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THE EXPERIENCE OF ATTRITION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
OF FRESHMEN IN ACADEMIC GOOD STANDING AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

By

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Dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The experience of attrition: A phenomenological study of freshmen in academic good standing at The University of Montana.

Chairperson: Catherine B. Jenni, Ph. D.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain clear, precise systematic descriptions of the experienced meaning of voluntary non-continuation of academic studies, attrition, after the first-year. Based on interviews with six college freshman in academic good standing, with phenomenology as a research method, the study documented ways in which college freshman perceived, experienced and defined their decision and experience of dropping out of college.

Data were collected via one-on-one, open-ended, unstructured interviews conducted to gain an uncensored account of the experience of attrition reflected by the query, *“Please share with me your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive, and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.”*

Through a process of phenomenological reduction, results of the interviews provided essential descriptions of the experience in the participants’ natural language. Analysis revealed that participants felt excited and hopeful prior to matriculation and quickly became overwhelmed and confused early first semester. Mid-semester students’ feelings of being unfocused surfaced, exhibited in isolation and decreasing academic motivation. Participants’ eventual academic failure initiated feelings of disappointment and embarrassment, sponsoring an ultimate disengagement from the university. An essential structure or theme of identity loss emerged as an important developmental struggle experienced by the students as they decided not to persist in their academic studies.

An unanticipated benefit of the study was to the participants themselves, through the provision of a forum in which they could examine, identify, express and come to a better understanding of their experience of dropping out. Through developing a deeper understanding of freshmen attrition, the study has implications for higher education administrators, college retention and recruitment programs, educators, and school counselors interested in improving the quality of the freshman experience and ultimately encouraging success in higher education.

Acknowledgements

It takes a “village” to earn a doctoral degree and a ton of encouragement, support and caffeine. I extend my extreme gratitude to Cathy Jenni, my Chairperson, for seeing in me drive, determination, and potential for success, when at times I failed to see them in myself. I applaud her commitment to students, the field of education, and remaining faithful to both. Thank you to my committee members, John, Aida, Merle, and Bill ... without your encouragement, I would not have begun or finished this journey. You taught me, by example, patience, tenacity, grace under pressure, and gave me opportunity to grow. Special thanks to Diane Flamand, Assistant Registrar, and Cathy Burlison, Research Analyst, for willing, speedy data provision – you are *amazing* data sources.

To my fellow graduate students, Kerry and Diana, thank you for sharing the experience with me, joining me for hours in the library, for coffee, shopping, and margarita breaks. It’s been quite an experience sprinkled with the laughter of friendship.

Thanks to my Aunt Shirley and Dr. William McDougall (Mac), my mentor and surrogate father, who frequently called to ask, “How ya’ coming on that report?”

To my daughters, I try to show you through my actions, that all things are possible; that women *can* have it all, just not simultaneously or without friends and a sense of humor. To my husband, Mike, thank you for your undying love, patience, and encouragement ... “just do it ... don’t worry about perfection ...just put one foot in front of the other – take baby steps.” And, finally, to God, my creator and source of all wisdom, faithfulness and love, I give thanks and honor to you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE	1
Introduction	
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Attrition and American Heritage.....	6
Attrition and Economic Viability.....	7
Attrition and Educational Equity.....	10
Economic Impact.....	11
Changing Demographics.....	12
Attrition and Institutional Accountability.....	13
Enrollment-Driven Funding.....	15
Obligational Fulfillment.....	16
Purpose of the Study.....	17
Research Interest.....	21
Delimitations.....	21
Limitations and Assumptions.....	22
Definition of Terms.....	24
Significance of Study.....	25
CHAPTER TWO	27
Literature Review	
Introduction.....	27
First-Year Freshmen Attrition.....	28
Attrition as Institutional Failure.....	29
Descriptive Attrition Studies.....	31
Minority Student Attrition.....	33
Retention Programs.....	35
Conceptual Models of Attrition.....	38
Tinto's Student Integration Theory.....	40
Pascarella's General Casual Model.....	43
Bean's Student Attrition Model.....	45
Summary.....	47
CHAPTER THREE	50
Methodology	
Research Design.....	50
The Phenomenological Method.....	51
Rationale for Phenomenological Research.....	52
Procedure.....	53
Setting.....	53
Participants.....	54
Sampling.....	56
Research Prompt.....	57

Interview Protocol.....	59
Interview Questions.....	59
Data Collection and Analysis.....	60
Description of Phenomenological Reduction.....	60
Data Collection.....	62
Data Analysis.....	63
Role of the Researcher.....	64

CHAPTER FOUR **66**

Data Analysis and Results

Phenomenological Reduction.....	66
Phenomenological / Psychological Reduction.....	67
Level One: Verbatim Transcriptions.....	68
Level Two: Spontaneous Meaning Units.....	69
Level Three: Emergent Themes.....	70
Level Four: Transformation.....	71
Level Four for All Six Participants.....	72
Level Five: Fundamental Description.....	88
Level Six: Essential Descriptions.....	89

CHAPTER FIVE **91**

Discussion

Introduction.....	91
Psychological Themes.....	93
College Transition and Adjustment.....	94
Feeling: Excited and Hopeful.....	95
Feeling: Overwhelmed and Confused.....	96
Feeling: Unconnected and Isolated.....	98
Feeling: Unfocused & a Lost Sense of Purpose	101
The Decision to Drop Out.....	104
Feeling: Unmotivated.....	104
Feeling: Invisible and Uncared For.....	106
Feeling: Disappointed and Embarrassed	109
Disengaging from the University.....	110
Looking Toward the Future.....	113
Feeling: Hopeful.....	113
Taking Action.....	114

CHAPTER SIX **117**

Implications and Recommendations

Implications for Research.....	117
Retention Programs.....	118
Retention Research.....	118

Implications for Student Support Programs.....	119
First-Generation Students.....	120
Minority Students	120
Financial and Parental Support.....	121
Academically-Successful Students.....	122
Identity Formation.....	123
Early Warning Programs.....	124
Freshman Programs.....	125
Mental Health and Social Development.....	126
Implications for the Institution.....	127
Campus-Wide Collaboration.....	127
Outreach to Secondary Schools.....	129
Implications for Retention Programs	129
Career Counseling and Undeclared Majors.....	130
Retention Task Force.....	131
Need for Further Research	131

REFERENCES

 133

APPENDICES

 142

Appendix A.....	143
IRB Checklist, 11-Point Summary and Approval	
Appendix B.....	148
Participant Information and Consent Form	
Appendix C.....	150
Sample Letter to Participants	
Appendix D.....	151
Participant Demographic Information & Interview Questions	
Appendix E.....	153
Explanation of Research Study to Participants	
Appendix F.....	154
Participant Profiles	
Appendix G.....	156
Data Analyses, Levels One-Three	

“Of all the civil rights for which the world
has struggled and fought for 5,000 years,
the right to learn is undoubtedly
the most fundamental.”

- *W. E. B. DuBois* –
The Freedom to Learn, 1949

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

“More students leave college prior to degree completion than stay” (Tinto, 1993, p. 1). First-year students show a tremendous desire to finish college and earn a degree, however the 2006 National Freshman Attitudes Research Study indicates that nearly half those students will not graduate. According to data from the American College Testing, nearly forty-seven percent of college freshmen nationwide ever complete their degree (ACT, 2005). The exodus of students from institutions of higher education has garnered over-whelming attention and the concern of academic administrators, educators, politicians and state government officials.

The federal government has fervent concerns regarding retention in higher education and recently mandated that institutions of higher education provide retention rates in their annual reporting. Governmental concerns have been so ardent that the Clinton Administration proposed a six-year educational qualification limit to be placed on financial aid and Pell grants. Tim Culver, Associate Vice President of Noel-Levitz, the most highly respected higher education research firm, reported that research has uncovered a significant level of frustration and disappointment; students are arriving on college campuses wanting to complete their education, yet half never meet that goal (Noel-Levitz, 2006). The large number of high school graduates who enroll in college the fall semester immediately following high school, sixty-seven percent reflects the extraordinary value placed on a college education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). In addition, nearly seventy-five percent of high school graduates enroll

in post-secondary school within two years of graduation (The Education Trust-Week, 2002, p. 5). Statistics indicate that traditional aged students, eighteen- to twenty-four years, comprise forty-two percent of college students; while the other fifty-eight percent are older and more often married with dependents (Wolf-Wendel & Ruel, 1999).

It is clear that Americans desire a college degree and view it as a portal to economic opportunity, prosperity, and social mobility. Still, there exists a great disconnect between aspiration and actual achievement. Given that a college education is more essential than ever for individual opportunity and prosperity, colleges and universities are being asked to demonstrate accountability for student success and designate it a priority. Facing a thirty percent national attrition rate, universities are at a pivotal, precarious moment where short-sighted research and educational programming may prove permanently limiting to students and detrimental to our country's economic growth and participation in an interdependent global community.

Americans have long placed value on higher education, but for most our history, it was a privilege reserved for few with the goal of fostering the intellect, religious and moral development of selected students. Today, circumstances have fundamentally changed; far-reaching global, economic, and technological developments have converged to make post-secondary education essential for nearly all Americans. Although access to and participation in postsecondary education continues to increase, only fifty-five percent of undergraduates who began their studies at a four-year institution in the 1995-1996 academic term completed a degree within six years (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Bean (1980) found that a statistical review of 35 student attrition studies conducted between 1913 and 1962 indicated that the median four-year loss of students

from higher education was fifty percent and concluded that the attrition rate had not appreciably changed between 1913 and 1980. The most recent comprehensive national annual survey, completed in 2006 by the American College Testing Program, indicated a first- to second-year retention rate of seventy-three percent for first-to-second year students at traditional four-year public colleges including The University of Montana. Given the decline in birthrate over the past thirty years and the consequential decline in the number of college-aged students, as well as the national average annual attrition rate of thirty percent, universities and the federal government are eager to better understand the phenomenon of attrition.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) documented the growing demographic diversity of the undergraduate student body in American postsecondary education. Levine and Cureton (1998) describe the typical college student as no longer fitting our traditional stereotype of a full-time student, eighteen to twenty-four years of age, living on campus; the new profile emerging is older and of more ethnic diversity. The 2002 ten-year longitudinal study of the Center for Policy Analysis for the American Council on Education reported that of college freshman, forty percent were traditional aged 18-24 years with thirty percent representing minority populations. In addition, twenty percent are foreign born, eleven percent speak English as a second language, more than three-quarters work part- or full-time, and one-quarter work full-time while attending school. Given our rapidly changing demographics, more students, especially those from minority backgrounds, will need to obtain a college education if America is to maintain and advance its labor force and tax base.

Americans are more educated than ever before, yet while high school graduation rates have increased, a high school diploma is no longer sufficient to secure employment in today's technological knowledge-based economy. Post-secondary education is the key to a stronger national workforce and a better quality of life for our citizenry, as higher wages, greater health and retirement benefits, and secure employment result from a bachelor's degree or higher (ACT Policy Report, 2004). Our nation's changing demographics and the educational demands of our economy, coupled with alarming national university attrition rates have elevated concerns amongst administrators, politicians, and governmental officials regarding college attrition rates.

Consequences of the mass student exodus from higher education are significant for academic institutions and the students who leave them. Student attrition represents a significant loss and cost for both students and universities. When a student leaves an institution of higher education, it is a loss of current revenue and future alumni support for the institution, as well as possible loss of productivity for the individual. Low college retention rates waste human talent and development potential, as well as financial resources, jeopardizing our nation's economic future and threatening the fiscal viability of postsecondary institutions. Powers (2007) reports that college graduates cast ballots at a higher rate than those with only a high school degree; that rates of volunteerism rise with education level; intellectual curiosity and empathy are highest in college graduates; and that college graduates are healthier and more active compared to high school graduates. Access to and participation in higher education is vital to the economic and social health of our nation, as is retaining and assisting students in the completion of their college degree. College retention and completion remain central challenges carrying

serious implications for the development of human potential, educational equity and institutional accountability (Braxton, Hirschy, McClendon, 2003). Retention rates must be enhanced so more American students are prepared for the challenges of a dynamic and every-expanding workplace. To remain competitive, maintain a share of the student population, and sustain economic viability, colleges and universities must focus serious attention and systematic research on retention.

It is critical that universities honor the commitment they make to students who aspire to a college education, especially to those for whom college is a route, perhaps the only route to a better future. Student retention is a complicated, dynamic issue (Li & Killian, 1999) that involves a complex interplay between academic and non-academic factors. Given the tenor of our economic times and the evolving demographics of student populations, retention has increasingly becoming a focus of a rapidly expanding body of research. Researchers have extensively studied and continue to study phenomena that affect and ultimately predict a student's decision to remain in school or prematurely terminate their education. An overwhelming amount of research has been conducted to examine factors which may lead to attrition, yet few researchers have studied attrition through the perspective of the students who prematurely leave institutions of higher education. Furthermore, a lack of consensus regarding specific justifications for the premature voluntary educational departure of students exists in the literature. Research, absent direct feedback from students, provides little explanation for the behavioral and psychological motivation for dropping out and offers weak strategy for launching retention programs. It is essential for institutions to understand the perspective of the

students who prematurely terminate their education, if they hope to provide a fertile environment for student and institutional success.

Attrition and American Heritage

Until the mid-eighteenth century, education in the United States was reserved for elite sons destined for leadership in the state, church or courts and transmitted through private tutoring. Americans have historically held education in high regard as the foundation of democracy and necessary for the support and promotion of society and good citizenship. In the late eighteenth century, Congress set aside land for the building and operation of free, public schools recognizing that human talent and virtue, necessary in a free society, should be fostered regardless of status of wealth or birth. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States (1801-1809), advanced the realization that ignorance and democracy can not co-exist and that self-government can only be assumed by enlightened people. The capacity for America to survive as a democracy rests on a free public education that arms its citizens with intelligence capable of free and independent thought. (Darling-Hammond, 1996). The role of education began to be viewed as the method of transmitting the intellectual heritage of Western civilization; fostering a high level of verbal and mathematical skills; developing an in-depth understanding of social, cultural and political institutions; facilitating one's ability to think reflectively, analytically, critically, synthetically, and evaluatively; developing one's value structures and moral sensibilities; facilitating personal growth and self-identity; and fostering one's sense of career identify and vocational competence. (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 1). College embodies experiences which should promote development in cognition, identity and moral judgment necessary in a

democratic society. Those involved in higher education ascribe immense importance to the value of education for its own sake. In a September 13, 2007, article on Inside Higher education it is reported that, “College graduates are more engaged citizens and make healthier decision than those who don’t earn a diploma. A more educated work force means greater tax revenue and a stronger democracy.”

Attrition and Economic Viability

There is considerable preoccupation with student retention in contemporary higher education policy. Higher education administrators and faculty are fully cognizant that a majority of new students entering higher education leave their initial college of choice without completing a degree (Tinto, 1993). Yet, retention is not an issue solely for administrators and educators; it is an issue of critical importance to all citizens, as an undereducated population negatively impacts our national and global economies (Burr, Burr & Novak, 1999). Even a modest reduction of three percent in the national level of higher education attrition, from thirty percent to twenty-seven percent, would result in cost savings of millions of dollars. Through reducing the number of freshmen dropout by a single student, a four-year institution can, on average, save \$15,000 to \$25,000 in gross revenue over four to five years (Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999). As a result of tuition dollars lost, institutions of higher education suffer significant years of future lost revenue when freshmen fail to return to campus. Institutional attention to persistence rates has emerged for a variety of reasons, but is currently the source of increased attention in order to meet the Federal mandates and demands of state-mandated budget-connected performance indicators. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found the cost of recruiting one new student approximates the cost of retaining three to five students already enrolled.

Federal policy makers are considering reauthorizing the Higher Education Act to link institutional eligibility for federal student financial aid to institutional graduation rates (Titus, 2004). High attrition rates are a concern in the United Kingdom, as well as in the United States. In the United Kingdom undergraduate retention is an area of extreme interest as the Department of Education and Skills is “bearing down on rates of non-completion” (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005, p. 707) and imposing financial consequences on universities for decreasing student numbers. The investment of time, resources and investigation in retention programs can yield substantial savings for even the smallest of institutions and millions of dollars for the largest. Incentives exist for research aimed at monitoring and evaluating programs and performance to meet quality assurance requirements in the face of economic market competition for students (McInnis, 2001). Beyond the economic viability and budgetary impact of improved retention exists increased student satisfaction and success, which in turn, begets institutional success.

While increased retention produces institutional success, it also generates positive benefits for individuals and society. Data show that higher education has a significant impact on the wages an individual can command in the marketplace. Reynolds and Weagley (2003) write that markets are more efficient and society functions better with an educated population. An educated citizenry provides analytical thinkers, scientific progress, a populace less dependent on government funds, and individuals more supportive of education. Americans realize education is a gateway to opportunity in our culture and that it is a passport to expanded personal economic viability. Moreover, a college education is becoming essential to provide an economically liberating education for all Americans. However, a person’s decision to enroll and persist in college is

dependent upon the cost and expected benefits associated with obtaining an education. Cabrera, Stampen, and Hensen (1990) recognize the ability to pay tuition reduces barriers to participation in academic and social dimensions of university life, creating opportunity for academic and social institutional integration. Furthermore, they found that freedom from financial concerns increased the likelihood of a student's degree completion.

As a higher education career counselor and an instructor of a freshmen career development course, the researcher has witnessed the complex phenomenon of academic attrition and associated effects that negatively impact the personal, career, economic, and quality of life of freshman students. For the United States workforce to remain competitive in our interdependent global, technological economy, we must enable a greater percentage of our high school graduates to enroll in post-secondary education and complete a degree. A high school diploma is no longer sufficient to secure employment and those lacking a college degree face tremendous barriers to employment, career development, and economic success. Today, sixty percent of jobs require some postsecondary education and training and by 2012 the number of jobs requiring advanced skills will grow at twice the rate of those requiring only basic skills (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). The U. S. Department of Education (2003) reported that the lifetime gap in earnings exceeds one million dollars between those with a high school diploma and those holding a bachelor's degree or higher. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) estimate that a "bachelor's degree provides between a twenty and forty percent advantage in earnings over a high school diploma". (p. 529). In addition, they calculated an estimate of financial return on investment, the rate of return to a bachelor's degree, to be between nine and eleven percent. The earning advantage suggests that earning a bachelor's degree may be

the single most important educational step in the occupational and economic attainment process. The context in which today's students compose their lives is being reshaped by scientific and technological innovations, global interdependence, cross-cultural encounters, and changes in the balance of economic and political power (LEAP, 2007). Educated persons obtain a better quality of life as they are able to secure employment that provides advancement opportunity, pays higher wages, and offers health and retirement benefits. For first-year students, persistence is critical for the attainment of a college degree, which has a significant influence on their subsequent economic and occupational success (Pascarella & Terrenzini, 1991). Furthermore, every first-year student withdrawal represents a lost opportunity for the individual student and a current and future financial loss for the institution.

Attrition and Educational Equity

America is the world's most powerful democracy founded on a set of core values; equality, freedom, justice, responsibility and human dignity. The endowment of an education and access to higher education for a wide population of our citizens is a relatively recent addition to those core values. Traditionally, the role of producing an educated citizenry was assigned to public schools rather than to institutions of higher education, which until recently served only a small fraction of our population. A shift occurred in the mid-twenty first century in the American educational system away from the exclusive and narrowly defined access held by universities for centuries, toward a system favoring equity of access for all those capable of benefiting from a university education (Longden, 2006). Expanding higher education to persons previously excluded on the basis of social status, culture, religion, race or gender has taken over a century to

achieve. The expansion of educational opportunity and widening participation in higher education by these groups, has increased social capital and strengthened societal cohesion. St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter, and Weber (2004) contend that, “Equalizing educational attainment has been regarded nationally as a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for creating a more just society.” (p. 209).

Economic Impact

A bachelor’s degree has often been referred to as “a passport to the American middle class” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 369.) Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) stated that one of the safest generalizations made about the structure of highly developed societies is that “formal education has a positive association with earnings and occupational status”. (p. 500). In addition, the authors report earnings related to a bachelor’s degree are seven times larger than those for the first three years of college and hold a twenty to forty percent advantage in earnings over a high school diploma. Completion of a college degree has a significant and substantial effect on lifetime earnings and produces human capital sated with cognitive skills and personal traits characteristic of productive employees and citizens. Therefore, it may be concluded that completing a bachelor’s degree may be the single most important educational step in a person’s lifetime occupational and economical attainment process. Institutions that fail to sustain high graduation rates and low attrition rates, not only jeopardize their reputation and economic viability, but do long-term disservice to students who fail to persist. Students who do not earn a college degree face economic hardships including longer periods of unemployment, limited income and job opportunities, as well as inadequate health insurance and inferior retirement benefits. A college degree is increasingly being

seen by human resource managers and employees as the norm for educational attainment and occupational advancement. Clearly, quality of life and career advancement expectations may be diminished by the failure to complete a post-secondary education (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004).

Changing Demographics

Trotter and Cover (2005) state that the “changing nature of higher education means that many university courses satisfy the function of both education and professional training” (p. 30), which means many professions share a stake in the number of students being retained. The impact of an under-educated professional population may be complicated further by the changing demographic composition of potential student enrollments. The ability to communicate with service providers, educators, government officials, and others in the United States depends largely on the ability to speak, write and comprehend English. Additionally, the ability to proficiently communicate in English has a direct effect on basic reading, writing, and communication skills in the classroom. From 1990-2000, the minority and foreign-born population of the United States increased by half. The 2000 Census indicated that eighteen percent of the total population of the United States spoke English as a second language. Montana, out-ranked only by Mississippi, reported the number of Montanans who speaking English “less than very well” was one and a half percent. Nationally, the number of minority and foreign-born individuals is eleven percent; Montana, reported a foreign-born population of nearly two percent, out-ranked only by West Virginia (U.S. Census Bureau). Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) cite the growing diversity of the American student population as having

“dramatic and profound” implications on institutions of higher education and student behavior and achievement.

Changes are needed in current educational practice to address educational inequalities for minorities, to accommodate higher education’s increasingly diverse clientele, and to develop programs and conditions that create a congenial campus-wide environment and tone for all students. LEAP (2002) recommend campuses complete a self-audit review of the “extent to which the educational environment is successfully advancing learning for all groups of students, fostering student engagement and achievement”. (p. 43). A more welcoming environment tendering a culture of academic engagement and shared purpose would undoubtedly lead to greater retention rates.

Attrition and Institutional Accountability

Accountability demands from state legislatures and accreditation bodies have increased substantially over the past decade (Porter, 2003). The current trend in the performance-based approach to student outcome assessment focuses on student persistence and degree completion (Ryan & Glenn, 2003). Increasingly, institutions of higher education feel the demanding pressure of market-driven accountability by stakeholders including students, parents, funding agencies, employers, local government agencies, and the tax-paying public. These external constituents, as well as nationally-recognized publications including *Peterson’s* and *U.S. News and World Report*, highlight quantitative outcomes including retention and graduation rates. Attrition rates present serious blemishes for academic institutions as unsteady enrollment figures make the forecast of class size difficult leading to closed, cancelled, overcrowded, and / or understaffed classes. Additionally, the prediction of on-campus meal plans and housing

demands become erroneous, as do institutional budgets based upon anticipated student FTE and state budget allocations. Because federal and state support of higher education has decreased in recent years, institutions are increasingly vulnerable to decreased student FTE and therefore loss of student tuition.

Financially, it is more effective for institutions of higher education to retain current students than to recruit replacements for those who terminate their education. University student recruitment is a well-understood, complex and expensive process, but retention is less understood. For universities, retaining students is considered “repeat business” and current students are considered a “captive audience” (Nichols, Orchovee, & Ingold, 1998. p. 35) which should be the focus of targeted resources and expenditures intended to increase retention and ultimately graduation rates, rather than recruitment. Institutions must consider the severe economic implications of freshman attrition; to sustain strong economic viability, institutions need students.

Of contemporary college students who completed a bachelor’s degree, nearly sixty percent indicated they completed courses at more than one college or university and nearly twenty-five percent took courses at more than two institutions. In addition, nearly half the college students began their studies in two-year institutions (LEAP, 2002). Researching first-year college persistence, Kahn (2001) stated that “one of the most significant issues facing both students and undergraduate institutions in this country is high attrition [drop-out, stop-out, and school-shifting] rates among students” (p. 633). With the dwindling number of traditional-aged college students and consequently declining enrollments, a foremost national institutional goal has emerged – retain a higher percentage of enrolled students (Tillman, 2002).

Enrollment-Driven Funding

For enrollment-driven, tuition-dependent institutions of higher education, student persistence is a means of economic survival, as well as a performance measure. Low attrition rates tend to serve as a barometer of the social and intellectual health of the institution rather than the academic success of students within the institution. Rankings of colleges are included in national publications which can positively or negatively affect institutional reputation. Retention rates have become a “*de facto* measure of institutional quality” (Porter & Swing, 2006). The implication of movement toward greater educational accountability has pushed retention to the forefront of dialogue and research. However, focus on attrition is complicated by a set of uncontrollable organizational, psychological, social, and economic interactions. Institutions have become increasingly concerned with those interactions, given the current focus on retention by federal and state regulatory agencies. Federal Law requires that colleges and universities disclose graduation rates along with campus crime rates as part of the Student Right to Know Act (Federal Register, 1995). In addition, the use of retention statistics for self-promotion and self-aggrandizement, to rate and rank universities in national college guide publications, e.g., US News & World Report’s *America’s Best Colleges*, threaten a school’s reputations and future enrollments. State legislatures and boards of higher education are more frequently utilizing graduation and retention measures as performance indicators linking retention and graduation rates to university budgets as components of performance-based funding. Much has been written on academic and social integration, student behaviors and their relation to retention. However, the global nature of findings is hard to translate into specific accountability actions for each institution.

Obligational Fulfillment

A reciprocal obligation exists between a student and the institution of higher education upon university admittance; the university commits to provide an environment fertile for academic success and the student commits to master their own learning. Institutions are being questioned about their level of obligational fulfillment, as graduating students are a mark of success in producing an educated citizenry and appropriate utilization of financial resources. The cost of attrition on society, academic institutions, and students by attrition is high. Social costs include a decrease in tax base and economic output, increased unemployment, and the need for additional governmental aid. Significant financial costs associated with attrition are borne by students who terminate their studies as they have invested significant funds in their education, both resources distributed to them and resources utilized by universities teaching them. With financial resources becoming limited, higher education administrators endeavor to spend their resources on students who will see their education through to completion.

There exist emotional costs associated with attrition as a student's academic termination may negatively affect the educational achievement and development of other students, by shaking their morale and making them question their own commitment to their course or educational institution (Tinto, 1975). In addition, there is a social cost associated with attrition as it is seldom the least able students who terminate their education. On the contrary; students who drop-out from higher education are often *more academically able* than those who stay (Tinto, 1982). Therefore, the process of attrition can result in an academically inferior graduating class than the one that enrolled the first year. Given financial, emotional and social costs, associated with attrition, it is obvious

that colleges and universities need to better understand the forces driving the mass student exodus from education.

Academic funding for higher education is based on student enrollment and fiscal allocations provided by state governments. These funds are used to create and sponsor student programs and services. The accountability movement in education holds the public school system accountable for academic success and financial responsibility. The accountability movement has now enveloped institutions of higher education as they are also being held accountable for appropriate and efficient use of public support.

Educational equity, institutional accountability, and economic viability are all in jeopardy if educational researchers fail to attend to all areas of retention research including the perceived, experienced and defined meaning by students who prematurely terminate a college education. Without seeking to understand the underlying influences and causes of attrition, institutions of higher education are at risk of imprudent reactions. If a causal relation is not understood, there is risk that sustained long-term amelioration and decreased attrition may not be achieved. In today's society, high attrition rates, whether in secondary school or college, represent institutional and societal failure.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to add to the existing research base by discovering students' thoughts and feelings about the essence of the progression of the decision to drop out after the freshmen year of college. To discover clear and comprehensive descriptions of the experience of leaving college, as well as if student programs or academic policies have a negative effect on students' educational experience, administrators, faculty, and policy makers will benefit from viewing retention through the experience of students' and the meaning they ascribe to it. The literature is abundant with

reviews and research focused on college-leaving behaviors and justifications. Levitz, Noel and Richter (1999) relate that national college-leaving surveys indicate money, time, and personal reasons as justification and in answer to the question of why students leave campus; authors further suggest that research shows these are only superficial reasons for the behavior. Literature defines freshman college-leaving behavior as reflective of problems of academic and personal adjustment which have a major negative impact on retention rates (Bragg, 1994). However, the literature reveals a surprising lack of attention, an utter omission of research investigating students' perceived, experienced, and defined meaning for the termination of their college education. Heverly (1999) stated that students' justifications for college-leaving behavior can be linked to a multiplicity of cognitive, psychological, social, emotional, environmental and circumstantial factors; Heverly continues to state that those identical factors manifest in the lives of students who select to continue their education, which suggests that identified justifications may be an over-simplification of identifiable, socially-acceptable explanations. He suggests causality deeper than surface justifications or socially-acceptable explanations.

The neglect of attention in the literature to explore deeper causality, the essence of the experience of attrition through a descriptive, reflective, interpretive, and engaging mode of inquiry, validates this proposal for a qualitative phenomenological study of attrition. An objective study of only empirical behaviors and justifications for attrition, cannot provide data regarding the essential structure of the experience. Additionally, to research and describe attrition solely by examining college-leaving behaviors and justifications may not offer congruency with or linguistic expression to the perceived and defined experience of students and may consequentially lead to inadequate interpretations

and erroneous implications. Belcheir and Michener (1997) suggest that researchers take a new approach to understanding retention by listening to students and incorporating their thoughts and feelings into student programming. The literature reveals the powerful effects students' feelings and attitudes play in retention. However, in spite of immense research, decades of experience and solid knowledge, assessment of the experience of attrition has played no role in educational or psychological research.

This phenomenological study has been designed to seek emergent clusters of variables within student narratives that may tell the story of a limited number of students who have selected to discontinue their post-secondary education. Additionally, this study purports that it is primarily when students are given the opportunity to define the experience of attrition, their perceptions and interpretations of the meaning of attrition, that progress can be made to develop policies and programs to improve retention.

There is a well-documented need in the literature for increased scholarship, understanding, and dialogue focusing on educational departure from college. An investigation of the experience of attrition may bring light to inner meanings that extend beyond student behaviors, expectations, and justifications, delving deeper than the theoretical and rational to the core, or essence of the experience. Data gathered through this research may provide higher education administrators and student service professionals with a heightened understanding of the essential, invariant structure, or essence of the experience of attrition, recognizing that there may exist a single unifying meaning of the experience. It is believed that through the open dialogue a qualitative study can provide, greater insight and a heightened understanding of the experience of attrition will be gained through which improvements in educational practice may be made.

Therefore, through the rigorous descriptive approach of phenomenological research, this study will endeavor to produce an accurate, clear and articulate description of the experience of attrition through the words of freshman students who have directly experienced attrition.

Creswell (1998) suggests that to learn what is real, the natural attitude of an experience, presuppositions and judgments are to be suspended, which is the aim of phenomenology's approach to research. The nature and purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to investigate and elucidate the educational phenomenon of attrition by obtaining, from freshmen students' verbal descriptions, deep descriptive perceptions of the personal-emotional experience of attrition. Through use of phenomenological analysis, the essential structure of attrition will be extracted from the students' descriptions. Literature concerned with student persistence omits investigation into how students' progression of the decision to drop out of college ultimately affects academic persistence. This research study will provide a deeper understanding of the facets contributing to attrition, as well as students' experience of attrition in order to assist administrators in formulating recruitment efforts and admission policies, improving retention of freshman students, identifying students with potential to leave and developing more responsive fiscal resources. Research in the unexamined area of freshman students' experience of attrition will provide valuable insight and serve as a powerful, practical vehicle for improving retention initiatives and programs that lead to greater student success. Institutions of higher education stress academic excellence and the importance of active student involvement in their own learning (Astin, 1985), but

neglect to invite students to share their experience of attrition, what definition and meaning they attribute to the experience.

Research Interest

The literature is flush with reports on the determinants of attrition, but lacks research on students' perceived, experienced and defined meaning of attrition. Because of this absence of inquiry, no foundation exists to analyze or understand ways in which the relationship between students' perception and experience of attrition effects educational termination itself. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of educational attrition, and the following area of research interest will be addressed: "What are students' thoughts and feelings about the decision to drop out and what meaning do they ascribe to the experience".

Delimitations

This research aims at investigating the phenomenon of student attrition, particularly freshman attrition, which according to the American College Testing Program, is nationally reported to be slightly more than twenty-eight percent. Therefore, the study population will be limited to traditional-aged freshman students, ages 18-24 years, and attended The University of Montana over a three-year period of time including the 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007 academic years. Freshman students who are married will not be included in the study in order to avoid the external negative complexities and forces that family life has on academic study. The sample will be limited to a convenient sample of Missoula County residents who voluntarily agree to participate. DesJardins (1998) suggests that distance from campus to a student's home is negatively associated with persistence. Therefore, to control for negative effects distance

has on academic persistence and mental health that homesickness, due to a physical separation from family and friends, may cause, participants will be selected from permanent residents of Missoula County. Tinto (1993) states that “only fifteen to twenty-four percent of all institutional departures arise because of academic failure; most students who terminate their education prior to degree completion leave prior to their sophomore year and do so voluntarily” (pp. 81-82). Therefore, the sample will be drawn from a population of freshman students in academic good standing who were matriculated at a Montana state four-year public institution to hold steady the variable of academic ability.

Limitations and Assumptions

Limitations are limiting factors inherent in a study that should be clarified and made explicit (Creswell, 2003). In terms of participant selection, the phenomenological research approach requires a participant have had the experience the researcher wishes to more fully understand. It further requires that the participant be able to reflect on the experience thoughtfully and convey it in detail and depth through conversation or other means such as artistic work, poetry or other writings. In addition, the phenomenological approach requires the researcher be able to engage in thoughtful communication with the participant. In the case of the researcher, the expectation is that s/he possesses a well-developed understanding of the topic gained through careful review of and attention to the literature. The researcher may also carefully explicate his or her personal experiences and beliefs about the participant as phenomenological research does not purport to eliminate personal or professional bias. Phenomenological research expects the

researcher to bring their biases into careful awareness and public view so that the biases do not negatively impact the data or analysis.

In terms of methodological limitations, a potential limitation of this study concerns the reliance upon a self-selecting volunteer sample group which can result in biased findings. A major limitation of this study is reviewing only a three-year sample of entering freshman. Findings may be deficient, in that any observed results may be due to a cohort effect and lack generalizability. A relatively small sample size and the use of self-report may be seen as a limitation, yet also a necessity within the phenomenological method, which is appropriate for this investigation. Self-report instruments and interviews are vulnerable to retrospective recall distortion by participants, making the trustworthiness of the inquiry contingent upon an assumption that the participants reveal authentic responses regarding their personal experience and perception of attrition. Phenomenological studies rely on self-report, on retrospective recall that can be inaccurate and provide distortions associated with response bias. The study's focus on investigating the emotional experience surrounding the decision to terminate education, is not meant to suggest that persistence is unaffected by other factors mentioned in the literature. An obvious limitation is a single-institution sample which limits generalizability to other freshmen in dissimilar educational institutions or contexts, as research conducted on a single institution and results thereof can offer only transferability or "retrospective generalizability" (Eisner, 1991) to similar institutions.

The phenomenological method requires the researcher to state any assumption regarding the phenomena and set aside preconceptions or judgments in order to avoid the imposition of a prior hypothesis (Creswell, 1998). The results of the research may be

limited by the researcher's subjectivity, personal bias, and engagement with the participants, rather than serving as a removed observer. Furthermore, results may be limited by the researcher's noted observations of the interview responses of the students. An assumption exists that by serving in an intimate investigative role, the researcher may gain a deeper understanding which may enrich the data and analysis, creating a more comprehensive study. An additional limitation may include the findings' generalizability which is limited by the use of in-depth interviews as the primary data collection procedure, as well as a lack of data triangulation resulting in an inquiry of less confident results.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will be used for the purpose of this study:

Academic good standing: It is the obligation of students to conform to certain academic standards that guide them toward making satisfactory academic progress. One criteria of making satisfactory academic progress requires that students uphold academic good standing which requires them to maintain a minimum C average, a 2.0 cumulative grade point average or above.

Attrition: Attrition in this study will refer to the occurrence of a student terminating their education, leaving The University of Montana, and failing to return for a second year of study to continue their education.

Degree-seeking: In this study, degree-seeking will refer to students enrolled in a degree-seeking program, with the ultimate educational goal of a four-year degree, rather than upgrading skills, gaining higher professional or employment status, increasing pay, or additional learning regarding an area of employment.

First-time freshmen: First-time freshmen in this study will refer to students who have no prior college credit or experience via examination through the College Level Examination Program, advanced placement, departmental examinations or freshmen placements.

Full-time enrollment: Full-time enrollment refers to an undergraduate student registered for a minimum of 12 credit hours a semester; less than 12 credit hours is considered part-time enrollment.

Persistence: Undergraduate persistence will be defined as re-enrollment at the same institution from fall semester the following spring semester as indicated by official university records.

Retention: Retention in this study is used to describe a student continuing academic studies at The University of Montana from their first to second year, for three consecutive semesters.

System-Departure: Students who select to leave higher education altogether and do not transfer to another institution, will be considered to have departed from the system.

Traditional-aged: A universal definition found in the literature and in higher education, identifies traditional-aged freshmen as students within the age range of 18-24 years.

Significance of the Study

Literature indicates a clear omission of research capturing or assessing the complex experience of students' understanding of the experience of attrition. The lack of research on the nature of the experience and the attributed meaning may be responsible for inadequate interpretations and in appropriate implications of data on student attrition.

Data on student attrition have focused on college-leaving behaviors, factors and expectations rather than the perceived experience and meaning of the decision to discontinue academic enrollment. Bank, Biddle and Slavings (1992) state students are active participants in their academic outcome and that their thoughts and opinions may predict their subsequent decision to terminate their education. Furthermore, the authors purport an absence of research and consensus regarding the nature of students' thoughts and opinions that best predict undergraduate persistence.

