them, making a point to get in there and get in a relationship and I did that and I took summer school, I took two classes during summer school and passed both of them with like “A’s”./ 13. And then following that, that semester I took kind of a workload, I took…because I was suspended academically I had to like follow a certain GPA, and I had to like, um, not with just the University but with the NCAA, the governing body for athletics…and so I took 15 credits in the fall (wincses) and I took kind of a workload. I took Business Law and this, that, and the other tough courses and I ended up, I passed all of them! Pretty daily work and all and they were tough and I did it with just, I disciplined myself. I guess having different, different, um (pause)... UM.../ 14. Probably one of the biggest things is I got a girlfriend in the summer or the fall, last semester, I got a girlfriend right before the semester got over. And all she’s a, she’s just a studier, all she does is study and she don’t drink or anything and she more or less has helped me…you know, rather than every Saturday night go out and party, we you know go walk around Walmart and go home at one in the morning and we’ll just be looking around./ 15. Different outlets like that, you know. I just got different outlets and then I was just disciplining myself and I had a lot better relationships with the professors and got to know them on a first name basis, and like that. That really helped. But, uh…oh…Probably the biggest part was that I wasn’t…/ 16...and another part was, that he started going to classes every single day. As a result he started taking better notes. Another big thing was making a point to develop a relationship with each of his professors. As a result of these things, he got “A’s” in both of his summer classes.

13. P4 had to take a heavy workload the following semester. He had to maintain a certain grade point due to his previous academic suspension as well as make grade and credit progress for the NCAA, the college athletics governing body. He attributes his success to daily work, more discipline, and different priorities.

14. The biggest reason for P4’s academic turnaround is finding a girlfriend in the fall semester. She’s a positive influence, as she studies a lot and doesn’t drink. Rather than party, they pursue different, more positive outlets.

15. P4 says that the combination of different outlets, more self-discipline, and better relationships with his professors helped him. There were some things that he wasn’t doing like before.

16. Another part was that P4 felt guilty
you know, because there was that guilt there because my mom was helping me foot the bill considering I wasn’t on scholarship no more because of I was suspended, so I mean when you’re, when you’re paying for your own stuff you, well, it’s a different.../

Yeah, different story.

P4. 17. Because when you’re on scholarship, you’re more or less covered with everything. You know if you mess up or have an accident or something, they’re more or less going to fix it for you, I mean help, not just fix it, they’re going to help you, you know, and, but they help you out a lot but if it’s just you footing the bill and stuff like that.../ 18. I mean, it’s tough but it’s a lot more rewarding than getting the poorer grades and stuff like that.../

Um hum.

P4. 19. That was probably the biggest part, I mean. It’s just, I guess I need to say that it wasn’t only one thing, that it was just a bunch of things...that (cough) helped me get through that. I’ve been doing pretty good this semester, so.....

It sounds to me like you had a pretty significant turnaround.

P4. Yeah./

And I’m wondering if, since you said that your academic background wasn’t very good, coming to college, do you think that it was just a matter of time, being here at a university, that you were gathering some of the background you needed...that later bolstered you....or do you think it is more your motivation that had changed you, that...or?

17. P4 felt more or less covered by being on scholarship. If he messed up or had an accident, there is a lot of help. They don’t fix it for you but they help you out a lot.

18. Footing the bill yourself is tough but a lot more rewarding than getting the poorer grades.

19. P4 states that it wasn’t only one thing, it was a bunch of things, that helped him get through that. He’s been doing pretty good now.
P4. 20. Uh, I guess it's a little bit of both, but, you know, being, when you're kind of in a corner like that you are either going to get motivated or you're just going to bomb off the edge so I just kind of got different priorities, I really didn't have a choice, you know./

Uh huh. Well, you did have a choice.

P4. 21. Yeah.

Yes, and you made the one (decision) to dig your heels in and do this.

P4. Yeah./

How? Where did that come from?

P4. 22. Um, I think that coaches helped a lot, um, the summer, or my second year here toward the end of the semester a coach left and our new coach came in....

Oh, was that that coach...

P4. Yeah, the old one and the new one came in./ 23. I guess you could say the former coach was somewhat, you know, not as tough academically as the new one is...the new one is the kind of guy that’ll make you work for everything you get and he’s the kind of.../ 24. but, the new one, I mean he just more or less laid it on the line for me and he kinda told me you haven’t done academically well and it doesn’t just shine up on you it shines up on the whole program and stuff like that/ 25. and he said you’ve either got to do it or you’ll be done...if you want to stay here and continue to play with the program and the University. I guess that motivated me a lot and then, you know, / 26....it motivated me but there’s those things, but sometimes, I mean, you’re motivated the first week and you’ll take on the world but how long...

20. He thinks that what changed his academic experience was being put in a corner and having to choose to be motivated or to bomb off the edge, so he got different priorities. He really didn’t have a choice.

21. P4 agrees that he did have a choice and that he dug his heels in to get motivated.

22. P4 received a lot of help in the summer from the coaches. A new coach came in at the end of his second year. The former left and newer coach came in.

23. P4 says that the former was not as tough academically as the new coach. The new one makes P4 work for everything he gets.

24. The new coach laid it on the line with P4, telling him that he hadn’t done well academically. New Coach told P4 that how he did academically not only shines up on him, it shines up on the while program.

25. New coach motivated P4 by telling him that he needed to do it if he wanted to stay and play at the UM.

26. P4 admits that the new coach motivated him but that at first he was motivated to take on the world but wondered for how long. P4 agreed that
(laugh) yeah...you mean I have to do this for another 14 weeks?

P4. (laugh) yeah. And after a couple weeks into it...

...the shine wears off...

P4. Yeah...exactly./ 27. But, I mean my girlfriend helped me, being there, she helped motivate me, you know, calling me and telling me “you gotta attend class”...and my mom, my mom helped a lot too. I mean, you know, I just felt badly about some things. Financially, she can hardly pay for any...other...thing...I mean, I think, but then I, there was.../ 28. I was motivated myself, because you get, I started to get to that point where I wanted it. I wanted to get a degree. I don’t want to be on a seven-year plan or nothing like that, you know, so I started working hard too. That was a part of this too, I want to get a degree and I don’t want to make myself look like an ass by being here for seven years so..../

And you’re playing again? Let’s see, did you play this year?

P4. 29. Uh, no, I didn’t play this season, I won’t play until next year, till fall. I’m really happy to be doing decently this semester because I did really pretty good my first semester (of this years) and then I’ll be back on the team./ 30. I’ve been practicing! The NCAA allows you to practice and pretty much to everything with the team, but play the games. I do all the work outs and all that with the team, I just can’t play in a game, but...It’s tough, but I mean, practicing and doing everything, you know, because during the pre-season we had 5:30 (a.m.) practices, we had 6:00 lifting, starting from the first day of September and everything we do as a team

after a couple weeks, the shine wears off.

27. P4’s girlfriend helped him. She called him and told him to attend class. His mother helped a lot also. He felt badly about some things, him mother can hardly pay for things.

28. Then, P4 was motivated himself because he got to the point where he wanted to get a degree. He didn’t want to look like an ass and be on the seven-year plan.

29. P4 didn’t play this season. He’ll play in the fall next year: he’ll be back on the team because he did pretty good first semester and he’s happy to be doing decently now.

30. P4 has been practicing with the team but not playing in the games. He has worked out with the team, including 5:30 a.m. practices and 6:00 lifting, since the first day of last September and attended all team activities every afternoon. It’s tough.
every afternoon...so I mean it’s tough, doing all that. 31. Trying to stay motivated to do it all academically plus, you know, knowing you’re not going to be able to play with all this work and all these work-outs, it could kinda make you feel worse.../ 31. It can make P4 feel worse, trying to stay motivated to do it academically plus knowing he’s not able to play in the game with all the work and work-outs.

Could you go to the games?

P4. 32. Yes, yes, I sat with the team, yeah, I sat there with a tie on. It was hard to stay motivated, I guess I have to say. 33. At the time it was hard, but when it is a semester later, you can feel okay about it, maybe even good about it. And I guess that kind of helps you keep on going...and forget about yourself./ 32. P4 could attend the games. He wore a tie and sat with the team. 33. It was hard for him to stay motivated at the time. A semester later, he felt okay and even good about it. This helps him keep on going and helps him forget about himself.

Uh huh.

P4. 34. I don’t know, that first semester...or, you know, the second year, it was sometimes, it was kind of I don’t know, I’m not playing ball, and I kind of got somewhat depressed, I guess, you know. I wasn’t playing ball and I had nothing keeping me back from partying around and being lazy and I wasn’t really going to school. It really felt that I wasn’t going to be doing anything to help myself... there.../ 34. During his second year when he was not playing ball, P4 got somewhat depressed. Not playing ball, he had nothing to keep him from partying and being lazy. He wasn’t really going to school. He wasn’t doing anything to help himself.

Kinda hit a slump.

P4. 35. Yeah, it was pretty hard to pull myself out of that./ 35. P4 had a hard time pulling himself out of that.

How did you pull that off?

P4. 36. Um, I don’t know, my mom was kinda saying well, what are you going to do? You can’t stay here, you’ll have to come home. I talked to coach about it and he said, well, we’ll have to see about this, you’re a grown man now./ 36. His mom asked him what he was going to do and told him he would have to come home. His coach told him he was a grown man now and they’d have to see. 37. but it 37. The semester ended and things
worked out, the semester got over and I worked and stuff like that and then I got back the next year and started practicing again and looking forward to going to school and stuff like that. And even then, it was still tough. 38. It wasn’t the academics, I wasn’t having trouble in my classes, they weren’t too hard, they were just generals and stuff, but it was just....../

Have you, did you, when you returned to school, check into available resources...

P4. No, no....

...maybe like tutoring or study skills cla...

P4. 39. No, no, no, not really, no..

No. I’m hearing you say “no” (laugh). So, it sounds like you’re a pretty sharp guy, actually...

P4. I didn’t do any tutoring or take no study skills or anything./ 40. I mean, I just, it’s just, really it’s just a matter of me showing up and getting motivated...

...go to class...

P4. Yeah, go to class, take notes, get to know the profs...exactly. /

But how about math?

P4. 41. Um (pause) I’ve never done my math yet. I’m like so scared to death. I’ve taken, like, I’ve.....I’m enrolled in one in the fall next year.../

I just have to tell you that many, many students are in your same boat, having trouble and being scared of math. I just want to assure you....
P4. I know, I know...I believe you./ 42. I mean everything else you can more or less kind of wing it, I guess. But math is just, I'm not...I guess you could say I'm avoiding it until now, they've told me you have to take it.../

You probably only need one math course for....

P4. 43. All I need is 117...

117 or do you need 107?

P4. Yeah, 117...

For the Native American Studies major?

P4. 44. Yeah, but I could just take that class and get it out of the way, but I can't do that because I know I'll have to start in, at least, uh, at minimum, in 100./ 44. Because, like I said I went to algebra class my freshman year of high school and the following year I took trig, but my junior year I took algebra II and those were the classes and I passed them with a "B" but I didn't do hardly any work on them at all./ 45. I'd just sit in the back of the class, me and one of the guys would sit back there and the teacher was so unmotivated to do anything. It's like she'd give up - why do anything, just for the fact that, you know, she could tell everyone was so under, not academically, she just lost her motivation./ 46. Most of the staff that come to the schools that I went to on the reservation, like, I guess you know, they're fresh out of college, looking for a job...ready to take on the world or something, I don't know if they're going to save the noble savages or something, you know these geeky kids from college think that they're going to do a good deed/ 47...and then they get there and they find out that everyone is not academically where they should be and

42. P4 knows he's not alone in being scared of math. He thinks that he can more or less wing it in other classes but he's avoided math until he's been told he has to take it.

43. Math 117 is the only course he needs for his Native American Studies major. He could just take that class and get it out of the way, but he knows he'll have to start in, at least, Math 100.

44. Starting as a freshman in high school, P4 took algebra and trig the following year. He took algebra II as a junior. He passed them with a "B" but did hardly any work on them.

45. In class, P4 sat in the back with one of the guys. The teacher was not motivated because she could tell that everyone was under, academically. She lost her motivation and gave up.

46. P4 says that most staff that comes to the reservation schools are fresh out of college, looking for a job, ready to take on the world. Those geeky kids from college are going to save the noble savages or going to do a good deed.

47. Once there, they find out everyone is not academically where they should be. P4 said they weren't the nicest kids,
well, we weren’t exactly the nicest kids...we weren’t exactly sitting there, you know, we were going to raise hell with ‘em because we knew.../

How long is this one going to last?

P4. 48. Yeah, like depending upon what we do (laugh) so, well, during the semester it would pretty much be us sitting around, drawing, having fun, talking about basketball and the teacher would be just sitting up there, just kinda, I don’t know, messing around with something else, maybe grading papers./ 49. So, I mean, I know, I mean knowing that, a lot of people don’t know that about me, so they would say, well, he graduated high school and he’s here in college and he should be able to get through this (math) and it’s kind of,/ 50. a part of it too is just kind of embarrassment, I mean, most of my teammates are all, they started out at 117. Some of them were in calculus and statistics and stuff like that, and myself, I might have to start out at 005 or something like that and it, it’s, it is a little embarrassing, you know, you get that, kind of, I don’t know...

I do know that many students need to start out in MATH 005 or 100...

P4. 51. Yeah?

Yep. Hey, listen, can we go back a bit? I feel like you’ve talked a good amount about your academic adjustment to college. Could you comment on some of the other adjustment issues you faced by coming to UM?

P4. 52. Well, I felt welcome to campus as far as my team and my coaches, obviously because of that but I never really had a lot in common with them and as far

not exactly sitting there. They were going to raise hell with the staff.

48. P4 didn’t know how long the new one would stay and depended on what the students did. The students would sit around drawing, having fun, talking about basketball and the teacher would just be sitting up there, maybe grading papers.

49. A lot of people see that P4 graduated from high school and that he’s in college. They believe that he should be able to get through math but they don’t know about his high school math classes.

50. P4 is also embarrassed. Most of his teammates started in Math 117 and some were in calculus and statistics. He might have to start in Math 005 and that is a little embarrassing.

51. When the interviewer reports that many students need to start out in Math 005 or 100, P4 says “yeah?”

52. P4 had other adjustment issues on campus. While he felt welcomed by his team and coaches he didn’t have a lot in common with them. He didn’t
as the whole other student body, I just didn’t associate with anybody (laugh) you know. I’d just go to classes./

53. I had a few friends that were from the reservation and that....they didn’t go to school here. They just lived here and worked here and I’d go stay at their house and they’d be at my dorm./ 54. I just hung with them the first semester and they had things, they were doing things that, you know, we’d end up at a, there’d either be a party or some deal. They wouldn’t have class the next day so they wouldn’t have to worry about it. I’d end up missing class because of that.../

Oh...

P4. 55. And you, I just, I guess, you know, I was socially unprepared and that..../

Uh huh.

P4. 56. I guess (pause) you just kinda dig yourself in a hole too...more or less afraid to ask for help and stuff, (very faint) as far as coming over to this building and...(pause)./

Right. How about your major department, were you an NAS major as soon as you first got here?

P4. No....

Oh, general?

P4. 57. Yeah, general. I didn’t know what..../

Did your declaration of the NAS major help you meet, socially....

P4. 58. Yeah, it’s helped a lot. I mean, the NAS building, you can go there and associate with the rest of the student body; P4 just went to classes.

53. P4 had a few friends from the reservation who didn’t go to school. They lived and worked in Missoula, so they would visit each other. 54. When he would hang with these friends, they would end up at a party. Since these friends wouldn’t have class the next day, they had no worries. P4 would end up missing classes.

55. P4 was socially unprepared.

56. He dug himself in a hole, being more or less afraid to ask for help and coming over to this building.

57. P4 was in general studies when he first came to campus, not knowing what major to choose.

58. Declaring his NAS major helped P4 a lot. He can go to the NAS building
meet a lot of people and pretty much hang out and you get to know a lot of American Indians from all...I mean you guys all carry a certain form I mean you guys aren’t all from the same area but most of ‘em are just like each other more socially and stuff so, you know, I mean....we’re the chosen few I guess... But, I mean, it’s..../

Did you feel, in class, like....

P4. 59. No, I didn’t really feel scared or nothing... I felt all right...and I was playing ball and busy and whatever so, but I really wasn’t scared but I know that it’s affected a lot of other Native Americans and stuff like that as far as in emotionally and they get frustrated and in that they don’t come back the next year and it’s been like that, but,/ 60. you know, for me, it really wasn’t that, uh, hum, (laugh) just like all the white-colored freshmen.../

(laugh) ...it cuts across all the demographics...

P4. 61. (laugh) I just wasn’t, I mean partying and just I don’t know not taking it all so seriously and the fact that I wasn’t paying for my own school because I was on scholarship.../

Right.

P4. 62. It was just hard to get motivated to go to class when you come fresh out of high school and you don’t have someone waking you up in the morning./ 63. No one’s taking roll at class./

64. so.....and I had a car. Yeah, it’s a funny thing. I had a car. And I had a cell phone...a credit card...I was pretty much rolling my freshman year./ 65. But now that I don’t have a car....I don’t have a cell phone....I don’t have a credit card – I can’t hardly afford to pay for anything - I’m

and meet people and hang. He got to know a lot of American Indians from all over. American Indians all carry a certain form even if they’re not from the same area: socially, they are more like each other and they are the chosen few.

59. P4 did not feel scared in class. He was playing ball and busy, but not really scared. He knows a lot of other Native Americans are affected emotionally, they get frustrated, and don’t come back the next year.

60. P4 thinks his adjustment is just like all the white-colored freshmen.

61. What affected P4 was the partying, not taking it all so seriously, and not paying for his own school because of his scholarship.

62. It was hard to get motivated to go to class fresh out of high school without someone waking him up.

63. No roll is taken in class.

64. It was a funny thing, P4 had a car, a cell phone, and a credit card. He was rolling his freshman year.

65. Now that P4 doesn’t have a car, a cell phone, a credit card, and can’t hardly afford anything, he’s doing better academically. It’s funny.
doing a lot better academically!

**Isn’t that funny?**

P4. Yeah./

**Yes. It’s a simpler life. You still have the student-athlete pressures...and your outlets are...different also?**

P4. 66. Yeah, I’m with my girlfriend and our outlets are as far as, we try to do things like go to movies and stuff like that...

66. Even though he still has student-athlete pressures, P4’s outlets are going to movies with his girlfriend and rather than blowing money on a couple kegs of beer, they go out to eat.

**And don’t do the alcohol thing...**

P4. Yeah, say, I think the same, rather than blowing money on a couple kegs of beer, we like go out to eat or something./

P4. 67. My freshman year, pffew, sophomore year too, I just did a lot of partying and stuff like that, with alcohol, and with alcohol there’s also that depression.../

67. During his freshman and sophomore years, P4 did a lot of partying with alcohol.

**Yep.**

P4. 68. It’s like a depression or you know you don’t want to get out of bed or go to class...you don’t want to do anything because you been drinking.../ 68. Alcohol comes with that depression. With the depression, he didn’t want to get out of bed or go to class. He wouldn’t want to do anything because of the drinking.

**Sounds like you educated yourself about alcohol.**

P4. 69. Yeah...yeah, pretty much, but I don’t know. I guess it’s just something...I know I just hated the feeling of waking up and going oh, noooo, and (laugh) having that depressed feeling you get and the paranoia from, just everything and you know./ 69. P4 educated himself about alcohol pretty much. He knows that he just hated the feeling of waking up and having that depressed feeling and the paranoia from everything.

70. Every once in awhile I’ll have several drinks and stuff but other than that, I mean....../ 70. Every once in awhile, P4 will have several drinks but nothing other than that.
Okay, now. Tell me about your girlfriend (laugh).

P4. 71. Uh. Huh. Actually, I was actually planning on going out and partying that night. But my friend called me and he said he was going out with this girl and she, his girl, needs someone to go out with her friend. So, I said, okay, you know. So he said, well, he's a big partier too, so he said yeah, we’ll go out and party after this movie. So we went to the movie with them, and we watched the movie Hidalgo...

Good?

P4. Ummmm, it was alright. It was filmed on a Montana Indian reservation.

Really?

P4. Yeah, so...

You’re kidding me, I had no idea!

P4. Have you ever watched it?

I have not.

P4. Yeah, so the Indian part, the Indian part was filmed on the reservation.

And you thought it was well done?

P4. Yes, I did./

Good, I’ll have to check it out...and now I'll shut up (laugh)!

P4. 72. Okay, and so I mean, I get there and you know after the movie we stop at a store and he buys a keg and we take it up to his house and we’re thinking we’ll drink this up and then head to the bars in plenty of time and all that./

72. After the movie, the couples stopped at a store and P4’s friend buys a keg. They take it to his friend’s house. The plan was to drink up the keg and head to the bars in plenty of time.

73. Well, his girl’s friend, she tells me she

73. P4 discovers that his date doesn’t
don’t DRINK. And so I go, geez, if I want anything to happen with her, I better not be drinking. Well, I wound up not drinking that night and just going home./
74. And then I go up and I talked to her the next day, I call her and I talked about the pow wow, the pow wow was the next day and so go to the pow wow/
75. and then I just couldn’t believe...and we been together pretty much./

Uh. Where is she from?

P4. 76. Pryor, she’s from Pryor. But, she’s a dancer. She’s half Crow and half Hopi.

What’s her major...she’s in school?

P4. Business...marketing.

Older woman (laugh)?

P4. She’s the same age as me, yeah, but.....

This sounds pretty good.

P4. Yeah. It is...I mean, we can relate, like I know a lot of her family and she knows a lot of my family...we’re from the same area, I guess, and, oh, (very quietly) so I think this helped out a lot I guess...she.....so....(pauses and looks out the window)./

Great view, huh.

P4. 77. Yeah, it is. You see the whole campus.

Yep. Only, I’m usually facing your way and not looking out the window (laugh).

P4. Well, I know the folks downstairs, like Moonie and she don’t have such a drink. He decides that if he wants anything to happen with her, he’d better not drink. He didn’t drink that night.
74. He talked to this girl the next day. They talked about the pow wow that was the next day. They went to the pow wow.
75. P4 can’t believe that they’ve been together pretty much since.

76. P4’s girlfriend is from Pryor. She’s half Crow and half Hopi. She’s a dancer. She is majoring in business marketing. P4’s girlfriend is the same age as he is. It’s good. P4 knows a lot of his girlfriend’s family and she knows a lot of his family, as they’re both from the same area. This helped out a lot.

77. I can see the whole campus here.
Oh, yes, I know. The building of this addition was a whole big story...well, what else? How do you feel now, compared to back when you were more, as you called it, down in the dumps? Do you wake up in the morning and go "Wow" and "how things have changed"?

P4. 78. Yeah (laugh). It feels a lot better waking up in the morning than it did a couple years ago. A couple years ago, I’d wake up and like bummer, there’d be those things I’d be worried about like I gotta get this paper done and I’d be like way behind and the coaches would be calling me and saying “hey, what are you doing?” and “why didn’t you show up for this class?” and stuff like that. And now, it’s just the phone is never ringing and I think that’s a good sign (laugh) and it’s just....../

79. you get a lot more mature, too, I think, as far as socially, and stuff. You can meet more people and you can talk a lot more, to a lot more people and then that helps you.../

Is that from being here longer?

P4. 80. I don’t ever get homesick now. I used to get so homesick then. This is more my home now, I mean, I go home now and in three days, I’m ready to come back here, you know. That helps a lot (very faint)./ 80. P4 doesn’t ever get homesick now. He used to get homesick then. This is more my home now. When he visits back home, he’s ready to come back here in three days. That helps.

So, uh, what’s your goal?

P4. 81. Um, uh, my goal is to, well, right now, it is to just keep up and be able to get through next week (laugh). But, really, I want to try to get my NAS degree and my Anthro degree, that’s what I’m trying to push right now in the next two or three years that I have left, just push academically and get it through it and just

81. P4’s goal right now is to keep up and get through next week. Seriously, he wants to try to get his NAS/Anthro degree in a push in the next two or three years. We plants to push academically, get through it, and make good improvements. P4 wants to be pulling all “A’s” and “B’s” by the time
make really good improvements. By the time I’m a senior I want to be pulling all “A’s” and “B’s”./
82. Then, I want to get into law school, I want to try to get into law school. I talked to my friend and my cousin and they went to law school here and they started off the same way I did. They said that the biggest thing for me to do is to make improvement every year...

Uh huh.

P4. They said that me being a Native American, you know, I guess they’re, I mean, they’re hurting in terms of minorities in the law school. They said that they try to get so many Native Americans in law school every year./

That’s a good goal to have. I would have thought…I’m shocked. I would have thought you would have said, for your goal, “play professional ball”.

P4. 83. I, I would, I’d like to, um, try to play professional ball but, you know, I mean, it’s, it’s a goal, and I’ll work for it but, I mean, it’s really the law side is a goal of mine.

Actually, I got offered to play when I wasn’t playing but…I kinda think of the school thing as more, my, um, it’s more what I’m doing now.

Sure, I play ball and all, and maybe I’m a little burnt out right now but some of, well,

I think I plan to have school with me now.  

Okay, good job. I think I’ve got your story and I want to thank you so much

He plans to have school with him now.

83. P4 would like to try to play professional ball, it’s a goal and he’ll work on it, but he’s more interested in the law side. P4 was offered to play when he wasn’t playing in college. He thinks that school is more what he’s doing now. Although he’s playing ball, he thinks he might be a little burnt out right now.
for talking with me today.
P4, Level Three (Narrative Based on Emergent Themes)

P4 did not find college that tough academically. Granted, he grew up on a reservation, so he wasn’t prepared socially or academically for college. Coming to school from his reservation where their academics are rated the lowest on reservations in Montana, he was really unprepared for core classes such as English and mathematics. He can “wing it” in other, easier classes by studying for them while watching TV and not really paying much attention.

It was tough socially, also, coming to college from the reservation. Being raised with Native Americans his whole life, he lived a whole different lifestyle socially and language wise. They had everything in common. Being here can be tough. On top of this, P4 plays athletics and he has practice to go to and a whole lot of other things to do.

Early on in college, P4 played sports and worked out. He played the whole season his freshman year. The following year, P4 didn’t play sports the first semester. When he came back and started practice again the second semester, it was like he was burnt out on both his sport and academics. He didn’t quite know what it was, but on top of that, he was partying a lot and his priorities were not where they should have been. He was just not disciplined academically, coming from a really horrible background, and he just didn’t know what to do academically.

When it got tough, P4 picked bad outlets like partying and things like that. He did okay his freshman year, not really too bad. He mostly passed all his classes and maybe had to drop one class. It was in his sophomore that he fell. He didn’t come to school one semester because he dropped out mid-semester. The following semester, P4 didn’t think he passed even one class. He just wasn’t disciplined academically and he had his priorities all out of whack.

P4 went to summer school after his second year. He started looking back at that year and he wanted to stop partying. The biggest thing that helped him was showing up to classes every day. He forced himself to make it every day and he started taking better notes. The biggest part was having a relationship with the professors; he forced himself to go in and talk to them and get in a relationship with them. That summer, P4 took two classes and passed both with “A’s”.

The following semester, P4 took kind of a workload because he had to follow certain NCAA rules and the University gpa requirement. He took 15 credits with Business Law and other tough courses. He surprised himself by passing all of them. He did daily work and he disciplined himself. He also had different priorities: he got a girlfriend in the summer, right before the end of the semester. All she does is study, she don’t drink, and she helped him. Now, rather than go out every Saturday night and party, they go walk around Walmart and get home early. So, that, and different outlets, developing more discipline, and having a lot better relationships with his professors really helped P4’s academics.

Another big part was that P4 felt guilty that his mother was helping him pay for school, as he’d lost his scholarship since being suspended. Paying for his own stuff made a difference. On scholarship, he felt covered: if he messed up or had an accident, things weren’t fixed for him, but there was a lot of help. Footing his own bill is tough but a lot more rewarding than getting the poorer grades. P4 is doing pretty good now due to a bunch of things that helped get him through that time.
P4 had been placed in a kind of comer and he had to either get motivated or bomb off the edge, so he got different priorities. His coaches helped him in the summer and the change in head coach his second year made a difference too. The new coach made everyone work for what they got. He laid it on the line with P4, telling him that he hadn’t done the job academically and that not only shines on him, it shines on the whole program. This new coach motivated P4 by telling him what he needed to do to stay at the University and continue playing his sport. The new coach motivated P4 to take on the world, but after a couple weeks, the shine was wearing off. Again, his girlfriend helped him out. She would call him to tell him to go to class. His mom helped P4, too. He felt bad that financially, she can hardly pay for any other thing. Finally, P4 got to the point where he was motivated himself to get the degree. He didn’t want to make himself look like an ass by being here on the seven-year plan.

While P4 didn’t play this past season, he’ll play in the fall because he did good last semester and is doing decently this semester. He is excited to be practicing with the team even though NCAA doesn’t allow him to play in the games. He works out with the team at 5:30 a.m. practices, 6 a.m. lifting, and team activities in the afternoon. It can make P4 feel worse having to stay motivated academically while working out but not being able to play during games. He wears a tie and sits with the team during the games. After doing this for a semester, even though it was hard to stay motivated, he feels good about it and it helped him forget about himself.

P4 got somewhat depressed during his second year when he was not playing his sport. He had nothing to keep him from partying around and being lazy. He wasn’t going to school and he wasn’t doing anything to help himself. He had a hard time pulling himself out of that. His mom asked him what he was going to do and that he’d have to come home; his coach told him he was a grown man and things would become clear. Things eventually worked out, but it was still tough. It wasn’t so much the academics, it was really a matter of P4 showing up, getting motivated, going to class, taking notes, and getting to know the professors.