The purpose of this study was to go beyond the focus of existing research to identify and analyze themes that describe the phenomenon of freshmen attrition and the meaning and definition freshmen ascribe to the experience. The intent of the research was to add to current knowledge of attrition and build awareness through the perceived and defined experience of dropping out of college through the words and lenses of the participants who have lived the experience. It is hoped that this study will generate an enhanced understanding of the essential experience, or essence, of attrition. In addition, it is anticipated that research results will recognize an underlying structure of meaning of the phenomenon or experience of attrition. Research results may have implications for higher education administrators and student service professionals and programs.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The puzzle of academic attrition has been the object of empirical inquiry for decades. For over seventy years researchers have been studying the question of why more than one-fourth of first-year college students voluntarily depart higher education prior to degree completion (Braxton, 2000) most frequently at the end of their first year. The puzzle of freshman student persistence and academic departure is one of the most studied areas in higher education (Tillman, 2002). Thirty years after Astin (1975) concluded that college attrition could be linked to freshman with “poor academic high school records, low aspirations, poor study habits, relatively uneducated parents, and small town backgrounds” (p. 45), higher education researchers are still attempting to identify specific characteristics, factors and behaviors that predict the likelihood of dropping out. Numerous retention studies over the past several decades have focused on varied predictive factors such as: parental educational attainment and influence (Billison, 1981; St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter & Weber, 2004); race (Astin, 1997; Lindquist et al., 2003; Murtaugh, Burns & Schuster, 1999); high school grade point average and ACT / SAT scores (Astin, 1975; Reason, 2004; Zhu, 2002); peer and social networks (Scott, 1998); financial resources (Gilbert & Auger, 1987; Reynolds & Weagley, 2003; Yorke, 1998); learning communities (Barefoot, 2004); and student integration and goal commitment (Lowe, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1975). Yorke (1998) cites “wrong field of study” (p. 193) as one of the major reasons of undergraduate attrition, while Pitkethly and Prosser (2001) identify “lack of clearly defined goals” as the primary reason. Wilcox, Winn, and Fyvie-Gauld (2005) found in their study that influences on

retention are “complex and multifaceted” (p. 710) and that a student’s decision to withdraw and university withdrawal itself, occurred over a period of time. A key United Kingdom (UK) retention researcher, Yorke (2001), found that UK school-leavers were unprepared for the experience of higher education, research of which was supported by a review of Australian retention literature (McInnis et al., 2000). The aggregate of all retention studies find no single reason for attrition and completely ignore the complex process of choice and decision-making by students, as well as students’ experiential meaning of attrition.

Students pursuing completion of a higher education degree confront many decisions while pursuing their education; two of the most fundamental are whether to complete their education and whether to complete it at the institution where they matriculated. It may be through disentangling students’ decision-making and choices that assessment practitioners and administrators can conduct complex analysis of the behavior, gain a richer understanding of persistence behavior, and tailor academic and programmatic initiatives to stem attrition.

First-year Freshman Attrition

President George Dennison outlined in the *2006 Strategic Direction for The University of Montana* an administrative strategic goal to “reduce the freshman attrition rate to no more than 25% by 2009.” Richard Ferguson, American College Testing Program’s Chief Executive Officer, stated in a December 13, 2004, *ACT Newsroom* article, “retention for students remains a significant issue for U.S. colleges and universities, with a substantial number of students not returning for their second year of school.” There is general agreement in the literature that high proportions of students

either withdraw or fail because of adjustment or environmental factors during their first year (Tinto, 1995). According to a 1999 survival analysis by Murtaugh, Burns, and Schuster, the greatest attrition tends to occur between freshman and sophomore years. Because the majority of students who voluntarily terminate their education do so before their second year of study, it is vital that educators understand freshmen motivations, behaviors and attitudes and experiences in order to develop programs and interventions that meet students' needs and encourage persistence. The high rate of first year attrition has a direct impact on the cost productivity of the institution and personal success of the individual student. Tinto (1988) states that even with a clear understanding of freshman motivations, behaviors, and attitudes it is in "the individuals' response to those conditions that determines leaving or staying" (p. 445) and it is in those responses that researchers should focus more attention. Yorke (2001) suggests that attention be given to student development and experience rather than to the redress of student failure with particular "emphasis on other aspects of the existing profile student experience" (p. 120).

Attrition as Institutional Failure

The first-year experience is an important touchstone for the quality of the undergraduate educational and social experience. No longer are first-year dropout rates a sign of institutional status and comfort; they are now a measure of institutional inferiority and concern. Research by Levitz, Noel & Richter (1999) indicates that from an institutional standpoint, "the success of an institution and the success of its students are inseparable" (p. 31). When a student fails to achieve their desired and reasonable goal, attrition may be perceived by the student as failure and that failure, consequently, must be shared by the university (Pikethley & Prosser, 2001). Not only is attrition perceived by

the student and university as failure, it creates a public perception of institutional failure. No university wants to be known for or attempt to build a reputation on perceived failure due to an elevated attrition rate. Concern has been expressed for student retention (Parker, 1999) and student success by stakeholders of institutions of higher education. Astin (1977) finds that students and parents employ retention and graduation rates to compare colleges for quality and to make attendance decisions, while legislators use retention rates to make cost-effective, resource-allocation decisions. In the economic marketplace for students and their tuition dollars, retention reflects a measure of success greater perceived institutional success. While retention is not the primary goal of institutions of higher education, it is perhaps the best indicator of student satisfaction and success. Improving our understanding of influences on retention may increase the likelihood of student retention and thus, institutional success.

Few topics in American higher education have commanded as much attention in the educational literature as the tidal wave of student attrition. Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella and Nora (1996) found the quantity of literature focused on first-year retention “daunting” (p. 2) yet in need of greater research and attention. Although the participant of college attrition has been studied extensively, it is surprisingly limited in regard to the ascribed meaning students hold regarding attrition and the decision-making process. Ryan and Glenn (2003), while researching first-year retention, found that research approaches have been “quantitative and objective rather than qualitative and subjective” (p. 319). State legislatures ask public universities to demonstrate effectiveness with respect to objective, quantitative assessment outcomes, such as one-year retention rates. To develop student success and retention programs based solely on

quantitative, objective data to the exclusion of qualitative, subjective data is prejudiced and unreasonable. Research investigating the needs of entering freshmen completed in 1980 by Sagaria, Higginson and White found that students' perceptions of their expressed needs in college have "escaped investigation" (p. 243) suggesting serious limitation to and weakness in retention research. To increase our understanding of the meaning of and decision by students to terminate their education, attrition data need to continue to be gathered, analyzed, and utilized as a basis for academic response and institutional change.

Descriptive Attrition Studies

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), as well as this researcher, found "the volume of literature directly or indirectly addressing the area of inquiry [attrition] extensive to the point of being unmanageable" (p. 387). The majority of studies on attrition have been descriptive or correlational, identifying relationships between attrition and demographic, sociological, psychological and socio-psychological attributes of students, as well as various institutional characteristics (Munro, 1981). A strong interest in academic retention is indicated by hundreds of studies on variables as "predictors of retention, including: student's background characteristics such as gender, race, ability, birth order, work experiences, and marital status; demographic characteristics of students' families, particularly social class; students' activities and achievements in high school; characteristics of students' college of university such as size, exclusivity, cost, location, and heterogeneity of student body; a broad range of students' curricular and extra-curricular experiences, including faculty contact, membership in fraternities, sororities, or other campus organization, resident on-versus off-campus, numbers and types of courses pursued, academic majors, grades and relationships with other students" (Bank, Biddle,

Slavings, 1992, p. 321). Barefoot (2004) reports that the literature is focused on predictors of attrition, student characteristics or environmental elements that contribute to attrition, but has virtually ignored inquiry into the perception, definition, and /or meaning students ascribe to the termination of their education. Munro (1981) found that attrition research consists of ambiguous definitions of dropouts, lacks control groups and is lacking a representative sample, and cannot be generalized to a theoretical model of the dropout decision-making process. In a study of freshman engineering students at Mercer University, Burtner (2004) concluded students' self-reported feelings of inadequate confidence in study habits, deficient enjoyment in studies, and insufficient hope that a degree would guarantee them a career, lead to greater attrition rates. Burtner noted that while institutional fit of the collegiate experience is well-researched and documented, students' reported feelings, attitudes and perceptions which influence their decision to remain in a degree-granting program have not been considered.

A majority of retention research has focused on student-related factors. Thomas' (1998) social network approach to retention confirms that students with broader, well-connected social [peer and institutional] relations and networks are more likely to persist. Lindquist, Spalding and Landrum (2003) discovered that an extensive literature review illustrated that a preponderance of the research has focused on attrition of first-year students, minority vs. non-minority students, students' personal and financial problems, ethnicity, class standing, and gender. Prediction of retention has been studied from the viewpoint of students' academic and social integration, the influence of faculty and teaching styles on students, and the ability of students to adapt to various aspects of collegiate life. Lindquist, Spalding and Landrum also discovered deficiencies in the

research literature on faculty behaviors that influence students' attitudes toward leaving the university, as well as the experience of attrition, the ascribed meaning of the experience by students.

Minority Student Attrition

Despite the rhetoric of American equality, providing most Americans with an equal education has always been a struggle, and it remains one today (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 5). The academic experiences of minority students in the United States remain substantially unequal and the rates at which minority students enroll in college continue to significantly lag their white peers. Higher college attrition rates, lower levels of academic preparation and socioeconomic status, and greater alienation in a predominately white collegiate environment have been cited as issues facing minority students and contributing to attrition and graduation rates. There exists a wide gap in graduation rates among different racial-ethnic groups (The Education Trust, 2004). Minority students report feeling overwhelmed on predominantly white campuses and facing special problems including fear that assimilating into the mainstream might mean surrendering their cultural identity (Newsweek on Campus, 1983). After decades of civil rights legislation and equal opportunity programs, our national and state goals to provide minorities with equal access to opportunities for education and academic success at institutions of higher education have yet to be realized (Loo & Rolison, 1986, p. 58). The student body of The University of Montana during the 2004-2006 academic years represented a predominant White student ethnicity of eighty-four percent, decreasing to eighty-three percent during the 2006-2007 term. The student body of The University of Montana consisted of four percent Native American students each of the three years under study. The Hispanic

student population was represented by one percent in the two-year period 2004-2006 and two percent during the 2006-2007 academic term. For each of the three years, 2004-2006, enrollments consisted of one percent Asian students (The University of Montana Data Digest). The population of Missoula County, in which The University of Montana is located, is predominantly White at ninety-four percent, fourteen percent greater than the White population of the United States (U.S Census Bureau, 2007). Research has linked minority student attrition to social estrangement within the university system, an enclosed social system composed of two subsystems, the academic and the social. Lou and Rolison (1986) found that attrition reasons among minority students were often influenced by socio-cultural alienation including cultural domination and ethnic isolation, rather than academic factors. Tinto (1982) inquired about the ways institutions themselves are responsible for minority attrition rates, finding that “when students’ experiences are positive, they are more likely to accept a greater financial burden in order to continue attendance than when experiences are unsatisfactory.” (p. 690). He found that the attrition decision is affected significantly by the degree of minority students’ intellectual and social integration into the life of the institution. Attrition rates are highest during the first year of college, representing students who discover their expectations about the university social system, both the academic and social, were unrealistic. Minority student retention research, a legitimate institutional endeavor, should be vigorously pursued to plan for and encourage increased racial / ethnic diversity among students (Bean, 1982). Recognizing that minorities and women are vital to the well-being of institutions of higher education, Tinto (1982) suggests that successful retention programs may be viewed as opportunities for institutional self-renewal, which may benefit the institution’s

interests more than the simple reduction of attrition rates would. Castle (1993) recognizes that “institutional-level research on minority student attrition should not be placed on the periphery, but squarely in line with, vital priorities for a better future” (p. 28) and educational practice.

Retention Programs

Porter and Swing (2006) report on a study by the Policy Center on First Year of College that shows ninety-four percent of accredited four-year American colleges and universities offer first-year seminars to increase retention rates. Barefoot (2004) suggests that even with employment of freshmen retention programs, first-year seminars, learning communities, orientations, early alerts, and supplemental instruction in higher education institutions, retention rates remain disappointingly static. Results from the 1998 national American College Testing Program study suggest that even with establishment of retention programs, the first-to-second year attrition rate for four-year institutions is approximately twenty-seven percent. As state legislatures consider linking institutional funding to quantitative measures such as graduation and retention statistics, focus on attrition is more critical. The accountability movement in education has forced institutions of higher education to strengthen their assessment efforts, provide statistical attrition reports, create enrollment management committees, and offer insight and explanation for higher-than-average attrition levels at particular universities, including The University of Montana. Pikethley and Prosser (2001) stated, “It is clear from the literature that there is inadequate monitoring by individual universities of their students’ reasons for withdrawal”. Due to inherent differences among university campuses, each university must seek to understand the needs and experiences of its own students if they

are to address attrition. It is only through unbiased study of the experience of their own students, grounded and informed by institutional research, will concerned universities be able to address and alleviate attrition issues over which they have control. Attempts to address attrition will require a coordinated, informed university-wide response leading to the improvement of learning experiences for first-year students.

A universal freshman drop-out profile is not available in the literature; however, freshman self-report surveys create a four-tiered profile including a deficiency of financial and support resources, a lack of confidence in a major or career choice, mental health or physical problems, and a poor adjustment to the university. Bragg's 1994 path analysis study of first-time freshmen echoed other self-report surveys and found four critical reasons for attrition, including poor adjustment to the college environment, personal problems, a dislike for the school, and overwhelming feelings of homesickness. In a 1981 study, Billison linked student persistence to parental educational levels, as well as the legacy of parental aspirations for and expectations of their children. She noted that retention rates may be contaminated by low socioeconomic status, personality characteristics, race, sex, and culture, as well as institutional fit. In a literature review exploring retention in relation to academic major choice, St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter, and Weber (2004) found a pattern of cross-generational uplift; a gain in parental education in one generation having a positive influence on academic success [academic retention] for the next generation. Lowe and Cook (2003) suggest that students who are unable to manage the transition to university life and fail to adjust to the academic and social demands of college are at risk for persistence failure. In a 1994 study of freshmen transition to college, Terenzini, et al. found one constant theme throughout the research;

students who completed the first-year regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age or institution attended, felt a sense of belonging and connectedness to the institution and clearly identified someone at the institution who expressed concern for their success.

Researchers agree that retention is a multidimensional construct shaped by various internal and external determinants. Retention affects the entire campus community and, in turn, the campus community must be committed to the welfare of their students and secure a stake in the success of policies and practices that reduce student departure (Braxton et al., 2004). The campus community must be involved in a coordinated, systemic, comprehensive effort to develop and maintain retention programs. However, no consensus exists among educators and researchers on the profile of attrition-prone students or the academic and non-academic causes of attrition. Therefore, it is difficult, if not impossible, to design and implement successful retention programs which is evidenced by failure of nation-wide retention programs to affect any positive change in freshman retention rates. Li and Killian (1999) found it striking that no consensus exists in responses to both quantitative and qualitative research regarding reasons students prematurely terminate their education. In light of indeterminate research findings and the absence of consensus, Li and Killian suggest that no single intervention strategy is likely to provide the desired outcome; increased retention rates and ultimately, increased graduation rates. A successful intervention strategy would be obliged to address a wide variety of student characteristics and needs and be implemented by all university constituencies making student retention a campus-wide responsibility by compelling faculty, staff, and administrators to become effective agents of retention. Colleges and universities are responsible and liable for ensuring that their students receive the best

quality education and educational experience possible; unfortunately, statistics show that nearly one-third of students feel they do not and indicate their discontent through disengagement from the educational and social processes of campus life through academic attrition. It is only through well-grounded, research-informed practice that current college retention rates can receive significant attention and essential improvement.

Conceptual Models of Retention

In an effort to extract more meaningful relationships from research results, several retention theorists formulated conceptual models designed to increase understanding of the interaction of students with the college environment and the processes that affect a student's decision to dropout. The importance of operating and conducting research within a theoretical framework or a conceptual model of student retention cannot be understated. Without a theoretical framework or grounded research-informed practice, the enigma of student attrition becomes random disconnected ideas and actions that rely on intuition, rather than informed, evidence-based decision making. The study of student departure from higher education does not lack theories or models to explain the phenomenon. Educational researchers have thoroughly examined retention through various theoretical models to illustrate the big picture, describe patterns, behaviors, and connective variables. Literature indicates that research on attrition generally adopts one of four attrition models focused that focus on several theoretical perspectives; economic, interactional, organizational, psychological, or sociological (Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab & Lynch, 2003). While these theoretical perspectives explain behavior and are founded upon psychological models of persistence, they do not explain occurrence and have shown to be ineffectual for, and incompatible with, institutional administrations

which seek to increase student retention rates. The retention literature is replete with studies of college leaving behavior and conceptual models of retention. However, research reveals an omission of the investigation of the experience, the essential structure or meaning of the decision to disengage from the educational processes of university life and leave college. Previous studies stress the predictive validity of variables, yet avoid seeking an understanding of the experience of attrition and the meaning that extends beyond student behaviors, expectations, and justifications, delving deeper than rational, theoretical models to the core, or essence of the experience. Gilbert and Auger (1987) stated that reasons for student withdrawal, even an objective reason such as a student's negative financial situation, should be viewed in light of the meaning it holds for the individual student. Given the absence in the literature evaluating the meaning of attrition through the student's view, it is critical that researchers examine students' perceptions of factors which influenced their decision to terminate their university education after the first-year (Rickinson & Rutherford, 1996).

Over the past few decades, three extensively published seminal researchers have designed their own conceptual model describing attrition and have organized numerous predictive variables into three key conceptual models: Tinto's Student Integration Model; Pascarella's General Causal Model; and Bean's Student Attrition Model. While these key theoretical models of student attrition are effective at quantifying and describing academic departure, they are ineffective at qualifying and describing the experience or attributed meaning of the experience of attrition.

Tinto's Student Integration Theory

Vincent Tinto's 1975 Student Integration Theory provides the theoretical foundation for retention research and is the most influential explanatory, theoretical model of persistence in postsecondary education. Research on higher education freshman retention prior to 1975 focused on student characteristics absent any explicit theoretical framework. At the conceptual core of his model, is the importance of person-environment fit to freshman retention. Tinto suggests that students well-integrated into the social and academic community of the college are less likely to disengage or drop-out. Integration in this context refers to the "extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and information structural requirements for membership in that community" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p.52). Tinto conceptualized his theoretical model of retention on Emile Durkheim's research on suicide, which purports that people integrated into life are less likely to fatally disengage from life or commit suicide. Consequently, Tinto likens voluntary departure from college to educational suicide and equates an institution to a small society.

In addition, Tinto's Student Integration Theory purports that students enter college with a varying pattern of personal, family, and individual academic characteristics and skills including initial disposition and intentions with respect to college attendance and life goals. He conceptualizes persistence as an outcome of a student's interaction with and integration into the academic and social systems of the institution; that student characteristics, as well as intentions and commitments, transform through interactions between the student and the structure and / or members of the institution's social and academic system. The greater the assimilation into norms of the

institution would suggest the greater the assimilation into the norms of dominant society. Essentially, Tinto suggests the greater a student's level of social and academic integration, the greater their subsequent commitment to the institution and persistence in college, and the greater probability the student will persist and eventually achieve total development. Tinto (1998) states that the more academically and socially involved students are during their first year of college the more likely they are to persist. He claims social-integration is primarily a function of the quality of peer-group interactions and student-faculty interactions and that academic integration is primarily determined by a student's academic performance and intellectual development level. Increased levels of social and academic integration lead to an additional component which Tinto's Student Integration Theory terms "commitments". This component consists of commitments to the institution and goals associated with graduation and career. As the level of institutional and goal commitment increases, there exists a corresponding increase in the likelihood of persisting at the institution. Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) contend that persistence behavior is essentially the result of a "longitudinal process of person-environment fit and goal commitment" (p. 224).

Satisfying and rewarding encounters with formal and informal academic and social systems lead a student to greater integration or sharing of normative attitudes and values of peers and the institution, which consequentially commands higher retention rates. Nora and Lang (2001) note that for freshmen, being accepted into the university establishes an idea of academic belonging; however, creating friendships is their predominant concern which makes the most critical disjunction interpersonal, rather than academic. Therefore, making friends is a key to feeling accepted by peers and thus,

connected and committed to the institution. Social structures created by first-year students are important, as they often sever old social networks, establish new identities and interpersonal networks, as well as construct new attitudes, values, and behaviors. Tinto's model describes a "rite of passage" in higher education when students move away from past relations to find and adopt new ones within the college setting. Pascarella, et al. (1986) support Tinto's Student Integration Theory and find a direct positive effect on academic persistence through implementation of concentrated freshman orientations which create early positive relationships between a student's social integration, commitment to the institution, and therefore, persistence.

Lowe and Cook (2003) found that students' inaccurate pre-enrollment perceptions of academic life and their failure to attach to the institution contribute to disengagement from educational aspects of university life and have a direct negative impact on retention. Therefore, theoretically higher persistence rates ensue from clearer perceptions about the institution and a healthier match between institutional characteristics and student, as healthier matches lead to greater integration (Tinto, 1975) and greater integration leads to higher graduation rates (Kahn & Nauta, 2001). Lundquist, Spalding and Landrum (2003) found that students who experienced repeated affirmative interactions with faculty at their academic institution were positively correlated with retention rates. The influence of faculty members traverses the educational domain; not only are faculty involved in knowledge delivery, they are also influential in students' larger decision of whether or not to remain in school. Tinto's research and theory focus on college attrition and the intra-institutional influences on students, but lacks attention to students' processing of their experience of attrition or the decision to terminate their education. Elkins (2003)

explains that Tinto, the nation's leading retention researcher, through his Student Integration Model, thoroughly studied student adjustment and integration into the social and academic milieu of college life. However, Elkins notes that Tinto's theory and extensive research omits any analysis or consideration of the internal influences, the psychological implications of the attrition experience. Pascarella and Terenzini (1983) suggest that Tinto's model of attrition contributes to our understanding of the attrition phenomenon, but does not provide an algorithm for predicting it.

Pascarella's General Casual Model

The study of freshman retention in postsecondary institutions of higher education benefited from Tinto's 1975 theoretical model of persistence which guides much of the research on student attrition and disengagement. Tinto's Student Integration Theory supports the importance of person-environment fit, viewing persistence as a function of the degree of harmony between a student and the institution's environment. According to Pascarella's 1985 General Casual Model, Tinto's theory of student integration fails to capture the full complexity of the attrition phenomenon. Ernest Pascarella's research and subsequent General Casual Model parallels Tinto's Integration Theory, yet suggests three additional indirect variables that effect retention; a student's background, pre-college characteristics, and quality of effort in learning and development. While Tinto states that commitment to the institution and a goal of college completion are most influential in determining college persistence (Tinto, 1975, p. 102), he fails to look at the intent to persist or indirect variables of background, pre-college characteristics and quality of academic effort.

Reason (2004) found first- to second-year student retention may be predicted by the pre-college characteristic of ACT-Composite score, a key indicator of high school achievement. He found the effect of ACT score to be positive, indicating that the higher the ACT Composite score, the increased probability of retaining a student, although not to a large degree. His research suggests that even a one-point increase in ACT Composite score increases the odds of retaining a student by slightly more than one and a half percent. Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) hypothesized that students' interactions with the college environment are dependent on three variables; (a) pre-college background characteristics they bring to college; (b) freshman year academic performance, and (c) extracurricular involvement. Their research showed faculty-student relationships, as defined by the quantity of faculty-student informal contacts, were one standard deviation higher than those students who dropped out at of school at the end of their freshman year. Furthermore, their research suggests the quality and impact of student-faculty informal contacts are just as important to students' institutional integration and increased persistence. Pascarella's Casual Model (1985) purports that institutional environment or institutional fit has an indirect, rather than direct effect on retention. He suggests that retention is a function of the effects of direct, or external locus of control, variables and indirect, or internal locus of control, variables. Those direct and indirect variables include a student's background, quality of effort, and pre-college characteristics, as well as the institution's structural and organizational features and environment, and the frequency of interaction with major socializing agents on campus, i.e., faculty and other students.

Pascarella (1983) suggests that what happens to a student after arrival on campus has a greater impact on persistence than background characteristics or commitment to the

institution and goal of graduation. Pascarella and Terenzini's 1983 study on predicting freshman year persistence, found that teaching quality and faculty accessibility influence the strength of the bond students form with the institution. Pascarella and Terenzini found that freshman year experiences directly affected commitment level. In addition, they found that social integration fails to have a significant effect on persistence for male students, yet found the reverse to be true for female students, suggesting slight sex differences in persistence behavior. Finding greater attrition rates in first year students, they suggest increased student involvement in the educational process and life of the institution increases retention. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfle (1986) examined the influence of a student orientation program on persistence / withdrawal behavior and found that an institutionally-sponsored anticipatory socialization experience had a small positive effect on freshman persistence and a substantial positive effect on social integration and institutional commitment. Pascarella's General Casual Model highlights freshman orientation as a positive catalyst of retention by facilitating students' ability to cope with new social challenges in an unfamiliar environment, encouraging successful integration into the institutional social system thereby influencing commitment to the institution and ultimately, academic persistence.

Bean's Student Attrition Model

The third significant model of retention, Bean's Student Attrition Model, suggests that "the most important variable in explaining dropout is institutional commitment" or a student's behavioral intent to remain enrolled (Bean, 1980, p. 183). Tinto (1998) found institutional commitment whether expressed as motivation, drive or effort, is "centrally related to departure from institutions of higher education" (p. 41). Bean's theory

incorporates concepts from industrial worker turnover, paralleling student attrition to variables that influence a worker's intent to leave. Bean's theoretical construct purports that the intent to remain enrolled is shaped by belief and attitude about the institution, peers, and faculty. His model presumes that encouragement of close peers, solid academic friendships, and social ties impacts the extent to which students share group values, support structure and affinity for and a sense of membership within the institution. Belief and attitude regarding the institution result from students' positive academic and social participation in the educational process, which increase social integration and interpersonal bonds with the institution. Positive perceptions and experiences relating to the institution, lead to favorable beliefs, attitudes and commitment toward the institution, which lead to intent and likelihood to persist. Bean suggests that group attitudes and behaviors influence an individual's decision to leave. Intent to commit is conceptualized by Bean as the most proximal determinant of institutional departure. Lowe and Cook (2003) suggest that academic and support services implement intrusive, proactive strategies to reach freshmen "before they have an opportunity to experience negative feelings of fear, failure, disappointment, and confusion" (p. 75).

Karen Leppel's 2001 study focused on the impact of major selection on college persistence and found intent to persist and persistence rates were affected by negative social forces. Institutional commitment thereby is also affected, according to Bean, by social variables outside the collegiate environment including employment. Bean and Metzner (1985) found evidence linking first-year attrition with employment while attending college, establishing that more than part-time employment has deleterious consequences on persistence. Bean's Attrition Model emphasizes the importance of

interactions between psychological, environmental, and academic variables on attrition. These variables include family responsibilities and the amount of encouragement and support a student receives from influential persons [parents] in their lives, which Bean found to be of greater importance than Tinto's theory of social integration and institutional fit. Lack of familial encouragement to remain enrolled is posited by Bean and Metzner (1985) to be an important environmental variable that exerts both a direct and indirect effect on retention. Bank, Slavings, and Biddle (1990) found that parental and peer influence had strong direct effect on institutional departure which corroborates Bean's Attrition Model. The 2006 National Freshman Attitudes Report found that factors such as sociability, family emotional support and opinion tolerance make a significant difference in student success. Okun, Benin and William's (1996) study concurred with Bean's conceptual model as they found intent to persist to be significantly positively associated with enrollment [retention] behavior. Bean (1980, 1983) argued that intent to commit reflects the impact the school has on students' socialization and satisfaction, as well as the institution's behavior, not solely the behavior of the individual student. He further purports retention rates would increase through creation of academic policies intended to increase students' participation within the institution.

Summary

The goal of enhanced student retention is merely a vehicle to a larger goal; an institutional commitment to the welfare, social and intellectual growth, and educational goals of students. Despite the volume of research focused on attrition and a variability of research approaches and conceptual models, what has emerged is the foregone conclusion that it is impossible to identify a single variable responsible for explaining first-year

attrition. In addition, empirical support for theoretical constructs key to the three seminal models is mixed; suggesting there is more to predicting persistence than Tinto's student-institution fit, Pascarella's academic and social integration, or Bean's intent to persist. Because empirical support is weak and theoretical models have only partially addressed issues related to attrition, it seems important to examine attrition from the experience and attributed meaning of students. Rhodes and Nevil (2004), Barefoot (2004), and Burtner (2004) agree there is a void in the research with regard to students' expression of their personal perceptions, definition of and meaning attributed to the decision to disengage and discontinue academic studies. Ryan and Glenn (2003) note an absence of qualitative research while Elkins (2003) indicates an omission of concern of the psychological implication of the experience of attrition and the progression of the decision to drop out. Pikethley (2002) suggests that universities assess and evaluate attrition on their campuses.

Large nation-wide institutional attrition rates may be reduced if institutions are able to exert control over internal / external factors contributing to students' dissatisfaction. The voluminous research on freshman persistence demonstrates that there is not a simple contributory factor or answer to the question of why some students persist toward degree completion and others do not. The issue of student retention is multi-dimensional and it is important for researchers to approach the topic in a holistic context, including seeking to understand the psychological facet of the human experience of freshman attrition. Rickinson and Rutherford (1996) suggest systematic study of first-year students as a strategy to ensure students contemplating academic termination are provided an opportunity to express their feelings and researchers an opportunity to elucidate factors influencing students' decision-making. It is incumbent upon

academicians and researchers to seek greater understanding and clarity of students' experience of attrition and administrators' role in engaging the needs of students given the large number of students selecting to terminate their collegiate studies. Rhodes and Nevill (2004) suggest that it may be through a greater understanding of factors leading to attrition that institutional systems aimed at "ensuring recruitment effort is not undermined by misplaced by ineffective retention efforts" (p. 191). Considering one-fourth of students entering four-year higher education institutions voluntarily depart at the end of their first year and fifty-percent depart prior to completing a degree, research on student persistence is crucial to sustaining fiscal health of institutions of higher education and to producing an educated citizenry.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

“Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced.” John Keats

Research Design

Two diverse methods of scientific inquiry exist based upon differing paradigms and assumptions about phenomena: quantitative and qualitative inquiry methods. The method of inquiry utilized, either qualitative or quantitative research, is dependent upon the way in which the researcher engages in the phenomenon studied and on the nature of the research prompt. In qualitative research, the research prompt asks *how* or *what* is happening. Quantitative research prompts *why* something happens using group comparison and is seen as the conventional method of research and considered to be objective. Focusing solely on one method of inquiry to the exclusion of the other may lead to poor theory, poor research, and ultimately poor practice. The preponderance of what is known about first-year freshman retention has been learned utilizing the quantitative method of inquiry. Retention research has completely excluded qualitative study utilizing “quantitative research methodologies exclusively” (Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991, p. 632), which today is still a statement of validity.

The qualitative research method is seen as subjective and descriptive, an unconventional method of research. Qualitative research endeavors to study things in their natural environments, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Creswell, 1998). A qualitative researcher creates a complex yet holistic picture, analyzing words and reporting detailed informant views. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the key instrument of data collection,

analyzes data inductively, focuses on the perspectives and meaning of participants, and describes findings in expressive, persuasive language.

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Sanders (1982) describes phenomenological research as a “qualitative research technique that seeks to make explicit the implicit structure and meaning of human experiences.” VanManen (1990) describes phenomenology as a research method that offers a descriptive, reflective, interpretive, and engaging mode of inquiry to derive the essence of an experience. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that attempts to explore the experience of individuals through listening for the discoverable through in-depth interviews that provide data for intuition and reflection. It is a research method that attempts to get to the heart of the “pure and unencumbered vision of what an experience essentially is” (Sanders, 1982, p. 354) and to bring the experience to clarity.

The Phenomenological Method

Phenomenological research has its roots in the teachings of the twentieth century German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who believed the basic structure of life can be found within perception of the experience. The lived experience is considered to be a person’s perception of his or her presence in the world at the moment when things, truths or values are constituted (Morse & Richards, 2002). Phenomenological research searches for the essence of a human experience, which cannot be revealed by observation or other research method, to appear, to show itself. Phenomenological research acknowledges that human experience and behavior occurs only in the context of relationships to things, people, events, and situations. Polkinghorne (1989, p.46)

describes phenomenological inquiry as a three-step practice applied to a research prompt. Initially, the researcher gathers data (descriptions) in sufficient depth and breadth from persons who have experienced the phenomena being studied; then, the researcher analyzes the data to provide an understanding of fundamental elements that frame the essence of the experience; and finally, the researcher articulates a study describing the experience in order that an uneducated reader is able to “understand better what it is like for someone to experience” the phenomena. The aim of phenomenological research is to discover the meaning of an experience, to have the meaning become observable, and to highlight an unencumbered vision of what essentially constitutes a lived experience through the emergence of themes and essences underlying the human consciousness. The value of employing a phenomenological research approach is that emergent themes and essences may serve to validate, complement, or repudiate quantitative research findings.

Rationale for Phenomenological Research

No identified reason exists to explain why a student persists in their academic studies. Multiple theories and three main theoretical concepts have been employed to study persistence in hopes of explaining how specific variables may influence a student’s persistence. Much is known and has been written about students who stay and / or leave college, but little is known of students’ experiences of the decision to terminate their education. This study will employ a qualitative phenomenological research design to convey linguistic expression to the consciousness of the experience of attrition in hopes of providing a richer, deeper interpretation, understanding, and psychological essence of freshman attrition. Polkinghorne (1989) states the goal of phenomenological research is to “produce clear and accurate descriptions of a particular aspect of human experience”

(p. 44) acknowledging that the realm of experience consists of the particular occurrence and the meaning ascribed to it. Sanders (1982) describes phenomenological research as a method to examine individual conscious experiences (phenomena) and analyze “how meanings develop” (p. 254). The task in conducting phenomenological research is to describe the intentional objects of consciousness from the perspective of phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 1997). The phenomenological method of inquiry was selected for this study due to its rigorous descriptive approach and because it offers a method for accessing the complicated phenomena of human experience.

Phenomenological studies “thematize the phenomenon of consciousness, and in its most comprehensive sense, refer to the totality of the lived experiences that belong to a single person” (Giorgi, 1997). The phenomenological method of research pushes the question of experience deeper, seeking to understand lived events and personal motivations and interpretations. This phenomenological study is designed to access, evaluate, and search for the essence of the unspoken consciousness surrounding the experience of college freshman attrition. The search for the essence of the phenomenon is the articulation, based on intuition, of a fundamental meaning without which a phenomenon could not present itself. Undoubtedly, the findings will serve as a data base for further investigations.

Procedure

Setting

Explored and claimed in 1805 for the United States by the Lewis and Clark Expedition, land populated by American’s First Nations of Assiniboine, Blackfeet, Crow, Salish, and Gros Ventres tribes, eventually became the state of Montana. Admitted to the

United States in 1889 as the forty-first state, Montana boasts a population of slightly less than one million residents (Schweitzer, 2006). The University of Montana is located in Missoula, a town of 60,722 residents in the center of five valleys and three major rivers nested in the Rocky Mountains of western Montana between Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks. Founded in 1892, three years after statehood was established, The University of Montana is a mid-sized liberal arts university (<http://www.umt.edu>) and is accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges as a coeducational, doctoral degree-granting university. Study participants will be drawn from first-time, degree-seeking traditional-aged freshmen in academic good standing who attended The University of Montana during the 2004-2005, 2005-2006 and 206-2007 academic years and indicated their permanent residence in Missoula County, Montana.

Participants

During the past three academic years, 2004-2007, The University of Montana reported enrollments of 13,558 (2004), 13,602 (2005) and 13961 (2006) full- and part-time students. The average age of both graduate and undergraduate students attending the University of Montana during the three year period of time was 24.7 years, slightly highly than the universal definition of a traditional-aged student, aged 18-24 years. Freshman students represented an average of 27 percent of enrollments over the three academic terms; 3724 in 2004, 3710 in 2005 and 3655 in 2006. In both 2004 and 2005, seventeen percent of freshman students indicated a permanent address within Missoula County decreasing to sixteen percent in 2006. Over the three year period, Montana residency levels remained stable at seventy-four percent for both undergraduate and graduate students, as did gender division presenting a fifty-four percent female and forty-

six percent male student body. The student body of The University of Montana during the 2004-2006 academic years represented a predominantly White student ethnicity of eighty-four percent, decreasing slightly to eighty-three percent during the 2006-2007 term. The student body of The University of Montana consisted of four percent Native American students each of the three years under study. The Hispanic student population was represented by one percent in the two year period 2004-2006 and two percent during the 2006-2007 academic term. For each of the three academic terms, 2004-2007, enrollments consisted of one percent Asian student. (The University of Montana Data Digest). The minority population in Missoula County, in which The University of Montana is located, is slightly more than six percent. The population of Missoula County is predominantly White, ninety-four percent, fourteen percent greater than the White population of the United States (U.S Census Bureau, 2007).

The purpose of phenomenological research is to fully describe the meaning attributed to an experience or phenomena by a number of individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon under review. Two primary criteria for participant selection demand that each participant had had the experience being investigated and be able to openly, willingly and fully explore the experience in a conversation with the researcher. Phenomenological studies require data to be collected through long one-on-one interviews with participants ranging in number from five to twenty-five (Creswell, 1998). Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that with in-depth interviews lasting as long as two hours, ten participants in a study represent a reasonable size. In phenomenological research, sample size remains small due to the time involved in data transcription and analysis of the voluminous data collected. The format of this study makes examination of a large

population impossible; therefore, for this study between six and ten participants will be solicited from full-time University of Montana freshmen students admitted in academic good standing in one of three academic years, 2004-2007, with a permanent address of Missoula County who did not return to campus as matriculated students for what would have been their sophomore year.