The next big challenge for P4 will be math. Math 117 is the math he needs for his Native American Studies major. He would like to just take that class but he knows he’ll have to start in a lower class, like Math 100. In high school, P4 took algebra, trig, and algebra II and passed them with “B’s” but didn’t do hardly any work in them. In these classes, he’d just sit in the back with one of the guys. The teacher could tell that everyone was not academically ready and she lost her motivation. Staff that come to reservation schools, according to P4, are fresh out of college and ready to take on the world. They are geeky college kids who are going to save the noble savages and do a good deed. Once there, they find out the academics are not where they should be. P4 says they weren’t the nicest kids, not exactly sitting there: they were going to raise hell with the staff. One would never know how long a new teacher would stay. It usually depended upon what the students did. Mostly they would sit around drawing, having fun and talking about sports while the teacher sat up front, messing around with something else. A lot of people don’t know about P4’s background. They know he graduated from high school and is in college. They believe he should be able to get through math but they don’t know about his math courses. P4 is also embarrassed, since most of his teammates start in Math 117 and some are even in calculus or statistics. He may have to start in Math 005.
When P4 first came to campus, he felt welcomed by his team and coaches but never had a lot in common with them. As far as the whole other student body, he just didn’t associate with anybody. He considered himself socially unprepared. He just went to classes. P4 had friends from the reservation who lived and worked in Missoula but didn’t go to school. He’d go stay at their house and they’d visit him in the dorm. They’d end up at a party and his friends would have no worries since they didn’t have class the next day. P4 ended up missing classes. He dug himself in a hole, being more or less afraid to ask for help and coming over to this building.

At first, P4 was in general studies and did not know what major to choose. Being a major in NAS now has helped a lot. He can hang out at the NAS building, meet a lot of people, and get to know a lot of American Indians. They all carry a certain form, even if not from the same area but most are more like each other socially. P4 (jokingly) calls them the chosen few. P4 knows a lot of other Native Americans who are affected emotionally, get frustrated, and don’t come back to school, but he did not feel scared or nothing in class. He felt all right, playing, being busy and whatever. P4 (laughs) about his adjustment to college being the same as all the white-colored freshmen. What affected him was the partying, not taking school seriously, and not paying for his own schooling because of his scholarship. It was hard to be motivated to go to class fresh out of high school without someone waking him up in the morning, no one was taking roll in class, and he had a car. It is funny to P4 that he had a car, a cell phone, and a credit card: he was rolling his freshman year. Now that he doesn’t have a car, a cell phone, a credit card, and can’t hardly afford anything, he’s doing better academically (laugh).

During his freshman and sophomore years, P4 did a lot of partying with alcohol. With alcohol, there’s also depression. P4 wouldn’t want to get out of bed or go to class. He wouldn’t want to do anything because of the drinking. He just hated the feeling of waking up and going “oh, nooo” and having that depressed feeling and the paranoia. P4 feels a lot better waking up in the morning now than he did two years ago. Back then, he’d wake up and it would be a bummer. He’d be worried about things like getting a paper done and being way behind. His coaches would call him and ask why he hadn’t shown up for class. Now, he laughs about it being a good sign that the phone is never ringing.

When P4 first met his girlfriend, he had been planning to party that night. But, a friend was going out with a girl and she needed someone to go out with her friend. The plan was to go partying after going to a movie. After the movie, though, the couples stopped to buy a keg, planning to go to P4’s friend’s house to drink it up and then head to the bars. P4’s date told him that she don’t drink. He knew that if he wanted anything to happen with her that he’d better not drink either, so he didn’t drink. He just went home. P4 called her the next day and they talked about the pow wow. Then, they went to the pow wow together and have been pretty much together since. Now, P4’s outlets are going to movies with his girlfriend, and rather than blowing money on a couple kegs of beer, they go out to eat. Every once in awhile now he’ll have several drinks but nothing other than that.

P4 and his girlfriend have a lot in common. They are the same age and she’s also a college student. They can relate because P4 knows a lot of her family and she knows a
lot of his family, being that they’re from the same area in the state. These family connections helped out a lot.

Thinking back, P4 feels he has matured socially and that is helping him. He can meet more people and talk about a lot more to people. He doesn’t ever get homesick now, which he did back then. Now, he goes home for a visit and is ready to come back here in three days. That helps too.

P4 laughs about his immediate goal which is to keep up and to be able to get through next week. Seriously, he is pushing to get his NAS and his Anthro degree in the next two or three years. He will push the academics, make really good improvements, and get through. By his senior year, he wants to be pulling all “A’s” and “B’s”. Then, he wants to get into law school. His friend and his cousin both went to law school and they had the same start in college as P4. They told P4 that the biggest thing to do is make improvements every year. Law schools are interested in minorities and getting a certain number of Native Americans in school every year. Even though P4 would like to try to play professional ball, it’s a goal and he’s working on it, he is more interested in the law side as his goal. He had an offer to play professionally when he wasn’t in school, but school is more what he’s doing now. He might be a little burnt out with his sport right now, but he plans to have school with him now.
Appendix H

Participant 5, Levels One-Three
P5, Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

[Demographic information was collected prior to the taped interview and is included here in order to serve as referent points to certain comments made in the body of the taped interview transcription. Student 5 is a non-traditional student, age 35, who quit high school in the middle of the 10th grade. She was pregnant at 14 and married the father of her child. While they attempted to remain in school, it became difficult due to rules of conduct that applied to the essentially unmarried student body. She and the baby's father had three children together and today, those children are ages 20 (a daughter who now has her own baby), 16 and 10. She was divorced from her first husband in 1999. The student earned her GED at 18 years of age. She started the Medical Transcription program at the Missoula Vocational Technical Institute in 1990 but did not find it satisfying, so upon her divorce, she started college at UM in 1999. She experienced academic difficulty during her first two semesters in college for the reasons indicated in the taped interview. She left college in the middle of her second semester without knowing the proper procedure for official withdrawal in order to find work. Eventually, she pursued employment working as a detention center officer, a job that she hoped would prove to be a good career path. She returned to UM after she married her current husband, with whom she shares two children (both under the age of four), and she became disillusioned with her job. She is now a social work major with near junior standing.]

Okay, since I've already asked you some demographics and know that you are a

[P5 is a non-traditional, 35-year-old college student with five children. She became pregnant at 14, in the 10th grade, and married the father of her child. Due to conduct codes, they found it difficult to be married and remain in school. P5 and her first husband had three children together; those children are now 10, 16, and 20. P5 was divorced in 1999.

P5 earned her GED at 18 years of age. She started the Medical Transcription program at the Missoula Vocational Technical Institute in 1990 but did not find it satisfying. Once divorced, P5 started college at UM in 1999.

P5 experienced academic difficulty during her first two semesters in college and she left in the middle of the second semester without properly withdrawing. She found work as a detention office, but what she thought would be a good career path did not turn out to be.

When she became disillusioned with her job and after she married her current husband, P5 returned to UM. She and her second husband have two children, both under the age of four. P5 is currently a social work major with junior standing.]

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non-traditional student with five children, I’m eager for you to tell me your story. Would you please think of a time when you reflected upon your early academic experience in college, your academic difficulty and academic suspension, and then your return to good academic standing. Please share your thoughts about this experience with me.

P5: 1. Well (laugh), oh, um, I don’t know. Mostly it’s been really overwhelming but, um, and sometimes very depressing and/ 2. it’s hard to fight through it all, um because I’m not like every one of those younger kids who might have more time and, um,/ 3. to take on sometimes like five classes is kind of scary. Um,/ 1. P5’s experience has been overwhelming and depressing. 2. She finds it hard to fight through it all, as she’s not like younger kids with more time. 3. Taking on five classes is scary for P5.

More time?

P5: 4. Um, well, finding the time for all of it.../ 4. Finding time for all of it is a problem for P5.

Balancing? Being a mommy and a student and...

P5: 5. Finding the time, well, I have so little uncommitted time.../ 5. P5 has little uncommitted time.

Are you currently married, I guess I wasn’t nosy enough to ask you about that (laugh)?

P5: Yes.

Okay, so you’ve got a partner.

P5: 6. Yes, so uh, yeah. But he’s not a, he’s not very, uh, he’s not the type to, uh, well, he’s one of those old-fashioned dads where the mom does most of it but we manage to work it out./ 7. I don’t know, I tend to be kind of an over-achiever I guess, and my mom was that way and I have a 6. P5’s husband is an old-fashioned dad and she’s the mom who does most of the work, but they manage. 7. P5 is an over-achiever like her mother and her sister, and like she’s recently noticed in her oldest daughter.
sister who I think is that way (laugh) and I'm starting to notice that my oldest daughter is this same way as well..../
8. We'll all take on a LOT and we almost feel more comfortable with a lot of things to do rather than having to just sit around../

Uh huh.

P5: 9. So, I don’t know, I know that my self-esteem is all wrapped around being able to finish (the degree) and being able to do something that I like for a career, so I'm just trying to get through and so that is sort of where I'm at......./

I didn’t ask you about your siblings or your family constellation.

P5: 10. Um, I have an older sister but we were raised pretty much apart and we saw each other sort of infrequently but I know she’s pretty well... oh, driven.../

Oh, so...

P5: 11. Yes, that’s pretty much it, I mean she wasn’t really around but I’ve gotten to know her more recently and we seem pretty much alike./

So she’s not local?

P5: 12. We talk on the phone./

Share troubles and travails?

P5: 13. Uh, yeah, for the most part, I mean not constantly but if there’s something drastic.../

You said that she driven as well? How so?

P5: 14. Well, she’s not necessarily as much as my mom and my oldest daughter are most driven but her sister appears to be
15. Her sister is a new mother who wants to go to school and keep working, too.

Oh, okay. Well, going back just a bit, at the point where you got suspended was when?

P5: (groan)

Can you describe the sequence of events that happened?

P5: 16. Um (pause) that was back when I started seeing my current husband, well we weren’t married yet and... well, we got back together... well, we’d known each other for several years, so we’d just kind of gotten back together and I was going here for a good semester before that and um, this was the second semester and just, well, I just realized that money-wise, I couldn’t support myself and I had my three children./

17. Living in family housing, she found she couldn’t manage it all and she felt lost.

Oh.

P5: 17. And I was living in the family housing and I was finding that I just couldn’t manage it all and I felt just kind of lost... / 18. and I just went out and found a job. It wasn’t much it was just anything I could grab and I just stopped, I just stopped going./ 19. And, yes, I really didn’t know the procedures to withdraw, I didn’t know that I could do that, and I didn’t know many people or persons to even ask about that.../

Right, right...

P5: 20. So, but, so when I came back, when I wanted to come back and had to find out what to do, I was amazed to find all the stuff that I could have done, like going that route.

16. It was during her second semester that P5 had gotten back together with a man who would become her current husband. She realized that money-wise she couldn’t support herself and her three children while being in school.

17. She stopped going to school and she found work doing anything she could grab.

18. P5 didn’t know that she could withdraw and that there was a withdrawal procedure. She didn’t know anyone to ask about this.

19. It was when P5 wanted to come back that she found out all that she could have done and the help that she could have gotten to get through. She found out all the
help, like I probably could have gotten through it or taken an incomplete or whatever, all the different options out there.../

So when you stopped out, was that your first term or...

P5: 21. I think it was my second...

Oh, okay.

P5: My second, um, semester.

So you got a job and so did you work through that summer, then, come back in the fall?

P5: I ended up getting that job at the jail.../

Oh, yeah.

P5: 22. ...because I thought that it was going to be a career thing, the pay was pretty, and I thought that maybe this would work, but it turned out to be just, well, not quite...just employment./

So, then, when you came back to school, you were on academic probation?

P5: 23. Yeah, well, uh, they let me, uh, retro-withdraw, so that ended up taking out, well, uh, well, the financial aid probation was fine because it had been long enough, or maybe it was just probation./

It was probation and not financial aid suspension.

P5: 24. Right, but I wasn’t worried about it because I knew about it and I was ready for it (school) and I knew I could get good grades. I wasn’t worried about that part...and the same with the academic part

different options there are out there.

21. P5 stopped school during her second semester and ended up getting the job at the jail.

22. P5 thought the job would be a career thing, the pay was pretty, but the work turned out to be just employment.

23. P5 retro-withdrew when she returned to school and the financial aid probation was fine because she’d been out long enough.

24. She was worried about the financial aid or academic probation because she was ready for school and knew she could get good grades.
And when you got a letter that said you’d been susp-

P5: 25. ...It was scary (laugh)./ 25. It was scary when P5 got the letter saying she’d been suspended.

Oh, it was scary, yeah, scary and what did you think about yourself then?

P5: 26. Oh, awful, yeah, awful (pause)/ 26. She thought it was awful, awful.

...and so how did you sort of work yourself into thinking “I want to go back” .... Even though it was scary?

P5: 27. Oooaaaaauuuuuhhh. Um (hardly audible) I guess you just have to know that this happens to a lot of and you have to get past that to know that you are better than that .../ 27. P5 knew that this kind of thing happens to a lot of others and she had to get past it to know that she was better than that.

28. you didn’t put, you didn’t put your best foot forward or whatever for whatever, I mean they don’t know whatever your reasons.../

28. She told herself that she didn’t put her best foot forward for whatever reason and that they didn’t know her reasons.

Right.

P5: 29. ..and you just pick yourself up and you have to get past it and don’t take it personal./ 29. She picked herself up. She had to get past it and not take it personal.

Uh huh, and then when you did return, do you think you were doing things differently?

P5: 30. Yeah, pretty much I was careful, I mean in terms of it all.../ 30. P5 was pretty careful when she returned.

You paid attention to course load and...

P5: 31. Yeah, I started off with just two (courses) so I could ease back in and then I went to three (courses) and then (laugh) now I’m up to five (courses) but (laugh).../ 31. She started off with just two courses to ease back in, then took three, and now is up to five courses.

At what point did you get married?
P5: 32. Um (pause). Probably about six months after I quit here.

So while you were working at the detention center.

P5: Um, yeah./

So, when you decided to go back to school, your husband was supportive of that?

P5: 33. Um hum, yes, he was.

Supporting you and paying the bills, or did you also work?

P5: Yes, but no, no, I didn’t work. Well I have done a couple little things, but, I find that, with being a mother and school, well, it’s just too much. You just can’t do all three (laugh), so.../

Right. Yes. I would think being in college,

P5: ..um..

having five kids,

P5: Um.

being married

P5: Um...

– that’s enough!

P5: 34. Um. Um. Um. Um...(laugh)

So, what do you think about yourself now? You’re successful...

P5: 34. Yeah. I still have a little difficulty about giving presentations in

32. P5 got married about six months after she quit school, while she was working at the detention center.

33. Her husband supported her return to school. She doesn’t work because with being a mother and going to school, work is just too much. She can’t do all three.