Sampling

Sampling is a key to solid qualitative inquiry and to understanding the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher sought a valid representation of freshman attrition through the use of a convenient, purposeful sample. A convenient, purposeful sample was utilized to select for the characteristic of the phenomenon being investigated, dropping out of college, and further, to examine students readily available to the researcher. Study participants were randomly drawn from the population of first-time, degree-seeking traditional freshmen who attended The University of Montana during the 2004-2005, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 academic terms and failed to continue enrollment the following semester, at the beginning of what was to be their sophomore year. Academic drop-out has not been found to be tied to academic failure as attrition rates exist equally across all levels of academic performance (Tinto, 1990). Nonetheless, to hold the variable of academic ability constant, only students admitted to the university in good academic standing were invited to participate. In addition, holding the academic ability variable constant may indicate the students are effective consumers of an educational product. Janasiewicz's 1987 study advocated future research limiting participants to students who made a conscious, self-motivated decision to terminate their education, regardless of academic performance, which would secure the variable of

academic ability. Gold (1995) investigated the effect of intergenerational family patterns on freshmen adaptation to the collegiate environment and found that family demands and the subsequent lack of social integration into college life, has a negative effect on retention. To hold steady the variable of academic and social integration, only unmarried students were asked to participate. Participants were drawn from students noting a local permanent address within Missoula County, whom Belcheir and Michener (1997) found are at greater risk of dropping out. Belcheir and Michener's study indicates that local students present a higher risk of dropping out because the degree of achievement and commitment required of local students is inferior to that required of students who move across the nation or state to attend college. A letter of invitation to participate voluntarily in the research study was mailed to students identified by University enrollment records as non-returning. Participants were selected in order to gain a variety of richly varied descriptions of the experience of attrition. The selection process via a letter of invitation to participate began at the conclusion of fall semester 2006 when matriculation records were finalized and made public by the university Registrar's Office.

Research Prompt

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain clear, precise systematic descriptions of the experienced meaning of non-continuation of enrollment after the first-year of academic study. To gain an uncensored account of the meaning of the experience of attrition, one-on-one, open-ended, unstructured interactive interviews were conducted beginning with the research inquiry; *"Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive, and the neutral, in as much detail as you*

remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college. The opening inquiry was designed to elicit the recall of students' thoughts and feelings regarding the decision to discontinue academic studies. The grand tour opening research prompt was created to be broad and open-ended without boundaries, providing participants an adequate opportunity to comprehensively express their thoughts and feelings about their experience of attrition without interruption. Subscribing to the phenomenological method of research, additional questions were "restricted to clarification or elaboration" (Polkinghorne, 1989). During the interview, the researcher assisted students with elucidation of their ideas, feelings and the meaning they ascribe to the experience in detail and depth by using a probing technique of open-ended, gentle queries.

The interviews began with social dialogue and a few demographic questions to establish rapport before the actual in-depth interview began. Demographic data gathered includes: gender, age, year of high school graduation or award of General Education Diploma, freshman year living accommodations, and declared major or educational goal. The researcher helped participants describe their experience without leading the discussion. The in-depth interview began with the opening query:

Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive, and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.

Open-ended interviewing permits researchers to pursue participants' lead, to pose clarifying questions and to smooth the expression of participants' experience. During the interview, the researcher helped participants explain ideas, feelings and detailed meanings they ascribed to their experiences in greater detail and depth by using open-ended, gentle probing questioning techniques that include queries such as:

*If you are able, can you tell me more about it?
What does that mean to you?
Is it possible to give an example?
Describe to me what that was like for you.*

Interview Protocol

Participants were invited via letter to participate in an in-depth, unstructured one-on-one interactive interview with the researcher. Five of the participants contacted the researcher and asked to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted to gain an uncensored naïve description of the experiential world of non-continuation of academic study. Each interview included an explanation of the basic purpose of the interview, namely that the study is intended to assess students' college-leaving emotions, the feelings, thoughts and meaning ascribed to the experience of discontinuation of academic enrollment. The structure of the interview was explained and interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. In addition, the researcher took any necessary observational notes during the interview regarding the student's responses, behaviors and body language. The transcribed narratives and the researcher's noted observation provided the data to be analyzed, providing the researcher exacting verbiage to be studied and analyzed.

Interview Questions

Participants were asked to recall their uncensored thoughts, feelings and the meaning ascribed to their experience of their freshman year and terminating their academic study at The University of Montana. The grand tour question, followed by gentle probing queries, was formulated to capture the experience as it presents itself to the participants' consciousness. In phenomenological research, the quality of the researcher's broad, open-ended questioning and probing supersedes the quantity of the

questions. In phenomenological research, it is far better to ask fewer quality questions and investigate them more intensively, than to ask many questions superficially.

Data Collection and Analysis

Phenomenological research aims to reveal and unravel the structures, logic and interrelationships of the phenomenon being analyzed surmising that experience manifests at the intersection of person and world. In addition, phenomenological research seeks processes of consciousness which provides meaning, clarity and discrimination and further reduces a lived human experience to its essence. Van Manen (1990) purports that the key to phenomenological analysis consists of methodical reading, reflection and writing which in turn allows researchers to transform lived experiences into textual expressions of their essence. Through analyzing words and phrases, as well as obtaining experiential descriptions from participants, greater observation, reflection and insight may coalesce. It is hoped that by attributing lived-structures of meaning, or essences, to the experience of attrition, a shared experiential world will appear.

Description of Phenomenological Reduction

Honoring the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure, the researcher sought to assess the phenomenon of the human experience of non-continuation of academic studies. Giorgi (1997) and Polkinghorne (1989) explain and outline the phenomenological method through a six-level process:

Level One – Verbatim Transcriptions (Individual Protocols): Collect verbal data via an audiotaped interview, transcribe data in verbatim and critically read the raw data to get a general sense of the interview.

Level Two – Spontaneous Meaning Units (Individual Protocols): Read the data, suspending and breaking data into parts that seem to express a self-contained meaning from a psychological perspective or meaning unit of the experience phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1987, p. 53). The researcher restates the meaning units in the third person, retaining the participant's original language.

Level Three – Emergent Themes (Individual Protocols): Initial transformation of data in the participant's words into the researcher's words, organized according to topic and presented in narrative form to reveal each participant's experience of attrition. Statements are carefully judged for inclusion and, after careful consideration, those not containing inherent or experiential descriptions are excluded.

Level Four – Transformations (Individual Protocols): In a second transformation of the data, the researcher redescribes the concrete data into psychological language expressing psychological meanings emphasizing the experience being investigated.

Level Five – Fundamental Description (Combined Protocols): Raw data is distilled moving through four levels and are commingled and synthesized to form a descriptive narrative reflecting and summarizing data into a discrete entity of persistent psychological meanings. Perspectives representative of only one or two participants are excluded.

Level Six – Essential Description (Combined Protocols): In the final level of abstraction, the experience is viewed and described in general, transsituational terms to allow articulation of essential structural features of the experience. The Essential Description, or final distillation of meaning, represents key findings of the study

Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that the above six levels are to be taken to tie original protocols together to produce “a description of general structure of experience” (p. 53). Transformation of the collected verbatim interviews into a clear, informative description of the phenomenon is a “complex and difficult process” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 51).

Data Collection

Research utilizing the phenomenological method begins with the collection of verbal data. After approval was granted for the study by The University of Montana Institutional Review Board, participants identified, and written consent granted by the volunteer participants, the collection of verbal data began with one-on-one interviews during the summer of 2007. Participants were asked to sign the “Participant Information and Consent Form” (Appendix B) granting written consent to participate and have their verbalizations audio-recorded. They were informed that they had the option to stop or withdraw from the study, without penalty, at any time. Inherent in the initial step of phenomenological research, data collection, there are three phases: (a) in-depth participant interviews that are audio-recorded and transcribed; (b) thorough study of the participants’ verbalizations in order to derive “meaning”; and (c) keen observation of the participants to explore the experience in greater depth. Participants were asked to, in as much detail as possible, share their experience of deciding to terminate their education following their first-year. Following the phenomenological method, questioning was confined to requests for clarification or elaboration of the participant’s response (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 48). Data was collected via in-depth, one-on-one interviews in order to gather pure, uncensored descriptions of the experience of attrition, which offered

structure to the participants' consciousness that constitutes the lived experience. Observation of both the participants' verbalization and non-verbal communication and behavior was studied during the interview in order to derive meaning or tease out essential descriptions of their experience. These observations were noted by the researcher during the interview. Data gathered via interview was audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and converted to written form. Audio-recordings were repeatedly listened to in order to absorb the students' language and rich descriptions of experiences, and to obtain a sense of the whole. During the second and third phases of data collection, the participants' transcribed verbalizations with supplementary margin notes were read repeatedly and thoroughly. Initial themeing (Level Two) was formed representing elementary essential descriptions of the experience; in phenomenological data analysis this is known as *memoing*. Data collected during reflective interviews with the participants, together with researcher memoing and themeing, was complimented by personal reflections by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Giorgi (1997) described six interlocking levels of data analysis encompassed by the phenomenological method: (a) a thorough reading of the data by the researcher to obtain a sense of the whole and offer a description of the phenomenon as revealed in the interviews; (b) verbatim transcription, (c) using researcher's judgment, a division of the transcripts into meaningful units; (d) transforming data from everyday verbatim to implicit psychological aspects, emergent themes, or meaning units; (e) development of *noetic* correlates, the subjective reflections of the emergent themes representing the individual's perception of the reality; and (f) a search for, abstraction of, and arrival at a

synthesis of universal essences or psychological meanings, known in phenomenological research as *eidetic reduction*. The taped interviews were transcribed and significant statements extracted which served as raw data. Meaning units were formulated from the statements and clustered into common themes. An exhaustive description of the phenomenon was produced, offering a universal essence of psychological meaning of the experience of attrition.

Role of the Researcher

According to Morse and Richards (2002), phenomenological researchers attempt to understand the essence of how people attend to the world, cognizant of the fact that people's descriptions are perceptions and forms of interpretation of experience. The role of the researcher conducting a phenomenological study is to descriptively investigate the conscious phenomenon and transform the experience into a textural expression of its essence. This study presupposed the researcher's sensitivity to the phenomenon being investigated and faithfulness to the participants' experience. Additionally, phenomenological research mandates that researchers set aside prejudgments or bracket any preconceived ideas about the phenomenon in order to understand it through voices of the informants. The researcher's role in this phenomenological study was to awaken essential possibilities within the experience of attrition and to give the experience an articulated consciousness. In addition, the researcher, through reduction of research, sought to uncover and offer a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of attrition through the development of "meaning units", the discriminated articulations of the description of the experience. The researcher maintained professional spontaneity and sensitivity, as well as an attitude open enough to allow unexpected meanings to emerge

and be intuited. The researcher provided an atmosphere in which participants were able to relax and offer sufficient time and thought during the interview.

The researcher has worked in higher education for nearly thirty years on four campuses in two states, including two four-year state institutions and two four-year private faith-based colleges. Currently, the researcher is in her eighth year as a career counselor / internship coordinated at the university. In addition, she had two college-aged children attending the University of Montana during the period of research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis and Results

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).

Phenomenological Reduction

Individual interviews of six University of Montana freshmen admitted to the university in good academic standing who voluntarily terminated studies provided data for this study. Individual interviews were conducted summer 2007 and each participant (P1-P6) was given one to two hours of uninterrupted time to respond to the question, “Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive, and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.” At the end of an hour of interviewing, the researcher shared the time limitation with each participant. Quite interesting to the researcher, each of the students stated that they had more to share and continued to talk for as much as one hour more. The question was employed to allow students to convey verbal expression to their experience of attrition in hopes of providing a deeper interpretation, understanding, and psychological essence of freshman attrition. Participants were asked to respond without any additional questions; however, gentle probes were employed when necessary to help participants clarify feelings or express experiences in greater detail.

To gain an uncensored account of the meaning of the experience of attrition, students were asked recall their thoughts and feelings about their freshman year and their experience making the decision to discontinue academic studies. They were asked to

respond without boundaries giving adequate opportunity to comprehensively express their thoughts and feelings about their freshman year and experience of deciding to leave college. In order to fully engage participants, the researcher audio-taped the interviews and made observational notes. Audio-taped data were laboriously transcribed verbatim and put into written form. The researcher analyzed the data through Level Two, Spontaneous Meaning Units, and Level Three, Narrative of Emergent Themes. Interview excerpts and analysis are included in this chapter, as are Levels Four, Five and Six in their entirety. The reader is encouraged to view Appendices for full verbatim interview transcripts (Level One), for spontaneous meaning units (Level Two), and narratives based on emergent themes (Level Three).

Adapted for this study from Jenni (1990) and included below is a schematic of the phenomenological / psychological reduction (analysis procedure). A description of each level, with illustrations follows.

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 shift 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 thoughts, feelings, and experience of their freshman year at the University of Montana and their experience of their decision to discontinue academic studies 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's college student's thoughts, feelings, and experience of their freshman year at the University of Montana and their experience of their decision to discontinue academic studies. 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 of 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 (Individual 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 from the interview with Participant One (CD) 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 numerous readings of each verbatim transcription from the audio-taped interviews. The transcription process was labor intensive yet produced rich strong voices and data. Multiple readings provided clarity and a "general sense" of the experience with each reading offering additional insight of the experience of freshman attrition. The stories the participants told, the subjects and feelings they selected to share, the global impression that was conveyed form Level One data holding primary significance to inform the analysis procedure.

The following passage from one of the interview transcriptions provides a description of P1's freshman year experience.

An Example of Level One (Verbatim Transcription)

P1. Okay. Let's see. Throughout high school I was never quite sure exactly what I wanted to do, so college was never, well I knew I was going to go but it was never anything big. I finally decided I wanted to work hard and accomplish something so I decided it would be perfect for me to teach kindergarten because for my Senior Project I wrote a children's book and took it to schools and read it and I loved the little kids. I'm one of those people who hate making life-long decisions, because what if I change my mind? I can't commit to something right now. So when I got there, it was like ... I didn't want to make the decision.

Interviewer: So, senior year you decided to become a teacher, but when you got to UM you couldn't decide.

Level Two: Spontaneous Meaning Units (Individual Protocols)

Spontaneous meaning units of each verbatim transcription (Level One) are identified according to shift 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, spontaneous meaning units of each verbatim transcription (Level One) were identified according to the appearance of shifts in focus of attention in the participant's description of the experience. The researcher identified meaning units and numbered them for easier accessibility and study, restated the meaning units in the third person allowing the researcher to report on what the participant said while maintaining the integrity of the participant's original language. At Level Two, all statements, even those that seemed insignificant, were retained.

Since there was minimal external structure imposed on the original interview to allow participants' and not the researcher's perceptions to be expressed, the researcher now searched the entirety of the transcription in order to identify meaning units within the participants' statements. Level Two constitutes the initial stage in the data analysis of the meaning units.

As an example of Level Two analysis, the identical passage quoted above as an example of Level One, Verbatim Transcription is employed. The researcher restated meaning units in third person maintaining the participant's original language, numbered and placed each spontaneous meaning unit on the right side of the page.

An Example of Level One (Verbatim Transcription)

(Verbatim Transcriptions)	(Meaning Units)
<p>P1. 1. Okay. Let's see. Throughout high school I was never quite sure exactly what I wanted to do, so college was never, well I knew I was going to go but it was never anything big. /</p> <p>2. I finally decided I wanted to work hard and accomplish something so I decided it would be perfect for me to teach kindergarten because for my Senior Project I wrote a children's book and took it to schools and read it and I loved the little kids./</p> <p>3. I'm one of those people who hate making life-long decisions, because what if I change my mind? I can't commit to something right now. So when I got there, it was like ... I didn't want to make the decision./</p> <p>So, senior year you decided to become a teacher, but when you got to UM you couldn't decide.</p>	<p>1. P1 wasn't sure what she wanted to do [major] in college. She knew she was going to attend college.</p> <p>2. She wanted to work hard and accomplish something. She decided to become a teacher after writing a children's book.</p> <p>3. She hates making life decisions for fear she'll change her mind. She has trouble committing.</p>

Level Three: Emergent Themes (Individual Protocols)

Meaning units (Level Two) revealing each participant's thoughts, feelings, and experience of their freshman year at the University of Montana and their experience of their decision to discontinue academic studies 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 organized according to themes that may have appeared at various places in the interview. The themes were organized and

rewritten in the narrative form. The original language of the participants' was retained, but meaning units not plainly addressing the phenomenon of a student's experience of freshman year and the decision to terminate studies were discarded after cautious deliberation.

The narrative below illustrates how themes emerged from meaning units from Level Two: P1 as the participant felt unsure and uncertain of her academic and career future as well as swept along with the tide of everyone else, including her best friend, attending college.

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

In high school, P1 was not sure what she wanted to major in during college, but she knew she wanted to "work hard and accomplish something." She never felt an "urge to go to college", but knew she should and realized "everyone else was going." She registered for classes with her best friend which increased her motivation to attend college. During her senior year of high school, she wrote a children's book and read it to elementary school children for her Senior Project. It was such an exciting, positive experience for her that she thought she might become a kindergarten teacher.

Level Four: Transformation (Individual Protocols)

Meaning units (Level Three) are transformed into language expressing the psychological meanings of the University of Montana's college student's thoughts, feelings, and experience of their freshman year at the University of Montana and their experience of their decision to discontinue academic studies. The researcher's understandings elucidate the meanings of the participant's descriptions.

At Level Four, the participants' experience receded slightly and the researchers understanding of the underlying psychological constructs or meanings assumed a more vital role. A major transformation of the meaning units occurred, in which the researcher illuminated the psychological underpinnings of the participant's descriptions. In the

example, specific illustrations have receded and the underlying psychological constructs of uncertainty, hope, and fear are identified.

In Level Four, the researcher's perceptions are allowed for the first time to mingle with and illuminate the data. This is one of the most difficult levels of the analysis as the researcher must reflect on the situated descriptions and attempt to understand the emotional and psychological values and assumptions that lie beneath each situation. The researcher attaches psychological labels to the situated details used by the participant. At Level Four, material from different parts of the interviews is combined if they share similar psychological structures.

An Example of Level Four

During high school, P1 was uncertain of her future, but hopeful she would “work hard in college and accomplish something.” She stated, “I never had an urge to go to college, but knew I should.” She felt positive about the possibility of majoring in education and becoming a kindergarten teacher, which she felt it would be a “perfect” career for her. In order to prepare, for the challenge of college, P1 attended Summer Orientation and a one-credit Freshman Transition course. Neither program eased her feelings of being overwhelmed, confused, and “needing someone to talk to.” She registered for the same classes as her best friend which served to motivate her to attend class, but when her best friend dropped out of school, P1 felt “complete really alone.”

Transformation (Level Four) analysis follows for all six participants preceded by short narrative descriptions of background information provided by the participants from a brief oral questionnaire (refer to questions in Participant Demographic Information in Appendix D).

Level Four for All Six Participants

Participant One (P1)

Background Information: P1 is a 21 year old White female and a graduate of Big Sky High School in Missoula and has a large extended family in the area. She is the

oldest of three children, a younger brother and a sister. Neither of her parents graduated college although her mother attended a junior college for one semester. Her parents divorced prior to her freshman year and her father recently remarried and is expecting a baby. He is a blue-collar laborer and earns an excellent income in excavation. Her mother was a stay-at-home wife until the divorce and now operates an in-home daycare. Freshman year, P1 lived at home with her mother and siblings and had a serious boyfriend, also attending The University of Montana.

Level Four: Transformation. During high school, P1 was uncertain of her future, but hopeful she would “work hard in college and accomplish something.” She stated, “I never had an “urge to go to college, but knew I should.” She felt positive about the possibility of majoring in education and becoming a kindergarten teacher, which she felt would be a “perfect” career for her. In order to prepare for the challenge of college, P1 attended Summer Orientation and a one-credit Freshman Transition course. Neither program eased her feeling of being overwhelmed, confused, and “needing to talk to somebody.” She registered for the same classes as her best friend which served to motivate her to attend class, but when her best friend dropped out of school, P1 felt “completely really alone.”

P1 became overwhelmed and confused first semester, and began to feel isolated and alone - somewhat disconnected from school. Peer academic advising caused her additional confusion as she had the idea her advisor’s role was to provide full discussion of academic options and career counseling, not simply course selection in a hurried environment. Her confusion and isolation, coupled with budding doubts about the field of education as a life-long decision, made her feel afraid and unfocused. Her misgivings

about a career in education, her investigation into the numerous majors, and research on general education courses to select from increased her feelings of being confused and overwhelmed and lacking clear direction. She did not want to “commit” to a “life-long decision” fearing she might change her mind. She felt “completely clueless” about vital academic information such as how to select courses for a particular major, why she was required to take general education courses, the availability of career counselors, and what education majors do other than teach. While she “did ok in school” she “didn’t do close to her best” because it “didn’t seem that she was going anywhere.” As confused and overwhelmed as she was, she felt first semester was a positive experience. She stated, “At the end of first semester, I wanted to quit, but I decided to focus and try a second semester.”

P1 felt encouraged and positive about second semester although she felt “so confused” a lot of the time. She was overwhelmed by the many choices of academic majors and career paths and in need of someone to talk to about a question core to her, “What am I going to do?” By mid-semester without a clear goal, she became very anxious and afraid of declaring a major. She felt “really confused, overwhelmed, afraid and unfocused” and feared being trapped and “boxed-in to one career” and major that might not be a good fit for her. She decided to leave the university because quitting school “wasn’t a big deal because there’s always the possibility of going back.”

P1 feels that “if she could just figure out” a clear academic and career goal she would return to UM “in a heartbeat and do really well.” She thinks the university should “make it a requirement to completely talk to a career counselor” and still has a strong desire to talk to someone and find direction as she “would love to try again.” She knows

she “can do it”, but continues to struggle with “can I be it?” Although she struggles with life questions, she wants “to figure it out and go back”

Participant Two (P2)

Background Information. P2 is a 22 year old White male and a graduate of a private parochial high school in Missoula. He is the eldest child and has a younger brother and two older step-siblings, one living in Hawaii and the other in Europe, both with families of their own. Neither of his parents attended college. His father is self-employed in the Missoula entertainment industry and his mother works in retail sales. His father has been battling terminal cancer for quite a few years and his parents, while extremely close, recently separated. Freshman year, P2 lived in the all-male dorm on campus and had declared media arts as his intended major.

Level Four: Transformation. P2 was “very nervous” about starting college but excited to move into the dorms and meet new people. He prepared for freshman year by quitting his job so he could focus on coursework. His classes went so well that P2 thought he “could make it through all four years of college lickety-split”. Early in the semester, he “began the partying scene that every freshman does” with new friends he met in the dorm, yet he still “got good grades first semester even with all the partying.” He was happy his first semester of college and declared media arts as his major, with a minor in psychology. He always thought he would “make it through the next few years of college” and earn a four-year degree. Mid-way through the semester after realizing he was a people-person, interested in media arts but with no desire for a career in it, he changed his major temporarily to business management. He began to feel *unfocused* without a solid academic or career goal.

Second semester, P2 moved off campus and “got a job as a bartender at Stockman’s bar where night shifts turned into working from 8:00 pm until 2:30 am and then getting up for classes.” He “picked up smoking and drinking ... always trying to cheat, get work from friends, and never going to study groups.” The poor decisions he made “when he started working in the downtown area, felt awful.” In addition to the negative affect bartending had on his studies, he was advised to take German for fun, a course outside his major requirements. Early in the semester, he realized he was failing German, but the drop deadline passed and he could not transfer into another course; he felt trapped. His parents were unhappy with his focus on friends and fun, rather than on school and studying. Moving off campus and bartending coupled with his parents’ displeasure caused P2 to feel high levels of anxiety and stress. He became depressed second semester, “balled” a lot, and had a “horrible time.” He began to feel apathetic toward school. He felt uncared for by his professors and as if not one cared about the termination of his academic study. He felt replaceable. He was “always exhausted and stressed out” and scared his parents would find out about his poor grades. The more uncomfortable he felt on campus, the more time he spent working in the comfort of the bar where he felt he “had a new family” which he attributed to the evaporation of his academic drive. He pretended to care about school “but that was a front.” He lamented, “I lost my way, I just lost my way. I felt completely lost.”

P2 described himself as a freshman as a “cute little puppy chewing and digging – the puppy that every dog owner would hate, but love.” Fearing he was digging himself a big hole, he planned to hide his academic failure from his parents and arranged a semester stop-out. He told his parents he was going to use the semester to work full-time

and save money to travel and sing with the university Choral Choir in Europe. It was difficult for him to stop-out; he felt “worthless” and like a “pile of shit” when he realized what a poor decision leaving college was.” His decision to leave college was “painful” for his father and especially “tough” on his mother. He felt “horrible” and deemed himself a “failure.” He stated, after he left college he “lost sight of my goal” to save money and sing with the choir. The excitement of hanging with new friends and the buzz of alcohol “blurred his vision.”

After a semester away from the university he realized, “I want an education. I want a degree, I really, really do”. He feels more mature and believes he is “ready to go back to school” and that he has the “focus” necessary for academic success. While at Stockman’s, he learned that he likes “talking to people, being in front of people, and in control” and that “people skills are where his strengths” are showcased best. After self-reflection and introspection, he realized his academic goals must match his out-going personality, interests, abilities, and core values. As an extrovert, “good communicator” and someone who “needs to be around people”, he feels communications would be a better match with his natural abilities and interests than media arts or business. If he returns to campus, he has decided to change his academic course of study and declare communications as a major with a psychology minor. He wishes University of Montana had smaller classes like a community college which would offer “more boundaries, more structure” which he thinks he needs to be academically successful.

P2 holds some resentment toward the University of Montana for not making him look at his skills and strengths through a “mandatory freshman year” career assessment. He feels misled by his advisor and abandoned by the school when he needed attention

and assistance the most. He felt he was invisible to professors who did not “care” or “give a shit if students drop out of school” because “they are still getting paid, getting more students to come ... there are always more students coming.”

P2 will be returning to campus in the fall with a new found level of maturity. He stated, “I’ve spent time away, matured, and I need to go back to school.” He is confident in his ability to focus on communications studies and has confidence in his new academic major selection, personal initiative, drive, and ability to succeed.

Participant Three (P3)

Background Information. P3 is a 21 year old White female and an honors graduate of Sentinel High School in Missoula. She is the eldest of four children with siblings aged 13 – 19 years. Her father did not attend college, yet built a successful business in Missoula. Her mother, an extremely religious woman, stayed home with her children until P3 was in high school. At that time, she attended and graduated from a two-year nursing program at the local College of Technology and began working in a doctor’s office. Against her parents and extended faithfully committed family’s wishes and religious beliefs, freshman year, P3 moved into an apartment with her boyfriend.

Level Four: Transformation. P3 began freshman first semester “happy to be there”. She was “very excited and confident” having “huge dreams of college” and the realization that “a degree is important and a necessity in today’s world.” She attended Summer Orientation and was confident, fully engaged with campus life, and “completely 100% into it.” She “always loved school, loved learning, especially subjects like French, English literature, history and the fine arts.” She loved the university atmosphere, finding it exciting although a bit scary. “Advising went well”, with the exception of not being

informed that working full-time and attending school full-time was impossible. Her excitement lasted about three weeks when she realized there were not enough hours in a day to work full-time and attend college. She could not find her “rhythm – how to do it all, you know, work and live and go to school all at the same time.” The pressure was starting to make her feel miserable and uncomfortable. She “lacked motivation” and “lacked focus”. Her drive began to falter and she felt overwhelmed, hopeless and unfocused. To her, college felt like “a foreign country. You don’t know how to read the signs, communicate with people around you or find the way you want to go.” To purge feelings of being lost and alone, she decided to withdraw and take the semester off, save money, and assess her life.

Second semester, once again feeling hopeful and excited, she moved home and began taking classes part-time. Yet again, she realized it was impossible and hopeless and became overwhelmed by the financial responsibility of college and the many academic majors from which to choose. P3 felt unmotivated, unfocused, and a deep sense of aloneness. The negative things “started adding up” so much that P3 began “having panic attacks” and so she withdrew again. She was questioning, “Who am I and where was I going?” She felt invisible and uncared for by the University. Her parents were “disappointed and upset” with her decision to drop out although they supported her desires. P3’s mother was incredibly saddened while her boyfriend was apathetic. P3 felt a sense of abandonment from the university because not one professor “called me – no one checked in with me” to guide her toward an academic goal. She believes she needed “that little push, that little shove” toward campus resources, as well as more personalized advising. She needed “someone to hold my hand a bit.” She did not have anyone saying,

“Let’s make it happen. Not parents, not the school.” P3 attributes “immaturity, no guidance, and procrastination” for her termination of collegiate study.

P3 did not think terminating her studies was a horrible decision because she felt she could return when she was older. Now she beats herself up, regrets her decision, and believes college is her path to the future. She laments, “It’s sad. I really regret not being in college with my peers.” She sees “school as a necessity” toward a career. She still feels positive about her experience at the University of Montana and, with a backpack of hope, plans to return next semester.

Participant Four (P4)

Background Information. P4 is a very attractive and socially popular 21 year old White female and graduate and senior year homecoming queen of a Missoula County public high school in Missoula. She is the oldest child and has a brother two years younger. She comes from a well-known political family - her uncle was a senator. Neither of her parents attended college, yet are extremely financially successful. Her mother graduated from a trade school and owns a business while her father manages family-owned real estate. Freshman year, P4 moved five times living in an apartment with a roommate, in an apartment alone, in a house with a roommate, in a house alone, and at home with her family. After dropping out, she moved out-of-state, taking a year off school, to work in a bank.

Level Four: Transformation. While an average high school student, P4 “didn’t want to go to school” but was pressured and pushed exceptionally hard into attending by her parents and grandfather. In addition, she was bribed by grandfather who “pays for schooling, all of it, and rent and pretty much everything.” Because she did not get along

with her mother and wanted to move out of the house, her grandfather's bribe of money for an apartment was extremely appealing. So, she registered at University of Montana as an education major, but still felt unfocused with no clear academic or career goals. P4 began freshman year at the tail-end of the break-up of her first romance, feeling "destroyed", depressed and alone. Her advising was poor and she was "put in a math class that apparently I [she] wasn't supposed to be in" which was too advanced for her abilities. Her "teacher didn't speak English" so she "didn't understand one thing she was saying." P4 seemed to lose her authenticity and self-esteem freshman year. She stated, "I was doing it for everyone else and wasn't doing it for me. I had no self-esteem at all and like, seriously, all I did was eat. So, I gained weight so I got even more depressed. I'd look at the pictures from high school, I was really happy and really pretty and now I'm not." She felt overwhelmed; her depression deepened and she lay in bed and cried. She "never made the grades even though she "would try and still not get it and fail." She did not care anymore and "didn't want to go to class", so began to skip class to lie in her bed and cry. For P4, freshman year was "a really, really bad time," a "really bad time, a bad year." She felt disconnected from life.

Feeling somewhat discouraged, P4 tried, but failed, to get good grades like her friends. Feeling pressured, she "was lost" and alone, she found it difficult to balance school and work, so she began to 'drink every single day, so much it was ridiculous." She "felt like an outcast with her friends," all academically-achievers, "a disappointment" to her parents", invisible to her professors, and like she was "wasting her grandfathers money." She considered changing her major from education to drama as her mother "never supported" her dreams of teaching, but wanted her to go into the medical field.

P4's parents began to fight over her and her mother told her "like a million times they almost separated" because of her. She needed her grandfather's money for rent, so she was trapped into continuing studies second semester. She "felt broken," absolutely "numb" and uncared for. One of her professors noted her depression and "took an interest" in her well-being, gave her "a card to go to Curry for three counseling sessions for free" and "extra time on assignments." Her x-boyfriend took her against her will to Curry because she was "overwhelmed and depressed." Involuntary counseling did not go well, she was "a mess and so mad." Second semester her depression hit a serious low; she failed all but one course and found herself on academic probation. She struggled to hide her failure from her parents and grandfather in order to avoid confrontation. She decided to move out-of-state and live with her cousins at the end of freshman year. After living in out-of-state a short time, her depression eased, she became bored and wanted to move home.

Deciding "to come back" on her own and realizing college was a decision she had to make for herself, she returned to Missoula and enrolled in College of Technology (COT). She was motivated and has "a clear goal" to earn an AA degree. P4 "got a 3.2 grade point average last semester" at COT and had never earned grades "so good in her life." She is really proud of herself. P4 attributes her good grades at COT to smaller classes which offer individual attention and study skills workshops. She met one-on-one with a retention counselor and felt cared for and connected. After earning an AA degree, she plans to continue on with studies to earn a four-year degree on the mountain campus. With clear focus and a goal, P4 now has hope and confidence in the future.

Participant Five (P5)

Background Information. P5 is a 22 year old White male and the youngest of two children raised in a small town bordering Missoula on large acreage on which his grandparents and many other relatives built their homes. The family's small business is also on the acreage and his father, brother, and cousin all work at the business. Neither of his parents nor his older sibling attended college. After his parents divorce, he moved with his mother to the midwest, yet returned home frequently, living with his father and extended family each holiday including summer vacation, Christmas and Thanksgiving breaks, spring break, and Labor Day. He did not attend college immediately after high school because he was erroneously told he had to sit out of college a year to gain Montana state residency, which he already held. His first year of college, P5 moved into an apartment in Missoula near campus with three friends who were not attending college. He worked half-time at the family business, driving back and forth to school / work daily.

Level Four: Transformation. After taking a year off school, P5 was *excited* and “gung-ho” to begin his collegiate studies at the University of Montana. He had “big plans of going to college.” His uncle, a College of Technology professor, helped him register for classes; therefore, he did not attend Freshman Orientation, speak with an academic advisor, or take the math placement exam. Because P5 was living and working off campus and no longer playing football, he did not meet any new people which caused him to feel lost. He felt isolated without friends on campus, like a “quarterback without a team.” He briefly considered attending The College of Technology, but decided to “do the four-year program” and be “in for the long haul, go big or go home.”

Shortly after starting school, he became confused and realized he “put his feelings in the wrong direction” as he discovered he did not want to pursue a business major. When he shifted his interest away from studying business, he became unfocused and undetermined. Being ill-advised to take an advanced math course and public speaking, a course for which he held great trepidation, he began to feel trapped, “overwhelmed and frustrated.” Struggling with crushing negative feelings and panic, he abruptly stopped attending class mid-way through the semester. He “lost touch with the whole thing” as well as his “determination” and “focus.” He was disappointed in himself and embarrassed that he, a champion athlete, quit and did not persevere. He stated, terminating his studies “brought his hopes down a little bit.”

While on campus, he felt uncared for, disliked, and “pushed aside” by the university. While on campus, he felt as if he did not “have an actual stance in class.” P5’s feelings of being uncared for and “cast out there with no kind of anyone looking after him” amplified after he stopped attending class. He felt as if he were a “ghost”, invisible to his professors, other students, and the university community. He wanted to talk to someone about his confusion, but did not know who to talk to, where to go, and did not believe anyone truly cared about him or his collegiate career. P5 stated, “The teacher never, not a single one, pulled me aside in class to even ask me if I was doing ok or where I was.” He complained, “Never once did I get a call wondering if I was dropping out or what I was doing or anything.” Increasing his feelings of being invisible, he came to believe the university cared only that he paid his tuition, noting “they were on the ball for payment.” P5 criticized the university saying, “They could have cared a little bit more. Maybe they should have cared for some of their students. That’s pretty bad.” He

thinks he should have taken a study skills course or a class to help him learn to survive college and select a major which might have lead to academic success.

P5 has a strong interest in returning to campus to study culinary arts at the College of Technology, in an environment offering smaller-classrooms. He assumes a majority of the responsibility for leaving campus, but assigns responsibility to the university as well. He remains “pretty disappointed” that he didn’t persevere, bemoaning, “I quit and I don’t quit anything.”

Participant Six (P6)

Background Information. P6 is a 19 year old White male who was born and raised in Missoula and is a graduate of Sentinel High School. He was an extremely well-liked, very involved high school student and earned good grades. Freshman year he lived in the dorm. P6 is a younger sibling of P4.

Level Four: Transformation. As a student at Sentinel High School, P6 was an academically successful student and “got a 3.8 GPA” and was “incredibly involved – almost too much” in high school extra-curricular activities. He knew “from junior year in high school” he would be attending the University of Montana. It was “not much of a decision” to attend UM, as he was “pretty much expected” to attend. He was “excited” to “move into the dorms and have the whole college experience.” He met many great people living in the dorm and “hangs out even today” with his new friends. He attended Freshman Orientation, but felt that the non-academic activities “like Griz games, stuff at the oval and the UC” were over-stressed. He stated that no one was “pointing out anything or emphasizing where to go for a career.” He was struggling with uncertainty regarding, “What job I can get with this degree?” and “What specialized programs do you

have for jobs?” He recalled deciding to major in communications because, “I work well with people, I love talking to people, I’m a good people person, and get along with people great.” He declared his major as communications and took all general education courses and one communications course first semester in which he earned “a high B.” He lamented that the communications curriculum was “like wow, a totally different image than I had in mind.” Additionally, he felt a communications degree would force him to have to move out of state to find a job, which he did not want to do. However, “nothing else on campus was catching” his eye and he wanted to “find something that would interest” him a lot.

The transition from high school to college was a shock to P6 and he “wasn’t ready for the difference between high school and college classes.” He missed the close relationships and communication between students and faculty that he experienced in high school and did not like being so autonomous. While he struggled academically freshman year, he “pulled it out and tried to be the best student” he could be. Because “classes were so different from high school and more difficult” he did not become as involved in extra-curricular activities as he had in high school.

He struggled with career development issues freshman year. He shared, “Every day I was thinking what am I doing here? What am I doing with my life? Everyday made me feel like I had no clue.” He stated he wanted to “feel like I was moving along to get somewhere” and questioned if he “really wanted to do this?” if he “wanted to be in the university.” At the end of freshman first semester, P6 declared the “university never made me feel like I was headed in the right direction.” He had dreams of being like his dad and have what he has, “a well-paying job, a hometown job ... a wife, family, nice

house, his community ... Missoula, picket fence, dog, kids, good job .. ahh, I'd love that, love that -nothing better." He continued to question, "How am I going to get that? I never knew how I would get that!" He felt "overwhelmed, very overwhelmed." He became "unfocused and I guess, yes, I was directionless." He began to question if the University of Montana "fit" him and lamented that he "needed more direction" to find academic and career direction so he could "work hard at that, be super at that and become that." Although he questioned his life, he registered for and his grandfather paid for second semester. He felt "stuck and it sucked." During Christmas break, P6 began to very seriously contemplate his decision to continue studies at UM and to research the fire science program at Helena College of Technology.