34. P5 thinks she’s successful, although she has difficulty giving presentations and
Do you mean like computer skills?

P5: 36. No, not necessarily, I understand that, I mean I can get around that but, you know, but I mean I NEVER had to stand up in front of people unless it was a speech class, you know, I mean that was the ONLY time we did that. That is very hard for me, I get anxiety and tunnel vision and I can’t oh, OH....my.../

You think the 18 year olds are better at that?

P5: 37. Oh, well, not necessarily, but they get a lot of practice in school now. They make them do it and they, I’m finding out with other kids that they do it all the time, so they get so much of it that by the time that they, well they’re fine, they’re great...so which is good, I wish that I had that back then. 38. So, yeah, and you know, there’s the math and I’ve been putting it off and now it has just been like seventeen years since I’ve had any of it, so I’m a little nervous about that..../

So, when do you give yourself a break or a rest?

P5: 39. Oh, uh (laugh), every once in awhile I break down (laugh). I try to take it easy every once in awhile but with the school and the kids, there’s an awful lot to be done and I just need to get to it. /
Sounds like you’re quite disciplined.

P5: 40. I am. I mean, there’s a lot with five kids and I don’t mean that I don’t love that...(laugh)/

Gotta be hard work.

P5: 41. They are. My husband complains sometimes that I them more than I love him (laugh) but I’m just like, well (shrugs)/ 42. they sure are a constant in our lives and they know that they can count on me, I don’t know, I mean, / 43. sometimes I get frustrated (very quiet) and think “Oh, I just don’t have any time to myself”./

That’s hard...do you think about how far you’ve come from being 14 years old with a pregnancy? Do you look at that and say “I’m successful”?

P5: 44. Uh, yeah, I....think so and though I also, um, have that little negativity of “kinda late” or “should have done this before now” but, I realize that there’s not a lot of things that I could have done/ 45. and definitely compared to what a lot of other people have gone through, I’m glad with what I’ve...I didn’t have a lot...of...issues./ 46. But, yeah, I wish I could have started earlier and then I’d already be more settled in a career and have a more comfortable future and that kind of thing./ 47. But, I’m happy now and I’m going to focus on that./

So, good. What’s your goal, when do you graduate?

P5: 48. Um, well, if I can stay on course, I have like maybe another year and a half. I think that would include another summer. But definitely in two years./ And then?

40. Not that P5 doesn’t love them, but it’s a lot to manage with five kids.

41. P5’s husband complains that she loves the kids more than she loves him.

42. The kids are a constant in their lives and know they can count on her.

43. P5 gets frustrated sometimes, thinking she doesn’t have any time to herself.

44. P5 has negativity about being late in college or feeling she should have completed before now, but realizes that there’s not a lot she could have done.

45. She’s glad with what she’s done and compared to what other people have gone through, P5 didn’t have a lot of issues.

46. P5 wishes she could have started earlier in order to be settled in a career with a more comfortable future.

47. P5 is happy and focuses on that.

48. P5 can definitely graduate in two years or less if she can stay on course.
P5: 48. I was planning to work with kids but then, this last semester, I had a light bulb go off and realized that I’d be too burned out on kids and that I wouldn’t have anything left for my kids. 49. Even though, that’s where my love is so I just recently found out that I could easily get my licensure for addiction counseling. 50. I know that I will possibly work in three or four areas in my lifetime.

That’s probably true.

P5: 51. The addiction license just requires a couple courses that I’ll probably need to take anyway.

Oh, well, you sound like you’re set.

P5: Hum (pause).

Well, in summary, if you had to pick three things that you could say got you in the hole in school...

P5: 52. Well, um, money. I mean, I had financial aid and all, but with my kids... I mean, I didn’t tap into too many resources, like I’d done in the past, but I just couldn’t do it financially. And, I suppose, another would be that I didn’t have a support network, I sort of got lost in the masses in school and I’m shy about asking if I have a problem. 53. And, I guess, I also think that the idea of maybe getting a job and just having things be easier. Just my kids and a job, no school. Which is funny because I really want to be in school (laugh).

Conflicting priorities? And when the balance between kids, school, and finances got to be too much.

P5: Yeah, that’s, well, yes.
Well, in terms of three things that have gotten you out of the hole?

P5: 54. I suppose you could say it’s the opposite, you know, I mean, with having a partner now and with his financial support and all being taken care of. That means I have only my schoolwork and the kids, where before I was worried about the financial and I had my kids, no support and I felt that I had too much to balance./ 55. My kids are really, they are really my life, the really solid and important part in my life and they are such good kids. It’s important that I have enough time for all of them./

Yes, I hear that. You’ve got five children, I think you told me ranging in age from the oldest being 16 to the youngest being 2. You have a 2 and a 4 year old?

P5: Yes, that’s right.

Well, okay, I think I’ve got your story, pretty much. You think? Is there else that you haven’t mentioned and that I haven’t been nosy about (laugh) that you think plays a role in where you’re at right now?

P5: 56. Um, well. I (pause) don’t know, um. If I, did I mention that….well, my two year old is diagnosed with autism./

(Surprised look) Wow.

P5: 57. And, well, my four-year old is a high-functioning autistic. With speech therapy we think that will be fine, that will very much improve./ 58. But my youngest, she is so sweet, very cuddly which isn’t at all like the stereotype of the distant, rocking…but she needs lots of therapy, behavior therapy, speech and

54. With directly opposite situations in place, P5’s academic situation improved. Her husband provides the necessary financial support for her and the kids and this also allows her to have enough time to spend on her kids and her schoolwork.

55. P5’s kids are the real solid and important part of her life and having enough time for all five of them is important.

56. P5’s two year old is diagnosed with autism.

57. Her four-year old is diagnosed with high-functioning autism. With speech therapy, she’ll improve and be fine.

58. P5’s youngest child is very sweet and cuddly, not the stereotype of a distant, rocking autistic. She requires behavior, speech and occupational therapy but will remain dependent upon P5 and the family.
occupational therapy and she’s going to be dependent upon me, in the family./
P5. 58. That’s some of the reason that I have so little time for myself, it is all the therapy appointments for the two youngest, each day or every afternoon to get them to appointments./

I see, I see. How about your husband’s part in this?

P5: 59. Well, I think he depends upon me to take care of the kids, I mean he’s a good father and all…well, there’s a sense about, that, I mean. He’s, I guess, a high functioning autistic and he, his job, well, he feels comfortable with the computer and that works for him./ 60. I get (pause) frustrated sometimes in that I don’t feel sometimes like I get what I need emotionally from him but I know, I mean, I feel…/ 61. well, I get a lot from my kids. We have such a strong…and this is where sometimes my husband (laugh) says that I love them (the kids) more than I do him./ 62. But, you know, we work at it, work it out./

Big responsibility.

P5: Yeah, well, it’s, you know (pause).

Anything else?

P5: No (laugh). I think that’s it(laugh).

You sure (laugh)?

P5: 63. Yeah, I mean I think that’s pretty much it.

All right, then, I’m going to turn off the recorder. Thank you.
P5, Level Three (Narrative Based on Emergent Themes)

(Demographic information collected prior to the taped interview is included in summary here to provide a backdrop to the narrative: Participant 5 is a non-traditional student, age 35, who quit high school in the middle of the 10th grade. She was pregnant at 14 and married the father of her child. Continuing to attend school became problematic for them. P5 and her husband subsequently had three children together. Today, those children are 20, 16 and 10. P5 was divorced in 1999 and earned her GED. She briefly attended the Missoula Vo-Tech but found the Medical Transcription program unsatisfactory and started college at UM. She experienced academic difficulty during her first two semesters of college and left in the middle of the second semester. This placed her on academic suspension. She remarried and has two children, ages 2 and 4, with her current husband. P5 returned to college and is currently a junior majoring in Social Work.)

P5’s experience with academic difficulty has been overwhelming and depressing. She has a hard time fighting through it, since she’s not like younger kids with more time. Sometimes, taking five classes is scary for P5 and finding the time for all of it is the problem since she has little uncommitted time.

P5 is married to an old-fashioned dad and she’s the mom who does most of the work. They manage, since she is an overachiever like her mom, her older sister and her oldest daughter. They all do a lot and feel more comfortable with lots to do and not sitting around. P5 refers to them all as “driven”, driven to succeed in work, school, and family. P5 has recently gotten to know her older sister better and can see their similarities now. They talk on the phone and share the big things.

P5’s self-esteem is wrapped up in being able to finish school and find a career she likes. She’s just working steadily to get through.

Talking about her academic suspension, P5 says it started during her second semester in college. She had gotten back together with a man who is now her current husband. Money-wise, she realized that she couldn’t support herself and her three children while being in school. She and her family were living in family housing, but she couldn’t manage it all. She felt lost.

P5 stopped going to school and found work doing anything she could grab. She didn’t find out until later that there was a withdrawal procedure. At the time she left school, she didn’t know anyone to ask about this. It was when P5 wanted to come back that she found out all that she could have done, all the help that she could have gotten, all the different options there are out there.

She eventually ended up getting a job at the jail. She thought the job would be a career thing and the pay was pretty (good). But, the work turned out to be just employment. P5 got married about six months after she quit school, while she was working at the detention center. Her husband supported her return to school. While she’s done a couple little things, she doesn’t work because being a mother and school is just too much. She cannot do all three.

When she returned to school, P5 was able to retro-withdraw and her financial aid probation was fine because she’d been out of school long enough. She wasn’t worried
about the financial aid or academic parts because she was ready for it (school) and she knew she could get good grades.

When she had gotten the letter saying she’d been suspended, it was scary for P5. It was awful, yes, awful. She knew that this kind of thing happens to a lot of others and that she had to get past it to know that she was better then that. She told herself that she didn’t put her best foot forward for whatever reason and that they don’t know whatever her reasons were. She just picked herself up. She had to get past it and not take it personal.

P5 was pretty careful when she returned. She started off with just two courses to ease back in. Then, she went to three and now she’s up to five courses. P5 thinks she’s successful, although she has difficulty giving presentations and feels that she is expected to know certain things because she is older. Even if she had finished high school, she wouldn’t have been taught those things.

She understands having to deal with things like math and she can get around things like computer skills, but she never had to stand up in front of people unless it was in a speech class. This is very hard for P5. She gets anxious about this as she gets tunnel vision. This is very distressing. Younger students now get lots of practice speaking in school. P5’s kids are made to do this and they are fine, great with it as a result. This is good and she wishes she’d had that back then. Also, it has been seventeen years since P5 has had any math. She has been putting off taking it. The thought makes her nervous.

P5 tries to take it easy every once in awhile, but she has a lot to do and needs to get to it. Sometimes she breaks down. Not that she doesn’t love her kids, but it’s a lot of work having five kids. Sometimes, P5’s husband complains that she loves the kids more than she loves him. But the kids are a constant in their lives and they know they can count on her. P5 gets frustrated sometimes, thinking she doesn’t have any time to herself.

P5 has negativity about being late in college or feeling that she should have completed before now. She realizes, though, that there’s not a lot she could have done differently. She is glad with what she’s done and compared to what other people have gone through, P5 hasn’t had a lot of issues, really. She only wishes she could have started earlier in order to be settled already in a career with a more comfortable future ahead. But, P5 is happy and she focuses on that. She can definitely graduate in two years or less if she can stay on course.

P5 was planning to work with kids until a light bulb went off recently. She realized that she’d bum out on kids doing so and have nothing left for her own children. She’s discovered that getting licensed in addiction counseling would be an easy alternative and in fact, it requires a few courses she probably needs to take anyway. P5 also knows it’s possible to work in three or four areas in her lifetime.

The things that got P5 in trouble in school include financial issues, a lack of a support network, being shy about asking for help, and getting lost in the masses on campus. She now finds it funny that she thought that quitting school and getting a job would make things easier for her, even though her goal was to be in school. P5’s success in school now is due to being in a place opposite from the one when she got in trouble. Her academic situation has improved because her husband provides the needed financial support for her and the kids. This also allows her to have enough time to spend on the kids as well as her schoolwork.
A recent challenge is that P5's two year old was diagnosed with autism. Her four-year old is diagnosed with high-functioning autism and with speech therapy, will be fine. The two year old requires extensive speech, occupational, and behavior therapy that require P5's daily attention. P5's husband depends upon her to take care of the children; he too is a high functioning autistic and is more comfortable with his job and computers. Sometimes, P5 gets frustrated, feeling that her husband doesn't meet her emotional needs, but she gets a lot back from the strong bond she has with her kids. Even though her husband sometimes says P5 loves her kids more than him, they work at it and work it out.
Okay, I’ve explained about my research topic being an investigation of students’ experience of academic difficulty that resulted in suspension and reinstatement and then a subsequent return to good academic standing. Could you start by telling me a little about your academic difficulty or, uh, about when you started slipping in your coursework?

P6: 1. Let’s see, I’ll talk about my “fall from grace” (laugh). Let’s see, that was....well (cough) I didn’t do too good at Georgia State. Um, after my first semester there, I got all “A’s” and a “B”.

That’s pretty good.

P6: 2. Oh, yeah. And then my second semester I got all “B’s” and a “C”...and then...my...the first semester back for my second year I went for about a week and I decided I didn’t want to go to school./ 3. I wanted to go to work and do my own thing. And, so I did that for awhile in Georgia and then I realized that, that I wasn’t making any money, I mean I wasn’t making anything that was going to sustain a life/ 4. so I decided I needed to go back to school but I didn’t want to go back to school in Georgia, I wanted to go to a different place. So, I moved out here and/ 5. when I got here, I got the great idea that I wanted to switch my major from Business, which I’ve always been pretty distinct about in terms of following my dad, you know, in kind of learning from him and stuff like that, so moving from Business to an attempt at...being a doctor! Oh, like an oral surgeon or a dentist, one of the two./ 6. and so then my first semester here, well, first of all I found out that the

1. P6 laughs when he talks about his “fall from grace”. He didn’t do too good at Georgia State. After his first semester he got all “A’s” and one “B”.

2. His second semester, he got all “B’s” and a “C”. P6 came back the first semester of his second year, decided he didn’t want to go to school, and left after only one week.

3. P6 wanted to go to work, which he did for a while in Georgia, until he realized that he wasn’t making enough money to sustain his life.

4. P6 decided he needed to go back to school but didn’t want to go back to school in Georgia. He wanted to go to a different place, so he moved here.

5. When P6 got here, he had the great idea to switch his major from Business, which he’s been pretty distinct about in terms of following his dad. He made an attempt at being a doctor, either an oral surgeon or dentist.

6. In his first semester, P6 found out that the great state of Montana’s in-state tuition
great state of Montana’s in-state tuition requirements which only allowed me to go to school for the most six hours (credits), I had to make a certain amount of money (in the year of establishing residency), I had to register my vehicle in this state, and all sorts of crazy stuff which is a whole lot to get done when I first moved out here.