During break, P6 met the spouse of a fire fighter and ran into a high school friend enrolled in fire science. He became interested, applied and was accepted into the highly competitive residency program. The first day he started fire science training he felt "like I was on my way to doing something, to a career that I could actually do the rest of my life and it all fit together. This is me, this is hometown, this is Montana – I love it!"

P6 believes "it wasn't the university's fault or my fault" that he dropped out but that "he just didn't feel cared for by the university." He stated, "Money wasn't a question for me. Leaving UM wasn't about grades. Leaving wasn't about missing friends ... I left because it didn't, nothing at UM made, nothing I did at least, I know you go to school, you should feel you are doing something with your life." He criticized the University which made him feel like "just another chunk of change, more money in their wallet. I wasn't cared for and I felt like, alright give us your money – here's a card for food and Griz games, now go to class." P6 felt the university should have taken card for and

helped students more for “that kind of money,” that he was not “presented with caring,” but wondered if other students were. Dropping out of UM was about feeling “overwhelmed, lost, directionless” and “uncared for.” P6 complained, “I was uninterested – things did interest me, but nothing career-wise interested me.” He see not taking a career assessment or talking with a career counselor as “a mistake I made. I didn’t know what I was doing.” Although he left campus after completing freshman year and earning excellent grades, he was not “disappointed in the experience. I enjoyed my year, had a lot of fun.” He felt that second semester was an “expensive semester” to figure out what he wanted to do with his life.

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 subjects are discarded.

During high school, P was a student favored by peers, in extra-curricular activities, and held in academic good standing status. While uncertain of the future, P was confident, excited and hopeful that studies at The University of Montana, while challenging, would be rewarding and lead to a career.

P assumed college was in the future and was anxious to experience college life and earn a four-year degree. The decision to attend The University of Montana was not difficult as attending the local university was somewhat expected. P felt nervous, yet happy to be going to college.

P attended summer freshman orientation to learn about and prepare for the expectations of college. The transition from high school to college was surprising, as P missed the close relationships and communication between teachers and students in high school.

Shortly into first semester, P became overwhelmed and confused and began to feel a sense of isolation. Doubts about academic major and career decision made P feel afraid and unfocused.

Lacking someone to talk to, appropriate advising about course selection, and the ability to translate a major into a career, P felt clueless. P began to ruminate over key questions such as, “How to make college work”, Who was I and where was I going?,

“What am I going to do?, and What job can someone get with this degree?” Without a clear goal or direction, P began to feel unfocused and trapped. The internalized angst began to make P feel miserable and uncomfortable. Regardless of the angst P felt and a budding desire to quit school, P registered for second semester.

Second semester began and P was again hopeful. However, early in second semester, P struggled with negative feelings, became disappointed and began to feel stuck. Feeling alone, unimportant and anonymous at the university, P became unmotivated and unfocused. P felt like a ghost, invisible to professors and other students. P coped with feelings of confusion, anxiety and loneliness by partying and avoiding going to class. P began to spiral into sadness, letting grades slip and avoiding friends and family. P began to think about dropping out of school.

When P most needed caring and direction, P felt uncared for by professors. P began to believe that the university did not care if students dropped out. A sense of discouragement settled in. Thoughts of dropping out were triggered by qualitative feelings - being overwhelmed, lost, and directionless, rather than quantitative experiences including poor grades, financial challenges or lack of friends. P struggled most with core life questions, superficially “Can I do it?” and fundamentally, “Can I be it?” P felt ambivalent and torn about the decision to drop out.

Retrospectively sharing the experience, P enjoyed freshman year and had a lot of fun. For the most part, P’s experience of The University of Montana was positive and P would return to school if clear academic and career goals could be designed. Even though the experience of leaving school was hard, the time away from school gave P an opportunity to review life goals.

Reflecting on the decision to terminate studies, P recognizes the value of an education. P started to feel self-assured again and prepared to return to school with the necessary focus for success. P is again enrolled in school and has confidence in the future.

P offers ideas for improvement of the freshman year which include smaller classes, career counseling and guidance, improved academic advising, a mandatory freshman career assessment and study skills course, and the expression of genuine caring by faculty.

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 University of Montana freshmen who dropped out during or at the end of their freshman year originally approached college with excitement, confidence, and hopefulness. In high school, they were favored by peers and in academic good-standing. They believed a college degree would lead to a career. Despite preparing for challenges of campus life through attendance at freshman orientation, the students experienced college as overwhelming, confusing, and isolating. They missed the close relationships between teachers and students, which amplified transition to college difficulties. Budding

uncertainty about academic and career goals coupled with what was experienced as inferior academic advising, absent career guidance, and large freshman classes negatively affected their confidence, focus, and motivation to remain enrolled in college.

The students' excitement, confidence and hopefulness were quickly replaced by confusion, loneliness, anxiety, and feeling invisible. The absence of close institutional relationships, someone to discuss their confusion with and seek guidance from, produced feelings of isolation. The students felt unimportant and anonymous. They struggled with the superficial question, "Can I do it?" and with the profound question, "Can I be it?" Trapped by the inability to design a solid academic and career goal, feelings of confusion, anxiety, depression, and discouragement developed. The negative feelings initiated thoughts of dropping out.

Historically programmed for success, these academically-achieving, socially-connected freshmen were discouraged. They kept their academic difficulties hidden from family and friends and were embarrassed and disappointed in themselves. As a result of confusing academic experiences, overwhelming negative feelings, and aborted academic and career goals, these students selected to drop out. The decision to drop out was difficult and embarrassing and kept hidden from others. Reflecting on freshman year as positive and negative, these students recognize value in a college degree and continue to dream of obtaining one. After spending time away from campus contemplating their future, these students look toward their future with hope, excitement, and a strong desire to try college again.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

This phenomenological study of the experience of attrition of six University of Montana freshmen with academic good standing offers a verbal portrait of common features and structural connections that were developed through intensive interviews and a phenomenological data analysis. In this chapter, students' descriptions are presented in clustered themes reflecting the essence of the progression of the decision to drop out after the freshman year of college. The researcher provides a synthesis of significant statements through clustered themes, and meaningful descriptions to provide the reader with a structural description of the experience of dropping out.

The researcher conducted personal in-depth interviews with six University of Montana freshmen representing classes of 2004-2006 to gain their clear and comprehensive descriptions of the experience of attrition, i.e., non-continuation of enrollment, after the first year of academic study. As prospectors are rewarded by the glitter of colors of precious metals collected at the bottom of their pan, this researcher experienced many "eureka moments" during the interviews and data analysis. Recognition of themes are presented as interesting nuggets of gold painstakingly panned, screened, sieved, and picked from collected data. All six participants possessed similar academic success characteristics including: 1) social popularity, 2) academic success as high school students, and 3) financially secure parents. Also revealed was a second surprising coincidence: all twelve biological parents of the students did not graduate from college, although one parent attended a junior college one semester. It is possible that

because their parents were financially secure and had not graduated from college, a heavier burden was placed on the students to become first-generation college graduates. The parents may have believed that obtaining a college degree was something their children could achieve through the family's financial success. More gold extracted from the data showed that as the freshman year began, only one male student was being parented within a divorced-family environment. However, at the conclusion of freshman year, two sets of parents had legally separated.

As gold is found hidden in crevices, wedged in pieces of wood, or stuck in slow moving waters along the shore, an additional gem or structural connection was discovered through data analysis: all students possessed strong success identities and lacked significant failure experiences prior to attending college. Historically cocooned by prosperous parents, supportive teacher, and admiring peers, the challenges faced by these students during the freshman year represented their first failures. The lack of such previous challenges in their lives may have hindered them from facing discontinuity or countering with resilience. Erik Erickson's (1963) human development theory suggests that individuals progress through natural maturation stages. Tasks of moving through the adolescence stage include determining identity, struggling with social interactions, and discovering who we are as individuals, separate from family and friends. Tinto's (1993) model describes a "rite of passage" in higher education when students move away from past associations to find and adopt new ones. The study's participants seemed initially to struggle to navigate the "rite of passage" or movement from adolescent development to young adulthood, as evidenced by their apparent confusion of role and identity. The freshman year destabilized what had previously been a "taken-for-granted" identity.

Near the conclusion of the audio-taped interviews, all six students had articulated a renewal in self-confidence, hopefulness, and excitement about the future. As in panning for gold, if a prospector tips the pan in a circular, side-to-side motion too quickly, any loose gold will be washed out with the rocks and sand to be carried away downstream. These six students were academically successful students, essentially nuggets of gold, quickly overwhelmed by the rapid motion of college life and separated from their identities of success. The students collectively complained that the university painstakingly panned, screened, sieved and recruited them from high school to attend The University of Montana, yet did not attempt to retrieve them when they became washed away.

The researcher followed-up with personal contact with each of the six participants early into autumn semester, 2007. Surprisingly, four of the six had re-enrolled in college and were happily attending classes, three at The University of Montana and one on the Helena campus of The University of Montana College of Technology. The other two students had applied, were accepted, and placed on waiting lists for technical training programs at The University of Montana College of Technology and at a two-year translation school in Montreal, Canada.

Psychological Themes

The phenomenological method of inquiry used in this study produced quantities of complex data. These data were distilled by a methodical, six-step process and reduced into essential psychological themes. The themes comprise the students' common and collective experience of the freshman year and their experience of the decision to terminate their academic studies.

Psychological themes related to students' pre-college experience include feeling excited about college life, confident in their academic ability, and hopeful about the future. Historically good students, the students believed that a college degree would lead to a successful career and future.

Psychological themes related to students' transition to college are comprised of difficulties rooted in a budding uncertainty about their academic and career goals. The difficulties included feelings of confusion, isolation, lack of focus and being overwhelmed. These feelings apparently negated the students' historically strong success identities.

Psychological themes related to students' need for close institutional relationships and their experience of the decision to drop out included feelings of being uncared for, unmotivated, hiding their academic failure due to feelings of disappointment and embarrassment; factors which initiated academic disengagement.

Psychological themes triggered by reflection upon and reevaluation of the freshmen year experience after a respite from campus included renewed self-confidence, hopefulness, and excitement about the future, as well as a renewed interest in college.

The essential psychological themes identified will be discussed individually in dialogue form and triangulated with relevant literature on freshmen retention. Readers are reminded that while an attempt is made to discuss each theme in isolation, themes are often revealed concurrently.

College Transition and Adjustment

Psychological themes related to students' pre-college experience include feeling excited about college life, confident in their academic ability, and hopeful about the

future. Historically good students, the students believed that a college degree would lead to a successful career and future.

Feeling Excited and Hopeful. For years we have impressed upon our young people the importance of pursuing and completing a quality education by telling them that knowledge is power, appealing to their sense of eventual financial success, by suggesting a college degree is a ticket to success. Today's youth have apparently comprehended, internalized, and accepted the message of the importance of a high-quality education. Nationally, a majority, seventy-five percent, excitedly expect to pursue postsecondary education (Ali, 2002). Their goals are multi-faceted; to gain skills and knowledge, to earn a degree or develop a career, or earn higher professional status for increased pay. Retention studies have shown that students with lower grades withdraw in proportionately greater numbers (Avarian, 1982). Conversely, a study by Levitz and Noel (2000) found that many drop-outs were outstanding students. In a national study, the authors revealed that thirty-seven percent of students not returning to their initial institution for a second year earned a freshman cumulative grade point of 2.50 or greater. This study focused on freshmen who were socially-successful high school students entering college with positive expectations and in academic good standing, but who dropped out regardless.

“I was a good student in high school, got a 3.8 GPA and was incredibly involved, almost too much, but I liked it a lot.” (P6)

“I was the cute high school girl. I'd look at the pictures from high school, I was really happy and really pretty and now I'm not. I was this happy, happy person, then this [college].” (P4)

“I've always had huge dreams of college and obviously a degree is important to me and a necessity in today's world.” (P3)

“Got good grades first semester ... Classes went great and I never thought I wouldn’t make it through the next few years of college.” (P2)

Freshmen often enter college with anticipations, positive expectations, and favorable views of higher education when assured of a desired outcome, such as a career path. Often, they hold expectations for themselves during and after college that they do not know how to articulate. Bank (1992) found students’ positive expectancies, thoughts, and feelings increase persistence. In addition, Bank suggests that students with a stronger sense of self and internalized goals produce greater persistence. Tinto (1993) found students’ commitment not only to a particular institution but to personal goals has strong predictive value. The transition from high school to college is a complex phenomenon (Terenzini et al., 1994), bewilderingly multifaceted and highly individual. Participants in this study shared their recall of prematriculation thoughts and feelings regarding their impending transition to The University of Montana. Overall, the participants felt confident regarding their adjustment capacity for transitioning into college, excited for the possibilities presented, and hopeful about the future.

“I was very excited, confident. The first couple of days I was still excited, as overwhelmed and tired as I was, I love the classroom. I was happy to be there.” (P3)

“I thought about the COT but figured I was in for the long haul, go big or go home, might as well do the four-year program.” “I was pretty gun-ho the first week ... I had it all together, I maintained the first couple weeks doing really well.” (P5)

“I was excited, I was ecstatic to go, move into the dorms - have the whole college experience.” “I was attached to being a Griz.” (P6)

Feeling Overwhelmed and Confused. Students’ excitement and hopefulness about college influence their college experience and persistence behavior. It is feelings experienced during the freshman year, the adjustment year, which have a major impact

on avoiding attrition. For the freshmen in this study, there was a gradual, imperceptible transformation of initial feelings of excitement and hopefulness into persistent, negative emotions that produced paralyzing anxiety and utter confusion. The complex psychological feelings of being overwhelmed and confused profoundly influenced the departure decisions of students. Lewallen (1993) stated, “College students with unclear or uncertain academic and career goals have been identified in several attrition studies as a dropout-prone population.” (p. 103). The confusion caused by unclear or a change in career goals may result in a concomitant lack of any perceived reason for staying in school. Tinto (1975) suggests it is the “goal of college completion that is most influential in determining college persistence.” (p. 102).

“It’s overwhelming. You can literally do anything, go in any direction.” (P1)

“It was only an interest, not my natural ability or personality for media arts. I have the personality to be in communications. I didn’t know that, I had no idea. My brother is in business but doesn’t know what he wants to do with his life ... I’m gonna roll with Communications.” (P2)

“I was overwhelmed and frustrated and there was no reason, I wasn’t getting anywhere. Might as well drop out and work. Brought my hopes down a little bit.” (P5)

Twenty-first century youth correctly calibrate their expectations and assumptions of college as a way to attain career and financial success. However, institutions of higher education have not restructured their attitudes or support services to align with students’ expectations and assumptions. This feeling of anonymity and lack of career guidance and structure in higher education has been found in the literature. Sagaria, Higginson and White (1980) found that entering students’ perceptions of their own needs in a college setting expressed before enrollment has escaped investigation.

“Backtrack from this is the career I want, so I need this major, and if I need this major, I need these courses. Not the other way around.” (P1)

“Why don’t they ask students? No one is fitting the students; none of the students know what they want to do after college – no one fit me.” (P2)

“There was no one helping me figure it out... to be cast out there and have no kind of anyone looking after you. You lose yourself pretty quickly. It was all or nothing.” (P5)

Research suggests that students who drop out in the freshman year have “less confidence” and are less inclined to believe their area of study will “guarantee them a career” (Burtner, 2004, p. 4). In this study, students’ statements reflected disillusionment with their adjustment to college, academic major selection, and career goals.

“I went to school maybe 2-3 weeks and realized I couldn’t do it physically, I could not do it, it was impossible ... Nobody told me I couldn’t work 40 hours a week; nobody said start slow ... I should have built my way up until I found my rhythm – how I could do it all, you know, work and live and go to school all at the same time.” (P3)

“I was do I really want to do this? Do I want to be at the university? What am I gonna do? It didn’t feel like I was moving along to get somewhere.” (P6)

Feeling Unconnected and Isolated. Traditional-aged freshmen are challenged with conquering the transition from adolescence to young adulthood plus the development of autonomy and identity formation. Bragg (1994) found that for many freshmen, adjustment into college life is marked with issues related to self-identity, anxiety and isolation. Erik Erickson's (1963) theory of human development suggests that individuals progress through eight stages of maturation spanning birth to end of life. Societal and cultural factors influence each stage through which an individual moves and fails or successfully accomplishes the requisite developmental tasks. Developmental tasks of Late Adolescence Stage (ages 19-23) include identity development, intimacy in relationships, and formation of autonomy, e.g., discovering who we are as an individual separate from family and friends. Terenzini et al. (1994) indicate that college affords students the opportunity to

develop identity and autonomy, “to explore a new self, to try on a different persona, or to redesign one’s self.” (p. 68). Successful progression through the eight stages of development results in higher level functioning, while unsuccessful navigation of developmental stages may cause psychological difficulties and developmental delays.

Three surprising revelations surfaced from the study; 1) all participants in the study fell within Erickson’s Late Adolescence Stage of ages 19-23 years; 2) none of the participants had experienced significant life failures or challenges; and 3) all were highly regarded in high school by their peers and faculty. Through fortune or chance, they all evaded significant life failures and challenges which did not allow them an opportunity to face discontinuity or counter with resilience. When they faced instability in identity definition during the freshmen year, they became anonymous, effectively producing feelings of unimportance on campus, which contributed to the shattering their personal identity. Interestingly, all participants isolated and distanced themselves from friends, family, and campus through dropping out. Erickson suggests isolation characterizes failure to move through the Late Adolescence Stage. During freshmen year, their past became irrelevant and remote, while their future appeared uncertain and inaccessible. The participants found themselves in the unknown – pushed to find skills of self-direction and identity whereas previously these had been provided to them largely externally. The students experienced difficulty relinquishing their perception of who they were from both an external and internal psychological structure to facilitate movement to the next developmental stage, Adulthood.

“I was going to be a teacher, they [teachers] thought it was a wonderful idea ... I don’t know exactly what made me think I didn’t want to be a teacher ... making a final decision, that makes me afraid.” (P1)

“The bar became my family, my friends, and my goal. It [bartending] was a drug. I needed the drug – the excitement, stimulation, fun, feeling like everyone knew you and walked up to you to shake your hand. People bought me drinks; everybody loved me – the bartender.” (P2)

“I had no self-esteem at all.” “I was the cute high school girl ... oh and now I’m fat, that’s sweet, freaking awesome, why go to school if I can’t even put on a pair of pants ... I’d look at the pictures from high school, I was really happy and really pretty and now I’m not.”(P4)

“I was captain, quarterback - now a quarterback without a team.” (P5)

Astin (1993) claims that peers are the single most potent source of influence in the lives of freshmen and those individuals with strong social networks are more likely to persist. Bank et al. (1990) found that students’ peers and parents have a stronger influence on their persistence than the faculty. Tinto (1993) found student integration into campus peer subcultures positively affects retention. Tinto (1983) further suggests for a student to persist, successful college adjustment and integration must occur. Students who report “large social networks have higher levels of academic satisfaction, stronger intentions of continuing enrollment and are in fact, more likely to persist” (Thomas, 1998, p. 17).

“Emotionally it wasn’t a good time for me, second semester. I lost all my girlfriends.” (P3)

“Me and my friends had been friends since kindergarten and that year, we just did our own thing.” (P4)

“Going to class where you don’t know anybody, its hard... seems like everybody knows everybody ... its like going to a new high school half-way through the year.”(P4)

Billson (1982) found that freshman living off campus suffer from reduced feelings of integration. Two-thirds of this study’s participants lived off campus, yet all participants felt unconnected to campus, i.e., excluded and isolated. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) recommend, “freshmen should be the target of inclusion not exclusion ... they

should be weeded in, not weeded out ... they cannot be left to sink or swim.” (p. 5). Retention appears to be positively correlated with a more personalized educational experience with faculty as shown in Daempfle’s (2003) study. Students seek validation through faculty, staff, and peer interactions “through which they come to feel accepted into the new community, receive signals confirming they can be successful and are worthy of a place there” (Terenzini, 1994, p. 66). Participants in this study had high school academic and extra-curricular experiences that signaled to them they were competent learners and able to succeed. The transition to college and resultant feelings of isolation, failure, and being disconnected required a painful redefinition of self; an evaluation they selected to avoid by dropping out.

”No one even talked to me at all ... Nobody sat down with me and talked to me.” (P1)

”I lost my way, I just lost my way... I was completely lost.” (P2)

”I never felt like the main campus – classes are huge, teachers are like alright, whatever – not connected.” (P4)

Feeling Unfocused and a Lost Sense of Purpose. Unintentionally, all research participants were first-generation college students, which Billson (1982) found “are more sensitive to the utility of career preparation through their college experience.” Tinto (1993) describes commitment to a personal education or career goal a strong predictor of whether students will persist in higher education. Janasiewicz (1987) suggests that the decision to leave school by freshmen who made a conscious, self-motivated decision to leave may not be a form of student academic indecision or institutional failure, but the result of an [emotional] cost / benefit analysis; for the students, the cost of remaining enrolled outweighed the benefit. Janasiewicz further suggests that students’ discouragement may represent failure of the institution to provide support to mitigate

students' career or academic confusion, which may color their assessment of the economic value of remaining enrolled. While departure from college may be a positive step for some students, it is more often associated with disruption of life plans for both students and their families, not to mention the economic disadvantages of leaving prior to obtaining a degree (Kahn, 2001, p. 633). Initially, these students socially and intellectually integrated into the life of the institution, which Tinto (1993, 1997) emphasizes as key to persistence, yet they did not persist. However, early in the semester they began a physical and emotional separation from the institution.

“See, I feel so completely at the bottom, because I have no direction ... I was all over the place and still didn't know what I wanted to do and if I'm not focused on a goal, why bother?” (P1)

“At that time, I had no idea, I kept changing majors, I had no real focus ...it [dropping out] was easier than saying I'm not doing so well and I don't know what I'm doing. It was a front, saying screw this, I need to get out of here before I dig myself a big hole.” (P2)

“I didn't have any goal. I didn't know what I wanted to do, I still don't.” (P4)

“I lost my focus ... I started to think that I didn't want to sit in an office all day long, that's not going to happen .. my options were back on the table, I could look for something more like me.” (P5)

A major social theory of educational and social attainment argues that a cross-generational uplift exists with gains in parent education and occupational status having a positive influence on the next generation (St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter and Weber, 2004). Furthermore, they found evidence that parents' social background and aspirations have a substantial influence on their children's college attendance and persistence. First-generation students may be disadvantaged by a lack of exposure to alternative life patterns. Pascarella et al. (2004) indicate that first-generation students experience a more difficult transition from high school to

college and tend to be at a distinct disadvantage with respect to basic knowledge about postsecondary education.

“My parents didn’t go to school. My mom went to college for hardly any time at all. My dad didn’t go. So, they couldn’t guide me ... but they supported me.” (P1)

“I remember once she [mom] told me, ‘Do not put off school until you have a family, until you have something major in your life – it drains you and I don’t want it for you.’ “My parents didn’t know how it worked ... there was no one to tell me how to go about doing it.” (P3)

“A lot of my family hasn’t gone to school. My sister was only the second one out of my entire family that has gone to college.” (P6)

Attending college may be an intimidating cultural transition for first-generation students. First-generation students are at “greater risk with respect to persistence and degree attainment than are their traditional peers largely due to lower levels of academic and social integration” (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, and Nora, 1996, p. 3). The first-year can be a taxing transition for students and for some it is a frightening leap into the unknown. The shift from a protected high school and family setting to an environment in which students are expected to accept responsibility for both academic and social aspects of their lives can create overwhelming anxiety and distress and undermine normal coping mechanisms. Often students have not formed realistic expectations of college life and cope by avoiding the challenge through disengagement from the educational and social processes of the institution (Lowe and Cook, 2003) which was made clear through the statements of the participants’ in this study.

“Half-way through I didn’t care ... I didn’t go to my classes as much.” (P1)

“Everything went downhill... never going to study groups ... I was attending most my courses, well, trying to.” (P2)

The Decision to Drop Out

Psychological themes related to students' transition to college are comprised of difficulties rooted in a budding uncertainty about their academic and career goals. The difficulties included feelings of confusion, isolation, lack of focus and being overwhelmed. These feelings apparently negated the students' historically strong success identities.

Feeling Unmotivated. Motivation is a psychological feature that moves humans to action toward a desired goal. Motivation is the reason for the action which gives purpose and direction to behavior. Basically, motivation is goal-directed behavior. Without a concrete goal, motivation and goal-directed behavior ceases. A majority of today's entering undergraduates arrive on campus highly motivated to complete their college degree (Noel-Levitz, 2006), yet have serious doubts about the fit of their academic major and career goal. While students in this study were committed to a long-term educational goal of college graduation, their short-term academic major and career goal was uncertain, thus diminishing their motivation.

*"Lack of motivation, I don't know, lack of focus .. um, maybe more real information about how to go about this ... I didn't think deep enough, dig deep enough to find out how to do it – how to do this, how to make it work."
(P3)*

Pinkethly and Prosser (2001) suggest that it is not lack of motivation but negative adjustment factors that contribute to attrition. Bank, Biddle, and Slavings (1994) purport attrition is not a consequence of students' lack of motivation, but a consequence of students being ineffective consumers of the educational "product." The students in this study failed to adjust to developmental tasks of young adulthood as defined by academic persistence to a four-year college degree. These students needed time to move from an externally defined identity to an internal sense of self. In addition, they admitted the

inability to verbalize their educational expectations and need for guidance while enrolled at the university. In that vein, it may be true that they were unmotivated, ineffective consumers of the educational product; conversely, the university may have been an ineffective salesperson.

“Nobody answered my questions, but I didn’t ask. I think I need people to come into my face and be like okay ... you need to do this. If they don’t come at me, I won’t go to them – I’m a little quieter.” (P1)

“Nobody told me I couldn’t work 40 hours a week; nobody said start slow or only take 1-2 classes.” ... “I thought I could figure out financial aid, scholarships, whatever it is that could make me have the ability to go to school. I went to the Financial Aid Office and they gave me all these forms to fill out, showed me how to fill them out and that was about as far as that went.” (P3)

The National Student Satisfaction and Priorities Report (2007) notes that satisfaction is a key component in student life and learning and is a measure of whether an institution provides experience students deem worthwhile. An educational experience that students find worthwhile includes ensuring academic success through tutoring, advising, class and academic major selection, as well as establishment of career goals. Student satisfaction is a by-product of successfully pursuing their goals.

The National Freshman Attitudes Report (2006) found that ninety-five percent of freshmen surveyed during freshmen orientation were deeply committed to educational goals; yet, according to ACT (2005) only forty-six percent of entering college students nationwide ever complete their degrees. A large proportion of students drop-out because of adjustment or environmental factors, rather than academic inability. The adjustment factors include a mismatch between the student and course of study plus feelings of isolation that lead to depressed motivation (Pitkethly and Prosser, 2001) which was confirmed by this study. Perceptions of college tend to revolve around stereotypical

assumptions of exciting social experiences and reasonable academic demands. The leading reasons students attend college are to obtain fulfilling employment and plan for a future that provides contentment and financial security. Unfulfilled expectations and mismatch between expectations and reality contributed to attrition behavior of the participants in this study.

“I’ve never known what I wanted to do. I didn’t know what to take and went to my advisor and thought she will tell me what to do but she said, ‘What do you want to take?’ and I thought, that’s what I came to see you for!” (P1)

Lowe (2003) found that older students tended to be more focused and better decision makers, while youth and inexperience characterize students who left school.

“I was 20, having too much fun, not worried about school. Once I knew I was failing, I didn’t care. And, I tried, but I said, it was impossible.” (P2)

“Obviously, an 18-year old girl is not financially smart knowing what to do with your money because you lived off your parents and I did it [college] young and I regret it.” (P3)

Motivation to learn, taking action to meet academic demands, a clear goal and sense of purpose, and satisfaction with the institutional environment are important elements of academic adjustment. Self-esteem was found to be a significant determinant of student motivation and in turn poor motivation has been shown to contribute to poor academic performance and premature student departure (Rhodes and Neville, 2004).

“I felt like everyone knows what they are doing, but me.” (P1)

“The drive left academically when I became comfortable at Stocks. My comfort level increased at the bar and academically it decreased...the bar became my family, my goal, no longer school, choir or friends.” (P2)

Feeling Invisible and Uncared For. The transition from high school to college is an exceedingly complex phenomenon. Students receiving parental support and

encouragement persisted in their academic programs at significantly greater levels than students who received little encouragement from influential persons in their life (Bean and Metzner, 1985). Traditional freshmen students need academic and social encouragement by the campus community, as well as a reason to put forth effort beyond parental pressure and expectations (Belcheir, Michener and Gray, 1998). Desmond (1996) explored the phenomenon and factors that influence students' attrition behavior and found that a critical factor was the availability of appropriate academic and personal support at the transition stage. His study showed that students who left campus felt "overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy and distress" (p. 5) and, in retrospect, felt they needed more personal support but did not recognize their need at the time. Desmond found that some students may require more support than others to cope with the developmental task of leaving home and adjusting to life on a university campus. However, no significant research study has found correlation between students' use of academic advising and retention services and their actual retention (Bean and Metzner, 1985).

All participants in this study were high-profile, high school students favored by peers and involved in extra-curricular activities. The participants noticed that The University of Montana freshman-level courses are generally large and students rarely become known by name or recognized for their individual characteristics. Bragg (1994) stated that college "causes some students to experience anonymity for the first time... and can lead to maladjustment within the new environment and ultimately contribute to students leaving an institution." Terenzini et al. (1994) suggest that without personal validation in and out of the classroom by family, peers, faculty, and staff, students will

not feel accepted in their new community, feel worthy of a place therein, have their contributions recognized as valuable, or receive signals that they can be successful in college. Only one participant in this study enrolled in *Freshman Interest Group*, a freshman course offering academic support and career development, designed to encourage personal validation in a small group setting. Porter and Swing (2006) found that teaching study skills and conducting academic and career counseling help students to develop holistically and are the two most important links to academic persistence in the freshman year.

“The FIG [Freshman Interest Group] I took didn’t help me.” (P1)

“... It’s like make community colleges mandatory – a stepping stone from high school to college. Like still in high school, taking college classes, just smaller classes.” (P2)

“Smaller classes so you get more like one-on-one.” (P4)

“I’m not really big on 150 kids in a classroom, no one-on-one contact at all ... 200 kids in a class - I have a hard time when it’s not interactive.” (P5)

The social estrangement and lack of public identity felt by freshmen students in this study literally shook their self-confidence and self-image. Tinto’s social integration model purports the greater the number of contacts students have with peers and faculty, the greater their level of social integration and retention rates. Belcheir, Michener, and Gray (1998) found traditional freshmen who did not participate in campus activities, clubs or organizations often expressed feelings of isolation. None of the participants in this study joined campus activities, clubs or organizations and all expressed feelings of being invisible and unnurtured. Their feelings seemed to contribute to disengagement from the educational and social processes of university life. These students quietly struggled unsuccessfully on their own during the transition to college.

“Why do professors not give a shit if we drop out of school? They don’t care. They are still getting paid, getting more students to come. They don’t give a crap – there’s more students coming.” (P2)

“The only person like, when I was a freshman, cared that I passed was my English teacher ... he was the only person who took an interest in me.” (P4)

“No one cares. I was pretty much just a ghost. They were on the ball for payment though – guess ghosts pay bills.” (P5)

“I didn’t feel cared for by the university. I felt like another chunk of change, more money in their wallet. I wasn’t cared for and I felt like, alright give us your money ... it wasn’t we’re gonna take care of you and help you out for this kind of money. It didn’t feel like I was presented with caring.” (P6)

Feeling Disappointed and Embarrassed. Ryan and Glenn (2003) found a certain level of disappointment and despair accompanying academic failure by freshmen who expected to be as successful in college as they had been in high school. Additionally, Ryan and Glenn discovered that students failing to earn high marks akin to those earned in high school, internalized a strong institutional message that undermined their sense of academic integration and learning efficacy. Institutions of higher education place tremendous focus on academic adjustment during the transition to college freshman year when a more pressing issue is the social and emotional adjustment during the transition (Skahill, 2003). Efforts to target at-risk populations are vital, yet an outreach limited to these populations may be short-sighted; above-average students may benefit from adjustment assistance during the transition from high school to higher education, as well.

College is a period of significant growth in an individual's adaptive capacities in cognitive, emotional, and social domains. Erikson (1963) suggests that college years are a time of exponential growth in psychosocial functioning and the psychosocial matter of ego identity. As characteristics such as “confident”, “hopeful” and “achievement-oriented” collapsed in students in this study, their measure of self-esteem and self-

expectancies shifted; they were neither confident in their future nor in self-image. The participants alternated between feeling disappointed in themselves and public embarrassment. Labels and statements about who one is, the general measure of self-concept, are also statements of self-expectation. Characteristics students assign to themselves may affect their persistence in college and only a few research studies (e.g., Biddle, Bank and Slavings, 1987) test this possibility.

“It was a really bad time, a bad year. It was a year, like, you know. I felt like an outcast with my friends and a disappointment to my parents.” (P4)

“My parents have always been supportive of me ... but I could tell they were disappointed.” (P3)

According to Okun, Benin and Brandt-Williams (1996), the lack of encouragement from others to remain enrolled is an important environmental variable which exerts direct positive effect on institutional departure. Keeping their academic failure, relative to their excellent high school performance, and disappointment hidden from family and friends protected the participants in this study from shame and embarrassment, yet in reality it promoted their attrition behavior.

“It didn’t pan out like I wanted it to – like I said, I felt absolutely horrible...I was a failure and I didn’t even make it halfway ... I was always exhausted, stressed out of my mind, so stressed. Scared my parents would find out.” (P2)

“I was pretty embarrassed I dropped out so soon and didn’t want to talk to anyone about it. By the time people started to find out, it was too late.” (P5)

Disengaging from the University. Porter and Swing (2006) indicate that “about sixteen percent of students who enter a four-year institution leave during the first year or do not return for their second year.” (p. 90). The decision by students to withdraw from college has been studied, and numerous predictors of retention have been evaluated and organized into conceptual models including Tinto’s Student Integration Theory, Bean’s

Student Attrition Model, and Pascarella's General Casual Model. Regardless of extensive literature on attrition in higher education, much remains unknown about the nature of the voluntary disengagement process (Tinto, 1975). Furthermore, the literature does not distinguish between dropouts resulting from academic failure from those that arise from voluntary withdrawal. Barefoot (2004) suggests "goal commitment [retention] is more likely to be realized as a function of student maturity and academic or career focus." (p.12). The majority of freshman attrition does not result from academic failure, but from a complex mix of justifications including maturity and academic or career focus.

Sagaria, Higginson and White (1980) found that most research on voluntary withdrawal reviewed the needs and interests of freshmen as perceived by faculty, staff and more senior students, rather than reviewing the needs and interests of freshmen as perceived by freshmen. This study found students to be active participants in their education with their experiences, thoughts, and feelings predictive of their decision to disengage or drop-out. All students in this study processed their decision to drop out completely alone by mulling over their interest-level, commitment, and motivation to complete a course of study, as well as their individual perceptions related to the relative cost and benefit of education. Voluntary disengagement from the university becomes a means of coping with the lack of congruency between student and the environment, between student and his / her goals.

"I went to college and thought it [academic major selection] would come to me, but it hasn't ... A big thing for me is the experience before I commit to it [a career]." (P1)

"Second semester, I didn't care. I'm not going to go. I cried so much." (P4)

"I stopped going to class and lost touch with the whole thing." (P5)

Tinto (1975) suggested that a commitment to the goal of college is the most influential determinant in college persistence. This study confirmed that finding, as all six students expressed sincere confusion in terms of educational goals and expectations, as well as their career goals. Astin (1964) found a family's socioeconomic status to be inversely related to drop-out with lower status families exhibiting higher rates of attrition. Twelve years later, Astin (1972) suggested that family income had become less a determinant of college persistence as more dropouts represent voluntary withdrawals. General findings with regard to linking family socioeconomic status to retention are negated by this study; all six students lived in financially successful families.

No consensus or single theory governs the field of freshman retention or highlights the thoughts and feelings of students which might best predict attrition. This phenomenological study found that feelings of being overwhelmed, unfocused and directionless, as well as uncared for by the university dominated a participant's decision to drop-out. It was not ambivalence about college choice or college attendance, but rather the ambivalence of college major and career choice. In addition, it was the students' idealized image of college confronting the daunting reality of their actual college experience which was overwhelming. The students in this study, high-achieving high school students, unsuccessfully faced the challenge of making intelligent and informed choices regarding their academic course and major selection and management of credit-load and work schedule. This difficult challenge was inextricably intertwined with their decision to drop-out.

“During my last semester, academically I went downhill ... it was like I cared, but that was a front.” (P2)

“I got to the point at the end of the semester it was, that I don't care anymore. I was so depressed; I just lay in my bed and cried.” (P4)

“... it [dropping out] felt right - the university never made me feel like I was headed in the right direction to somewhere. That’s why I stopped going.” (P5)

Looking Toward the Future

Psychological themes triggered by reflection upon and reevaluation of the freshmen year experience after a respite from campus included renewed self-confidence, hopefulness, and excitement about the future, as well as a renewed interest in college.

Feeling Hopeful. Nationally, about sixty-three percent of high school graduates enroll in postsecondary education immediately after completing high school, and the enrollment of traditional college-aged students continues at record high levels (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Levine and Cureton, 1998, found that “fewer than one in six undergraduates fit the traditional stereotype of a full-time American college student” eighteen to twenty-three years of age. After enrollment in higher education and initial pursuit of a degree, students face numerous decisions. Three fundamental decisions are whether to remain enrolled at the institution of original matriculation, transfer to another institution or whether to dropout. One to four semesters after dropping out, all students in this study retrospectively perceive their university experience as positive and may view their original decision to drop out as a cost-to-benefit analysis – the cost of remaining enrolled outweighed the benefits. A clear developmental shift in identity is evident in the students’ statements.