7. So, I jumped into a chemistry class, the regular chemistry class whatever that is, 101 or whatever is, maybe 161... and, uh... That stuff’s just not for me, basically. I found out very quickly why I’ve always moved towards the business aspect and stayed away from the sciences and stuff like that so.

8. My first semester, it was the first time I’d had a class... that I had not... been able to do. I’d never been in a class where, if I did put the effort in, I couldn’t get an “A”.

9. Effort is always the question. That’s always been my question. Throughout my whole life, it’s never been whether I can or can’t, it’s whether I will or won’t and most of the time I chose what I can do and that’s the easy way but that’s how it was.

10. So I’m going on 23 and I’m stuck in college again. Um, but, so that first semester I was here, you know, and I took that chemistry class and after the first two weeks, I just couldn’t understand it and it was whoa, it was really bothering me and I just gave up. I mean I still went to class and I still did, I still tried minimally, but I was just going into it with a bad attitude. I kind of had the attitude of “I don’t know this, I’m not going to figure this out, I’m never going to get it”.

11. So, in that class, I think I ended up getting a “D”...? Or was it an “F”... one of the two... it was definitely closer to a “D” or an “F” and, uh, after that, that was during the spring (semester) so/

12. during the summer (session) I decided I was going to take 162! Chemistry. Because like I had already decided that like before and all and I had signed up and I requirement only allowed him to attend school for, at most, six credits. He had other requirements to meet also to establish residency. That was a whole lot of crazy stuff to get done when he first moved here.

7. P6 jumped into chemistry, the regular chemistry 161. He quickly found out why he’s always moved toward the business aspect and stayed away from the sciences.

8. The chemistry was the first time he’d had a class that he had not been able to do. P6 had never been in a class where he put the effort in and couldn’t get an “A”.

9. Effort is always the question, it’s always been P6’s question. Throughout his life, it has never been whether he can or can’t, it’s whether he will or won’t. Mostly, P6 has taken the easy way.

10. At 23, P6 was stuck in college again. But, after two weeks in the chemistry class, he couldn’t understand it. It really bothered him and he just gave up. He kept going to class but he was going to it with a bad attitude.

11. P6 ended up getting a “D” or an “F”.

12. Since he’d already signed up for summer, P6 thought what the heck, why not take Chemistry 162?
thought what the heck! 13. Well, I didn’t even go to one day – well, no, I went to the first day, I went to the first day of summer school and you know, it was more of the same, except for a lot more calculus and let’s face it, I got a “D” in it the first time, there was no way I was get anything better than a “D” and so I decided to quit. P6: 14. So that’s why my academic standing fell so…/

You didn’t know how to withdraw?

P6: 15. Withdraw? No, I wasn’t smart enough to do any of that…/

Did you know, er, the consequences?

P6: 16. Oh, yeah. I just didn’t care. I just, I got to the point where, I just didn’t care. I’ve been doing a lot of stuff, pretty much my whole life, doing, working really hard at everything I’d done and, it’s a, I played a lot of sports when I was younger so I devoted, like, all my time to that, so once I stopped playing sports, I devoted all my time to work and school and then all my time at working. Then, when I came out here, I was just devoted to the one thing, except it was harder now, with the chemistry and all./ 17. I didn’t care what happened and I was just saying school is not for me. And so it doesn’t really matter if I fail out, it’s horrible, maybe but I’m never going back! /

Huh.

P6: 18. And, well, then I, you know, started working…and I don’t really know what turned the switch. I’m not really too sure, I mean when (my advisor) told me about this thing you’re doing, I started really thinking about what made me change from not caring to caring…/

13. P6 went to class the first day of summer school. It was more of the same, but with a lot more calculus. With a “D” in the first chemistry, P6 figured there was no way of getting anything better than that, so he quit.

14. Quitting was why his academic standing fell.

15. P6 wasn’t smart enough to withdraw.

16. P6 knew what would happen but he just didn’t care. Pretty much his whole life, he had worked really hard at everything he’d done, whether it was sports when he was young, or work, or school. He devoted all his time to whatever he was doing. He pretty much devoted himself to just one thing when he came out here, except that thing was harder with the chemistry and all.

17. By saying that he didn’t care what happened and saying school was not for him, it didn’t really matter if he failed out. It was horrible but P6 thought maybe he’d never go back to school.

18. Then, P6 started working and he doesn’t know what turned the switch. When P6’s advisor talked to him about this thing I’m doing, he started thinking about what made him change from not caring to caring.
Uh huh, uh huh?

P6: 19. And, uh, well, er...the only thing that changed was the weather...cause it went from spring to winter. You know, and that’s it. There was, I mean, I realized that I needed to get back into school and I realized that I was 23 and it was time to get going!

19. The only thing that changed was the weather. It went from spring into winter. That was it: P6 realized he was 23 and it was time to get going. He needed to get back into school.

How about, um, let’s see if I’ve got this right. You went one day to summer school and you quit and you had been working at the motel?

P6: 20. I actually was working at the bank at that time.

Okay, you were working at the bank-

P6: The First Interstate Bank.

So, okay, you had been working during your first semester here, which sounds like it was in the spring semester?

P6: Yes, um yes, because of the fact that Montana required me to make “X” amount of money before I became a resident to pay in-state tuition because they don’t want you coming to the state specifically for school.

Right. Okay, so you were working at the bank. How many hours a week?

P6: Thirty-five or so, yeah, about that, mostly during the daytime, like starting at 12 o’clock. I mean I’d get out of chemistry class about 10 or maybe 11 and I’d leave the bank then at 6 p.m.

So was it just the chemistry class you took?

P6: Actually, the chemistry was a five-credit class so the only other thing that I took was a, uh...
P.E. course?

P6: No, uh, pass/fail, yeah, uh, no, it was actually a, um, Modern Medical Advances or Modern or, oh, um, Recent Medical Advances... it was just a pass/no credit class for doctors, or I mean people who want to go into that kind of profession, so. I just needed a class that you just had to show up in more times than you didn’t (laugh) so I did pass that one, I did pass that one. I did show up more times than I didn’t.

Okay.

P6: And, uh, then the chemistry that I got the “D” but it was only (a total of) six hours (credits).

Did you go to every chemistry class?

P6: 21. Uh, nooo. No. No. Well, during that springtime was also March 5th which happened to be my 21st birthday... and, I’ve never been much of a drinker because, I mean, lookit, I mean I’m obviously not, I mean I don’t look exactly OLDER than I am. I look quite YOUNGER than I already am, so I was never able to get into a bar, even with a fake ID because it was always a laughable thing like “there’s no way this kid’s getting in” and so, once I hit 21, hey, it was kind of like it’s me against the world now. 22. I’ve always kind of had that attitude that once I was 21 I was going to do what I was legal to do, whatever I wanted.

Like go nuts about it... (laugh)

P6: 23. Yeah, it was a bad month, it was about a month straight of, just no good.

So, you were partying with, what, your...
friends and your girlfriend? Tell me about them.

P6: 24. I met my girlfriend, it was right when I moved out here, I actually met her, uh, she was going out with one of my good buddies and they broke up, and she went out with another one of my buddies and they (laugh) broke up and it was about like four or five months after that, well, we, uh, we started dating and we’ve been dating ever since.

Your relationship with her has been stable since you started...

P6: Yeah./

Okay, so I’m hearing that there was the difficult class and then the partying that went on for a bit, but then...


About a month?

P6: 26. And then, well, I’m a real, uh, mmm, when I’m actually drinking it’s fine, it’s just the next day. I mean, that’s the only problem that I figure I had, I had no problem when I drink, I mean I’m not a mean person, I’m not an idiot, I don’t do stupid things, I didn’t drive....

Did you see the fellow in the news the other day? He was at a party that the police were busting and he slipped into an unlocked cop car and tried to “slip away” – that didn’t work too well. You didn’t pull stunts like that? (laugh)

P6: Yeah, I DID see that, isn’t that just. No, I didn’t do anything stupid like that.

You are smart!
P6: No, I wasn’t a fighter and I wasn’t looking for any trouble and about to pull any kind of that stuff…

So then that brought you up to summer school?

P6: 27. Well, let’s see I sort of went through that, March turned into April, that took care of the whole drinking “binge” thing and then it’s May and finals, but I only had the one class, I had the chemistry class. I was already so out of it during the class that, it was so...

Did you take the final?

P6: Yeah, sure I took the final (laugh). The person next to me got a “C”, so I got a “C” as well, um (pause) but yeah, um, it was yeah, um, it was just a, even with the “C” it was, just, I still failed pretty much that class.

You remember who your instructor was?

P6: 28. I can’t, let’s see, what, hmmm, I see him all the time now because he teaches a class in room where I have a class, but I can’t, he’s a young guy, but I can’t think of…

Well, okay. So, getting back on track (laugh), so it turned into summer and you were still working at the bank for that summer.

P6: 29. Stayed working at the bank, for a little while, yeah, after the summer, uh, and...

Did you return to school in the Fall?

P6: Uh, no. No, I did not come back to school in the Fall. 30. I, uh, er, I’m trying to think how long of a break I actually did
take. I think, let’s see, I took a year break from...when that first chemistry class was, and then summer...yeah, and I guess it was fall and then the next spring or maybe it was the next fall. The next fall...

Fall?

P6:  Yeah, let’s say that this is the, that the end of this semester will be the end of my first full (academic) year back. / 31. Once P6 established residency, he decided to try school one more time. Like pretty much his whole life, it would be a sink or swim type of thing. Given the choice of sink or swim, P6 will swim. However, if it’s a choice of sink, swim, or take some more time, he’d take some more time. It’s that basic.

P6:  And then I had residency established. Once I got my residency established I had kind of decided that I was going to try school one more time and we’ll see, you know, if what’s coming up. It’s a sink or swim type of thing, which, is, you know, honestly...that’s pretty much my whole life. If it’s sink or swim, I’ll swim. But, if it’s sink, swim, or you’ve got some more time to do it, I’ll take some time to do it. Yeah. That’s what it basically comes down to. / 32. So now, it’s sink or swim time...and I’m back in the business program, and uh, I don’t drink anymore. I just quit that altogether. /

At all?

P6: 33. Yeah, I just quit that altogether, once I’m going to school so much and you know, working so much that I pretty much only have Saturday night to do it and I don’t want to be all hungover on Sunday, because that’s my only other day off that I get to relax on, so I pretty much quit that altogether and now. / 34. I do my homework at work (at the motel) and go to school and show up to classes. You know, it’s a whole lot easier when you do that...

I bet. And you had no, uh, remorse, about leaving the idea of a medical career? Or was it sort of a whim?

P6: 35. Exactly, it was all on a whim 35. Since it was a whim that P6 switched
and you know, like, yeah, I had no remorse, I had pretty much no remorse for anything, even dropping out or getting “F’s”, it’s all water under the bridge for me. It’s always another day, another time, we’ll work it out the next time and see what happens next time.

Parents have any influence?

P6: 36. Mom and Dad have actually just been awesome! If it wasn’t for them, I’d be...dead, pretty much. They supported me ten times more when I was an idiot and a screw-up than now./ 37. I mean, now I do my own stuff. I pay my own insurance, I pay my own car, I pay my own rent, I pay my own utilities. The only thing my mom does is she gives me an American Express card for gas every month so I can get gas any time I need it and that’s what she does for me and./ 38. but when I was being a screw up and not really going to school or anything and back in Georgia, I got involved with the wrong crowd I guess you could say...

How wrong?

P6: No, not, nothing really wrong I mean, it was just marijuana and I mean I didn’t even do any cocaine or anything like that.../

But that made you a little less motivated...

P6: 39. Oh, well, you know, if you do anything enough it becomes a problem. I mean I’m pretty much of a firm believer in that, well, if you have to pick one or the other, you know, alcohol or marijuana, I’d much prefer to be on marijuana because I’ve never done too much stupid on that, I mean, never tried to get in a car and kill anybody or anything like that, uh, but if from business to a medical major, he has no remorse leaving that. He pretty much has no remorse for anything, even dropping out and getting “F’s”. For P6, it’s always another day and another time. He’ll work it out and see what happens next.

36. P6’s Mom and Dad have been awesome. They supported him ten times more when he was being an idiot and a screw-up than they do now.
37. Now, P6 pays for his car, his insurance, his rent and his utilities. The only thing his mom pays for is P6’s gas on an American Express card.

38. When P6 was being a screw up, not really going to school back in Georgia, he got involved with the wrong crowd. Nothing really wrong, just marijuana, not cocaine or anything like that.

39. Doing anything enough becomes a problem. P6 is a firm believer that if you have to pick one or the other, he prefers marijuana to alcohol. He’s never done too much stupid on that, never tried to get in a car and kill anybody. But doing anything in excess will eventually stone you and dumb you up.

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you do anything in excess, I mean if you drink alcohol every day or you smoke everyday, they eventually stone you and pretty much dumbs you up to and dumbs you up to anything and/ 40. that was pretty much how it was. I was working a dead end job, and waiting tables at a pizzeria in Georgia, making $4.25 an hour at a waiter’s salary plus tips so it evened out to about $7.50 or $8.00 an hour. And my mom and dad just supported the hell out of me the whole time because they just./

P6: 41. you know my mom’s always been, she’s always been a big believer in me. She knows that I can, she knows that it’s never a can or can’t, it is always the will or won’t with me so. So, she’s always had good faith in me and she just stuck with it for a while./ 42. I got in a lot of trouble, you know I was definitely was under house arrest, uh, with my mom (laugh) you know she was really watching over me pretty closely and everything./

P6: 43. But, now that, well, she knew that eventually I’d come back around and I came back around.

44. And, now, well, they’ve just been supporting me for so long (laugh) I feel so bad about it, now, I’m just like “don’t give me any money, please, you guys just stuck with me when I was 18, 19, 20 and 21” and now that I’m 22 and 23, I’ve been taking care of myself and it’s just like let me take care of myself, please cause I feel real bad for them and they’ve just been really great and/

Yeah, it sounds like they were really very supportive.

P6: 45. Yeah, I mean, they’ve really been. I mean my mom helped me out, paid for my insurances and everything else like that...maybe when they shouldn’t have./

45. P6’s mother has paid for his insurances and everything else like that. P6’s parents have been there for him maybe when they shouldn’t have.

Have they paid for your school?

40. That was how it was for P6. He was working a dead end job, waiting tables at a pizzeria in Georgia, making about $8 an hour. His parents supported him the whole time.

41. P6’s mom has always been a big believer in him. She knows that he can, that it’s never can or can’t, that it is always will or won’t with him. His mom has always had good faith in P6 and she stuck with it for a while.

42. P6 got in a lot of trouble. He was under house arrest with his mom and she watched over him closely.

43. His mom knew that eventually, P6 would come back around and he did.

44. So now that his parents have been supporting him for so long, P6 feels really bad about it. He tells them not to give him anything, since they stuck with him into his 20’s. Now that he’s 23 and taking care of himself, he wants them to let him take care of himself.
P6: 46. Oh, no, I'm all loans, I'm all loaned up. I'm way deep into that shit, I mean I'd better graduate (laugh). That's another sink or swim issue there. If I don't do it (graduate) I'm gonna be piled up with about $15 grand in loans that I don't need, so...just gotta.../

So, uh, what's your goal?

P6: 47. Whatever kind of paper that this school gives me that says I'm that smart, I'm all for it. I've never really been a real big believer in all the school systems and stuff like that, but everybody else puts a whole lot of stock and faith in it so, yeah, and so that's the. 48. I'm really kind of, oh, anti-establish (laughs) and everything and so that's probably why I never did so good in school. I think it was in the 2nd grade the first time I told my teacher to, to F-off, that was the 2nd grade and the first time doing that, and, you know, I don't like people telling me what to do, when to do it and how to do it and all that kind of stuff./

49. But I just realized that no matter how screwed up things are, you can't change it so you, you can only deal with it and I've come to cope pretty much so...I'm here when I have to be, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday or Thursday and Tuesdays, you know, trying to do my thing./

So, you're going to get the degree...

P6: 50. Get the degree in business, uh, as far as goal, I guess I have, I don't, I love Missoula, I love Montana but the economy for what I'm going to try to do, I mean, you know, once I get a business management degree with marketing as well, it's just not that kind of economy here and I love Montana but I can't stay./

46. P6 is all loaned up, way deep into loans to pay for school. He laughs about another sink or swim issue. He needs to graduate. If he doesn't, he'll be piled up with about $15 grand in loans.

47. P6 wants whatever kind of paper the school gives him that says he's smart. Even though he's never been a big believer in the school systems, P6 knows that everybody else puts a whole lot of stock and faith in it.

48. P6 is anti-establishment, which is probably why he never did so good in school. He doesn't like people telling him what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. The first time he told his teacher to F-off was in the 2nd grade.

49. He has realized that no matter how screwed up things are, he can't change it. He can only deal with it and he's come to cope pretty much.

50. P6 will get the degree in business. He loves Montana, but his degree in business management and marketing in the Montana economy won't allow him to stay.
Back to Georgia... is your family still there?

P6: 51. Mom and Dad are actually in Philadelphia right now, they moved back up to Philadelphia. My dad actually got laid off his job after 23 years, uh, working for Phillips Lighting, he got laid off, just; they just completely got rid of his division and instead of regional sales managers, they have regional managers or something like that. It was just a cop out way to not have to pay my dad his retirement that he'd been earning all, and all his benefits, and all this kind of stuff, it's pretty, just, horrible. It's kind of why I'm anti-establishment, people doing like that kind of stuff in this world and it makes me mad.

P6: 52. But my mom, it actually ended up turning out well, we were always alright, I mean my dad lost his job, he makes over a $100 or $120 thousand a year, so that was kind of a big hit on the income but my mom has managed to move her way up from being a secretary, starting out with this company as just a secretary, you know $12K, and answering phones and directing calls, and now she's third in charge of the company. She's now making over a $100K a year, no college, no degrees, no nothing... just hard work.

What's the company?

P6: 53. M-Tech... it's called, uh M-Tech. Futura is another one of the companies, it's just this guy in Philadelphia who started it, yeah, it's a computer software company and it's this guy, it's amazing how shrewd he is, the definition of business and it's pretty cool. 54. Well actually, in actuality, he's got a son who's probably going to be taking over the company, uh, and me and his son are pretty good friends. We kind of grew up together when I lived in Philadelphia, cause he only
two years younger than me and he kind of looked up to me and it's like, you know...it's like.../

A shoe-in job? Is that what you’re telling me!?

P6: 55. IF I want one...if I want it, I’m sure I could, because the son is not as business-oriented as his dad and his dad really likes my business kinda...he sees me watching him all the time and trying to pick up on what he does, so he’s kinda interested in that because he thinks that, well./ 56. He’s worried about his business, basically, after his son takes over and I think he may be trying to get me in there.

You’ll be a safety net?

P6: Exactly!/

But would you have to move to Philadelphia?

P6: 57. But I would have to move to Philadelphia, so that’s a, that’s a questionable thing (laugh), I don’t know if (inaudible)...that place is....

Very different.

P6: (Very quietly)....It’s just plain nasty./

(Laugh) But could you tell yourself that you’re in this business for maybe five years or something like that? Pay off your college loans and sock a bunch of money away.....

P6: Oh, yeah, definitely....

....then you could afford to build a log home down the Bitterroot...
P6: 58. Oh, yeah, definitely. I COULD do, I mean, I could put up with anything, you know you can do what you have to do.../ 59. That’s pretty much what I’ve come to realize is that you CAN change, you have to deal with it. You screwed up, it’s obvious that you screwed up, and just about anybody gets a chance to change it and if you don’t change, you probably get it even more screwed up./ 60. So, you just deal with it and try to cut the difference, try to find a way, try to find a loophole to get through./ 61. You know, that’s pretty much what I’m looking for now is just grab as many screams as I can, finish up school, and go and find somebody to work for.

Did you say “grab as many screens”?

P6: Screams, yeah, just pull as many screams, like fun.../

Ohhhh. I get it. So where are you in your coursework? How long before you finish?

P6: 62. Uh, I’m actually just starting my upper core.

Okay.

P6: Yeah, I just started on my upper core.

The 300-level stuff?

P6: Yep, precisely, the 300-level stuff. I’ve pretty much, all of my, just general and pre-reqs are done./

Oh, like accounting and the econs. How’d they treat you?

P6: 63. Well, I’ve got that (econ) this semester and I’ve got my meeting with (my advisor) now. 63. P6 has econ this semester and will meet with his advisor to discuss his
advisor) coming up and we’ll discuss the...I’ve got the two accountings (courses) to do and...

You’ve done your math and your stats.
P6: Yep, already done that.

How’d that go?
P6: 64. No, well, wait, I’m doing Math 117 right now and on my first test, I got a 97 and the second one I got a 96...

So you’ve got some quantitative acumen...
P6: Well, yeah, well that...I’ve gotten 10 out of 10 on all my quizzes so that class should be all right. Uh, my econ class, I don’t, I didn’t attend but twice but I have an 87 and uh.../

You don’t go to class, just read the book? That works?
P6: 65. I teach myself, yeah. Every time I go to class I get annoyed. People ask questions over stuff that I understand, understood two weeks prior to and it’s like every time I go there it’s like I’m expecting, okay, what are we gonna learn that’s new and it’s always, so you guys didn’t understand this last week, well, okay, then here, we’ll go over it AGAIN, la da da da da. So, I just pretty much have self-taught me in that class. It did that last semester in micro (econ) and now this semester with macro./ 66. Teacher’s a really nice guy.

Is it Brandon Fuller, the new guy?
P6: Yeah, Brandon Fuller.

I keep hearing good news about this progress. He has the two accounting courses to do.

64. P6 is in Math 117 now and has gotten a 96 and 97 on the two tests. His quizzes are good so that class should be all right. P6 doesn’t attend his econ class regularly but he has an 87 in it.

65. P6 teaches himself in econ. Going to class annoyed him because people ask questions on stuff he understood two weeks prior. He kept expecting to learn something that’s new, but since some guys didn’t understand something from last week, they’ll go over it again and again. He is self-taught in this macro class, something that he did last semester in micro.

66. The econ teacher, Brandon Fuller, is a nice guy. He’ll really help you if you have a question. P6 keeps in email contact with him. The teacher recognized P6 from the micro class, even though he wasn’t attending the class. P6 emails him every once in awhile about review sessions and the tests, to let him know he’s keeping up
fellow.

P6: Good guy, heck of a nice guy. I mean he really, if you have a question, he'll definitely help. I keep in email contact with him, he, he, he recognized me from micro and realized (laugh) that I'm not even in class, but he knows, I mean he, I'll email him every once in awhile and let him know what's going on and let him know that I'll be there for the test, whenever it is, and I'll be there for the review sessions and all that, and I tell him I'm keeping up and I do, happily, the homework assignment-type of thing that are internet based and we have to do those at least once a week...and I've gotten “A’s” on all of those. So, he knows that I know what I'm doing so he's just pretty much...he's just like “if it really bothers you to come and you feel that the class is just dragging, don’t worry about it”. Also, P6 gets off work at midnight and gets to bed about one. Trying to get up by nine to shower and hunt for a parking spot at the University is never going to happen.

Uh huh.

P6: Yeah.

Well, is your girlfriend in school? I mean, that makes it easier to be engaged on campus if you’re both here...

P6: My girlfriend IS in school. She’s in physics and astronomy, some combination of those, like one’s the major and one’s a...minor or option or some such. I guess that’s it. She actually just got into that. She’s a really smart girl, she is. She has pretty much the same problems that I have though. Can but won’t. Yeah, yeah. So she’s pretty much feeding off my, P6’s girlfriend is in school as well. She’s in some combination of physics and astronomy. She’s a really smart girl with pretty much the same problems that P6 has: can but won’t. So, she’s feeding off P6’s sense of just gotta do it.
like, you know, yeah, great, you just gotta
do it./

So you’ve both got this commitment to
getting through school....

P6: 69. Um, yeah, I mean I took the
commitment before and she actually, um
just picked and goes “we really can do this”
and said it was a good idea. We pretty
much sat there and talked about all this,
about in this world, we’re not going to be
able to do anything without...I mean my
mom’s lucky. I mean, I’ve never heard of a
secretary turned totally in charge of a major
business, I mean, I’ve never, it’s not
something you hear about...and, uh, with,
in this world, you can only climb so high
without this piece of paper. With this piece
of paper...the skies...

You never know what you can
accomplish...

P6: Right, for some reason. I mean I
can’t agree with it and I can’t understand it,
but there’s.../

Right.

P6: 70. When I lived in Atlanta I met
some of the smartest people who’d never
gone to school a day in their lives, just
street smart, common sense smart, knowing
what’s going on, but no ability to make any
money because they didn’t have a piece of
paper saying that they are a trained, you
know, businessman, you know. These guys
have been surviving their whole lives on
nothing, you know and that’s more
impressive to me. Someone who’s
surviving off nothing or someone who’s
goin to school and you know taking the
high road and going to a couple of
classes....soon, they’re pulling in the
“green” and also suddenly being an expert.

69. P6 had made the school commitment
before. His girlfriend just picked her major
and now feels that they can really do this,
that it’s a good idea. They sat and talked
about not being able to do anything without
it. P6 realizes his mom is lucky to have
been a secretary turned totally in charge of
a major business. That’s not something
you hear. In this world, one can only climb
so high without the piece of paper: with the
paper, the skies. P6 can’t agree with or
understand this, but for some reason, this is
it.

70. P6 met some of the smartest people
when he lived in Atlanta. They’d never
gone to school but they were street-smart
and common sense smart. They didn’t
have the paper saying that they were
trained, so they had no ability to make
money. They’d survived their whole lives
on nothing. That’s more impressive than
someone taking the high road in school,
going to a couple classes and pulling in the
green, suddenly being an expert. This is a
weird game to P6.
It’s an interesting game, it’s all pretty weird to me.

I want to know where you go your “pluck”.

P6: Pluck? My pluck?

Yes, your pluck...your sense of self, your self-confidence.

P6: Oh, I don’t know because I’m really not that... self-confident...

No?

P6: Yeah, I mean no, I’ve always been a short kid, I mean not the really, really short kid...now I’m about 5’9”...but I’ve been one of the shorter...but when I was growing up, I was THE short one, I mean when I was, well, when I moved down to Georgia, actually my sophomore year in high school, I was 5’2”...uhhhhh, a hundred and five pounds (whisper)

Oh.

P6: And I was a sophomore in high school and I walked into the school and everyone was pointing me to the middle school because it was right next door and they were telling me “it’s right over there, kid, you just go on ahead because you just walked into the wrong building” and so I always had a chip on my shoulder because of that. I started playing basketball and that’s pretty much where the self-confidence came from just cause, well, I’ve always....

You’re athletic?

P6: Yeah, I’ve always, I’ve played football baseball, lacrosse, basketball, soccer...whatever kind of ball you can

P6 isn’t really that self-confident. He’s always been a short kid. Now, he’s about 5’9”, but he was THE short one growing up. When he moved to Georgia in his sophomore year of high school, P6 was 5’2” and 105 pounds. When he walked into the school, everyone pointed him to the middle school that was next door.

72. P6 started playing basketball. That’s where the self-confidence came from. He’s always played: football, baseball, lacrosse, basketball, and soccer. Basketball was his favorite and he played it throughout high school.
throw out there I’ll pick it up and mess
with it for a little while and see if I like it,
but I really liked basketball. I played
basketball throughout high school and/
P6: 73. that’s pretty much where the fake
self-confidence came from because when
you’re out there, you know, you’d better
get used to dealing with kids who were
telling me “you’re just a little punk” and
“You’re not going to be able to do this”.../

What position did you play?

P6: 74. Point guard. So, I was the
general of the court, I was the person who
had to keep everybody calm, put everybody
in the right spots, so it was a confidence
role, you’re supposed to have confidence in
that role.../

That’s a good spot to have.

P6: 75. As well, I’m supposed to get
everyone where they’re supposed to go...I
just had to develop it out of a lack of being
anything else, you know, if I wanted to
play sports...I couldn’t play football, I was
too small. I couldn’t play baseball, I just
couldn’t hit the ball...the ball’s coming too
fast and I don’t know what’s up with that
(laugh). Basketball was my only option
and, if you’re short like I was, point guard
is your only option. I mean you can play
outside of the basket where you don’t get
bumped by the big guys all day long and,
but to play the position I played you really
needed to be a confident kid. You needed
to really walk out onto the court and be like
okay you guys you don’t know what you’re
talking about, no one should question me
and I’m going to run this team and we’re
going to be GOOD. But, in reality I don’t
feel (faint) any extreme self-confidence in
myself. I know that I’m smart enough.

You represent yourself well?

73. P6 developed fake self-confidence
from being out there and having kids
telling him that he was just a little punk and
he wouldn’t be able to do this.

74. P6 played point guard, the general of
the court. He was the person to keep
everybody calm, put everybody in the right
place. It was a confidence role. He was
supposed to have confidence in that role.

75. P6 developed his role out of a lack of
being anything else if he wanted to play
sports. He was too small to play football.
He couldn’t hit a baseball because it comes
at him too fast. P6 felt basketball was his
only option and, being short like he was,
point guard was his only option.
outside of the basket where you don’t get bumped by the big guys all day long and, but to play the position I played you really needed to be a confident kid. You needed to really walk out onto the court and be like okay you guys you don’t know what you’re talking about, no one should question me and I’m going to run this team and we’re going to be GOOD. 76. But, in reality I don’t feel (faint) any extreme self-confidence in myself. I know that I’m smart enough.

You represent yourself well?

P6: It’s, well, I don’t, um, I just....