“One of the worst decisions – I look back and at least it was a good learning experience.” (P2)

“I wasn’t in that place of mind, now I need to make it happen. It won’t happen on its own – I have to make it happen.” (P3)

“Having a clear goal and knowing what classes to take ...I will graduate and get a 2-year degree, makes my parents happy, my grandpa happy, makes me happy.” (P4)

Pitkethly and Prosser (2001) state, “leaving can be a positive step: students may change their goals; transfer between courses or institutions; or join the workforce. An additional positive finding is that a high proportion of withdrawers do return to higher education.” (p. 186). The American Council on Education (2002) found that for the majority of students who left campus, the decision to drop-out was temporary; that within the subsequent six years, sixty-four percent returned to either their original institution or a different one. Feeling hopeful and goal-focused are keys to a return to campus. All participants demonstrated a developmental shift in identity and maturity of thought shown in their willingness to finally speak openly about their college experience and attrition decision-making process. They expressed relief to finally share the feelings and experiences which they struggled so courageously to keep hidden from family, friends and the academic community their freshman year.

“See, this is so helpful. That is what was missing from my experience – nobody sat down with me and talked to me.” (P1)

“I’m glad I got to get this off my chest and had an opportunity to talk about it.” (P2)

“It’s good I’m thinking and talking about this.” (P3)

“I’m glad I got to say all this; it feels good to say it. I hope you don’t think I’m stupid. Can I talk to you if I have problems next year?” (P4)

“Lots of thought never expressed to anybody – I would never talk to anybody. I didn’t want to talk about it [wanting to drop out]. You have to talk about it, you can’t bottle it up inside, it adds to the pressure.” (P5)

Taking Action. The American Council on Education Center (ACE) for Policy Analysis (2002) indicates the traditional path of entering college immediately after high school and earning a bachelor’s degree in four years is no longer the norm. The ACE found that “thirty-seven percent of students attend more than one institution and of those,

forty-eight percent took a break of at least four months between institutions.” (p. 27). More often, ACE found they enrolled in a different institution, rather than returning to their original institution. Of the six participants in this study, all have re-enrolled in higher education, yet only half at their original institution, The University of Montana.

Participants in this study did not leave college haphazardly; their decisions to leave school were deliberated completely in isolation throughout the freshman year and a viable solution, in their minds, to their individual situations. These six students faced a constricted range of alternatives by hiding their academic and social failures from support people both on campus and within their families. Leaving college can be a positive experience as students may change their goals, transfer institutions or seek full-time employment. Yorke (1997) found that eventually “a high proportion of withdrawers return to higher education.” Porter and Swing (2006) indicate that most students who leave college do so temporarily, as sixty-four percent return to college within six years. The return to college for these six students was made through a conscious decision to persist and a clearer vision of the future.

“I’m going back to school ...I’ve spent time away, matured, and I need to go back to school.” (P2)

“I still see school as a necessity. I don’t want to go through life without gaining higher knowledge, higher education - whether that be 4-year college, 2-year college, or learning other languages. I want an education and a career. The program in Montreal, the translation school ... I don’t think [The University of] Montana has anything to offer.” (P3)

“It’s better now because I switched over to the Tech ... and I love it! I’m getting an AA so I can transfer with that because I really want to be a teacher, I decided that.” (P4)

“My outlook on life shifted a little bit and I don’t know why ... Everything I believe now is so different. Right now, an option is the COT Culinary School – I love cooking.” (P5)

”And so it [Helena College of Technology Fire Science] felt so right - the university never made me feel like I was headed in the right direction.” (P6)

It is interesting to note that during the fall semester following participant interviews, four of six participants in this study re-enrolled in higher education. Of the remaining two participants, one applied and has been admitted to The University of Montana - College of Technology and is currently on a waiting list for the Culinary Arts Program and one applied to a translation and interpretation program at a university in Montreal, Canada.

Baker (1993) indicated that even one interview may have salutary effects on academic retention of students. While a bold statement to make, it may be that the one-on-one interview this researcher conducted with the participants had a constructive effect on their academic re-enrollment.

CHAPTER SIX

Implications and Recommendations

The American higher educational system has fallen short of academic performance goals. In 2002, the U.S. Department of Education reported that only fifty-five percent of undergraduates who began at a four-year institution during the 1995-1996 academic year completed a degree. Accountability for performance, i.e. graduation and retention rates, is a concern at the state and national levels, as well as on the student level as voiced by P2, “*Why do professors not give a shit if we drop out of school? They don’t care ... they don’t give a crap.*” Higher education faces significant economic constraints, but somehow finds money to financially support what they value most. The question regarding retention remains, “What do institutions value most?” If education values students most, this study suggests that retention research be responsive to their voices.

Implications for Research

Montana boasts one of the highest high school graduation rates in the country, yet has one of the lowest college attendance rates with only half of graduating seniors continuing on to college. The number of high school graduates in Montana is expected to decline over the next decade, effectively making retention a top priority. The University of Montana has begun to focus on identifying and implementing retention strategies to create a seamless, campus-wide retention system involving the participation of all stakeholders. Results of this study might be considered prior to implementing policy changes or retention programs.

Retention Programs

Decreasing demographics have sparked concern in viewing retention as a legitimate institutional endeavor to be vigorously pursued. Educators who intend to affect student success may wish to reflect on findings of this study to respond to the experiences of freshmen and develop retention programs. Students in this study lamented the lack of assistance available to negotiate the first-year as summarized by P5's statement, "*There was no one helping me figure it out ... cast out there and have no kind of anyone looking after you.*"

Retention programs may be externally imposed or voluntarily sought; defined in advance or developed incrementally; created programmatically or designed systematically. They may be implemented uniformly or planned so universities can make alterations according to students' needs. The first year is beginning to be seen as a year to teach academic content and life / career development skills so students may navigate college and achieve success, i.e. degree completion.

Retention Research

Attrition theories quantitatively describe departure, but are less effective at explaining students' experiences or ascribed meaning of attrition. Based on findings and limitations of this study, e.g., participants represented first-generation, academically successful White students from financially secure families, highly regarded by high school peers, further qualitative research might be conducted. Like all studies, this one has limitations, yet holds implications for future research including a larger sample size, varied student characteristics, and conduction at other universities. Within qualitative studies, research findings are in-depth and specific to the context in which they are found

and are not sufficient for generalization. Yet, results of this study are interesting enough to be considered by others as a vehicle for viewing retention initiatives.

Academic persistence factors abstracted from quantitative research provide disconnected parts of the story; to tell the full story, qualitative data are also needed. There are relatively few qualitative research studies investigating freshman attrition and no studies investigating the meaning and definition freshmen themselves ascribe to the attrition experience. Through interviews with freshmen, this study provides expression to the experience of attrition and documents students' perceptions and definitions of the experience of dropping out. Results of this study corroborate findings of Levitz and Noel (2000) that dropout-prone students experience feelings of being "confused", "overwhelmed," "lost," and "uncertain" all identical words P1 used to share her experience of dropping out freshman year.

Implications for Students

Americans place great value on higher education, but for most of our history, it was a privilege reserved for few. Today, some form of post-secondary education or training has become nearly essential, is no longer viewed as a privilege, but an educational entitlement. Institutions of higher education have been appointed two obligations; 1) to guarantee students that their learning will meet graduation and accreditation standards, and 2) that retention and graduation rates reflect institutional effectiveness. Twenty-first century higher education has been assigned the task of guaranteeing academic opportunity and success for all. Realistically, attrition is inevitable for some students for a variety of reasons.

First-Generation Students

Study participants revealed a surprising coincidence: all twelve of their biological parents did not complete one semester of college, making them first-generation college students. For first-generation college students, college represents a personal goal and a family dream. Angspatt (2001) in a doctoral dissertation on first-generation college students at The University of Montana stated, “For first-generation college students, going to college is not a part of their family tradition or expectations.” (p. 63). Angspatt’s study found that parents of first-generation students provided emotional encouragement, yet could not provide academic support and guidance.

Surprisingly, all participants in this study were first-generation college students who believe that a college degree is the gateway to economic opportunity, prosperity, and social mobility. As such, they qualified for the campus Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) which provides first-generation students a study skills course, academic advising, career guidance, tutoring, workshops, and assistance with financial aid and academic policy and procedure issues. Additional funding might be directed toward increase marketing efforts of first-year programs as *not one* of the students was familiar with EOP.

Minority Students

Students who volunteered for this study were upper middle-class, White, and were born and raised in Montana within a traditional home environment. With an eight-four percent campus, ninety-four percent Missoula County, and eighty-nine percent state-wide White ethnicity, it is clear that disparate experiences exist for minority populations in Montana. Castle (1993) found that despite more than forty years of retention research, it is only within the last decade that research has focused on minority student attrition.

Castle suggests, “Institutional-level research on minority student attrition should not be placed on the periphery, but squarely in line with vital priorities and educational practice.” (p.28).

A significant limitation of this study is the omission of the minority student experience. Thompson’s (2001) research on Hmong students’ perceptions of their college experience at The University of Montana encourages formulation of inventive, creative and opportunistic retention programs to provide minority students a voice. Replication of this study is warranted to welcome the voice of ESL, minority, and international students. It is only through research on minority attrition that higher education programs can be designed to augment the educational success of minorities to increase racial diversity on campus and in the workplace.

Financial and Parental Support

Lederman (2007) found, “more than eighty percent of students who dropped out had done so for reasons other than financial ones.” (p.1). This study revealed a surprising coincidence - all participants’ parents earned financial and career success without a college degree. One-third of the students had trust funds to pay for college, while only two students received financial aid. Parents of two students separated between the students’ high school graduation and freshman year of college which added an emotional strain, but did not alter their financial state as it related to college. Only one student dropped out for financial reasons – she moved in with her boyfriend and her parents, due to religious objections, refused to finance her education unless she moved home. Looking at an economic cost / benefit analysis, students assigned a decreased value to remaining at the institution, yet their decision had nothing to do with financial ability to pay. This

study revealed a loss of goal commitment freshmen year which caused the students to reassess the economic value of continuing their education. Quite simply, they concluded that the emotional and psychological costs of remaining at the university outweighed the benefits.

Desmond (1996) found that students' perception of factors influencing their withdrawal decision included a lack of parental emotional and personal support. However, parents of all study participants provided financial support as well as a high degree of emotional support and encouragement. The researcher suggests it may be beneficial to implement a systematic monitoring of all freshmen, not just those receiving financial aid in an effort to reduce attrition rates, facilitate academic integration, personal adjustment, and institutional commitment.

Academically Successful Students

Study participants held academic good standing upon matriculation, as well as solid externally-imposed identities and personal self-esteem found in academic success characteristics, including: 1) social popularity, 2) academic success in high school, and 3) financially-secure parents. While the students had favorable expectations about college, they did not experience the expected academic or personal success freshman year, but rather experienced a gradual, imperceptible transformation of initial feelings of excitement and hopefulness into negative feelings of anxiety and confusion. This study revealed that as previously academically-successful students, the participants did not find a safety net at the university. Therefore, it is suggested that retention programs embrace all freshmen including those earning superior high school grades as results of this study revealed they may not perform at that same level once in college.

Throughout their P-12 academic years, the students in this study were self-motivated academic achievers with little need for encouragement, support or guidance. Sometime during their freshman year it all changed – for the first time in their lives they needed academic support and experienced shame that they hid from the faculty, friends and family. Undoubtedly, suitable institutional intervention would have been useful to dissuade their decision to drop out. Because none of these students required remedial education, academic advising, enhancement of study skills, and all had declared majors, they fell through the cracks of existing support programming. Feeling “isolated”, “unconnected”, “clueless,” and “unfocused” and most importantly, “uncared for”, each student made a well-considered, self-motivated decision to leave campus.

It is a mistake to assume that students who drop out are prompted by inadequate performance or the lack of a declared major or will openly share their struggles with others. Continuing to research students’ experience of dropping out may shed additional light on support strategies. It is hoped that findings of this study encourage the creation of institutional programming for **all** freshmen, those defined as “at-risk” and as “academically-successful.”

Identity Formation

Students in this study had stable, secure families of origin and were highly regarded in high school. As they faced the developmental task of transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, they confronted identity crises. Because these students, through fortune or chance, evaded prior significant life crises, they had not tested their resiliency abilities. Freshmen year they tried unsuccessfully to anchor their selves at the university, yet did not feel recognized as individuals and were unable to navigate the

transition. Their role confusion and lack of resiliency seemed to shatter their self-confidence. Absent someone to confide in, the students responded by isolating themselves from family, friends, and the campus community - a maladaptive coping style based upon Eric Erikson's Eight Stages of Development.

Erikson identified isolation as a key characteristic of the inability to resolve conflict associated with transition out of the late adolescence developmental stage. The students' instability in identity definition diluted their enthusiasm and dashed the dreams they expected to be realized at the university. Unable to simultaneously navigate college and a developmental stage, the students' self-concept faltered. Further research on the relationship found in this study between attrition and a student's inability to navigate late adolescence is suggested.

Early Warning Programs

Campuses are becoming more intrusive in the academic lives of students to provide them academic feedback which Barefoot (2000) found to be motivational for freshmen. First year programs offer mid-term warning systems, counseling intervention, and support programs for students failing to obtain passing grades before a drop-out decision can be made. The University of Montana established an "Early Warning System" for all 100-level freshmen courses autumn semester 2007. Faculty in freshmen courses were required to submit mid-semester deficiency data to the Registrar for students earning letter grades of D or F; in turn, students deemed "deficient" were notified of their poor performance. Results of the Early Warning System and subsequent increase in retention rates are anxiously anticipated.

Only one student in this study, (P4), was academically deficient mid-semester freshmen first semester; however, some type of institutional alert system may have helped retain these students as they began their negative academic and emotional spiral first semester. Because these students sought, but did not find an institutional relationship, a sense of being cared for by the university, they initiated academic disengagement. A warning system, if gently employed, may have provided the caring they so quietly sought.

Freshman Programs

Students articulated that an absence of academic and career decision-making assistance, as well as in-depth academic advising advanced their drop-out decision. All but one student attended Orientation which primarily focuses on nonacademic, social-personal domains. The participants expressed concern with the modest focus on academic major and course selection and suggested more balance attention to the academic and non-academic domains of campus life, with a brighter spotlight on academic survival. Currently, academic adjustments are made without listening to or honoring the students' first-year experiences. While The University of Montana aims at increased retention through improved academic advising, creation of freshmen programs and career-guidance courses, a philosophical and programming commitment without students' input and commensurate funding is doomed to failure, which is the current situation.

In 1990, The University of Montana created Freshman Interest Groups (FIG), small learning groups open to all students with a goal of improving retention and graduation rates and assisting students with engagement in the academic and social life on campus. FIGs offer a meaningful beginning, strong mentoring, and new relationships and have experienced increased enrollments over the last seventeen years; however,

campus retention rates have remained stagnant. Only one of the students in this study attended a FIG.

In addition to FIGs, The University of Montana offers C&I 160, *Learning Strategies for Higher Education*, which is designed to help at-risk college students develop learning strategies. Students learn to manage stress and time, improve concentration and note-taking, read critically, think visually, and take exams. The University of Montana established a pilot course, *Exploring Majors and Careers*, for undeclared freshmen seeking decision-making assistance in relationship to academic major and career choice. Ryan and Glenn (2002) found that similar freshman year learning and college success courses have resulted in a fourteen percent increase in retention. Because they were not identified as “at-risk students”, none of the students in this study took either of the courses which might have offered them the guidance they needed. The researcher suggests that universities provide freshman a mandated, rather than optional, classroom opportunity to acquire and practice skills needed to become competent consumers of education which may, thereby, increase retention.

Mental Health and Social Development

Students in this study faced academic struggles, career indecision, and difficulty transitioning to college. Many factors impede a student’s academic progress including transition difficulties, physical or learning disabilities, addictions, mental health issues, academic struggles, and career indecision. The University of Montana continues to work to eliminate obstacles and, in 2006, hired a part-time psychiatrist to increase the school’s capacity to help students with mental health and addiction issues. In addition, the university is currently creating living / learning environments in freshmen dormitories to

increase interactions between students and faculty. In 2006, The University of Montana Office of Disability Services for Students piloted a Transition Seminar designed for high school students planning to attend college. The seminar was designed to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to develop self-determination and decision-making skills and to facilitate the transition from high school to college. While a few students in this study revealed issues including alcohol abuse, depression, and career indecision, only one utilized the campus support services. This research indicates a need for stronger marketing of freshman support services.

Implications for the Institution

Retention rates are used as indicators of whether an institution is meeting its goal of student satisfaction and success. Levitz et al. (1999) defined retention as a “measure of how much student growth and learning takes place, how valued and respected students feel on campus, how effectively the campus delivers what the students expect, need, and want.” (p. 31). Institutions that focus minimally on retention will be disadvantaged and may not thrive as the “sink or swim” philosophy applied to student success no longer fits. As resources shrink, competition for student enrollment increases, and all constituents demand greater accountability, institutions that attend to student retention will swim – those which do not, will sink.

Campus-Wide Collaboration

Bipartisan education reform, a partnership between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, with broadly shared responsibility, must be the cornerstone of a retention program. This is a culture change requiring campus to work synergistically to create a more integrated first-year experience. Strong leadership by the President and Provost are

necessary to enable such a culture shift. Currently, operating as separately each system is autonomous, lacks synergy, and creates opposition and competition. Collaboration is needed for accountability systems and programs to contribute to improved retention and graduation rates. Because all students in this study stated being “confused” and “overwhelmed” by a lack of clear academic and career goals, their questions and concerns fell into two administrative divisions, Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, with neither division offering comprehensive guidance. All students stated that if there had been a central person or office from which to seek assistance, they may have stayed at the university and completed their education. What the students in this study articulated is that retention is a one-on-one activity; it is a human endeavor rather than an institutional goal.

Virtually every program, person, and procedure on campus has the potential and responsibility to impact students, and reduce student departure. If retention is perceived as the responsibility of Student Affairs, faculty and administrators within Academic Affairs are consequentially relieved of any responsibility to relate retention to the classroom or campus administration (Barefoot, 2004). Campus-wide drop-out rates might be showcased by department and college with investigation into high rates in certain programs, classes or colleges. Because it is less costly to market to enrolled students rather than to recruit prospective students, programs, departments and / or colleges maintaining high enrollments might be rewarded with increased financial allocations, while sanctions could be imposed on those with higher attrition rates. The concern of faculty must shift voluntarily from one of traditional detachment as related to attrition as an administrative issue to a concern of the collective whole. If a voluntary shift in faculty

concern is not forthcoming, it could be encouraged by institutional rewards such as building retention efforts into faculty evaluations standards.

Outreach to Secondary Schools

If the future of higher education is contingent upon retention, and the success of its students is built upon secondary school success, higher education must increase collaboration with secondary schools. Universities might clarify first-year expectations and challenges and share them with secondary school administrators, teachers, and students state-wide.

Students offered admission to universities and their parents could be invited to workshops on the high school campus during the senior year to explore academic course and major selection. Currently, The University of Montana presents an annual financial aid workshop for high school seniors and their parents, but does not offer assistance in deciphering the college experience. Following a business model, customer service programs are designed to meet the expectations and satisfaction of the customer before, during, and after the service is provided. This study revealed that The University of Montana's recruitment efforts [before service] seem solid; however, it revealed that retention efforts [during service] are deficient.

Implications for Retention Programs

As a collaborative campus-wide effort, dissemination of outcomes of good or best practices might be shared campus-wide as a pathway to achieving higher retention rates. Administrators in Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, as well as faculty, might examine exemplary retention programs to gain a deeper understanding of and reduce freshmen attrition. Perhaps a freshmen success course could be interwoven within

academic programs as an engagement strategy or freshmen support courses might assume a proactive role and no longer encourage student participation, but require participation.

Career Counseling and Undeclared Majors

Retention programs might offer a robust process of self, career, and academic discovery for freshmen. As part of the self-discovery process, universities might teach and engage students in active decision-making regarding major selection, rather than forcing students into false choices (mandatory majors) or into non-choices (undeclared majors). Renaming “undeclared major” to “exploratory major,” while a play on words would touch the core of students’ vision of a hopeful future as the word “undeclared” identifies with indecision and holds negative connotations. In addition, the fit between the student, academic objective and career goal should be harmonious. All students in this study declared an academic major upon matriculation, yet all became disillusioned and unwilling to continue in a major they no longer found fitting or discovered to be their parents’ goal, rather than theirs.

Interestingly, all students in this study articulated a need to talk with a career counselor, yet did not do so. Currently, there are two-and-a-quarter full-time equivalent (FTE) career counselors on campus servicing nearly 14,000 students. Even if one student had sought career counseling, the counselors’ schedules are so full that the student may have had to wait three weeks for an appointment. The provision of an adequately resourced career center together with supplementary integration of career development in the freshmen classroom is essential whether staffed by faculty or counselor education graduate students.

Retention Task Force

A Retention Task Force (RTF) has recently been established at The University of Montana to conduct systematic retention assessment as an ongoing initiative and establish internal benchmarks to assess the freshman experience. With systematic collection of retention data, programs and processes may be created, improved, and terminated. Data may be utilized to focus resources and retention initiatives more precisely at improving student life and learning. With systematic assessment the contribution of campus-wide programs and collaborative involvement may guide policies and programs. Pitkethly and Prosser (2001) found that centrally-constituted retention plans foster greater campus-wide commitment. The results of this study were solicited by members of the RTF and may be presented to the RTF at a future date.

Need for Further Research

Retention should not be the primary goal of universities, education should be. However, this study illustrated retention represents the value students feel on campus and how effectively campuses create a student-centered environment and delivers what students expect, need, and deserve. A deeper understanding of students' experience of dropping out may be garnered from this study and parallels a simple principle: "The success of an institution and the success of its students are inseparable" (Levitz, Novel, & Richter, 1999).

Tinto summarized institutional response to attrition in a paper presented at the Annual Conference of the European Access Network in Prato, Italy, on June 20, 2002: "Institutional commitment is more than just words, more than just mission statements

issued in elaborate brochures; commitment is the willingness to invest the resources and provide the incentives and rewards needed to enhance student retention.” (p. 2).

This researcher suggests further research consisting of focused, longitudinal attrition research to study results over a longer period of time. In addition, it may be of benefit to replicate this study at two-year institutions and by other researchers. An additional focus for future research is the exploration of minority and graduate student attrition experiences, as well as that representative of wider socioeconomic groups of students.

While it is a tragedy to lose academically-capable students, it is not appropriate to label them or the institution a failure. Universities will never fully control or understand attrition because the issue is rooted in the basic structure of individual students' experiences. However, to increase retention, one fundamental student expectation must be met - the benefits of higher education, financial, academic, and developmental, must outweigh the costs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
CHECK-LIST, 11-POINT SUMMARY and APPROVAL

For Internal
Use Only

PROPOSAL # _____
Form RA-108
(Rev. 11/03)

The University of Montana
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) CHECKLIST

Submit 1 completed copy of this Checklist, including any required attachments, for each project involving human participants. The IRB meets monthly to evaluate proposals, and approval is usually granted for one year. See *IRB Guidelines and Procedures* for details.

Project Director: Cheryl Minnick, M.Ed. Dept.: Educational Leadership & Counseling Phone: 546-6046
E-mail: cherbear199@aol.com

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Co-Director: Dr. Catherine Jenni Dept.: Educational Leadership & Counseling Phone: 243-2608
E-mail: cathy.jenni@mso.umt.edu

Project Title: *The Experience of Attrition: A phenomenological study of Freshmen in academic good standing at The University of Montana*

Project Description: The project is dissertation research following the qualitative phenomenological research method and will research the “lived experience” of the decision to and experience of leaving The University of Montana following the first-year (freshman year). Participants will represent a volunteer sample of traditional-aged freshmen (18-24 yrs) in academic good standing, with a permanent address in Missoula County. Participants will participate in a one hour, one-on-one audio-taped interview which, transcribed, will become the primary data source.

Investigators, including faculty supervisors, on this project must complete a self-study course on protection of human research participants, available at UM IRB website: <http://www.umt.edu/research/irb.htm>.

Certification: I / We have completed the course -

Signature: _____ Date: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Students Only:

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Catherine Jenni Dept.: Educational Leadership & Counseling Phone: x 2608

Signature: _____

(My signature confirms I have read the IRB Checklist and attachments and agree it accurately represents the planned research and that I will supervise this research project.)

For IRB Use Only

IRB Determination:

____ Approved Exemption from Review — Exemption # _____

____ Approved by Expedited/Administrative Review

____ Full IRB Determination:

- ____ Approved
- ____ Conditional Approval (see attached memo)
- ____ Resubmit Proposal (see attached memo)
- ____ Disapproved (see attached memo)

Signature IRB Chair: _____ Date: _____

Project Information

1. Human Participants. *Describe briefly (include age/gender):*
Participants will be drawn from a population of 3237 first-year freshman students, aged 18-24 of both genders with a permanent address in Missoula indicated on UM records that enrolled the 2005-2006 academic term at the University of Montana and **did not** enroll Fall 2006.

2. Are any of the following included? *Check all that apply.*

NO Minors (under age 18) If YES, specify age ranges(s): _____

NO Members of physically, psychologically or socially vulnerable population? Explain why:

3. How are participants selected / recruited? *Explain briefly:*

A letter of invitation to participate will be mailed to potential participants. Mailing addresses will be procured from non-confidential university directory information in accordance with Montana's Constitutional right to privacy and FERPA regulations as defined in 34 CFR 99.3 and will specifically exclude students who opted to keep their directory information private.

4. How many participants will be included in the study?

As per parameters set by the phenomenological research method, a minimum of 8 and maximum of 12 participants will be interviewed for the study.

5. Identification of participants

Anonymous/ no identification Identified by name and/or address or other Confidentiality Plan

6. Participants matter or kind(s) of information to be compiled from/about participants. *Describe briefly:*
Participants will be asked to share their lived experience and decision to leave academic study after their freshmen first-year at The University of Montana.

Is information on any of the following included? *Check all that apply.*

Sexual behavior

Illegal conduct

Alcohol use/abuse

Drug use/abuse

Information about the participants that, if it became known outside the research, could reasonably place them at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participant's financial standing or employability.

7. Means of obtaining the information. *Check all that apply.*

Field/Laboratory observation

Mail survey (attach questionnaire/instrument)

Tissue/Blood sampling

On-site survey (attach questionnaire/instrument)

Measurement of motions/actions

Examine public documents, records, data, etc.

Examine private documents, records, data, etc.

Use of standard educational tests, etc.

Phone interviews/survey (attach questionnaire/instrument)

In-person interviews/survey (attach questionnaire/instrument)

Other means (specify): _____

Will participants be videotaped, audio-taped or photographed? **Audio-taped**

8. Is a written consent form being used? Yes (*attach copy*) No

9. Will participant(s) receive an explanation of the research before and/or after the project?

Yes (*attach copy*) No

10. Is this part of your thesis or dissertation? Yes No

If YES, date you successfully presented your proposal to your committee: **March 16, 2007**

11. Are you applying for funding for this project? Yes No Continuing Funding

If YES or Continuing Funding, please name the sponsor: _____

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

11-POINT SUMMARY

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research project is to examine the lived experience of and decision not to continue academic study at The University of Montana after the freshman first-year. The purpose is to gain a better understanding of the experience and decision-making process contributing to leaving academic studies in order for the University of Montana to improve recruitment efforts and admission policies, better serve freshman, increase retention, and improve the University's financial responsibility. The study will be designed utilizing the phenomenological method.

The literature on retention is replete with studies reviewing and researching college leaving behavior, reasons and contributing factors; however, a thorough literature review reveals a lack of attention, an utter omission of research investigating the lived experience, the essential, invariant structure or meaning of the decision to leave college after the freshmen first year of study.

There exists a documented need in the literature for an increased understanding and dialogue in regards to college attrition. An investigation of the lived experience and decision-making process of terminating academic study may bring light to inner meanings that extend beyond student behaviors, expectations, and justifications, delving deeper than the theoretical and rational to the core, or essence of the experience. The researcher believes that through this study, the educational community, higher education administrators, and student service professionals may be provided a heightened understanding of the essence of the experience of attrition, recognizing that there may exist a unifying meaning to the experience. It is believed that through open dialogue, greater insight and heightened understanding of the experience of terminating collegiate study after the first-year will be gained through which improvements in educational practice may be made.

Participants

UM reported an enrollment of 13,602 full- and part-time graduate and undergraduate students during the 2005-2006 academic year, with seventy-five percent indicating Montana state residency. Of those students, 2246 represented traditional aged, 18-24 years, full-time freshman of which 350 indicated a permanent address within Missoula County. The average age of undergraduate students was 21.6 years. (Bain, 2005).

A minimum of six and a maximum of twelve participants will be self-selected from the 2005-2006 class of 350 freshmen indicating a permanent address in Missoula County, who did not reenroll fall 2006. Creswell (1998) indicates that phenomenological studies require data to be collected through long, in-depth interviews with five to ten participants.

Recruitment of Participants

A letter of invitation (**Attached**) to voluntarily participate in the study will be mailed to freshmen students identified by university records* as *non-returning* and confirmed by fall 2006 end of term enrollment data. Third week enrollment is set by Montana State Legislature for finalization and submission of university enrollment and registration data to the State of Montana Office of the Commission of Higher Education in order to secure fiscal allocations; however, that data is tentative. Final numbers are confirmed by end of semester reports. Participants will be selected to gain a variety of richly varied descriptions of the experience of attrition. Recruitment, via letter of invitation, will begin mid-spring semester 2007 and participants will be selected on a first-come first-serve basis.

**FERPA regulations state that an educational agency may disclose directly information of former students. Directory information as defined in 34 CRP 99.3 means information contained in an education record of a student that would not generally be considered harmful or an invasion of privacy if disclosed. It includes, but is not limited to, the students' name, address, telephone listing, electronic mail address, dates of attendance, and enrollment status (undergraduate / graduate, full- or part-time). Montana's Constitution has an explicit right to privacy - a reasonable expectation of privacy. Previously enrolled students who did not opt-out of having their directory information "made public" when enrolled at The University of Montana would have no reasonable expectation that their name and address becomes non-public solely because they are no longer enrolled.*

Physical Location of Study

Participants will be invited to participate in a one hour, one-on-one in-depth personal interview. The interview will be conducted either on- or off-campus in a location quiet, convenient, and comfortable for each participant. If on-campus, interview rooms in Lommasson 154 are available, which are private, sound-proof and feature windowed doors.

Activities of Participants

At the start of the interview, informed consent will be discussed with emphasis on confidentiality, and the participant will be asked to sign a consent form. Participants will participate in a one-hour unstructured, open-ended interview which will be tape-recorded and transcribed. Open-ended interviews permit researchers to pursue participants' leads, to pose clarifying questions and smooth participants' expression of the experience being investigated. The initial verbal instruction will be:

Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive, and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.

The researcher will ask questions when necessary to help participants clarify ideas or express feelings and experiences in greater detail by using a gentle probing technique including the following questions:

What does that mean to you?

Can you describe how you felt?

Is it possible to give an example?

Describe to me what that was like for you.

If you are able, can you tell me more about it?

Please continue until you feel you have discussed your feelings as completely as possible.

Benefits of Research

It is hoped that through the participants' participation in the study, the University of Montana will become better able to serve first-year freshmen, as well as improve recruitment and admission policies, increase retention and improve financial responsibility. Participants may benefit from the study by uncovering, identifying, expressing and examining feelings, as well as coming to a better understanding of their decision to discontinue enrollment. There is no promise, however, that participants will benefit from contributing to this study.

Risk and Discomforts

Participants will not be exposed to any known deleterious physical, psychological, professional, financial, legal, spiritual, or cultural effects, risks, or discomforts associated with this study; however, answering interview questions may compel participants to reflect on feelings that may make them uncomfortable, sad or upset.

Deleterious Effects Minimization

Participants' decision to participate in the study is voluntary and they may refuse to participate, withdraw from, or leave the study for any reason at any time without penalty. To minimize deleterious effects, a participant may be asked to leave the study if a serious adverse reaction occurs for which evaluation may be required or the Project Director or Co-Director believe it is in the best interest of the participant's health and welfare. The researcher will take all efforts to minimize any deleterious effect, risk, or discomfort.

Protection of Participants' Privacy

Records will be kept private and will not be released without the written consent of the participant. The Project Director and Co-Director will have access to the data and participant files.

Participants' identities will remain confidential and if data were released, pseudonyms would be used. If results of this study are included in an educational journal or presented at an educational meeting, participants' names will not be used. Data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and the signed consent form will be stored in a cabinet separate from the data. Audio-taped interviews will be transcribed devoid of any information that could identify the participants and the tapes will be destroyed at conclusion of the study.

There exist conditions under which privacy may be breached. If a participant indicates the desire or intent to harm him/herself or someone else, the researcher will, as law mandates, speak with the participant first, followed by immediate contact with the Project Co-Director and/or authorities. A copy of the participant's informed consent will be given to the Project Co-Director or authorities who will immediately contact the participant. Because of this condition to breach privacy, the researcher will ask that participants provide their name and phone number(s).

Participant Information and Consent Form

A written consent form, *Participant Information and Consent Form*, will be signed by participants. (**Attached**)

Written Consent Waiver

A waiver of written informed consent is not required.

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION and CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH TITLE

The Experience of Attrition: A Phenomenological Study of Freshmen in academic good standing at University of Montana.

PROJECT DIRECTOR

Cheryl Minnick, M.Ed.
Educational Leadership & Counseling
The University of Montana
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Phone: 406.546.6046
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PROJECT Co-DIRECTOR

Dr. Catherine Jenni, Chair
Educational Leadership & Counseling
The University of Montana
Missoula, Montana 59812
Phone: 406.243.2608
Email: cathy.jenni@mso.umt.edu

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

PURPOSE of INTERVIEW / RESEARCH

You have been invited to participate in an important study researching students' perceptions, definitions and the meaning students give to the experience and decision-making process of leaving college after the freshman first-year year. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of reasons why students do not return to campus so the university may better serve freshmen, create special programs for freshmen, improve retention and recruitment efforts, develop better admission policies, and improve the University's financial responsibility.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a one hour, one-on-one personal interview which will be tape-recorded and transcribed. The interview will be conducted in a quiet location comfortable and convenient to you, either on- or off-campus.

RISKS / DISCOMFORTS

There are no known risks associated with this study. Answering interview questions could cause you to reflect on feelings that could make you uncomfortable, sad or upset.

BENEFITS to YOU and the UNIVERSITY

Your participation in this study will help the university gain a better understanding of reasons why students do not return to campus so the university may better serve freshmen, create special programs for freshmen, improve retention and recruitment efforts, develop better admission policies, and improve the University's financial responsibility.

You may benefit from this study by uncovering, identifying, expressing and examining feelings, as well as coming to a better understanding of your decision to discontinue academic study at The University of Montana. There is no promise, however, that you will benefit from participating.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records will be kept private and will not be released without your consent. Only the Project Director and Co-Director will have access to the files. Your identity will be confidential and if data were released, pseudonyms would be used. If the results of this study are included in an educational journal or presented at an educational meeting, your name will not be used. Data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and your signed consent form will be stored in a cabinet separate

from the data. The audiotape will be transcribed minus any information that could identify you. The tape will be destroyed at the end of the study.

LIMITS OF CONFIDENTIALITY

There are conditions under which confidentiality may be breached. If you indicate you wish to harm yourself or someone else, the Project Director will speak with you and this informed consent may be shared with the Co-Director who may contact you. Because of this, we ask that you provide your name and phone number.

Name: _____ Phone: _____

COMPENSATION TO INJURY

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 individually 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. (Reviewed by University Legal Counsel, July 6, 1993)

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION / WITHDRAWAL

Your decision to take part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in, withdraw from, or leave the study for any reason at any time without penalty. You may be asked to leave the study for any of the following reasons: 1) failure to follow the Director's instructions; 2) a serious adverse reaction occurs which may require evaluation; 3) the Project Director believes it is in the best interest of your health and welfare; or 4) the study is terminated.

QUESTIONS

You may wish to discuss participating in this study with others before you agree to take part. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the IRB Chair at The University of Montana Research Office at 243-6670. If you have questions about the research now or during the study, feel free to contact:

Project Co-Director
Dr. Catherine Jenni, Chair
Educational Leadership & Counseling
The University of Montana
Missoula, Montana 59812
406.243.2608 / cathy.jenni@mso.umt.edu

Project Director
Cheryl Minnick, M. Ed. (Doctoral Student)
Educational Leadership & Counseling
The University of Montana
Missoula, Montana 59812
406.546.6046 / cherbear199@aol.com

PARTICIPANT'S STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read the research study description and have been informed of involved risks and benefits. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I have been assured that any future questions I may have will be answered by the Project Director or Co-Director. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed /Typed Name of Participant

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

CHERYL MINNICK

The University of Montana
Department of Educational Leadership and Counseling
406.546.6046 • cherbear199@aol.com

Date

Name
Address
City State Zip

Dear _____:

My name is Cheryl Minnick and I am a graduate student at The University of Montana in Educational Leadership & Counseling. I am doing research for my doctoral dissertation on first-year freshmen from the class of 2005-2006 who decided not to return to the university fall 2006. I want to understand a student's experience of leaving the university and their decision-making process. What you share may be used to improve the freshman year experience for students including recruitment, academic advising, and student programs; please know, this is not an attempt to solicit your re-enrollment.

I invite you to participate in this *important* project. I would like to talk to you about your freshman year experiences – the good, the bad and the neutral, and your decision not to return to campus. Our one-hour interview will be tape-recorded and take place in a location convenient and comfortable for you or on- or off-campus in late April, May or early June.

Your name and identity and everything you share will be confidential. The tape-recording and transcription will also remain confidential and will not be released without your consent. Only the Project Co-Director, Dr. Cathy Jenni, and I will have access to the materials and information gathered will become part of my doctoral dissertation.

If you would like to participate in my study, complete the enclosed *Participant Information and Consent Form* and return it to me in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. If you would rather, you may email me at **cherbear199@aol.com** or call me on my cell at **406.546.6046** to become a participant in the study.

I would love to talk with you. Your thoughts and feelings are really important and if shared, could make a big difference to freshmen students in the future. I appreciate your time and consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Minnick, M. Ed.