Taking another route, I have a theory about people who’ve moved around a bunch as kids. Having to often start over in a new school, make new friends and try to fit in. Many of us who’ve not had that experience, well, we haven’t been forced into having to develop more sophisticated “meet and greet” social skills. What do you think about my theory?

P6: 77. That’s...one hundred percent accurate. Yes, that’s beyond. I can’t explain it to people because people get offended by me saying that if you live in one place your whole life you only get used to one thing, you’ve only seen one thing. And a lot of people out here in Montana, I mean my buddy’s never seen an ocean, he’s never been out of the state of Montana. 78. Granted, you don’t need to. You’ve got mountains, lakes, water. You’ve got everything you need inside the state but c’mon, it’s a big WORLD you know (laugh) if you’ve never seen the ocean before kind of thing you know. 79. And it is, I’ve lived, you know the first time I moved you know was from Billings to Washington when I was in the second grade and in the second grade I...

Point guards can be outside the basket, not getting bumped by the big guys all day long. The way P6 played the position, he needed to be a confident kid. He needed to walk onto the court and run the team; no one should question him and they would be a good team.

76. In reality, P6 doesn’t feel any extreme self-confidence. He knows he’s smart enough.

77. P6 agrees that his social skills have been developed from having moved around a lot as a kid. People get offended when he says that people who’ve lived only in one place have only seen one thing. Some people in Montana have never been out of the state. P6 has a buddy who’s never seen an ocean.

78. Granted, Montana has mountain, lakes, and water. But, it’s a big world to have never seen other kinds of things.

79. P6 moved for the first time in the 2nd grade, from Billings to Washington state. Just as he got settled, he moved in the 3rd grade to the northeast.
had to get acclimated and just right when I started getting settled in there, picked me up and moved me again in the third grade, to the northeast. 80. Seems like wherever I've come from is the one place that everyone else makes fun of, like when I went to Washington, it was like "oh, ho, you're from Montana?? You people from Montana..." just like we talk about someone coming from North Dakota, like "You're from North Dakota...da da da da da" (laugh) and then when I moved to, you know, from Washington to Philadelphia, it was like "oh, you're a west coast guy, huh? You're just like a little surfer punk?" And da da da da da da...Well then I moved from Philadelphia to Georgia, and now I'm a Yankee and I'm a Yankee and there's the Civil War and I killed all their brothers, I killed all their uncles...I, what was going on! 81. So, yeah. It's forced acclimation, really. Again, it's being put into a situation of sink or swim, yeah, and normally, I'd sink out nine times out of ten but if you put me into a situation of where I, you know you're going to be here no matter what, so, you'd better start making friends with somebody. You better start talking to somebody and...you better start learning the way they talk and learning how they do things and go just adapt towards that./

It sounds like you DID learn to talk a bit like they do in Georgia, you've got a bit of a southern thing going on...

P6: 82. Yeah, I'm pretty much of a mutt now...actually I talked to a buddy in Georgia the other day and he was ragging me for sounding like a northerner. He said you sound like a northerner!

Well, it's not super distinct but every once in awhile, there's a word...

P6: Yeah, it comes out every once in

80. Wherever P6 has come from is the place that everyone else makes fun of. In Washington, they made fun of Montana. In Philadelphia, they made fun of the west coast. In Georgia, P6 was now a Yankee.

81. P6's forced acclimation put him into a situation of sink or swim. Normally, he'd sink nine times out of ten, but being put in the situation of being there no matter what, he had to start making friends and start talking to somebody. He had to learn the way to talk and learn how to do things and adapt toward it.

82. P6 sounds pretty much like a mutt now. The other day he talked to a buddy in Georgia who ragged P6 for sounding like a northerner. His southern accent only comes out every once in awhile now.
while, yeah, but no I think that you’re right though. 83. if you only know one way your whole life you cannot put yourself in the other’s position so when you get people who’ve never lived outside of Montana, who’ve never changed their thoughts, have never, have never had to change their ways or changed their look or changed their personality... I mean it’s jeans and T-shirts out here, it’s khaki pants and polo shirts in the northeast and it’s shorts and tank tops down south. 84. If you don’t want to adapt and you never have to adapt, then you never will know the difference and you never can say “well, it is like this for me but I can see how someone else says it’s like this” and I can always see it now, cause, I well, when I moved, hmmm. 85. My parents have, I’ve always been a middle class... upper middle class kid, I mean, parents have a good job and all. But when I moved down to Georgia, and I went to Georgia State University which is actually in the center of the city of Atlanta and, well, I moved to the big city. I saw what the big city was like, I moved into an apartment and my next door neighbor was a prostitute and her pimp, there was a couple of cross-dressers, oh, there were a few drug dealers – there was everything all in that little area. In that apartment complex I lived in, we were all just kind of jumbled up together... and I saw how the other half lived/ 86. It made me realize how tough it is today, I mean the doors don’t just automatically open and it’s really hard for people, for a Montanan to think about a situation in Georgia or a situation in California other than to say, oh, that’s just California or that’s just Georgia... they’re just different. Everybody’s different but we’re all the same, you know, the accents are different and the mannerisms are but... we’re all just looking for a piece of pie, that’s all. You try to find it however you can work it./ 87. They don’t understand it if... you haven’t been forced into... you know
the best friends that I have, it seems like wherever I end up, my friends are, my best friends are those that have been around, that have been made to...my best friend in Georgia is a kid that had lived in England, Texas, he lived up north a little while and moved down to Georgia. My best friend in Philadelphia was a kid that lived in western Pennsylvania, Indiana, Ohio...and all that kinda stuff. Well, my good friend out here, probably my best friend that I consider out here he’s lived in Seattle, he’s lived in eastern Washington I think he went to school in eastern Washington, he’s been in Missoula, Butte. I think...he went down to LA one summer to do some golfing. He just wanted to see what the big city was like, these are the kinds of people that I ended up...

Gravitating to...

P6:  88. It is kinda weird that you mention that, that is, that it’s a hard thing to see if you’ve never seen it any other way./

Yep. Well, let’s see, we’ve been all over the board here. Can you think of anything that is related to my research question that you haven’t mentioned – I think I am pretty clear on who you are and how you are unique in your academic story.

P6:  Do you need anything else, because I mean I think I’m good...

Well, let me ask you one last question, if you can bear with me...

P6:  Okay.

Did you get a letter in the mail, informing you of your academic suspension?

P6:  89. Yep, yes, yes, um hum. 89. P6 got a letter in the mail, informing him that he was on academic suspension
Something along the lines of, pretty much...

P6: Yeah, like you are on suspension and you will not be allowed to do this or that, this and this, and that.

How did that, what did you, how was that for you?

P6: It hit the trash the minute I opened it.

As in, this isn’t me, I know what happened.

P6: Yes, uh, exact, I mean, I don’t need someone telling me, I already knew about that.

As far as caring about that...

P6: 90. Well, you know, I started, but, um. For awhile there, I used to regret the past a lot...(barely audible) but you can’t do anything about it.

When was the “awhile there”?

P6: Probably until I started turning around, turning it around, yeah, pretty much until then./ 91. I kind of, I used to dwell on the past, kind of like oh, man, I’ve made a mess of myself here and sometimes I still do, wondering about or getting worried about what other people might think./

91. P6 used to dwell on the past, thinking what a mess he’d made of himself there. Sometimes, he still does that, wondering or worrying about what other people might think.

92. But, it’s coming together for me now and it’s like whatever, you know. Everybody screws up, everybody in this world is doing every kind of thing so you just have to try to concentrate on yourself and try to get through it and that’s pretty much what I.../

92. But, it’s coming together for P6 now and he knows everybody in this world screws up doing every kind of thing. He just has to try to concentrate on himself to try to get through it.

93. when I opened up that letter, it was like yeah, I know. You screwed up, yep, I know, thanks I appreciate this, okay and if I want to come back, I’ll talk to you guys then. And so.....

93. When P6 opened up that letter, he knew he had screwed up. He appreciated the letter and he’d talk to those guys if he wanted to come back to school.
You had to have been reinstated to be back here. How did that go...what did that entail?

P6: 94. My advisor helped...she helped. Right, she was your advisor and helped you complete forms but you must have seen a person in a dean’s office? For a signature or authorization or something.

P6: (pause)...yeah....yeah?....yeah, I did, I did. I had to see somebody. I forget who I talked to...I...er.....um.....boy.....

A man or a woman?

P6: ....I.....I...who...oof...who was it? (perplexed)

Was it someone in the school of business?

P6: No, it was just.....a regular.....

Perhaps the College of Arts and Sciences, the LA building...?

P6: (pause)......yeah (faint)....let’s see, I had to see.....oh, it was somebody./

So, it wasn’t an aggravating experience (laugh) because you’re not able to

P6: 95. I’ve never had a problem getting a job. In an interview, well, you said yourself how I come off, talking and very confident and so when I went in for that, she went in with the attitude of, you know, here we go, here’s another one of those kids...and I went in with the attitude of hey, I’m going to turn it around. 96. That’s pretty much what I told her that day, in the first five minutes, saying, hey, I know I screwed up, don’t worry about it, I’m going to take care of it myself now, I’m going to get back into the game./

94. To be reinstated, P6 was helped by his advisor. P6 cannot recall the person he had to see for reinstatement.

95. P6 has never had a problem getting a job. In an interview, he comes off talking and very confident. When he went in for reinstatement, she had the attitude of having to meet with another one of those kids. P6 went in with the attitude of going to turn it around. 96. In the first five minutes, P6 admitted screwing up, but assured the dean that he was going to take care of it and get back in the game.
P6: 97. But she said, oh, well, we offer this, and this help and that help and... (quietly) I don’t need it, I don’t even need it. I know what I did wrong. Don’t worry about it. I’m an idiot. I know it.

98. I’m here now to prove to you guys that, you know, I’m not an idiot and then, we can see. 99. She, I, well, that took about ten minutes I think, that’s probably why I don’t even really remember it because she was like, well, I’ve got all these questions I’m supposed to ask, but she said well, here, I’ll sign here, you’re back in... just keep up with it. You sound like you know what you did wrong... she realized that she didn’t have to babysit me through it, you know. / Um.

P6: 100. I know, I come off a certain way and people react to that way and that’s pretty much what my opinion is on the, you know, whole college degree and stuff like that. As long as you come off a certain way, with this piece of paper, then everybody will react to you in a better way, whereas, if you don’t come out of it with a piece of paper, you’re just another poor schmuck who couldn’t make it in college, you know (laugh). So, I’m trying not to be that guy... trying to be that other guy. 101. I’m just tired of being in school at this point, in mean I’m 23.... even though I haven’t been in school since I was 18... especially since I was talking to my buddies back in Georgia, they’re graduated already, and stuff like that (laugh) and they’re all, I mean, they can’t believe they graduated before me! 102. But, it’s like, Congratulations, because you actually did it and I didn’t. I could have, you’re right, but I didn’t. So know, I’m trying to get it to where I did (graduate). 103. Plus, I just want to make my mom happy.

Who’s been the most important to you

P6: 97. She offered him help with this and that, but he didn’t need it. He knew what he’d done wrong, that he had been an idiot and he knew it.

98. He was there, now, to prove to them that he’s not an idiot and we will see. 99. She took about ten minutes with him, which is probably why he doesn’t remember it. She said she had a lot of questions she was supposed to ask him, but she just signed him back in because he sounded like he knew what he’d done wrong. She realized she didn’t have to babysit him through it.

100. P6 knows he comes off a certain way and knows that people react to that. That’s what his opinion on the whole college degree is, that as long as you come off a certain way, with this piece of paper, then everybody reacts to you in a better way. If you don’t come out of it with a piece of paper, you’re just a poor schmuck who couldn’t make it in college. P6 is trying not to be the schmuck, but rather the other guy. 101. P6 is just tired of being in school at 23. His buddies in Georgia are graduated already and they can’t believe they graduated before him.

102. Even though P6 hasn’t been in school since he was 18, he congratulates his buddies because they did it and he didn’t. He could have, but he didn’t, but he’s trying to get there. 103. Plus, P6 just wants to make his mom happy. She’s been the most important person to him.
this journey?

P6: My mom, no question, my mom. She, like I said, she, they did so much for me. / 104. I mean, my dad, he’s a dad and like he could tell me, like “you’re a moron” and I’d be “sorry, dad”...he’s just a typical guy-dad. He wasn’t really, he didn’t, he wasn’t for any support when I wasn’t in school, heck, he didn’t get any support even when he was in school, when he was a little kid, so he was all about, hey you little punk if he doesn’t want to go to school, let him earn it on his own./ 105. My mom was all like, no, hey, you’ve got to trust him, you’ve got to believe in him, you gotta realize that he will come around, he knows...

Wow, she sounds like a good mom!

P6: 106. She really IS. I mean, she helped me out a lot so actually now, that’s pretty much the only reason why...it just broke her heart when I quit and it just breaks her heart every time that I talk about it or if she thinks about me quitting school and not being able to have a life that I’ve been accustomed to...kind of like I grew up... / 107. I mean, vacations every summer in Italy, or the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls...you know I’ve been just about all over the place and if I want to continue to be able to live that life and my mom wants that for me and she knows I’ll have to get a degree. So, it just used to break her heart that wouldn’t especially since she knew that I could. / 108. So, if I get it, that’s that and that’s pretty much where I am. I guess that’ll prove that I’m smart and if I can get a job based on that, that’s good. /

109. But if I get the degree, it is definitely for my mom.

It’s good to have someone in your corner.

104. P6’s dad is a typical guy-dad. He wasn’t for any support when P6 wasn’t in school, since he didn’t get any support even when he was a little kid in school. P6’s dad thought if he was being a little punk and didn’t want to go to school, he should earn it on his own.

105. His mom believed they had to trust P6 and believe in him and that he would come around.

106. P6’s mom helped him out a lot and it broke her heart when he quit school. It breaks her heart when P6 talks about quitting and not being able to have the life he’s accustomed to.

107. She wants P6 to have a life with vacations and travel. She knows that he’ll have to get a degree.

108. If P6 gets the degree, it will prove that he’s smart. If he can get a job based on that, that’s good. That’s pretty much where P6 is.

109. If P6 gets the degree, it is definitely for his mom.
P6: That’s the case.

Well, do you think our work here is done...unless you can think of anything else that I must know!

P6: I can’t (weary laugh). I mean, if you can think of anything I haven’t covered (laugh)...

No, this has been good. I think we can turn the tape recorder off. Thank you.
P6, Level Three (Narrative Based on Emergent Themes)

P6 laughs when he starts to talk about his “fall from grace”. He started college at Georgia State but didn’t do too good. His first semester he got all “A’s” and one “B” and his second semester, he got all “B’s” and a “C”. P6 left after only one week into the first semester of his second year. He decided he didn’t want to go to school. P6 worked for a while in Georgia and came to realize that he was working a dead end job, waiting tables at a pizzeria for about eight dollars an hour. His parents supported him this whole time because he couldn’t make enough money to sustain a life.