Enclosures: *Participant Information and Consent Form / Postage-paid envelope*

APPENDIX D

Participant Demographic Information

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. It will be used to “triangulate” data (provide common threads, support evidence, and offer different views) that will be collected during interviews, as well as data uncovered during analysis of the protocols.

- 1) Name (initials only)
- 2) Birthdate
- 3) Age
- 4) Gender
- 5) Ethnicity
- 6) High School Attended
- 7) High School Extra-curricular Activities
- 8) College Goal or Academic Major
- 9) Freshman Year Living Arrangements

Date / Time of Interview: _____

Participant Gender: M _____ F _____

Participant Code: _____

Reviewed *Participant Information and Consent Form* with participant _____

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Participant Demographic Information

Birth Date / Age _____ / _____ /19____ Age _____
High School / Graduation Date _____ / _____
Collegiate Goal / Major _____
Frosh Year Living Arrangements _____

Grand Tour Interview Question

The phenomenological interview will begin with a broad, open-ended question designed to provide participants adequate opportunity to comprehensively express their thoughts and feelings, as well as the meaning they ascribe to the phenomena they experienced – the experience of and decision not to return to study at The University of Montana after the freshman first-year.

Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive, and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.

Probing Technique Questions

During the interview, the researcher will help participants articulate their ideas, feelings and the meaning they ascribe to the experience in greater detail and depth by using an open-ended, gentle probing technique which includes queries such as:

Describe to me, what that was like for you.

If you are able, can you tell me more about it?

What does (or did) that mean to you?

Is it possible to give an example?

Help me understand ...

Well, if you did know, take a guess ...

How did you feel or what do you think about that?

Thank you for participating in my study. It is my intent to respectfully represent your thoughts and feelings. If you wish to review a copy of the transcript of your interview, please let me know.

Copy of Transcript Requested: Yes ___ No ___
Re-enrollment Information Requested: Yes ___ No ___

APPENDIX E

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH STUDY TO PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research study. The purpose of the study is to try to understand a student's experience of leaving The University of Montana and their decision-making process. I am trying to learn about your internal experience of external factors that you encountered during college. I am interested in hearing your thoughts and feelings about your experience of attending college, as well as your thoughts and feelings about the decision not to return to study after your freshman year. I am interested in your experience of campus, the negative, positive and the neutral.

I will begin the interview by asking you some background questions about yourself and your academic history prior to coming to college. We will then begin the research interview. I will audiotape the 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. I will interview and analyze interviews of six study participants. At the conclusion of the six interviews, I will gather together themes discovered in the interviews to see if you all had common experiences, 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 this study.

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

P1 is a 21 year old White female and a graduate of Big Sky High School. She is the oldest of three children. Neither of her parents graduated college although her mother attended a junior college for one semester. They divorced just prior to her freshman year and her father recently remarried and is expecting a baby. He is a blue-collar laborer and earns an excellent income in excavation. Her mother was a stay-at-home wife until the divorce. She now operates a small in-home daycare. Freshman year, P1 lived at home with her mother and siblings.

P2 is a 22 year old White male and a graduate of a private high school in Missoula. He is the eldest child and has a younger brother and two much-older step-siblings, one living in Hawaii and the other in Europe both with families of their own. Neither of his parents attended college. His father is self-employed in the Missoula entertainment industry and his mother works in retail sales. His parents recently separated. Freshman year, P2 lived in the dorms.

P3 is a 21 year old White female and a graduate of Sentinel High School. She is the eldest of four children with siblings ages 13-19. Her father did not attend college but built a successful business in Missoula. Her mother, a devoutly religious woman, stayed home with her children until P3 was in high school. At that time, she attended and graduated from a two-year medical program at the College of Tech and began working in a doctor's office. Freshman year, P3 lived with her boyfriend in an apartment.

P4 is a 21 year old White female and a graduate of Sentinel High School. She is the eldest of child with a younger brother. She comes from a well-known political family - her uncle was a senator. Neither of her parents attended college. Her mother graduated from trade school and owns a business while her father manages family-owned real estate. Freshman year, P4 lived moved seven times living in an apartment with a roommate in an apartment alone, in a house with a roommate, in a house alone, at home with her family, and with cousins in out-of-state.

P5 is a 22 year old White male, attended elementary school in a small town bordering Missoula and graduated from high school out of state. He is the youngest of two boys. Neither his mother nor his father attended college. His father works at a family-owned business and his mother is unemployed. His parents divorced when he was a teen and he lived with his mother during the school term, and his father and a large extended family in Montana during all school vacations. His parents both remarried. Freshman year he lived in an apartment with three friends who were not attending college.

P6 is a 19 year old White male who was born and raised in Missoula and a graduate of Sentinel High School. He was an extremely well-liked, very involved high school student

and earned good grades. Freshman year he lived in the dorm. P6 is a younger sibling of P4.

APPENDIX G

Data Analyses, Levels One-Three

P1 (CD), Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

<p>Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.</p> <p>P1. 1. Okay. Let's see. Throughout high school I was never quite sure exactly what I wanted to do, so college was never, well I knew I was going to go but it was never anything big. / 2. I finally decided I wanted to work hard and accomplish something so I decided it would be perfect for me to teach kindergarten because for my Senior Project I wrote a children's book and took it to schools and read it and I loved the little kids./ 3. I'm one of those people who hate making life-long decisions, because what if I change my mind? I can't commit to something right now. So when I got there, it was like ... I didn't want to make the decision./</p> <p>So, senior year you decided to become a teacher, but when you got to UM you couldn't decide.</p> <p>P1: 4. Yeah. So, first I took generals, but I thought if I don't know what I'm doing, this is pointless./ 5. I wasn't really trying. So, then I was just "I don't want to do this right now"./ 6. After first semester, I took a whole bunch of random things to decide if I liked a different direction. I was all over the place and still didn't know what I wanted to do and if I'm not focused on a goal, why bother?/ 7. I felt like I needed to figure out what I wanted to do. I've never known what I wanted to do. See, that's another thing. I didn't know what to take./ 8. I went to college clueless and went to my</p>	<p>1. P1 wasn't sure what she wanted to do [major] in college. She knew she was going to attend college.</p> <p>2. She wanted to work hard and accomplish something. She decided to become a teacher after writing a children's book.</p> <p>3. She hates making life decisions for fear she'll change her mind. She has trouble committing.</p> <p>4. P1 felt talking general education courses and not knowing what she was going to do was pointless.</p> <p>5. She didn't try and didn't want to do it.</p> <p>6. She took random courses, didn't know what she wanted to do, lacked focus and felt why bother.</p> <p>7. P1 felt she needed to figure out what to do and what to take.</p> <p>8. P1 felt clueless and her advisor asked her</p>
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<p>advisor and thought she will tell me what to do, but she said, “what do you want to take?”, and I thought, that’s what I came to you for./</p> <p>9. It was awkward, so I just picked classes./</p> <p>10. She was a student, and I think that was one of the things - that I didn’t know exactly what I needed to do, direction to take, so I just took random stuff./</p>	<p>what she wanted to take. She went to see her Peer Advisor to figure out classes to take.</p> <p>9. She felt awkward so picked any class.</p> <p>10. After meeting with her Peer Advisor, she still had no direction.</p>
<p>Sounds like you felt lost, without direction.</p> <p>P1: 11. I felt like at the end of first semester, I wanted to quit; but, I decided to focus and try a second semester./</p> <p>12. About half-way through, I just didn’t care./</p>	<p>11. She wanted to quit at the end of first semester, but decided to keep trying.</p> <p>12. Half-way through second semester, she decided she no longer cared about school.</p>
<p>So, you felt like, “who cares”.</p> <p>P1: 13. Yeah. I didn’t go to my classes as much. They make it so easy not to go. You can get the notes on line./</p> <p>14. I’m surprised I didn’t take a couple of years – that surprises me. I don’t know what I didn’t take time, I just felt I’m gonna do this./</p> <p>15. I never really had an urge to go to college, but knew I should. Everyone was going, but I still didn’t know. First semester, I had every class with my best friend./</p>	<p>13. Second semester P1 ditched classes and got class notes on-line.</p> <p>14. She wonders why she didn’t take a few years off before college.</p> <p>15. She never felt compelled to go to college, but felt she should because everyone else was doing it. Her best friend went to school and took the same courses first semester.</p>
<p>Bet that was fun, and made it easier.</p> <p>P1: 16. Yeah. Once I told a few people I was going to be a teacher, they thought it was a wonderful idea. No one ever told me./</p> <p>17. When I was reading my book, I loved it, I loved the kids, they were so excited and at that age, they are so sweet./</p> <p>18. I don’t know exactly what made me think I didn’t want to be a teacher./</p> <p>19. Making a final decision, that makes me afraid./</p>	<p>16. A few people encouraged her to become a teacher but nobody told her to.</p> <p>17. She loved reading her book to the children and felt their excitement.</p> <p>18. She did not know why she was thinking about NOT becoming a teacher.</p> <p>19. She is afraid of making a final decision.</p>
<p>You felt afraid to commit to education as a major. What do you supposed you were afraid of?</p> <p>P1: 20. What if after all the time and effort I put into it, I want to start all over. I would be boxed in./</p>	<p>20. She was feeling that if she made a decision and later changed her mind, she would be boxed in [trapped].</p>
<p>It sounds like you thought an education</p>	

<p>major would box you into teaching. I feel sad no one showed you all the doors an education major could open for you.</p> <p>P1: 21. No one even talked to me at all; I didn't even know anything I had to do, where to go, or how classes were supposed to go./</p> <p>22. That's another thing! College is like, what? I was completely clueless. If I had had more information, even when people were signing up for classes, I was like what? When?/</p> <p>23. I think another part was actually talking to people. I never asked. They make it easy, but it's confusing./</p> <p>24. I needed to talk to somebody, but didn't know who to talk to except my peer advisor. To her, it was "pick your classes so I can go". Had I known there were counselors, grown up people counselors, who help you for a career to decide what you want to do, I would have asked them./</p> <p>And .. many of those grown-up counselors have education degrees.</p> <p>P1. 25. See, I didn't know that. I didn't know I could do that. That would have helped me./</p> <p>If you could go back in time and be your own advisor, how would you have helped you?</p> <p>P1: 26. I think I would really talk to the person and see all their interests, everything, even like their personality and see what they might mesh well with. At least give options, more than just pick classes./</p> <p>27. I even took the Summer Transition course but it didn't help - it was like a second Orientation. Oh, I and went to Orientation./</p> <p>So, it sounds like you were really trying to learn and prepare. "Here I am, I'm going to learn everything."</p> <p>P1: 28. I felt so confused that I don't even want to ask; everybody already knows, but me./</p> <p>29. My parents didn't go to school. My mom went to college for hardly any time at all. My dad didn't go so they couldn't guide me. My mom hated it. But they supported me./</p>	<p>21. P1 felt like nobody talked with her and she didn't know anything about picking courses.</p> <p>22. She felt clueless and lacked information.</p> <p>23. Even though she was quite confused, she didn't ask anyone any questions.</p> <p>24. She wanted to talk to someone, but didn't know who to talk to. Her advisor was not helpful and P1 felt hurried.</p> <p>25. She didn't know UM had staff career counselors to help.</p> <p>26. P1 thinks that it would have been helpful to talk about her interests, personality, and majors / careers options that would mesh.</p> <p>27. She prepared for college by attending Freshman Orientation and the Freshman 1-credit Summer Transition course, but was still confused.</p> <p>28. P1 was confused and believed the other students knew and understood college.</p> <p>29. Her parents didn't graduate college and thus couldn't give her guidance, but supported her.</p>
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<p>30. I was completely really alone when my friend and I weren't friends second semester./</p> <p>31. I thought my advisor would help me pick classes, but she just kept asking me what I wanted to take./</p> <p>So, thinking about the decision not to return to campus, how was that for you?</p> <p>P1: 32. It wasn't hard at all - I didn't want to go back. I made up my mind. /</p> <p>33. A part of me, really wanted to do it, but mostly it was "it's pointless"./</p> <p>34. I thought I should take time, work and it would come to me./</p> <p>Is it coming to you?</p> <p>P1: 35. NO! /</p> <p>36. I did start teaching dance to little kids and I'm glad I didn't go that way. I'll probably teach again, but being an actual teacher, instead of a friend is difficult. It would be cool if you could try it before you decide.</p> <p>As you see yourself teaching dance, do you see yourself returning to campus?</p> <p>P1: 37. I can make that decision after another year of teaching dance. /</p> <p>38. The fact that I'm sticking with teaching I guess there's something there.</p> <p>39. Teachers have such an influence on you.</p> <p>Perhaps if you return to UM, you could take <i>Teaching Dance to Children</i> for one of your General Education "A" courses.</p> <p>P1: 40. Oh my gosh! I didn't even know there was such a class. My peer advisor never even asked me what I wanted to teach and I would have said dance or kindergarten./</p> <p>41. I don't even know what qualifies for what – they gave me information, but it was overload. It was overwhelming./</p> <p>42. Orientation helped me understand the school, but didn't guide me toward a major or career./</p> <p>43. That was the one time I felt free to ask questions./</p>	<p>30. She was alone when she and her friend had a falling out.</p> <p>31. P1 thought her advisor would help her pick classes, but her advisor wanted P1 to tell her the classes she wanted to take.</p> <p>32. The decision to leave college was easy. P1 didn't want to return to campus.</p> <p>33. Part of her wanted to continue her education, but part of her felt it was pointless.</p> <p>34. She thought she should take time off school to work and eventually "it" [her academic / career focus] would come to her.</p> <p>35. After time away from college, she still has no focus.</p> <p>36. She is teaching dance but finds it difficult and is glad she did not continue in college as education major.</p> <p>37. P1 is going to teach dance one more year before making any decisions about college.</p> <p>38. The fact that she is going to teach a second year, is a good indicator she enjoys teaching.</p> <p>39. She feels teachers have influence on their students.</p> <p>40. Her peer advisor didn't ask her what subject she wanted to teach.</p> <p>41. She was given an overload of information and felt over-whelmed.</p> <p>42. P1 was helped to understand the college through Orientation, but felt no help with academic or career decision-making.</p> <p>43. She felt free to ask questions at Orientation.</p>
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<p>What was it about Orientation that you were comfortable asking questions?</p> <p>P1: 44. It was the small groups, but I asked basic questions like “where do I get my Griz card?” and “Where do I eat?” Not core questions, like what am I going to do./ (long pause)</p> <p>That’s a long pause - sounds like that was key for you – the core question, what am I going to do?</p> <p>P1: 45. I did ok in school. I obviously didn’t do close to my best, because it didn’t seem that I was going anywhere. /</p> <p>46. My experience was positive and negative. Positive that I wanted to try and I did. Negative cuz it is just so confusing. /</p> <p>47. If I had a goal right now, I’d go back in a heartbeat and I’d do really well. I’d concentrate. If I could just figure out what I wanted to do, I would be back in a heartbeat, for sure./</p> <p>Figure out what you want “to do”? Like in terms of a career.</p> <p>P1: 48. Yes. Backtrack from this is the career I want, so I need this major, and if I need this major, I need these courses. Not the other way around. /</p> <p>49. When I was there, it seemed like I can’t do this right now./</p> <p>50. So, maybe I need to talk to someone./</p> <p>51. If I could figure it out, I’d love to try again. It would be awesome. /</p> <p>You were successful in high school and during freshman year, and are successful teaching dance, which seem to indicate you’re capable of academic and career success. Did you know that there are career counselors on campus and career tests you can take -- grown-up advisors that can help you figure out this puzzle?</p> <p>P1: 52. No. See, I feel so completely at the bottom because I have no direction./</p> <p>Well, we have some direction – we have</p>	<p>44. P1 felt free to ask surface questions during Orientation, but not core questions about academic / career decision-making.</p> <p>45. She did ok in school, but not her best because she didn’t know what she was doing.</p> <p>46. She felt positive that she tried and felt the confusion was too negative.</p> <p>47. She would return to UM in a “heartbeat” if she had a goal and knew what she wanted to do.</p> <p>48. P1 wants to establish a career goal and then decide upon an academic major. She feels UM asks students to decide upon a major first.</p> <p>49. Her freshman year, she felt she couldn’t do it at that time.</p> <p>50. She thinks she needs to talk to somebody.</p> <p>51. She would return to campus if she could decide upon a career and an academic major.</p> <p>52. She feels she has no direction and thus, is at the bottom.</p>
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<p>ruled-out physics as a major.</p> <p>P1: 53. (Laughter) Not gonna be a doctor or physics major so I can rule some things out./ 54. I just feel like I wouldn't know what to say to a counselor. /</p> <p>So, if you did know what to say to a counselor, you might say, "if I'm going into education and I don't want to teach at the end of all this, what can I do then?"</p> <p>P1: 55. Yes! Exactly! That's why I can't decide. What if it doesn't work out? I don't want to get a degree and end up saying, "Welcome to Wal-Mart!" /</p> <p>Wouldn't that be something! Kinda sounds like your college experience was both positive and negative.</p> <p>P1: 56. Overall, I felt all those emotions. /</p> <p>You gave it a shot and weren't a failure. It felt like there were too many roads to choose from, too many paths and not any direction.</p> <p>P1: 57. Exactly! I went to college and thought it would come, but it hasn't yet./ 58. It wasn't can I do it, it was can I <i>be it</i>? /</p> <p>Can I be it - is it me?</p> <p>P1: 59. Exactly! You are picking my mind./</p> <p>Teaching dance to little ones and being successful shows you can do it. But is it you? And, if it is you, do you have to have an education degree?</p> <p>P1: 60. Yes. Do I?</p> <p>To teach in schools, you need an education degree. To teach dance to little ones, you can have an education degree, art or dance degree, or even communications degree.</p> <p>P1: 61. Wow! Nobody told me that./ 62. See, this is so helpful. That is what was missing from my experience. Nobody sat down with me and talked to me./</p>	<p>53. She doesn't want study the sciences.</p> <p>54. She wouldn't know what to say to a counselor.</p> <p>55. P1 is scared of getting a degree and it not working out. She's scared of ending up working as a greeter at Wal-Mart.</p> <p>56. She felt good and bad about college.</p> <p>57. She thought attending college would provide her with academic / career direction. 58. She knew she could do it [education major], but she wasn't sure she could BE a teacher.</p> <p>59. She knew she could be a teacher, but wasn't sure it was right for her.</p> <p>60. She wants to know if she has to have an education degree to teach dance to little ones.</p> <p>61. She didn't know she could teach dance with a degree other than education. 62. She felt like nobody really talked to her.</p>
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<p>63. They don't know me and I'm totally clueless, and they are telling me courses to take and I'm like "why?"/</p> <p>Sounds like you felt cautious about "why", but didn't feel comfortable to ask. But you didn't want to make waves, so you were quiet and took the course you were told even though you didn't understand why.</p> <p>P1: 64. Yeah – like why take History or Poetry. How does that help me? I wouldn't think to take Communications or History of Dance./</p> <p>65. I need to know how they connect, that would be very helpful. If I really focused, then I could do it. But if I don't understand why./</p> <p>66. I love the kids but the part of teaching I don't like is that the kids rely on you and their parents too. It's a lot of responsibility and I don't want to let them down./</p> <p>I'd think that if you weren't a good teacher, you wouldn't have been given a second year contract; the kids wouldn't hug you and the parents wouldn't ask you to stay.</p> <p>P1: 67. They are so cute. I was thinking of not teaching dance again; but the parents said yes./</p> <p>68. But I wanted to know why. Why am I good at it? If I could figure out how I'm good relates to teaching, I could do it. That would be extremely helpful. If I could see it linked./</p> <p>69. Nobody answered my questions but I didn't ask. I think I need people to come into my face and be like ok .. you need to do this. If they aren't coming at me, I won't go to them. I'm a little quieter. /</p> <p>70. They should make it a requirement to completely talk to a career counselor. If that had happened, like now, this is so helpful, I may have stayed./</p> <p>71. I felt like everyone knows what they are doing, but me./</p> <p>If it were required, would you have talked to the counselor?</p> <p>P1: 72. Yes. Maybe in Orientation or in the Transition course. Maybe a counselor could come to the high school after you were</p>	<p>63. Her advisor didn't know P1 but still told her to take certain courses even though P1 felt clueless about why she should take the courses.</p> <p>64. P1 never figured out why she had to take generals.</p> <p>65. She needs to understand how the courses connect and support an academic major/ career choice.</p> <p>66. She feels teaching is a lot of responsibility and doesn't want to disappoint anyone.</p> <p>67. She was thinking of not teaching dance next year, but thinks the kids are cute. The parents encouraged her to return.</p> <p>68. She desperately wants to know how her personality and skills are linked to teaching.</p> <p>69. She is somewhat quiet and need people to be more aggressive in checking-in with her.</p> <p>70. P1 thinks it is helpful to talk to a career counselor and it should be mandatory for freshman to do so.</p> <p>71. P1 felt like all other students have it together and know what they are doing at college.</p> <p>72. She thinks that UM counselors should visit newly admitted freshman in high school and talk with them so they know someone.</p>
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<p>accepted and knowing someone you could go to, if they were actually from the college. /</p> <p>I can see how you came to UM with an idea, but no clue. It is so big.</p> <p>P1: 73. Yes! It is overwhelming. You can literally do anything or go in any direction./</p> <p>Except Physics – we ruled that one out.</p> <p>P1: 74. Laughter. Yes – that one is ruled out./</p> <p>So, if I pick a major, I have to pick courses.</p> <p>P1: 75. Yes. But you have to know what the courses are. What is this class?/ 76. So, basically, it's fear to put myself out there and ask. / 77. I was really confused, overwhelmed, afraid and unfocused./</p> <p>If you were to return to UM, how would you overcome the confusion, fear and being unfocused?</p> <p>P1: 78. Well, I'd come and talk to you whenever something came up. I need guidance. Peer advisors have their own lives. Talking to a counselor would help me. If I knew more about majors./</p> <p>We haven't talked yet about your experience of deciding not to return?</p> <p>P1: 79. It wasn't a big deal because there's the possibility of going back. They know I'll figure it out and go back. But I don't know. Who knows what's going to happen. My parents are supportive and talk about it all the time./ 80. My mom was a wife and now that she's not a wife, she's nothing. She is like, "you need your own thing and don't be dependent upon a man". / 81. And I don't want that. But the only thing I've ever known I wanted was a family. I think because that's what my mom was. That is it exactly. Being a mom is all I know. /</p> <p>And writing books and teaching dance.</p>	<p>73. She was overwhelmed freshman year by all the courses and majors.</p> <p>74. She has ruled-out physics as a major.</p> <p>75. She didn't know all the courses, what they were about. 76. She was afraid to ask anyone for help. 77. She was confused, overwhelmed, afraid and unfocused during her first year.</p> <p>78. P1 believes if she returns to UM, it would be helpful for her to talk to a career counselor and learn about the majors offered other than education.</p> <p>79. Leaving college isn't a big deal to P1 because the possibility to return still exists and her parents would support a decision to return.</p> <p>80. Her mother was a stay-at home mom and wife and is now divorced or "nothing". P1's mom wants her to be financially independent.</p> <p>81. All P1 has ever known is that she wants to be a wife and mother; perhaps because that is what her mother modeled for her – marriage and motherhood is "all she knows".</p>
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<p>P1. 82. Yeah, writing the book came so easy to me. There's something about my life that children should always be involved./</p> <p>So, maybe teach in schools, at a daycare, teach dance, or write children's books ...</p> <p>P1. 83. My mom has a daycare now and I help. I like it. A big thing for me is the experience before I commit to it. I don't know if I'm going to like it. I think having experience on campus would have helped. /</p> <p>84. Maybe I should take just one class. I could do that. /</p> <p>85. There are too many doors./</p> <p>We've been talking for an hour, so reflecting on your positive, negative and neutral experiences attending UM and then deciding not to continue, you felt..</p> <p>P1: 86. Overwhelmed, confused, boxed-in to one career. /</p> <p>87. Part of me wants to figure it out and go back./</p> <p>What's the other part want?</p> <p>P1: 88. I don't know./</p> <p>If you did know ...</p> <p>P1: 89. I would tell you. I just don't know. I truly don't know.</p> <p>Well, we are done with our hour. I want to thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me.</p>	<p>82. She realizes that writing children's books is natural to her and that she loves being around children.</p> <p>83. She has experience helping at her mother's daycare and enjoys it.</p> <p>84. P1 is thinking of weaning herself back to campus and taking one course.</p> <p>85. She feels there are so many possibilities.</p> <p>86. P1 felt overwhelmed, confused, and forced into feeling trapped by deciding upon a major she wasn't sure of.</p> <p>87. Part of her wants to determine her goals academically and career-wise and return to school.</p> <p>88. The other part of her doesn't know what it wants.</p> <p>89. She truly does not know what she wants to do.</p>
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P1 (CD) -Level Three, Narrative Based on Emergent Themes

In high school, P1 was not sure what she wanted to major in during college, but she knew she wanted to “work hard and accomplish something.” She never felt an “urge to go to college”, but knew she should and realized “everyone else was going.” She registered for classes with her best friend which increased her motivation to attend college. During her senior year of high school, she wrote a children’s book and read it to elementary school children for her Senior Project. It was such an exciting, positive experience for her that she thought she might become a kindergarten teacher.

P1 prepared to attend The University of Montana by attending Summer Orientation and a one-credit Freshman Transition summer course. The two programs provided her an overwhelming amount of information and an “understanding of the school,” yet did not guide her toward a major. She felt “completely really alone” and “confused” first semester even after attending orientation and the transition course. She knew her parents supported her decision to attend college, but she could not ask them for advice or guidance as neither had attended college. While she knew she needed guidance, she felt “confused, overwhelmed, afraid and unfocused” and just too scared to put herself out there and ask questions.

When P1 began classes first semester, she did not want to declare a major as she felt it was a life-long decision and was afraid of changing her mind. She met with her peer advisor whose role she thought was to help her decide upon courses, a major and ultimate career goal. Instead, her peer advisor asked her what courses she wanted to take which caused P1 disappointed and increased confusion. Since she was not confident in her academic major selection, she did not know what courses to take so she just “picked classes.” She registered for required General Education Requirements courses but felt that without a declared major, taking “random” courses was “pointless.” She soon realized that even though she was experiencing courses from all academic areas she still was not focused on a clear goal. Without a clear goal, she thought “why bother?”

As P1 took General Education courses, she did not see how the courses connected to teaching. As her peer advisor encouraged her to take different courses, she wanted to ask “why” and “how” the courses connect to education. She felt that if she could understand how the courses were “linked” to teaching it would be extremely helpful. P1 believes that if she had been required to talk to a career counselor her freshman year, she might have returned for her sophomore year. She stated that in college you can “go in any direction” which caused her to feel absolutely overwhelmed.

P1 felt “clueless” and “confused” by a deficiency of core information when she arrived on campus. She felt that while she did ask questions at Orientation about where to eat and how the Griz card works, she was not comfortable or given opportunity to ask a core question - “what am I going to do?” She felt alone and in need of someone to talk to in depth about her academic goals. She believed “everyone knows what they are doing”, but her. Her peer advising meeting caused her to experience overwhelming feelings of information overload. Her peer advisor, who P1 liked very much and thought was responsible for guiding her academically, pushed her into picking classes. Instead, she wanted to talk to someone about her interests and personality to see what majors / career paths she might “mesh” well with. She felt hurriedly pushed to select classes without full

discussion or being given options. She was surprised she was not even asked what level students or subjects she wanted to teach.

Freshman first semester, P1 was doing ok in school, but not close to her best. The semester was a positive experience in that she wanted to try college and did try, but negative in that it was terribly confusing. At the end of first semester, she wanted to quit but decided to return for second semester and try to be more focused. However, mid-way through the second semester she no longer “cared.” At this point, the decision not to return to campus for her sophomore year was easy, even though a part of her wanted to continue her education. She thought that if she took time off school she could get a job teaching dance and what she wanted to study and do with her life would eventually come to her. She felt like she couldn’t continue college without a clearly identified goal.

P1 became very anxious and afraid about making a “final decision” and declaring a major as she felt she would be “boxed-in” to a career. She feared earning a degree and the degree not being a good fit for her. She thought that during the first semester of college her academic and career goals would “come” to her. She was confident she could do it [earn an education degree], but lacked confidence that she could “be it” [a teacher]. She was scared of being boxed-in by an education degree and felt uninformed of other options that would allow her to teach or be involved with children as a career.

Quitting school was not a “big deal” to her because the possibility of returning exists and her parents would support her decision to return to finish her studies. Her mother, a high school educated recently divorced stay-at-home mother, is pushing P1 to “do her own thing” and not “be dependent upon a man” which is making P1 even more anxious and eager to determine an academic / career path and return to campus.

P1 would return to The University of Montana “in a heartbeat” if she had a clear academic and career goal. She feels confident she would concentrate and excel. Currently, she feels “completely at the bottom” because she lacks “direction.” She has a strong desire to talk with someone to help her determine a goal so she can return to campus and continue studies. She thinks that if she returns to campus and starts slowly, taking only one class a semester, she will gain confidence and direction, eventually graduating. However, without clear direction there are “too many doors.” Part of her wants to figure it out and return to campus and the other part truly does not know.

Data Analyses, Levels One-Three

P2 (AB), Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

<p>Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.</p> <p>P2. 1. Got to college and moved into the dorms and enjoyed the hell out of them. I lived in the all male dorm (Elrod), right away attended all my classes, was nervous, <i>very nervous</i>./</p> <p>2. Then I met people and began the partying scene that every freshman does. So, you know, continued on and got good grades first semester even though I was partying./</p> <p>3. Didn't have a job./</p> <p>4. Classes went great and I <i>never</i> thought I wouldn't make it through the next few years of college./</p> <p>5. I got back second semester and got a job at ##### Bar and that's when my nights turned into working from 8pm -2:30 in the morning and getting up for classes./</p> <p>6. I moved into my own house with my cousin and a friend and that's when everything started downhill./</p> <p>7. My grades started to slip./</p> <p>8. I started taking a German class because I was in Chamber Choral and wanted to sing in Europe. The professor recommended I take German, even though I didn't need it./</p> <p>9. German didn't work well, on top of working at Stock's – like I said everything went downhill. Picked up smoking, drinking - stuff I learned freshman year in college. Played video games – God – working at ##### – lots had to do with the job, lack of sleep and not ever doing homework and not having any idea what was going on in class. Always trying to cheat, get work from friends, never going to study groups./</p> <p>10. Then at the end of the semester, I thought instead of continuing the downhill slide, why not take a year off or a semester? I decided it</p>	<p>1. P2 moved into the all male dorm, Elrod, and enjoyed living on campus and attended all classes. He was very nervous.</p> <p>2. He started partying his freshman year, but managed to still get good grades.</p> <p>3. He did not have a job first semester.</p> <p>4. Classes were great and he never thought he wouldn't make it through college.</p> <p>5. Second semester he got a job at ##### Bar and worked the 8 pm – 2:30 am shift and still got up for classes.</p> <p>6. Then he moved into a house with his cousin and a friend and everything started downhill.</p> <p>7. His grades slipped.</p> <p>8. A professor recommended he take German, even though he didn't need it, if he wanted to sing in Europe.</p> <p>9. German didn't work out well and everything went downhill. He started smoking, drinking, playing video games when he worked at #####. He lacked sleep and didn't do homework and was lost in class.</p> <p>10. At the end of second semester, rather than continue to get bad grades, he thought about taking a semester or year off as a stop-out and</p>
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<p>was a stop-out, not drop-out. I talked to my parents and decided to stop-out instead of continuing and getting lower grades making it harder to go back to school./</p> <p>11. I always had an intention of continuing school until the end of the summer. /</p> <p>12. I was continuing at ##### and partying – God./</p> <p>13. My goal to raise money during summer hadn't worked out at all. At the end of summer, I decided not to register but to continue to work at #####. Went to talk to my mom and said why not I stop-out fall semester./</p> <p>14. What was the original question?</p> <p>I asked if you could share your experience of deciding not to continue at UM - share any negative, positive and neutral thoughts and feelings about your decision and experience of leaving college. How was it for you?</p> <p>P2. 15. It was very easy – the decision – you know. Excuse me – it wasn't easy. The decision to stop-out was painful for my Dad because he wanted me to continue school. My mom agreed with me saying instead of bad grades, she knew working at Stocks and partying weren't the best decisions - we discussed it. It was painful and tough for her, but she agreed with me; I was taken back by it./</p> <p>16. I figured I could make it through all 4 years of college lickety-split, but nothing is quick, it took a lot of time./</p> <p>17. Let's stop school and continue working, raising money. Well, working and not raising money (the \$10,000 to go to Europe to sign in Europe and its my favorite thing) felt <i>horrible</i> – that was one decision that felt <i>awful</i> that I continued to work and not being in school and – I felt awful!/ 18. My older cousin told me it was the best experience he ever had to go to Europe and sing and I wanted that experience./</p> <p>19. For me to not raise the money and to make major poor decisions that I made when I started working in the downtown area, it felt awful. It felt awful. Not to have money in my pocket, to know I was scarping by paycheck to paycheck. I was making money, but spending so much money. /</p> <p>20. The bar scene was awesome. It has</p>	<p>talked to his parents about it.</p> <p>11. He intended to return to school, until the end of summer.</p> <p>12. He was still working at ##### and partying.</p> <p>13. He intended to save money during the summer but it didn't work out. So, at the end of summer he decided not to register for fall, to stop-out.</p> <p>14. He forgot what he was talking about.</p> <p>15. The decision to stop-out was not easy for him yet painful for his Dad, but his mom agreed with his decision although it was painful and tough for her.</p> <p>16. He figured he could make it through 4 years of college, but realized it took a lot of time.</p> <p>17. He stopped school and worked but didn't save money to return to school and go to Europe. He felt horrible, the decision felt awful.</p> <p>18. His cousin encouraged him to go to Europe and he wanted that experience.</p> <p>19. It felt awful to him to not save money, to make poor decisions and scrape by paycheck to paycheck even though he was making money.</p> <p>20. He thought the bar scene was awesome, but</p>
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<p>changed, but umm, the bar, I was making so much money, that $\frac{3}{4}$ my tip money was going back into the bar. As soon as I turned 21, I would go to other bars, different friends./</p> <p>21. I look back now – they weren’t friends, they were acquaintances- they were people I met one night, they knew me as the bartender at #####./</p> <p>22. I have charisma, not to be bragging – I have that type personality.</p> <p>23. They didn’t give a shit – they just wanted to hang out and bullshit and get free drinks./</p> <p>24. Oh, I said “shit” and it’s on tape. ”.</p> <p>Its, okay. I’ll change it to “poop.”</p> <p>P2. 25. No, change it to shoot.</p> <p>How about “bullshoot?” So, your first semester was good.</p> <p>P2. 26. It was awesome!/ 27. When it comes to things like – it was the drinking. I could drink and study at the same time. I still retained a B average. I got good enough grades. I set it into motion, downhill./</p> <p>28. I enjoyed the friends I made, some I’ll keep the rest of my life that I made freshman year of college. Those friends I had fun with freshman year – such a great time./</p> <p>29. Dropped out of school and I felt soo – that was the big thing about not going to school – I felt soo – ok, here we go, like a pile of shit. I felt worthless after a semester of not going to school. /</p> <p>30. But I <i>still</i> made the decision not to go back the next semester. I don’t even really remember what made me decide not to go back – it felt right. I was balling./</p> <p>31. Took the entire year off, my health went downhill, my friends only saw me at the bar and that was what my life was, the bar. All my friends were in school – I had no one./</p> <p>32. Now, I’m up at 7 am, go to work and have my nights open to relax, watch movies. Not staying up til 3 or 4 and getting up for classes.</p> <p>So, if I hear you right, your decision to leave school was a decision to continue school because you were leaving school to raise money to continue school and sing. Doesn’t</p>	<p>most his money was going back into bars.</p> <p>21. He reflects and realizes his new friends were only acquaintances.</p> <p>22. P2 feels he has charisma and a charismatic personality.</p> <p>23. His new friends did not give a shit about him, they just wanted free drinks.</p> <p>24. He realizes he said shit and it’s on tape.</p> <p>25. He wants to change shit to shoot.</p> <p>26. His first semester was awesome.</p> <p>27. He got a B average even though he was drinking and starting a downhill motion.</p> <p>28. He made friends freshman year.</p> <p>29. He felt like a pile of shit about dropping out of school and worthless after a semester out of school.</p> <p>30. Even though he felt worthless and was balling, he still decided not to return to school.</p> <p>31. The year he took off school, his friends were in school and he had no one.</p> <p>32. Now, he gets up at 7 am, goes to work and relaxes and watches movies at night, rather than staying up til 3 or 4.</p>
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<p>sound like that worked too well for ya.</p> <p>P2. 33. (Laughter) It didn't pan out like I wanted it to – like I said, I felt <i>absolutely horrible</i>./</p> <p>34. I never kept more than \$1500 in the bank. My mother doesn't even know that, maybe \$1000. My goal was \$10,000./</p> <p>35. I was a failure – I didn't even make it halfway.</p> <p>You got a tenth of the way.</p> <p>P2. 36. I was a tenth of a way, never more. I probably could have save \$20,000 that summer, I made so much money, but it all went back into the bar. That's how the bar owner loved it. We played games with coins, who ever lost paid for a round of shots. I didn't care – it was fun, and you know, umm ... so ... I never raised the money./</p> <p>37. I felt horrible and I look at it now. I'm going back to school and will do everything in my power to save money and go to Europe. I'm going to take a second chance. Europe might be my graduation present to myself.</p> <p>So before your job at the bar, thinking about your experience second semester making the decision to take a little time off, how were you doing academically?</p> <p>P2. 38. That was the semester I balled, had a horrible time, didn't understand anything. I had three years of French in high school and tried to learn German – huh!</p> <p>Sounds like maybe stopping-out to save money for Europe was a good front, a safe excuse to quit.</p> <p>P2. 39. Yes, very much so. Easier than saying I'm not doing so well and I don't know what I'm doing. It was a front, saying screw this, I need to get out of here before I dig myself a big hole./</p> <p>40. But, yet, in the back of my mind, in my heart I thought I could raise money and go back and go to Europe./</p> <p>41. But, I lost site of my goal when I dropped out. My mom would ask, and I would say, Oh,</p>	<p>33. He felt absolutely horrible about leaving school.</p> <p>34. He was not able to keep money in the bank and didn't tell his mother.</p> <p>35. He felt like he was a failure because he couldn't save money.</p> <p>36. He made a lot of money but spent it all in the bar having fun.</p> <p>37. He felt horrible, but now is going back to school. He thinks he can succeed with his second chance, save money and go to Europe.</p> <p>38. Second semester he balled and had a horrible time and didn't understand anything, especially German.</p> <p>39. He used stopping out to save money for Europe as an excuse rather than saying he wasn't doing well and didn't know what he was doing. He needed to get out of college before he dug himself a big hole.</p> <p>40. He felt he could raise the money and go back to school and go to Europe.</p> <p>41. He lost site of his goal when he left college.</p>
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<p>yeah saving money, mom.</p> <p>Looking back, how did not being in school make you lose site of your goals?</p> <p>P2. 42. Alcohol blurred my vision. I don't even drink that much – it was that year./</p> <p>43. My boss only cared if I was there, if I was making money for the bar, if I was late, but not about my school or if I were drinking.</p> <p>Sounds like Stocks became your life – your family, friends, hobby, and work – school got lost, your goals got lost.</p> <p>P2. 44. I liked working at ####, I kept in touch with my parents and brother, but it wasn't the same./</p> <p>45. God – what else? I enjoy answering the questions.</p> <p>So freshman year ...</p> <p>P2. 46. I was Media Arts major. I enjoyed psychology and media arts and think that was it. I was going to be a TA and I got back to school and I declared Business Management, got a new advisor – met him once./</p> <p>47. I kept Paulette Nooney, but she wasn't really my advisor. She and I bonded – she's awesome. She knew my mom from 25 years ago./</p> <p>48. During my last semester, academically I went downhill, had a new family at ####./</p> <p>49. It was like I cared, but that was a front. Behind that, I didn't care. I was having fun and making oodles of money.</p> <p>Where'd the “caring” go?</p> <p>P2. 50. It .. umm ... not because I wasn't doing well in school ... hmmm ... I loved Choir, got made fun of for singing. /</p> <p>51. The drive left academically when I became comfortable in ####. My comfort level increased at the bar and academically it decreased, going downhill./</p> <p>52. Choir even went downhill cuz I started smoking – how can you get a C in Choir? I did! Unheard of./</p> <p>53. I was attending most my courses, well</p>	<p>42. P2 stated alcohol blurred his vision.</p> <p>43. His boss did not care about his schooling or if he was drinking, only if he was at work, making money for the bar, or late to work.</p> <p>44. He liked working at #### Bar.</p> <p>45. P2 was enjoying the interview.</p> <p>46. He enjoyed media arts and psychology degree and was going to be a TA. When he returned second semester, he switched majors to Business Management and got a new advisor.</p> <p>47. He kept Paulette Nooney as his advisor as he bonded with her and his mom knew her for 25 years.</p> <p>48. Second semester, he went downhill academically due to ####.</p> <p>49. P2 said he cared that he was not in school, but he really didn't care because he was having fun and making oodles of money.</p> <p>50. He loved Choir even though he got made fun of for singing.</p> <p>51. He felt more comfortable at #### at the time he was academically going downhill.</p> <p>52. Choir went downhill when he started smoking and he got a C.</p> <p>53. He was trying to attend most his courses.</p>
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<p>trying to. It was hard, very hard.</p> <p>You mentioned you stopped caring - as you look back did any professor, staff, or advisor ask where you had been, how you were doing, make you feel cared for?</p> <p>P2. 54. Yeah – it’s nice to see you, no. Study groups./</p> <p>55. My whole life, I’ll say it one more time, the bar was my family, my goal – no longer school, choir, or friends.</p> <p>Wow – the bar pulled you like a magnet from your goals. What was that magnet that pulled you so far from goals? And, what drew you to school in the beginning?</p> <p>P2. 56. Fun! Having so much fun. Why go to school when it’s not fun. /</p> <p>57. Why get an education if I can make money at the bar?/</p> <p>58. One of the worst decisions – I look back and at least it was a good learning experience.</p> <p>Why get an education if I can have a fun career as a bartender.</p> <p>P2. 59. I feel like I’m straying from your question, talking so much about ##### Bar, but all my academic, school, money, girlfriend, friend, choir decisions were made cuz of it./</p> <p>60. The promise I made to my parents to save money was never kept. I had troubles paying rent. /</p> <p>61. Like I said, things are popping into my head./</p> <p>62. I started gambling – playing poker.</p> <p>More fun, more friends, less saving money.</p> <p>P2. 63. Staying up late, more friends. I was a cute little puppy chewing and digging – the puppy that every dog own would hate, but love.</p> <p>Your mom must have been so proud of you during this time.</p> <p>P2. 64. I don’t even want to ask her. You should interview her. It would be an interesting tape for me to listen to./</p>	<p>54. No one seemed to care that he was missing, not even study groups.</p> <p>55. The bar became his family and goal, it was no longer school, choir or friends.</p> <p>56. He came to school to have fun.</p> <p>57. He didn’t understand why he should get an education if he could make money at the bar.</p> <p>58. Working at the bar was one of his worst decisions, but a good learning experience.</p> <p>59. P2 felts like he strayed from the question and talked too much about. #####. However, his academic, school, money, girlfriend, friend, choir decisions were made because of #####.</p> <p>60. He didn’t keep the promise to his parents to save money.</p> <p>61. Memories pop into his head.</p> <p>62. He started to gamble and play poker.</p> <p>63. He compares himself to a cute puppy, chewing and digging, that the owner would hate but love.</p> <p>64. He doesn’t want to ask his mom about this time. He thinks it would be good to interview her and for him to listen to the tape.</p>
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<p>65. My Dad was unhappy, I will never forget that, he didn't want me to live in the dorms. My parents were against each other. He wanted me to live at home but my mom wanted me to meet new friends./</p> <p>66. All freshman like to party. My brother is a cute puppy too – chubby little, partying 3rd year puppy. He's bad./</p> <p>67. I've strayed – what was I saying?</p> <p>Your parents ...</p> <p>P2. 68. Very not happy. I will never regret living in the dorms. I visited at home, did laundry, so many friends met my parents doing laundry on Sunday night while my mom cooked. Every weekend I brought friends to do laundry, play pool, watch tv, eat, never do homework. It was fun. My focus was friends and having fun. /</p> <p>69. But, I still went to class. Oh, I can't play Frisbee gotta go to class. Got what I could. Could tell you where I went, not what they talked about. It's so easy not to have to go to class. In a few classes, I would think, crap I better go, they're taking roll./</p> <p>70. After all my experiences, I'm ready to go back to school. I have to get that out. I have focus now.</p> <p>Where'd your focus go and how'd it come back?</p> <p>P2. 71. I want an education. I want a degree, I really, really do.</p> <p>So, what's the different between freshman year wanting an education and now, wanting an education?</p> <p>P2. 72. Maturity. I can say "no" and it's okay. They will still be my friends. Freshman year, I couldn't say "no". I wanted to go to college and I can remember studying for a couple tests, but friends could say, you can do that later. I would stop studying to be with friends.</p> <p>I noticed you said, freshman year I wanted to go to college, but just now you said I want a degree.</p>	<p>65. His Dad was unhappy that he was living in the dorms and his mom wanted him to live in the dorm to make new friends.</p> <p>66. He states that all freshman party and that his brother parties too.</p> <p>67. He's strayed from the question and forgot what he was saying.</p> <p>68. His parents were not very happy with his focus on friends and having fun. He did visit home and bring his friends on Sundays to do laundry, play pool, watch tv and eat, but not to do homework.</p> <p>69. He went to class, but doesn't know what they talked about and felt it was easy not to go to class. P2 felt it would be good if teachers took roll.</p> <p>70. He is ready to return to school and believes he has focus now.</p> <p>71. He wants an education and a degree.</p> <p>72. He has maturity now and can say "no" to friends, when freshman year he could not say "no". He wanted to study for tests, but would stop to spend time with friends.</p>
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<p>P2. 73. Completely different wants. No, I need a degree. When you get older you realize there are lots of summer jobs I don't want to do the rest of my life. I don't want to be a roofer, don't want to work at ##### Bar! /</p> <p>74. Can you believe they offered me a job 3-4 weeks ago, but I turned it down? Been down that road. I work my butt off and they compliment me and want me back./</p> <p>75. Excuse me – hey - I just thought of something. Freshman year, I got a lot of night shifts; as soon as I stopped school, I got day shifts and didn't make as much money. They tricked me - I was lured in. (long pause and rubs forehead).</p>	<p>73. He needs a degree and realizes that he does not want to do any of his summer jobs for the rest of his life or work at ##### Bar.</p> <p>74. Because he works his butt off and gets compliments, he was offered a job again at Stockman's bar but turned it down.</p> <p>75. He realizes that freshman year he got night shifts, but when he stopped out of school, he got day shifts and didn't make as much money. He feels tricked and lured in.</p>
<p>Lots to think about.</p> <p>P2. 76. This is lots to remember./</p> <p>77. My parents didn't know I wasn't saving or focused on returning to school – they thought I had a great job, saving lots of money, networking with people I'll need in business relationships in the future./</p> <p>78. I strayed – let's go back and talk about that.</p>	<p>76. There is a lot for P2 to remember.</p> <p>77. His parents didn't know he was not saving money or focused on returning to school. They thought he had a great job and was saving money and networking.</p> <p>78. He feels like he strayed from the original question.</p>
<p>Reflecting on freshman year ...</p> <p>P2. 79. Great experience; had the academic ability, could have continued, made it through freshman year, skated on thin ice, switched my major, was doing generals./</p> <p>80. Like I said, started at ##### Bar and that was the end of it. The worst was I always had to work Saturdays.</p>	<p>79. P2 had a great experience freshman year, had academic ability, was skating on thin ice, switched majors and was taking generals.</p> <p>80. ##### Bar was the end of college and the worst was that he worked Saturdays.</p>
<p>So, when you stopped out, it sounds like you left school academically and socially, gave up Saturday fun times.</p> <p>P2. 81. I did leave a lot of social things. My college friends could only see me at the bar, I couldn't go to a concert or a football game, nope./</p> <p>82. I had to work and was too afraid to quit, I wanted to stay there./</p> <p>83. You know ... I had the drive, I could have continued sophomore year./</p> <p>84. It lured me in. I lost friends working there, good friends and made acquaintances./</p> <p>85. I lost my way, I just lost my way. (long</p>	<p>81. He left a lot of socializing with his college friends at concerts and football games.</p> <p>82. He had to work and was afraid to quit.</p> <p>83. He had the drive and could have continued sophomore year.</p> <p>84. He was lured in and lost friends working at Stockmans' bar and made acquaintances.</p> <p>85. He lost his way.</p>

<p>pause)</p> <p>Hmm - lost your way – sounds lonely.</p> <p>P2. 86. Yeah – in ways. (long pause)</p> <p>In what way could UM, your family, your friends helped you to find your way?</p> <p>P2. 87. I was completely lost./</p> <p>88. I don't even know – maybe slap me with a ruler. Tell me, go to bed earlier, you have a test! /</p> <p>89. My grades were ok./</p> <p>90. I was always exhausted, stressed out of my mind, so stressed. Scared my parents would find out. /</p> <p>91. I was 20, having too much fun, not worried about school. Like I said, it was a drug. I needed the drug – the excitement, stimulation, fun, feeling like everyone knew you and walked up to you to shake your hand. People bought me drinks, everybody loved the bartender.</p> <p>Everybody was your friend, it was fun, you were somebody.</p> <p>P2. 92. I was having so much fun talking to people, that I realized I'm a great people person, a good communicator. I should be in Communications. I need to be around people. I've pushed away the negative stuff with ##### Bar and kept the positive stuff./</p> <p>93. I've spent time away, matured, and I <i>need</i> to go back to school./</p> <p>94. UM is a great school in a lot of aspects./</p> <p>95. I don't think UM could have done anything to keep me in school./</p> <p>96. It was poor decisions freshman year, my poor decisions. That was my saying, poor decisions. /</p> <p>97. You know my friend dropped out. His excuse was that he was not college material. He's smart. /</p> <p>98. If you apply yourself, you're college material. My parents tell me, if I spent as much time in my books as I do with video games, I could be president of the U.S.</p> <p>I hear you talk about Communications as a</p>	<p>86. In ways, he was lonely.</p> <p>87. He was completely lost.</p> <p>88. He felt that the university could have slapped him with a ruler and told him to go to bed early because of his tests.</p> <p>89. His grades were ok.</p> <p>90. He was exhausted, stressed out of his mind and scared his parents would find out.</p> <p>91. He was 20, having fun, not worried about school. The excitement, stimulation and fun feelings were like a drug to him. He liked the feeling that everyone knew him as the bartender and bought him drinks.</p> <p>92. He was having fun talking to people and realized he is a people person and a good communicator. He decided he should study Communications as he needs to be around people.</p> <p>93. During his time away, he matured and needs to go back to school.</p> <p>94. He believes UM is a great school.</p> <p>95. UM couldn't have kept him in school.</p> <p>96. He made poor decisions freshman year.</p> <p>97. His friend dropped out stating that he wasn't college material even though he is smart.</p> <p>98. P2 stated that if you apply yourself you can be college material.</p>
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<p>major, how could we have gotten you there earlier?</p> <p>P2. 99. If I were to take someone positive out of Stocks, it's talking to people, being in front of people, in control. That is one big positive thing. Learned people skills, where my strengths are – that I got from my father. I put them to the test, to use, maybe I should have found something other than Stocks to learn those people skills.</p> <p>Something like student government, like you did in high school?</p> <p>P2. 100. Exactly! At that time, I had no idea, I kept changing majors, I had no real focus.</p> <p>Out of curiosity, did you ever take a career or personality test to help you figure out an academic or career focus?</p> <p>P2. 101. What are they? Never heard of them. What are they? What do you do?</p> <p>Career Services offers tests that explore your personality, values, and interests and takes the information gathered and matches it to academic majors and / or careers and counselors help to identify your strengths in those areas.</p> <p>P2. 102. I might do that just for the hell of it! Do these tests cost money? I wanna do that. Really? Why isn't that mandatory freshman year. I probably would have helped me a lot. /</p> <p>103. The FIG I took didn't really help me./</p> <p>104. I took the most boring class ever – Media Arts, 3 hrs Wed nites. There's one thing! I never stayed all 3 hours. If roll was taken at the beginning and end of class, I would have stayed.</p> <p>Let's go back to your freshman year, you are no longer you – you are in charge of P2 and your job is to keep P2 in school and doing well.</p> <p>P2. 105. I'm the boss of me? Umm, I would say, once a week you can have fun. I would say read 30- minutes to an hour each night, skim</p>	<p>99. Stock's gave him positive things, like talking to people, being in front of people, people skills, being in control and where his strengths are. He put his strengths to the test, to use.</p> <p>100. Freshman year, he kept changing majors because he had no real focus, no idea.</p> <p>101. He asked what are and what do career tests do.</p> <p>102. He wonders why career tests are not mandatory freshman year and thinks he might do one for the hell of it.</p> <p>103. The FIG didn't help him.</p> <p>104. He took a boring class on Wednesday nights for 3 hours, but never stayed the entire class. He would have stayed if the teacher would have taken roll.</p> <p>105. If he could return to freshman year, he would have fun once a week, read 30 minutes to an hour each night, skim his books and read.</p>
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<p>over the books, keep reading. / 106. You know, I bought my books and I never opened over half. What a waste of money. They would have helped if I read them. I carried them around campus.</p> <p>You looked good! (laughter)</p> <p>P2. 107. Oh, yeah, I had a huge backpack. I never opened them. How do you monitor if student's read? Tests? Pop-quizzes? They only give term tests. Community colleges give lots of pop quizzes, random tests./ 108. More boundaries, more structure.</p> <p>So back to the puppy analogy -- no fence, no boundaries.</p> <p>P2. 109. In college, it's like make community colleges mandatory – a stepping stone from high school to college. Like still in high school, taking college classes, smaller classes.</p> <p>We've talked a lot about ...</p> <p>P2. 110. Wow, this is a great interview. I'm sorry about talking so much about #####. Your question wasn't about ##### Bar, it was about my experience of school./ 111. German kicked my butt combined with everything else.</p> <p>And German wasn't even required for you.</p> <p>P2. 112. And I tried. I gave myself a 2-3 weeks and knew I was failing, not gonna make it. It was too late to drop. That's one thing I remember, you get the W or different letters, you're screwed. You are out and there are no classes to transfer into. Maybe if I had a chance to jump into something else. I was behind, I nearly failed. I could go to study groups with lots of kids, cram as much as I can, it could be possible. I was failing German. Once I knew I was failing, I didn't care. And, I tried, but I said, it was impossible./ 113. I loved psychology, sociology – it was awesome.</p> <p>So, if at the beginning of freshman year ...</p>	<p>106. He did not read his textbooks and felt they were a waste of money. But he took them to class.</p> <p>107. He never opened his books.</p> <p>108. P2 feels that community colleges offer more boundaries and structure.</p> <p>109. He thinks community college should be a stepping stone to college because of the smaller classes.</p> <p>110. He thinks the interview is great but is sorry for talking so much about ##### Bar.</p> <p>111. P2 believes it was German that kicked his butt when combined with everything else.</p> <p>112. He tried German but knew he was failing and it was too late to drop and no classes to transfer into. Once he knew he was failing, he no longer cared and realized it was impossible.</p> <p>113. He loved his psychology and sociology courses.</p>
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<p>P2. 114. I would have chosen a different route./ 115. I was literally bitched out by a teacher at Loyola when I didn't join speech and debate. He knew I had the ability and strength. I didn't think friends would accept me. My parents told me to do it, my brother did and is state champ./ 116. It's important to me to remain in a good point of view in front of my friends. Like at ##### Bar, buying drinks. Staying in the good graces of friends./ 117. If I would have had a way to evaluate the way I started college, what areas to go into, I would have chosen a different route. I needed to focus on me/ 118. I just remembered my first interest out of high school was electrical engineering.</p>	<p>P2 states that if he could do freshman year again, he would chose a different route. 115. He was bitched out by a teacher, who knew he had the ability and strength, when he wouldn't join speech and debate. His parents encouraged him to do it. 116. It is important to P2 to have a good point of view in front of friends - stay in their good graces. 117. P2 believes if he had a way to evaluate what areas to go into when he started college, he would have chosen a different route. He needed to focus on himself. 118. He thought about electrical engineering.</p>
<p>Engineers seems to have stronger math skills and weaker people skills ...</p>	
<p>P2. 119. and I'm not brilliant in math, not good at all./ 120. A lot of friends could, I could have, if there was a class that said, look at your math skills, and I realize I'm horrible at math, and screw up and have to start all over again with a different major./ 121. If you don't want to spend lots of money going to school for 8 years rather than 4, why isn't there a course that helps you along to find what you want to do./ 122. Granted students change their minds. You might change your opinion. Interesting.</p>	<p>119. P2 is not brilliant at math. 120. He thinks that if there was a class that made students look at their skills and realize their strengths, they would not screw up and have to start all over again in different majors. 121. He wonders why there isn't a course to help students find what they want to do. 122. He thinks students might change their minds and opinions.</p>
<p>We've been talking about an hour ..</p>	
<p>P2. 123. Hmm... you know what's funny? Even though you are not counseling me, I'm glad I got to get this off my chest and had an opportunity to talk about it. A lot of things were just spouting out my head. You aren't trying to help me, just listening.</p>	<p>123. P2 feel glad to have an opportunity to talk and get it of his chest as a lot of things were spouting out of his head. He felt listened to, not counseled.</p>
<p>I appreciate your sharing of your thoughts and feelings.</p>	
<p>P2. 124. It's funny that you asked me to do this interview cuz at work last week, I had to drive someone from the University back to campus and he said UM is losing students./ 125. He said that professors seem not to care</p>	<p>124. Last week, he ran into someone at work from UM who told him UM was losing students. 125. The person told P2 that UM is losing</p>

<p>when a student comes to class or leaves school. Why do professors not care?</p> <p>Not care?</p> <p>P2. 126. Yeah, why do professors not give a shit if we drop out of school? They don't care. They are still getting paid, getting more students to come. They don't give a crap – there's more students coming.</p> <p>Why do you suppose students are leaving?</p> <p>P2. 127. Why don't they ask the students? No one is fitting the students; none of the students know what they want to do after high school. No one fit me./</p> <p>128. They do have the FIGs, whole bunch of kids with the same major. Didn't help me. Just put me in a group of kids I became friends with./</p> <p>129. It was only an interest, not a natural ability or personality for media arts. I have the personality to be in communications. I didn't know that. I had no idea./</p> <p>130. My brother is in business but doesn't know what he wants to do with his life. He's a golfer./</p> <p>131. I'm gonna roll with Communications.</p> <p>I have a feeling you are gonna make it this time. We have talked a little over an hour and I want to thank you for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me. I appreciate your time and interesting comments.</p>	<p>students and professors seem not to care if a student comes to class or leaves school.</p> <p>126. He wonders why professors don't give a shit if students drop out of school. He thinks they don't care because they still get paid and there are more students coming.</p> <p>127. P2 wonders why UM doesn't ask students why they are leaving and feels the school does not fit the students and none of the students know what they want to do.</p> <p>128. He recognized that FIGs are interest groups and they helped him make friends.</p> <p>129. He states he had an interest in Media Arts, not the ability or personality for it. That he has the personality for communications, which he did not know freshman year.</p> <p>130. His brother is a business major and golfer but doesn't know what he will do in life.</p> <p>131. P2 is confident he will roll with a communications majors.</p>
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P2 (AB) -Level Three, Narrative Based on Emergent Themes

P2 arrived on campus and moved directly into an all-male dorm and enjoyed it very much, even though he was nervous to begin classes. His parents were happy he was going to college, but his father did not want him to live in the dorms, but to live at home. He met new people and began to party and had “such a great time.” Even though he began to party with his new friends, P2 received good grades (a B average) first semester. His classes went well, first semester was “awesome”, and he was confident he would complete college in four years “lickety-split”. His focus was on friends and having fun, but still attending class.

While P2 had no job first semester, he got a job second semester working the night shift as a bartender at ##### Bar. He moved out of the dorm and into a house with his cousin and a friend. He picked up smoking, drinking, and played a lot of video games. He started gambling (playing poker) and had trouble paying his rent. Because he was working such long hours, he was lacking sleep and no longer had time for homework, reading his textbooks, or study groups so he got homework from friends and began to cheat. His life became the bar and it was then that his grades began to slip. He felt like a “cute little puppy” that was chewing and digging, a puppy the owner would hate and love. He was “exhausted”, “stressed out of his mind”, and worried his parents would find out about his poor grades. He bought into the fun, excitement, and stimulation of being a bartender.

First semester he declared Media Arts as his major and took a FIG. Second semester, he switched majors to Business Management and continued to attend classes. He also took a German course second semester which was not required for his major, but recommended by his Chamber Choral teacher if P2 wanted to travel to Europe with the choral to sing. His cousin had gone to Europe to sing and P2 wanted the same experience. He had such a horrible time in German class that he cried and didn’t understand anything. It was too late in the semester to drop the class so he felt “screwed.” He tried, but felt it was impossible – he was failing German and he stopped caring. His grades went from slipping to a “downhill slide” and it was at this time that he thought about stopping-out and talking to his parents. His goal was to stop-out fall semester to raise money to go to Europe. In his heart he thought he could raise the money and return to campus and join the Choral on the trip to Europe. He was having so much fun at the bar and making so much money that he didn’t care about school. He felt more “comfortable” at the bar just as he began to feel academically uncomfortable at school with grades going downhill.

He began to question why he was going to school when the bar was fun. He questioned the value of an education when he could make such good money at the bar without a degree. The decision to stop-out was difficult for P2 and painful for his father. It was a painful, tough decision for his mother as she felt stopping school was a bad idea, but she agreed. So, P2 stopped-out of school and worked full-time with the plan to save money. The plan failed – he did not save any money and he felt “horrible and came to realize that stopping-out of school was an “awful” decision. Scraping by paycheck to paycheck, working full-time and having no money was a “major poor decision.”

P2 loved the bar scene and made a lot of money and friends, which he now realizes were simply acquaintances who wanted free drinks. His boss was not concerned about his education, only about the bar’s profit margin. Being out of school one semester,

P2 cried a lot, felt “worthless”, “absolutely horrible”, and like “a pile of shit.” Yet, he made the decision to take a second semester off school – an entire year. He had to work Saturdays at the bar so he was not able to attend Griz games or campus concerts; he lost real friends and “lost his way.” He was lonely and felt “completely lost.” He felt like a “failure” as he did not raise or save money even though he made a lot of money at the bar. He “lost site of his goal” as alcohol “blurred his vision.” He had to work and was afraid to quit and felt lured into the bar scene. Stopping-out was “one of the worst decisions” P2 made, but it has been a “good learning experience.”

P3 will be returning to UM this fall and plans to “do everything in his power to save money and go to Europe.” He takes responsibility for his poor decisions freshman year and knows that if he applies himself, he will succeed. He knows he has the academic ability, is more mature and focused, and is now ready to return to school. He wants an education and has learned through his experience that he *needs* a degree because he does not want to make a career out of his random summer jobs including roofing and bartending. His experience at ##### Bar showed him his natural skills, strengths, and needs which involve management and talking with and controlling people. Because he is a “people person” and a “good communicator” he switched his major to Communication Studies and is “gonna roll” with it. He feels confident now that he has focus and a solid idea of his academic goal. He has planned his study skills including only one night a week of fun and reading his textbooks each night.

P2 believes if he had focused on himself, his abilities, strengths and interests, he would have selected a “different route” freshman year. He articulates the need for a course to help students find “what they want to do” so students can graduate in four years and not waste money. He is upset that no one at UM “fit him” to a degree, but an advisor put him in an interest area (Media Arts) in which he held no natural ability or personality match. He was happy to talk about his stopping-out and glad to get it “off his chest.” He still holds some hurt feeling that UM and his professors “didn’t give a crap” that he stopped out.

Data Analyses, Levels One-Three

P3 (MC), Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

<p>Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.</p> <p>P3. 1. I graduated from Sentinel, got good grades/ 2. and that summer I got all enrolled to be a French major at UM and I went to the three-day Orientation and I was really excited and I met a lot of very nice people and I thought it was going to be great. So, up until the first day school actually started, I was completely 100% into it./ 3. At the time I was living with my boyfriend and basically it came down to I couldn't work enough to pay - with my work schedule./ 4. My freshman year, I only went to school maybe 2-3 weeks and realized I couldn't do it physically, I could not do it, it was impossible./ 5. I didn't want to move back home which would have been an option to continue school. So, I thought I would take the semester and save up money and get things in order, figure out my living situation and reassess where I am in school. So that's how freshman year started.</p> <p>And then ...</p> <p>P3. 6. Well, I started school again the next semester and I was only taking, I wasn't a full-time student, I was only taking 2-3 classes because I was working full time at my job, 40 hours a week. So, I started spring semester, end of January./ 7. I don't really remember how long I went – maybe a few weeks. I realized, nope I can't do this right now. It's too much - it's not the right time. Also, I didn't have scholarships so I was paying for school. My parents don't have enough money to pay for school with 3 other children. There was so much responsibility on</p>	<p>1. P3 graduated from Sentinel and earned good grades. 2. Summer after graduation, P3 enrolled at UM as a French major and attended Orientation. She was excited, met a lot of people, and thought it was going to be great. She was 100% into it. 3. She was living with her boyfriend and was not able to work enough to pay for school. 4. She attended classes 2-3 weeks when she realized she could not physically do it, it was "impossible." 5. She did not want to move home so she could continue school, so she decided to take a semester off and save money, get things in order, figure out her living situation and reassess school. 6. She began school again spring semester, as a part-time student taking 2-3 classes. She was also working full-time, 40 hrs a week. 7. She attended a few weeks and realized she could not do it, it wasn't the right time and she did not have enough money to pay for school. She felt there was "so much responsibility" on her financially.</p>
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<p>me financially.</p> <p>Wow – lots of responsibility ...</p> <p>P3. 8. Yeah, and I'm not eligible for financial aid, with the amount of money my parents made. The scholarship thing was my fault entirely cuz I applied for 2-3 and I didn't get them but I know there are thousands out there./ I think my senior year in high school I should have done it./</p> <p>9. Originally, I was planning on living with my parents or in the dorms, not in an apartment by myself./</p> <p>10. That was an unplanned spur of the moment thing - that was a huge decision to make, stay with my boyfriend or go home and go to school. Clearly, the smartest idea was to go home and go to school, but at 18 years old I wanted freedom.</p> <p>So, school started strong ...</p> <p>P3. 11. Orientation and advising went well;/</p> <p>12. I had a lot of questions about the classes I was taking and how to fit them into my day./</p> <p>13. Nobody told me I couldn't work 40 hours a week. Nobody said start slow or only take 1-2 classes. In retrospect, it would have been better for me to take 2-3 classes, the ones I really wanted to take or the heavy required ones./</p> <p>14. I should have built my way up until I found my rhythm – how I could do it all, you know, work and live and go to school all at the same time.</p> <p>How is this going to work</p> <p>P3. 15. Orientation was in July and I wasn't living with my boyfriend. We moved in together 2 weeks after that, spur of the moment./</p> <p>16. He was apathetic toward the situation and not behind me financially, actually a drain on the situation. He was a very negative influence in all aspects.</p> <p>Sounds hard.</p> <p>P3. 17. Yeah. (long pause)</p>	<p>8. She was not eligible for financial aid and she did not get any scholarships for which she applied.</p> <p>9. She planned to live with her parents or in the dorms, not in an apartment, first semester.</p> <p>10. As a spur of the moment thing, she decided to stay with her boyfriend in the apartment and stop-out of school. She wanted “freedom.”</p> <p>11. P3 felt orientation and advising went well.</p> <p>12. She asked a lot of questions about classes and how to fit them into her day.</p> <p>13. No one told her working 40 hours a week would not work. No one told her to “start slow” and take 1-2 classes, which she now feels would have been better for her.</p> <p>14. She felt she lacked the rhythm or working, living and attending school simultaneously.</p> <p>15. After Orientation, on a spur of the moment, she moved in with her boyfriend.</p> <p>16. Her boyfriend was apathetic toward her attending college, an unsupportive drain financially and a “very negative” influence.</p> <p>17. It was hard.</p>
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So, you get to school, get your books ...

P3. 18. Got my books./
19. Class was overwhelming, but good./
20. I love school, always loved school, love learning especially subjects like French, English literature, history, the fine arts. So, that was exciting to me. I've always loved the learning atmosphere. That was exciting./
21. But then I remember the first days, classes all day and directly to work, working 6 hours and studying for 2-3 hours and waking up and doing it all again. I thought this is ok, I'll pace myself./
22. Second week, it hit me, this isn't gonna work. The first week, I cut down my work hours so I could go to school. I was thinking, I'm only working 24 hrs a week, how will I do this?

I'm feeling overwhelmed thinking about it. Your family ...

P3. 23. My family was, I can't think of the right word - it's a mixture between disappointed and upset/
24. because I've always had huge dreams of college and obviously a degree is important to me and a necessity it today's world./
25. My family was not happy with my living situation because of religion./
26. Me not following through with school was a completely different thing. It hit my mother harder than my father because my father never went to college./
27. My parents married very early and he built his business up out of nothing which I am incredibly proud and astonished because he has done well for himself without having any higher education./
28. My mother didn't go to school before she had us - she went to nursing school after my brother was born. That was really hard on her, me, my father, on everyone involved cuz she was trying to be the mother, homemaker, wife, but she had hours of studying to do as nursing school is not easy. But, she did it./
29. I remember once she told me, "Do not put off school until you have a family, until you have something major in your life - it drains you and I don't want it for you. I am happy

18. She bought her books.
19. School was overwhelming, but good.
20. P3 loved school, the learning atmosphere, and especially learning French, English, history and fine arts. She found it "exciting."
21. During the first days of college, she had classes all day and went directly to work, after which she studied. She wanted to pace herself.
22. The second week of class, she realized it wasn't working and began to question how she could do it all [pay] after cutting her hours at work to half-time [24 hours].
23. Her family had mixed feelings of disappointment and being upset.
24. She always had "huge dreams of college" and earning a degree is important to her and a necessity in today's world.
25. Her family was unhappy with her for living with her boyfriend due to religious ideations.
26. Not attending college was harder on her mother than her father, as he did not attend college.
27. Her parents married early and her father built his business from nothing. She is proud of her father and astonished that he did so well for himself without an education.
28. Her mother attended nursing school after her children were born, which was hard on all members of her family including P3.
29. Her mother did not want her to put off school until she had major complications in her life. She wanted P3 to enjoy her life and take the opportunity to get an education.