P6 decided that he needed to go back to school. He wanted to go to a different place, so he moved to Missoula. During his first semester, P6 found out about the requirements to establish residency in Montana. One requirement allowed him to attend school for only six credits a term. There was a lot of other crazy stuff to do for residency when he first moved to Montana.

When P6 started school, he had the great idea to switch his major from business, which he’d always been distinct about in order to follow his dad. Instead, P6 made an attempt at being a doctor, oral surgeon, or dentist. He jumped into the regular chemistry, the 161, and quickly found out why he’s always leaned toward business and stayed away from sciences. P6 felt stuck in college again and after two weeks in the chemistry class, he couldn’t understand it. This really bothered him. He kept going to class but he had a bad attitude and he finally just gave up. Chemistry was the first class P6 had not been able to do: he’d never been in a class where he put the effort in and couldn’t get an “A”. P6 ended up getting a “D” or “F” in the class.

P6 admits that he did not go to every chemistry class that spring and he cannot even remember his chemistry instructor’s name. March 5 was P6’s 21st birthday. He’d never been much of a drinker. Since he looks like such a kid, P6 was never able to get into a bar even with a fake ID. So, he always had an attitude that once he was 21, he was going to do what was legal. It would be him against the world. As a result, P6 had a bad month: he partied with his girlfriend and buddies the entire month. For P6, the actual drinking is fine; however, it’s the next day that’s rough. When he’s drinking, he’s not mean, and he’s not an idiot by doing stupid things like driving or fighting. He doesn’t look for trouble.

Once March turned into April, the drinking binge ended and in May, there were finals. P6 was already so out of it during the class, that even though he got a “C” on the final because the person next to him got a “C”, he pretty much failed the class. P6 had already signed up for summer school so he figured “what the heck, why not take chemistry 162?” P6 went to class the first day of summer school to find more of the same chemistry, but with a lot more calculus. He figured that with a “D” in the first chemistry, there would be no way he’d do better than that in the second chemistry, so he quit. Quitting was why his academic standing fell. He wasn’t even smart enough to withdraw from school.

P6 knew what would happen by quitting, but he just didn’t care. His whole life, he had worked really hard at everything he’d done, whether it was sports, work, or school. P6 devotes all his time to whatever he’s doing and he devoted himself to school when he came out to Missoula. He didn’t count on chemistry being so hard. P6 told himself that
he didn’t care what happened. By saying school was not for him, it didn’t really matter if he failed out. Though it was horrible, P6 thought he might never go back to school.

P6 had been working at a bank in the spring, as a part of his residency requirement. So, he continued working his thirty-five hours a week at the bank during that summer. About this time, P6 got a letter in the mail informing him that he was on academic suspension and not allowed to do this or that. The letter hit the trash the minute he opened it. He didn’t need someone telling him what he already knew. But still, when he opened up that letter, P6 knew he had screwed up. At the same time, he appreciated the letter and knew he’d talk to these guys if he wanted to come back to school. P6 did not come back to school that fall. He decided to take a break from school.

P6 used to dwell on the past, thinking what a mess he’d made of himself here. Sometimes he still does that and also wonders or worries about what other people might think. P6 used to regret the past a lot, even though he can’t do anything about it. He had those regrets until he starting turning himself around. P6 came to realize that he could change and that he had to deal with his situation. He screwed up, it’s obvious, but everybody gets a chance to change things. P6 thinks it is important to deal with things and try to find a way to get through.

P6 doesn’t really know what turned the switch. As he was thinking this interview, he wondered what made him change from not caring about school to once again needing to get back in school. The one thing that changed was the weather: from P6’s first chemistry class and the summer when he quit and was suspended, P6 stayed out of school from one fall to the next fall. It went from spring into winter. That was it: P6 realized he was 23 and it was time to get going. Since he had established residency by then, P6 decided to try school one more time. It would be pretty much like his whole life, a sink or swim type of thing. If P6 has the choice to sink or swim, he’ll swim. But, since he’d had the choice of sink, swim, or take some more time, he’d always take some more time. But time was up.

To be reinstated, P6 got help from his advisor but doesn’t remember the dean he saw for reinstatement very well. When he went in, she had the attitude of just having to meet with another one of those kids, but P6 went in with the attitude of turning himself around. He’s never had a problem getting a job, and in an interview, P6 comes off talkative and very confident. In the first five minutes, he admitted screwing up and assured the dean that he was going to take care of it and get back in the game. She offered him help, but he didn’t need it. He knew what he’d done wrong: he’d been an idiot and he knew it. He was going to prove he’d changed and they’d see. The dean took about ten minutes. She said that she normally was supposed to ask a lot of questions, but she signed him back in because he sounded like he knew what he’d done wrong. She realized she didn’t have to baby sit him.

Since it was a whim when P6 switched from business to a medical major, he has no remorse leaving that. P6 has no remorse for anything much, even dropping out and getting “F’s”. For P6, it’s always another day; he’ll work it out and see what happens next. Now that he’s decided to swim, he’s back in the business program and he doesn’t drink anymore. He quit that because he’s in school so much and works so much, he has only Saturday night and Sunday to relax. He quit drinking because he doesn’t want to be hung-over on Sunday. Now, P6 does his homework at his new job at the motel. He goes
to school and shows up to classes; he finds school a whole lot easier doing this. P6 will
soon complete his first full year back in school.

P6 met his girlfriend right when he moved out here. She had been going out with
one of P6’s buddies and when they broke up, she went out with another of his buddies.
About four or five months after they broke up, P6 started dating her and they’ve been
dating ever since. P6’s girlfriend is also in school. She’s studying a combination of
physics and astronomy. She’s a smart girl with the same problem that P6 has: can but
won’t. Effort is the question. Throughout P6’s life, it has never been whether he can or
can’t, it’s whether he will or won’t and mostly, he’s taken the easy way.

Since P6 has made the school commitment and his girlfriend just picked her
major, she’s feeding off of P6’s sense of “just do it”. It seems like a good idea and now,
it feels that they can really do this. They’ve talked about not being able to do anything
without a degree. In this world, one can only climb so high without the piece of paper
but with the paper you get the skies. P6 can’t agree with or understand this, but he
believes it.

P6 is starting the 300-level business core. Most of his general and pre-requisites
are done. P6 is in Math 117 now and has gotten a 96 and 97 on the two tests; his quizzes
are good too, so he should be all right. P6 also has econ this semester. He doesn’t attend
his econ class regularly but he has an 87 average in it so far. P6 is self-taught in this
macro class, something that he did last semester in micro. Going to class annoys him.
People ask questions on stuff he understood two weeks before. He keeps expecting to
learn something new, but since some guys didn’t understand something from last week,
they go over it again and again and again. His econ teacher is a heck of a nice guy who
recognizes P6 from the previous micro class, even though P6 wasn’t attending the class
regularly. P6 keeps in email contact with the instructor, emailing him about review
sessions and tests and to let him know he’s keeping up on the assignments on the internet.
P6 has “A’s” on all assignments. Also, P6 gets off work at midnight, gets to bed about
one a.m., so trying to get up by 9 a.m. to shower and then hunt for a parking spot at the
University just never happens. P6 is looking forward to meeting with his advisor soon, to
discuss his progress.

P6 is all “loaned up”, way deep into loans to pay for school. He laughs about
another sink or swim issue: he needs to graduate. If he doesn’t, he’ll be piled up with
about fifteen grand in loans and nothing to show. If P6 gets the degree, it will prove that
he’s smart and if he can get a job based on that, that’s good. P6 plans to get the degree in
business and, while he loves Montana, the state economy won’t allow him to stay with a
degree in management and marketing.

P6’s parents home isn’t in Georgia any more. His parents are in Philadelphia
since his dad got laid off his job after twenty-three years of working for Phillips Lighting.
P6 believes it was just a cop out way to not have to pay his dad’s retirement benefits. It
makes P6 very angry. This kind of stuff happening in the world is part of why P6 is anti-
establishment. But, things ended up turning out well for the family that’s used to his dad
making over $120 thousand a year. The lay off was a big hit on the income, but P6’s
mom managed to move her way up from secretary in her company to third in charge now.
She makes over $100,000 a year with no college or degree, just hard work. P6 realizes his
mom is lucky to have been a secretary turned totally in charge of a major business. That’s
not something you hear. His mom works for a computer software company started by a fellow in Philadelphia. The owner is a shrewd, cool businessman.

P6 is sure that he could have a job in this company if he wanted it. The owner’s son, who’s probably going to take over the company, is P6’s good friend. They grew up together when P6’s family lived in Philadelphia before moving to Georgia. The son is two years younger than P6 and he looks up to P6. The son is not as business-oriented as the dad who sees P6 watching him and picking up on what he does, so he’s become interested in P6. The owner likes P6’s business sense and, since he’s worried about his business after his son takes over, P6 thinks he may be trying to bring him in there as backup. But, P6 would have to move to Philadelphia and he doesn’t like the place, since it’s plain nasty. But, P6 could do it: he could put up with anything that he has to do.

P6 is just tired of being in school at age 23. His buddies in Georgia are graduated already and they can’t believe they graduated before him. Even though P6 hasn’t been in school continually since he was 18, he congratulates his buddies because they did it and he didn’t. He could have but he didn’t. He’s trying to get there. P6 wants whatever kind of paper the school gives him that says he’s smart. Even though he’s never been a big believer in the school system, P6 knows that everybody else puts a whole lot of stock and faith in it. P6’s tendency to be anti-establishment is probably why he never did so good in school. He doesn’t like people telling him what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. The first time he told a teacher to F-off was in the 2nd grade.

P6 isn’t really very self-confident, although he knows he’s smart enough. He’s always been a short kid. Right now, he’s about 5’9” but he was the short one growing up. When he moved to Georgia his sophomore year of high school, P6 was 5’2” and 105 pounds. When he walked into the school, everyone pointed him to the middle school that was next door. He’s always had a chip on his shoulder since that. P6 started playing basketball and that’s where the sense of self-confidence came from. He’s always played ball, all types: football, baseball, lacrosse, basketball, and soccer. Basketball was his favorite and he played it throughout high school. P6 played point guard, which is the general of the court. He was the person to keep everybody calm and put everybody in the right place. It was a confidence role and he needed to have confidence in that role. P6 developed his role because he couldn’t be in any other position since he was too short. He was too small to play football; he couldn’t hit a baseball; so, basketball was his only option. P6 developed fake self-confidence from being out there and having kids telling him that he was just a little punk and he wouldn’t be able to do this. For P6, playing point guard allowed him to be outside of the basket and not getting bumped by the big guys all day long. The way P6 played the position, he had to be a confident kid: he needed to walk onto the court and run the team. No one should question him and he’d make good.

P6 knows that he comes off a certain way and he knows that people react to that. That’s what his opinion on the whole college degree is, that as long as you come off a certain way and with this piece of paper, then everybody reacts to you in a better way. If you don’t come out of it with a piece of paper, you’re just the poor schmuck who couldn’t make it in college. P6 is trying not to be the schmuck, but rather the other guy.

P6’s social skills were developed from having moved around a lot as a kid. The first time P6 moved was in the 2nd grade, when the family moved from Billings to Washington state. Just as he was getting settled, he moved to the northeast in the 3rd grade. Wherever P6 has come from is the place that everyone else makes fun of. In
Washington, they made fun of Montana; in Philadelphia, they made fun of the west coast; in Georgia, P6 was made into a Yankee. P6’s forced acclimation constantly put him into a situation of sink or swim. Normally, he’d sink nine times out of ten, but being put in the situation of being there no matter what, he learned to make friends and talk to somebody; he had to learn the way to talk, do things, and adapt.

People get offended when P6 tells them that if you’ve lived in only one place, you’ve only seen one thing. P6 has a buddy who’s never been out of the state of Montana and who’s never seen an ocean. It is a big world to have never seen other kinds of things. P6 thinks if you only know one way your whole life, you can’t put yourself in the other’s position. People in Montana who’ve never lived outside of Montana have never had to change their thoughts, ways, looks, or personality. Without having to adapt or wanting to adapt, it’s impossible to know the difference. Without that, it’s not possible to say how it is for me but how I can see how it’s like that for you. It’s a hard thing to see if you’ve never seen it any other way. P6 always sees the difference now.

P6 had always been an upper middle class kid. When he went to Georgia State University in the center of Atlanta, P6 moved into the big city. He saw what the city was like when he lived in an apartment. Everyone in the apartment complex was jumbled up and living together; he saw how the other half lived and how tough it is today. His neighbors were a prostitute and her pimp, a couple of cross-dressers, and a few drug dealers. P6 met some of the smartest people when he lived in Atlanta. They’d never gone to school but they had street smarts and common sense. They didn’t have the paper saying that they were trained, so they had little ability to make money but they’d survived their whole lives on nothing. P6 finds that more impressive than someone taking the high road in college, going to a couple classes and suddenly being an expert, pulling in the green. This seems like such a weird game to him.

P6’s mom and dad have been awesome. They supported him ten times more when he was being an idiot and a screw-up than they do now. When P6 was being a screw up, not really going to school back in Georgia, he got involved with the wrong crowd. He was doing nothing really wrong, just marijuana and not cocaine. Of course, doing anything enough becomes a problem. P6 is a firm believer that if you have to pick one or the other, he prefers marijuana to alcohol. He’s never done much that’s stupid on that: he’s never tried to get in a car and kill anybody. But, doing anything in excess will eventually stone you and dumb you up.

P6’s mom has always been a big believer in him. She knows that he can and that it’s never can or can’t with him: it’s always will or won’t. His mom has always had good faith in him and stuck with him. When P6 got in a lot of trouble in Georgia, his mom placed him under house arrest and she watched over him very closely. His mom knew that eventually, P6 would come back around and he did. Now that his parents have been supporting him for so long, P6 feels really bad about it. He tells them not to give him anything, since they stuck with him into his 20’s. P6’s parents have been there for him maybe even when they shouldn’t have. Now that he’s 23, he pays for his car, his insurance, his rent, and his utilities. The only thing P6’s mom pays for is his gasoline on an American Express card.

P6’s dad is a typical guy-dad. He wasn’t for any support when P6 wasn’t in school, since he didn’t get any support even when he was a little kid in school. P6’s dad thought if he was being a little punk and didn’t want to go to school, he should earn it on
his own. P6's mom believed they had to trust P6 and believe in him to come around. P6's mom helped him out a lot and it broke her heart when he quit school. It breaks her heart when P6 talks about quitting. She wants him to have the life he’s accustomed to, a life with vacations and travel. She knows that he’ll have to get a degree for that.

It's coming together for P6 now and he knows everybody in this world screws up, doing every kind of thing. He just has to try to concentrate on himself to get through it. P6's plan right now is to grab as many screams and fun as he can, finish school, and go find someone to work for.

P6 just wants to make his mom happy. She’s been the most important person to him. If P6 gets the degree, it is definitely for his mom.