<p>with my life, but you have an opportunity to start right, get it done, enjoy yourself, be 22-23 years old and then worry about the rest of your life.”/</p> <p>30. My parents have always been supportive of me and even though I wasn’t in school they were there for me. But, I could tell they were disappointed.</p> <p>Did their disappointment change when you decided to try school again?</p> <p>P3. 31. They backed me up./</p> <p>32. I had money I’d been saving since I was 12 and they said us it and then they would reevaluate and help me as much as they can because they really wanted me in school. That was good and I started doing that/</p> <p>33. At the same time, I got promoted to Assistant Manager at work and had to open or close the store and so I was working 8-5 or 1-10 which didn’t work with school. Those hours were difficult to build classes around. /</p> <p>34. So, once again, I decided not this semester, next semester./</p> <p>35. But, I tried, I did start, part-time. I was taking Intermediate French and Math. I thought it was going to work – it was decision I made. I was, ok you can be miserable and get through it, or you can see if you can make it work later on./</p> <p>36. I knew I wouldn’t be at Express forever./</p> <p>37. I thought I could take the summer and figure out financial aid, scholarships, whatever it is that could make me have the ability to go to school.</p> <p>Sounds like you were trying to figure it all out.</p> <p>P3. 37. Well, I went to the Financial Aid office and they gave me all the forms and showed me how to fill them out. And that was about as far as that went./</p> <p>38. At this time, I moved home with my parents and because I was living with my parents, I was not eligible for financial aid, my dad makes too much money.</p> <p>Your decision to leave school seems to have come to you quickly ...</p>	<p>30. Her parents were disappointed, but still supportive of P3 even though she stopped-out of college.</p> <p>31. The backed her up.</p> <p>32. She had some money to use for second semester and her parents said they would try to help her financially.</p> <p>33. Second semester, she was promoted to Assistant Manager at work which demanded long and difficult hours.</p> <p>34. She decided not to attend school spring semester.</p> <p>35. She tried, however part-time enrollment, taking two courses. She was “miserable” so she decided she could “make it work later on.”</p> <p>36. She knew she wouldn’t always be at Express.</p> <p>37. She decided to figure out financial aid and scholarships and how to attend college over the summer.</p> <p>37. She visited the Financial Aid office and got the forms, but did nothing more.</p> <p>38. She moved home with her parents spring semester.</p>
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<p>P3. 39. Oh, yes – very. Within 2 weeks;/ 40. In fact, my tuition payment had not even gone through -that was a factor for me. The date I had to pay which meant commitment and follow-through. So, I made the decision before the date.</p> <p>You decided to try again and were excited and motivated ...</p> <p>P3. 41. No, not really - I lacked motivation for the “right now”, the time being.</p> <p>As you share and I experience your words, I feel a sense of being overwhelmed with how to do this, a sense of aloneness ...</p> <p>P3. 42. Yeah. It was./ 43. But mostly, bad decisions on my part. Moving out so soon after high school with someone so financially draining on me. Obviously, an 18-year old girl is not financially smart knowing what to do with your money because you lived off your parents and I did it young and I regret it./ 44. Lack of motivation, I don’t know. Lack of focus.</p> <p>In what ways could UM have helped you with focus or motivation?</p> <p>P3. 45. Um ... maybe more <i>real</i> information and not starting freshman year -- / 46. Starting my senior year, more information about how to go about this./ 47. I know there are many people in far worse financial situations going to school./ 48. I didn’t think deep enough, dig deep enough to find out how to do it - how to do about this, how to make it work.</p> <p>Like living in a foreign country without a dictionary or map; how do I make this work.</p> <p>P3. 49. Right! Right!/ 50. I’ve talked to several people my age and I do think that in Montana, a low paying state, it is difficult to make a living, not a luxurious living and do something for yourself on the side, go to school, a hobby. It is very hard.</p>	<p>39. It took her 2 weeks to decide to leave UM. 40. The tuition payment date meant a commitment to her, so she decided to stop-out before she had to pay tuition.</p> <p>41. P3 lacked motivation that semester.</p> <p>42. She felt a sense of aloneness. 43. She made “bad decisions” that she regrets including moving out without knowing how to manage money.</p> <p>44. She lacked motivation and focus.</p> <p>45. She needed more “real” information before freshman year. 46. She needed information about how to “go about” college her senior year in high school. 47. P3 acknowledges other students have negative financial situations. 48. P3 felt that she did not think or dig deep enough to figure out how to make college work.</p> <p>49. College was like living in a foreign country without any map. 50. She found it very hard to make a living and pay for college and find the time to do well in class.</p>
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<p>They work all day, all night and don't do well in class and it's a vicious cycle.</p> <p>So, here you are in this vicious cycle. Trying to figure it out and go back to school second semester.</p> <p>P3. 51. Yeah. Nobody helped me./ 52. I just dove in the deep end and said I'll do this. I got registered on the internet and started./ 53. I don't think it's UM's fault./ 54. I started spring and I don't know how many start spring and the feeling isn't the same – faculty are like, here we are, we're in the second semester almost done. There wasn't the, "oh, you're new, let me help you, explain this or that."</p> <p>So, let's return to freshman first semester – you were feeling ...</p> <p>P3. 55. Very excited, confident. The first couple days I was still excited, as overwhelmed and tired as I was, I still love the classroom. I was happy to be there./ 56. But toward life in general, its not working./ 57. I just didn't know how to do it; to have a car to drive to campus, to afford to park on campus. There are so many small things I had not foreseen that started adding up that I was having panic attacks. How am I going to afford this and that and eat tomorrow?</p> <p>How can I do this? Something has to go and I can't not work ...</p> <p>P3. 58. Right. And at the time I was thinking, too, you know - I'm 18, I just graduated, I can wait a while./ 59. I remember my dad saying, "Bad idea". If you wait a semester it turns into waiting for two semesters, then three. And here I sit, how many semesters now? At the time, you think I can take a year off and figure it out, but it's so much harder to go back./ 60. Now, my friends are doing different things with their lives, progressing, going forward and here I am.</p> <p>Here you are.</p>	<p>51. Nobody helped her figure out school.. 52. She dove into the deep end alone.</p> <p>53. She does not blame UM. 54. Faculty did not help her or explain things because it was spring semester.</p> <p>55. Freshman year she was very excited, happy, confident, as well as overwhelmed and tired. She loved the classroom.</p> <p>56. Life in general wasn't working for P3. 57. Financially, she could not figure out "how to do it" and began to have panic attacks.</p> <p>58. As she made the decision to stop-out, she was thinking she could wait a while as she was only 18 years old. 59. Her dad did not want her to stop-out a semester as he feared it would turn into more and would be harder to return to UM.</p> <p>60. P3's friends are progressing, going forward with their lives and her life is static.</p>
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<p>P3. 61. Yeah.</p> <p>But, you're just taking some time off. How was it that no one suggested you consider taking just one course?</p> <p>P3. 62. I could have. It would have been easy./ 63. I think I thought it was all or nothing that semester. I was thinking I should keep up with major classes, keep my foot in the door, get a start on this. Be in the deep end./ 64. And my friends were all in college, all my friends here at UM. Some in worse financial situations./ 65. Its sad. I really regret not being in college with my peers. (long pause and turns to look away, out window).</p> <p>There are different paths to the future.</p> <p>P3. 66. But, for me, it is college./ 67. Since I live in France and go to school there right now taking 12 hours a week. So, I did go back, but I am only learning French, french history and art history. The credits don't work with American university system, so this is bonus knowledge/ 68. Maybe the four-year college isn't for me. I'm looking into 2-year translation school – it would open doors for me/ 69. I still see school as a necessity. I don't want to go through life without gaining higher knowledge, higher education. Whether that be 4-year college, 2-year college, or learning other languages. I want an education and a career.</p> <p>I can feel your enthusiasm and excitement about learning and school.</p> <p>P3. 70. The program in Montreal, translation school, you have to be fluent in French. I don't think Montana has anything to offer./ 71. I ran into a problem with out-of-state tuition. I moved to SLC and tried to get into school, but out-of-state tuition was too much. I was going to stay there for two years, live with my grandparents and gain residency. I got enrolled in the LDS business school to be an interior design major but I couldn't start without in-state residency./</p>	<p>61. She states she is "here."</p> <p>62. It would have been easy on P3 to take 1 class. 63. She felt she should "be in the deep end" and school was "all or nothing".</p> <p>64. All her friends were going to UM, some with negative financial situations.</p> <p>65. She regrets not being in college with her friends.</p> <p>66. College, she feels, is her path to the future. 67. She currently lives in France and attends school there to obtain "bonus knowledge" in French, art and French history.</p> <p>68. She is investigating a 2-year translation school to open doors for her.</p> <p>69. P3 sees school as a necessity and wants to gain higher education, either a 4-year or 2-year degree. She wants an education and a career.</p> <p>70. She cannot find educational program in Montana for French translation.</p> <p>71. She registered for LDS Business School in SLC, but could not afford the out-of-state tuition.</p>
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<p>72. Then I got this chance to <i>au pair</i> in France that I wouldn't take back for the world.</p> <p>If you could take something back about your freshman year, what would it be?</p> <p>P3. 73. I definitely think I made some stupid decisions./</p> <p>74. I would go back and do things differently. I would not have lived with my boyfriend. I'd have lived in a stable environment – my parent's house or the dorms where I could focus on school and not work 40 hours a week. I think I wasn't ready for the responsibility, no 18 year old is. At that time, school should have been the most important thing, instead of living with my boyfriend.</p> <p>What was it about living with your boyfriend that meant so much to you that you in ways, sacrificed school?</p> <p>P3. 75. It was freedom, independence./</p> <p>76. I had very strict parents, it was great. They did a wonderful job parenting./</p> <p>77. During high school, I just wanted out - freedom. I wanted to go out and stay out until I wanted to come home.</p> <p>Freedom. I can breath.</p> <p>P3. 78. It turned out to be the opposite of freedom. Freedom was really being 18, being with my friends, going to college and not worrying about working all day./</p> <p>79. I didn't know how to get back to the point of ...emotionally it wasn't a good time for me, second semester. I lost all my girlfriends – they were going to college. I was just doing nothing. I really cut them out of my life. A huge mistake and regret. I was left with nothing, when I moved back to my parents, I had nothing. No friends, no school, no money. They had busy lives, so that was the hardest time in my life – those days./</p> <p>80. Who was I and where was I going./</p> <p>81. That was followed by major emergency surgery – I was in hospital for a week and bed rest for 6 weeks. So, that put a damper on school as well.</p>	<p>72. She took at job as an <i>au pair</i> in France.</p> <p>73. P3 thinks she made some “stupid decisions.”</p> <p>74. She believes she was not ready for the responsibility of living on her own in an unstable environment with her boyfriend and working 40 hours a week.</p> <p>75. She found freedom and independence living with her boyfriend.</p> <p>76. Her parents were very strict.</p> <p>77. She wanted freedom and to come and go as she wanted.</p> <p>78. She discovered no freedom living on her own; freedom was really “being 18, being with friends, going to college and not worrying about working all day.”</p> <p>79. Emotionally, second semester was not a good time for P3. She cut her girlfriends out of her life and when she moved home, she felt she had “nothing”, “no friends, no school, no money.” It was the hardest time in her life.</p> <p>80. She was questioning who she was and where she was going.</p> <p>81. She had emergency surgery and was bedridden for 6 weeks which also put a “damper” on school.</p>
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<p>Sounds like life gave you a long “time-out”.</p> <p>P3. 82. And, although it was a horrible, painful emotional surgery and all that, I thank God every day it happened. It shook me. What are you doing? You can’t keep frolicking about. You need to find a path. Do something. Move in some direction./</p> <p>83. That’s when I decided to move to SLC where I could start over. I could get distance and freedom from my family here, but still be in a safe, loving, stable environment.</p> <p>When you look back at your decision to take a time-out ...</p> <p>P3. 84. Now, looking back, I can see the little opportunities – the windows. I didn’t see them at the time, acknowledge them.</p> <p>Let’s return to freshman year. How would you do it differently? How was your experience of your decision to take a break from school?</p> <p>P3. 85. I would go back to junior or senior year of high school, figure out what you are doing right now. Don’t let it go to last minute. You won’t make the commitment. The junior/senior years of high school are very important and get your butt in gear./</p> <p>86. Get it in order. What do you want to do in life, not final decisions - but, make decision about how to do life. /</p> <p>87. My parents never told me to get on the ball, they’re great, but they didn’t push me, you gotta do this, you gotta do that.</p> <p>They didn’t know the country ... the language of higher education.</p> <p>P3. 88. They didn’t experience it. They got married right out of high school. They don’t know where to find scholarship information. They were supportive, encouraging. Let’s make it happen, but you let us know what it is. I jumped into a marathon./</p> <p>89. Its’ nobody’s fault but my own. I know there were opportunities and programs to get prepared. I know the school counselors have information I applied for 3 scholarships, I</p>	<p>82. The surgery was horrible, painful and emotional, but she thanks God for it as it shook her up and pushed her to find a path and move in a direction.</p> <p>83. After her surgery, she decided to move to SLC and “start over” and have “freedom” yet live in a safe, loving, stable environment distant from her family.</p> <p>84. As she reflects, she can see opportunities to go to college which she did not see or acknowledge at the time.</p> <p>85. P3 believes the junior / senior years of high school are the years that students should commit to college and figure it out.</p> <p>86. During the junior / senior years in high school, student should temporarily decide what to do in life and how to do life.</p> <p>87. Her parents did not push her or tell her what to do.</p> <p>88. Although her parents were supportive and encouraging, they did not attend college. She felt like she jumped into running a “marathon.”</p> <p>89. She takes responsibility for her actions and realizes there were programs and scholarships to help students which she did not seek out.</p>
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<p>didn't get any, but I applied for the ones that <i>everyone</i> applies for at UM. That red-headed girl in my class got them all.</p> <p>If you would have gotten scholarships or financial aid, how would that have changed your story?</p> <p>P3. 90. It would have made me more motivated to start right away, rather than wait/ 91. Like my dad said, it's too hard to start again. Who wants to go back when you are working?</p> <p>Who was encouraging you, helping you find your way, your life passion, a major, a career goal?</p> <p>P3. 92. No one. Not a counselor, teacher, no one./ 93. I've always loved school, been excited to be in the classroom. I was a good student. I love to study, to write.</p> <p>Sounds like you were a natural to go to college and be successful learning.</p> <p>P3. 94. You would think! But, it was money and me being stupid. It was immaturity, no guidance, procrastination, thinking it was ok to put it off a little bit, which turned into a lotta-bit./ 95. My parents didn't know how it worked, and I'm the oldest child. There was no one to tell me how to go about doing it./ 96. I just assumed I would register and it would all work out like in high school. In college you can't just go - there's so much mental, financial, emotional preparation that needs to be done before that first day.</p> <p>Feels like we failed you. We lost you.</p> <p>P3. 97. No one called me. No one checked in with me.</p> <p>Would that have made a difference?</p> <p>P3. 98. Yeah, maybe. That little push, that little shove that I needed, someone to hold my hand a bit./</p>	<p>90. P3 believes, if she would have received a scholarship or financial aid, she would have been more motivated in school first semester. 91. P3 finds it hard to start again.</p> <p>92. Not a counselor, teacher, no one helped or encouraged P3 to discover a career goal. 93. P3 has always loved school, to study and write and was a good student. She find the classroom exciting.</p> <p>94. She stopped-out of school due to lack of money, immaturity, no guidance, and procrastination.</p> <p>95. Her parents did not know how college worked and she was the first child attending. She had no one to help her. 96. She though college would be like high school but found there's "so much mental, financial and emotional preparation" to do before the first day of school.</p> <p>97. No one from UM check in with her.</p> <p>98. She believes a "little push, a little shove, someone to hold her hand" could have helped.</p>
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<p>99. I know there are resources; I just didn't know how to find them. I don't have the map.</p> <p>There's no map.</p> <p>P3. 100. There's no one saying, tell me what you want to do and we'll work with that and make it happen. There was no one saying, let's make it happen. Not my parents, not the school./</p> <p>101. I think being that young, out of high school, the shock of so much to do, it's a big world, so much pressure from all the groups, what do I want to do, no one to guide me through it. My friends were going to school, really busy, starting college, doing their own thing, that's normal.</p> <p>Your friends ...</p> <p>P3. 102. Well, they knew what to do because their parents went to college./</p> <p>103. Its funny, I knew and <i>still know</i> what I want to do, my friends had no idea. And, here I am and there they are./</p> <p>104. Everyone has a natural ability to do something, a gift from God, whatever it is. I started French my sophomore year of high school thinking I was going to learn Italian – (she laughs) I figured - close enough. I fell in love with French; hate math and science, its torture. It doesn't make sense, I struggle. French and English alike, I enjoy and it comes to me, I don't have to work at it, my brain doesn't have to hurt./</p> <p>105. My generation has pressure – you can be anything, especially women. Fifty years ago, women could be a nurse, teacher, or secretary. Now, we can be anything – there's so much./</p> <p>106. I would have been helpful for me to take one of those tests in high school; I thought it would be interesting to see.</p> <p>We've been talking nearly an hour and I'd like to circle back to your decision-making process -- deciding to stop school.</p> <p>P3. 107. It was a general, "Am I going to be able to do this" - probably not! "Should I get out of this?" - I think so. It wasn't, I hate this, I can't go on. It was, "wow, this is harder than I</p>	<p>99. P3 did not know how to find campus resources.</p> <p>100. No one told P3 what to do or helped her make it happen, not her parents or UM.</p> <p>101. She was young, feeling pressured and shocked with so many things to do and had no guidance. Her friends were in school and too busy to help her.</p> <p>102. Her friends knew what they wanted to do because her friends' parents attended college.</p> <p>103. P3 finds it funny she always knew what she wanted to do [teach French] yet her friends had no idea and they are in school and she is not.</p> <p>104. She has a natural gift in languages; she enjoys them and does not have to work to learn them. She does not like math and science.</p> <p>105. She feels pressure that she can become "anything."</p> <p>106. P3 thinks it would have been "interesting" and "helpful" for her to take a [career] test in high school.</p> <p>107. As she decided to stop-out of school, she did not think she was going to be able to do it. She found it harder than she thought and found herself unable to handle it.</p>
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<p>thought. I thought I could handle this, I was wrong./</p> <p>108. The decision was school or independence and freedom. Not a good decision at all.</p> <p>Your decision to stop school and go to France, take classes, and be an <i>au pair</i> – its almost like you’re in college – doing a study-abroad or internship first <u>before</u> your freshman year.</p> <p>P3. 109. Yeah. Right. This is the start. Being in French class everyday makes me crave coming back. I will be back in October and what I hope and pray is that I can work it out and go to school, even if not as a full-time student, to continue with the knowledge, until I can figure out career-wise. /</p> <p>110. A big blessing in my life, before I left for France, I got financially caught up. No credit cards. I’ve learned so much over there. Before I went, I had to get everything taken care of./</p> <p>111. When I come back, I will live with my parents. I don’t have a car or phone, so I have no bills. So, spring semester I want to get into gear, even if not typical full-time student, I want to do something. If I were living with my parents, could I get financial aid?</p> <p>I don’t know for certain, but you could speak to Financial Aid. Maybe with all your French, you would get a work-study award to work in Foreign Student Services, International Programs or the French Department.</p> <p>P3. 112. I didn’t know that. There’s so much paperwork, that’s another thing. How do you do it all? Right now I have the UM application printed out in my apartment in Paris, but how do I fill it out? Do I have to re-apply?</p> <p>Yes, you do.</p> <p>P3. 113. Do I have to do it right now for spring?</p> <p>No, it’s due about mid-November; the dates are on-line or you could call Enrollment Services.</p>	<p>108. She felt if she attended UM she would have to give up her independence and freedom.</p> <p>109. She is returning to America and hoping to attend school, part- or full-time and figure out a career path.</p> <p>110. She is financially stable now.</p> <p>111. She will live with her parents when she returns to America and wants to return to school.</p> <p>112. She feels overwhelmed by all the paperwork for school.</p> <p>113. P3 wants to know when she needs to apply for Spring 2008.</p>
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<p>P3. 114. If I worked on campus, I would be motivated; I would be immersed in it./ 115. Living in Paris, I see so many jobs teaching English. Being in Europe, I've learned the importance of English. That's how Germans and Japanese Business men communicate. That's another option I've looked into, here in the US, to teach English to the huge Spanish community. People are dying to learn English. Tokyo makes my heart beat, I love it there but I hated Euro-Disney. One of my American friends in Paris, the mother she works for is high up in L'Oreal and has a great job and speaks English and French.</p> <p>Well, we've talked about an hour. What would you like to share to sum it your freshman year experience and your decision to stop school.</p> <p>P3. 116. My experience with UM overall has been good, great, wonderful place. They offer a lot and do the best with what they have/ 117. When it comes down to it, it's an individual thing. I look back and see that I was missing that motivation and drive. Perhaps I was caught up so much in the moment of high school. For my friends, college was just so easy to start the process. I thought it would be easy for me too – I'll go, it'll be great. / 118. And so, it comes down to - back to high school – its' good I'm thinking and talking about this. 119. I wasn't in that place of mind, now I need to make it happen. It won't happen on its own. I have to make it happen./ 120. I think parents – that's hard when it comes to parents. So many students have great parents, saying we're gonna make it happen. What do you need from us? But then there's mine, they just don't know. They are there, but they don't. / 121. It's a foreign country. You don't know how to read the signs, communicate with people around you and find the way you want to go. / 122. In high school, I didn't see an outside figure coming in and saying, "ok kids, you need this and this to make this happen by this date, get on the ball so it can happen." Even just tiny things, like a map of campus./</p>	<p>114. P3 feels that if she worked on campus, she would be immersed in college and therefore, more motivated. 115. Living in Paris, she has seen the need for French / English teachers / translators.</p> <p>116. Her experience of UM was good and she thinks it's a wonderful school. 117. She feels she was missing "motivation and drive" and thought it was going to be easy, but found it was not. 118. P3 feels "good" about thinking and talking about leaving UM. 119. She is in the place of mind that she wants to make college happen. 120. Her parents are not capable of helping her make it happen. 121. She equates college to living in a foreign country without the ability to read signs, talk to people, or find your way. 122. In high school, noone provided guidance.</p>
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<p>123. Its like going from high school to college, you're just plopped out of this secure, comfortable place where you know your way around, you're the top of the top, you're the cool kid, the seniors, into the new, scary place everyone's older, wiser than you. You have no idea where you are what you're doing, who you are./</p> <p>124. It's a hard time in a kid's life, 18-21 and to be completely lost like that.</p> <p>Before you knew it, you looked around and you were alone and lost.</p> <p>P3. 125. Yeah, and I said, "Can't do it, see ya later."/</p> <p>126. I still beat myself up. Look at my friends, they're talking about college graduation – wonderful and I'm happy for them. But at the same time, it could have been me.</p> <p>It can be you.</p> <p>P3. 127. I hope it will be me.</p> <p>I hope its you too – but whatever happens, I hope you are happy. I'd like to thank you for your time and sharing with me so openly.</p>	<p>123. In college, P3 felt plopped out of her secure, comfortable place that she knew, and put into a scary place. She interpreted everyone on campus as older and wiser and knowing what they were doing and who they were.</p> <p>124. She felt completely lost her freshman year.</p> <p>125. She was lost and alone and couldn't do it so she left.</p> <p>126. She continues to beat herself up about stopping-out and sees her friends preparing to graduate.</p> <p>127. She hopes she, too, will graduate some day.</p>
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P3 (MC) -Level Three, Narrative Based on Emergent Theme

As an academically solid high school student, P3 enrolled at The University of Montana to major in French. She was “excited” and believed college was “going to be great”. She always loved school and learning, especially subjects such as French, English literature, history, and fine arts and found learning “exciting.” she always had “huge dreams of college” and felt a degree was important to her and a necessity in today’s world. She prepared herself by attending Orientation where she met a lot of people. Her advising went well and she had a lot of questions about how to fit classes into her day and still work full-time. Her advisor did not suggest that since she had to work full-time she might consider attending school part-time which in retrospect; she feels would have been a better decision. Yet, she wanted to be “in the deep end” and felt school was “all or nothing.” To help with finances, she planned to live at home, or perhaps in the dorms. She found college to be a scary place and thought all the freshmen except her already knew what they were going to study and who they were going to become.

Seeking “freedom and independence”, P3 moved into an apartment with her boyfriend on the spur of the moment after Summer Orientation. She started school and attended classes 2-3 weeks when she realized she could not physically manage being a student and work enough hours to pay tuition. She struggled with how to pay for college and considered moving home to save money, but decided against it. She felt as if she “jumped into running a marathon” and had no help or encouragement from the university – not from a professor, counselor, from no one. She decided to take a semester off, reassess and “get things in order.” P3 states she discovered “freedom was really being 18, being with friends, going to college and not worrying about working.”

P3 returned to campus second semester as a part-time student, thinking she could attend classes part-time and still manage to work full-time to pay tuition. She felt attending college part-time would allow her to build her way up and find her “rhythm” and “pace” herself. While her family said they would try to help her financially, she accepted a promotion at work to Assistant Manager which increased her responsibilities and required “long and difficult” work hours. Second semester was not emotionally a good time for her. Living with her boyfriend, working full-time again and attending school part-time, left no time for P3 and her friends.

Her boyfriend was unsupportive and apathetic toward her schooling, as well as a financial drain and “very negative influence.” She found second semester to be “overwhelming”, “hard”, but good. After a few weeks, she realized it was “too much” as she struggled with “too much financial responsibility.” She was beginning to feel “miserable” and already felt “lost and alone.” When spring tuition came due, she realized if she paid tuition she would be making a commitment she could not keep. She felt perhaps she could make it work later on. Once again, she stopped-out. It was the hardest time of her life as she was questioning who she was and where she was going. She moved home and began thinking about the possibility of attending summer school. She felt that moving home required her to relinquish her freedom and independence. She had emergency surgery early in the summer and was bedridden for weeks, so summer school was impossible.

Because summer school did not work out, P3 moved to SLC to live with her grandparents to attend a private religious business school. She wanted to “start over” and live in a safe, stable loving environment that still offered her a level of freedom. Because she was an out-of-state student, she could not afford tuition at the private religious school so she took a job as an *au pair* in France. The emergency surgery P3 had earlier in the summer was horrible but shook her up and pushed her to move in a direction.

Her family was supportive and encouraging of her desire to attend college, but not pushy. They were disappointed and upset with her for not following through with school and, due to religious beliefs, unhappy with her living situation. Her mother was more upset than her father, as her father never attended college. P3’s mother attended nursing school after she had her children and it was really hard on the whole family, including P3. Her mother warned her “not to put off school until you have a family or something major in your life” as it is very draining.

As a freshman, P3 lacked motivation, focus and drive and felt a sense of aloneness. She yearned for more “real information” about how to go to college and figure out how to make college work. She equated attending UM to “living in a “foreign country without any map” and felt that it would have helped if during high school she had been exposed to making life decisions about college and career. She was shocked with the many things to do to attend college and found it harder than she thought and herself unable to juggle work and college.

As she seeing her friends progressing academically and “going forward in their lives”, she feels that her life is “static.” P3 now regrets not being in college with her friends as well as her “stupid decisions” which include living in an unstable environment with her boyfriend and stopping out of school. She now sees opportunities she did not take or acknowledge that would have made college a possibility for her. She believes she left UM due to a lack of money, maturity, and guidance from the university or her parents and continues to beat herself up over her decision to leave UM.

P3 feels college is the path to her future and is currently attending school in France to obtain “bonus knowledge” as the courses she is taking are not transferable to UM. She is investigating a translation school in Montreal and sees higher education as a “necessity” and yearns for an education and a career. She knows she has a natural ability for languages and enjoys them and thinks it would have been “interesting” and helpful” to her if she had the opportunity to take a high school [career] test. She is now financially stable and planning to return to America and go back to school. However, she is a little overwhelmed with all the paperwork and thinks it will be hard to start again. P3 feels that if she had a “little push, a little shove, or someone to hold her hand” it could help her be successful. She has hope for her future, which includes college graduation.

Data Analyses, Levels One-Three

P4 (DW), Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

<p>Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.</p> <p>P4. 1. Well, me .. my grandpa pays for my schooling, all of it, and my rent and pretty much everything./</p> <p>2. And I wasn't .. I never had the grades I high school./</p> <p>3. So, when I graduated I didn't want to go to school, but my parents were pushing for it and my grandpa was paying for it. SO, all right, I'll go./</p> <p>4. So, that summer, I met a boy and we broke up when I first started college and it destroyed me. (laughter)/</p> <p>5. I never made the grades and I was really depressed about it and never wanted to get up./</p> <p>6. I've never been good at math and they put me in a math class that apparently I wasn't supposed to be in. AND, my teacher didn't speak English so I didn't understand one thing she was saying. So, I failed that twice. And, I wasn't even supposed to be in that class./</p> <p>7. I never wanted to go, ever./</p> <p>8. I wanted to lay in my bed. It was my first love and I had a hard time with it.</p> <p>Sounds like a really hard time.</p> <p>P4. 9. I was by myself in my apt all alone./</p> <p>10. I don't get along with my mom so well, so going home wasn't an option. Like my parents push me and push me and push me and push me and <i>push me</i> and <u><i>push me</i></u> and <i>PUSH ME</i>, so I try to do things to please them, but it never does.</p> <p>Sounds like maybe school was more about pleasing them ..</p>	<p>1. P4's grandfather pays her tuition and rent.</p> <p>2. P4 did not get great grades in high school.</p> <p>3. She did not want to go to college, but her parents and grandfather were pushing her.</p> <p>4. Summer prior to freshman year, she broke up with her first love and it "destroyed her."</p> <p>5. She got bad grades and became depressed.</p> <p>6. P4 was placed in an advanced math class for which she was not academically prepared. Her math teacher was a foreign student who's English she did not understand. She failed.</p> <p>7. She never wanted to go to class.</p> <p>8. She was depressed and stayed in bed.</p> <p>9. P4 felt, and was, alone.</p> <p>10. Her mother and she do not get along. Her parents push her to do things to please them, but she never seems to be able to please them.</p>
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<p>P4. 11. I never really wanted to go. I don't have any goals, I didn't know what I wanted to do – still don't. It was a really really bad time./ 12. I never made the grades. Like, and then I would try and still not get it and fail.</p> <p>Like, why bother going ..</p> <p>P4. 13. Yeah. And then I got to the point at the end of the semester it was, that I don't care anymore. I was so depressed I just lay in my bed and cried.</p> <p>Crying cuz nothing was going right – not school, not the love life, not the parents, can't find my way ...</p> <p>P4. 14. It was a really bad time, a bad year. It was a year, like, you know,/</p> <p>15. Me and my friends had been friends since kindergarten and that year we just did our own thing. I felt weird around them cuz they've always gotten the grades and I never had. I felt that way in high school too. So, I felt like an outcast with my friends,/</p> <p>16. a disappointment to my parents,/</p> <p>17. and then I have to compete with my brother too – he knows exactly what he wants to do, he gets the grades, he's very grown up. Its not that I'm not happy for my brother cuz I am. But it's hard to compete with him especially in my household. /</p> <p>18. And then the boyfriend thing – he was my best friend and my boyfriend.</p> <p>Feels kinda all alone ...</p> <p>P4. 19. Yeah and I felt like I was wasting my grandpa's money and I didn't really want to quit school in the middle cuz I counted on the money for rent and if I didn't' have that I would have been in big trouble.</p> <p>Did you feel like you had Grandpa ...</p> <p>P4. 20. I had to give him my grades, but I didn't want to do that at the end of the year, so I was like that's it, I quit, I'm moving.</p> <p>That's it, I quit! Sounds like you decided to quit school fast after freshman year.</p>	<p>11. She never wanted to attend college, had no academic or career goals.</p> <p>12. She tried, but failed to get good grades.</p> <p>13. The end of freshman first semester, she became seriously depressed and slept and cried most the time.</p> <p>14. Freshman year was bad.</p> <p>15. She lost touch with her friends. Because her friends were academically achieving, she felt like an “outcast.”</p> <p>16. P4 felt like she was a “disappointment” to her parents.</p> <p>17. She felt she had to compete with her younger brother, who seems to achieve everything.</p> <p>18. When her boyfriend broke up with her, she felt she lost her boyfriend and best friend.</p> <p>19. P4 felt like she was wasting her grandpa's money, but was trapped and couldn't quit because he paid her rent.</p> <p>20. To avoid giving her grades to her grandpa, she decided to quit college and move away.</p>
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<p>P4. 21. I'm really close with my aunts and cousins and I was talking to my aunt every single day and she was like, quit and get away from there. My cousin had an apartment and she worked in a bank and said I could move in with her and she got me a job at the bank with benefits. If I got a job with benefits, \$12 an hour, paid each week, I have a room, a ton of family over there, I'm not doing anything here./</p> <p>22. So, while I was there – things didn't go well either. I lived with my cousin and her girlfriend. And I told them before I got there; I'm not staying here if I don't like it. I'll live here a few months and if I don't like it, I'll go home. And then, they were like, well, we're gonna move out, so unless you want to sign a year lease, you have to move out. I didn't know anyone but my family. So, these girls I worked with at the bank told me I could live with them in the basement – not a bedroom, just a room in the basement.</p> <p>So, you're alone again, in a different place – in the basement.</p> <p>P4. 23. Yes! And they were, really, I think, they became my friends./</p> <p>24. I decided to move home and go back to school. Cuz I got really bored. I needed to be doing something. I needed to go to school. I like writing and stuff like that./</p> <p>25. My freshman year, I got too depressed and wasn't doing it for me, I was doing it for everyone else. I couldn't do it for me because, seriously, I had no self-esteem at all and like, seriously, all I did was eat too. So, I gained weight so I got even more depressed. I'd look at the pictures from high school, I was really happy and really pretty and now I'm not.</p> <p>Oooh, sounds sad and painful - a vicious circle – I'm sad and lonely, I'll eat – now I'm fat, sad and lonely, I think I'll eat.</p> <p>P4. 26. I know. It was just like, I never knew, still don't know what I want. It's better now because I switched over to the Tech last semester. And I love it! I got a 3.2 last semester ...</p> <p>Yeah –give me five!</p>	<p>21. Her aunts and cousins talked her into moving to out-of-state, living with her cousin and working at the local bank.</p> <p>22. Life out-of-state with roommates was not working out smoothly.</p> <p>23. While she made friends with her roommates, she felt alone.</p> <p>24. She decided to move home and go to school as she was bored and felt she needed to return to school.</p> <p>25. Freshman year she was going to school for everyone but herself. She had lost her self-esteem and became depressed. She wondered where the happy, pretty P4 went.</p> <p>26. She never knew what she wanted to do in life. At the COT she seems to be doing well academically and is focused on a 2-yr degree.</p>
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<p>P4. 27. I've never gotten so good in my life. I was really proud. Second semester my first year I got like a 1.5. gpa, it was really bad. I was really proud./</p> <p>28. I'm getting an AA so I can transfer with that because I really want to be a teacher, I decided that. My mom never supported me on that. She was like do something in the medical field. I didn't want to do that. Why would I do that when I hyperventilate when I look at a hospital? I don't have to even be going, just getting a prescription.</p> <p>Not a good match.</p> <p>P4. 29. I'm like, why do you think I can't do what <u>I</u> want to do? Like, I'm good with kids. She's like you don't even want to have kids. Its' not that, its not a big priority in my life but I would like to work with them. I was a camp counselor for 3 years and my kids were really little and I know what I can do.</p> <p>You can totally work with kids, you proved it. So, how has the experience been for you at the College of Tech compared to main campus freshman year?</p> <p>P4. 30. Smaller classes, so you get more like one-on-one. The teachers' doors are always open and like they have a whole like, tutoring and stuff. I know where to go –</p> <p>Sounds like you had more personal attention and help..</p> <p>P4. 31. Yeah, I got on academic probation my last semester at the U and so COT took me./</p> <p>32. I was seeing a retention lady and she met with me every week. I took an organization study skills, class. I had to meet with her every week and tell her how things are going and she monitored my grades every week, so she always knew if I was passing or failing.</p> <p>How was that for you?</p> <p>P4. 33. It was way better. I never felt like the main campus – classes are huge, teachers are like all right, whatever – not connected.</p>	<p>27. She's "proud" of her grades at COT.</p> <p>28. She has motivation toward earning an AA degree and transferring to main campus to earn an education degree to teach. Her mother does not want her to do into education, rather into a medical field.</p> <p>29. She questions why her mother thinks she would not be a good teacher, especially when she was a successful camp counselor for 3 yrs.</p> <p>30. COT fits her better due to smaller classes, one-on-one attention and tutoring.</p> <p>31. COT accepted her, even though she was on academic probation.</p> <p>32. She took a study skills class and met weekly with a retention counselor which she credits with her success.</p> <p>33. P4 did not feel like she fit on main campus – classes were too "huge" and she felt teachers were disconnected from students.</p>
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<p>Seems like they don't care if you are there, pass or fail...</p> <p>P4. 34. And, also they take attendance and I my math and accounting class, like that, you lose points and like that. So, they make you go. It was like 15% of your grade to just be there.</p> <p>It sounds like smaller classes, being forced to go to class, and having someone truly care, someone there for you ...</p> <p>P4. 35. Yes. And having a clear goal and knowing what classes to take./</p> <p>36. And they transfer back to over to the main campus and I don't know if I will, but at least I will have a degree that I will be able to if <i>I want</i> to that – if it's something I want to do, when I want to do it and it kinda makes everybody happy I guess./</p> <p>37. I still graduate and get a 2-year degree, makes my parents happy, my grandpa happy ..</p> <p>makes you happy that everyone's happy ...</p> <p>P4. 38. Makes me happy./</p> <p>39. The only person like, when I was a freshman, cared that I passed I think was my English class. I'm a really good writer and I'm good like that. And like, my English teacher, everybody hated. But, he was the only person who took an interest in me. Like, he came to me and gave me a card to go to Curry for 3 counseling sessions for free and told me he would give me extra time on my assignments. Everybody was like, he's so hard. I was like, he may be hard, but he came up to me after class and he was like, I know one of the other students told me what was going on with you.</p> <p>So, other students noticed your unhappiness and he took the time to help you ..</p> <p>P4. 39. And, I was moving a lot. I moved 7 times in a year. I moved out after high school in with a friend in an apartment and it didn't work out. There were drunken boys in there all the time but we're still friends. So I moved in with my parents, moved out of their house, into Valley Pines apartments, then out-of-state,</p>	<p>34. At COT she felt compelled to attend classes or she would lose points and jeopardize her grade.</p> <p>35. She enjoyed having a “clear goal” and knowing exactly which classes to take.</p> <p>36. After graduation from COT, if she wants, she will go to main campus.</p> <p>37. Earning a 2-year degree, P4 feels will make her parents and grandpa happy.</p> <p>38. Earning a 2-year degree at COT will make her happy because her parents and grandpa will be happy.</p> <p>39. P4 felt the only person her freshman year who cared about her was her English teacher who noticed her sadness and encouraged her to go to Curry.</p> <p>39. P4 moved 7 times freshman year.</p>
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moved out of that apartment to the basement, then back home, I had to move out of my house again, to move in with a friend in a house. Everything got screwed over with that, then I moved into another house and got completely screwed over by roommates and now I'm home again. And that takes a toll on me and most that moving was during freshman year. I've moved so many times cuz I keep getting screwed over.

Wow – so many moves - How could anyone concentrate or focus when the ship keeps rocking and toss you overboard?

P4. 40. And like, to go, I hate living at home cuz I don't get along with my mom. Like that's a sad thing that we don't agree on anything. She's like, why don't' you talk to me and I'm like, because you have an opinion on everything. I'm not behind you, you're right so I'm not going to talk to you. And I get the fact that she wants me to be better, but sometimes you just need someone to say, It's gonna be ok. She's just like, you should have done it different. And I'm like, well, mom, I didn't do it differently. I have to deal with how I did it. It's frustrating.

So, you want to seek comfort from your mom but she's no available to give it to you.

P4. 41. Yeah and like, I'm a big daddy's girl and she doesn't like that either. So, they get in fights mostly about me so my dad gets stressed out. She's told me like a million times they've almost separated and I feel like it's my fault cuz that' all they fight about is just me. She was telling me all about it when I was a freshman. So, it was I'm fat, I suck at school, I'm breaking up my parents .. (long pause)

I'm on academic probation, Ry's out of here, my girlfriends are too busy ... I feel so overwhelmed; I want to run away for you.

P4. 42. I did – I moved away./

43. I didn't manage; I stayed in bed and cried and ate - pretty much all I did. Food was a comfort. Then like my boyfriend, he knew it too. I was dumb about it and still talked to him; still do currently. He knew too - drug me to

40. She does not like living at home as she does not get along or agree on anything with her mother. She feel "frustrated" and wishes her mother would just say, "it's gonna be ok".

41. She is a "daddy's girl" and her parents fight over here and her dad gets "stressed out." Her mother told her many times they've nearly separated because of her which deepens her depression.

42. She moved away.

43. She became more depressed, "cried and ate". Her x-boyfriend recognized her depression and took her to Curry. She felt he thought she was "crazy".

Curry, made me an appointment. It was hard for me, it was like, you think I'm crazy. Great, my boyfriend thinks I'm crazy, I need help. He's like, I'm sorry.

Did life feel crazy for you?

P4. 44. I told him I wasn't crazy, I was *overwhelmed* and depressed. He's doing it to me and everything is so bad, then going to call to make me see a therapist? That made me more upset. Don't do that. I'm sorry, but you did part of this.

He thought he was helping, but he hurt you more.

P4. 45. I found out he was cheating on me, too and it was like, come on – anything more?/
46. He drug me to Curry. I didn't want to talk to that lady. It wasn't like my English teacher coming to me to tell me here's something you can do if you want. This is, him making me go.

Someone making your decisions again.

P4. 47. This lady was just like how does this make you feel. I just screamed, how the hell do you think it makes me feel? I felt bad cuz I screamed - I was a mess, so mad and felt .. I feel bad now. I didn't want to be there – she asked do you want to talk with me again and I said *absolutely not!*

No way – I'm not talking to you again.

P4. 48. I'm an unorganized person, too – so trying to go to school for something you have to be organized for – like teaching. Like that./
49. I lived with my friend in Valley Pines and she was dating her boyfriend and I needed a roommate and since I get my rent paid for I said I'll pay for mine and ½ of yours. I could afford it. He moved in and they are fighting constantly.

No peace, no calm. How do you study?

P4. 50. They took advantage. There were 2 of them, I told them to pay. She got mad, freaked out, moved out.

44. She was “overwhelmed and depressed”.

45. P4 learned her x –boyfriend had been cheating on her.

46. She did not want to go to Curry as she felt her boyfriend was making her go, it wasn't her choice.

47. She did not want to go to counseling and was mad. She screamed at the counselor and refused to return.

48. She worries as an unorganized person, she might fail at teaching.

49. Her roommate and boyfriend fought constantly.

50. She felt her roommate and boyfriend “took advantage” of her.

Sounds like you were trying to get control of your life and had very little.

P4. 51. I work every single day summers, but not school year. /

52. But I like the COT. School's not my thing, but I'm doing better. Better than D's like I got before. /

53. Right now, things are not so good at home. I got pretty much kicked out – I got a dog – it helps. But basically, my dog is in Darby. My mom wants me to give her away. I drive to Darby every day and I don't like my mom saying I don't have an open mind to get rid of my dog. But, I'm not giving her back. She loved me through a hard time. It's a big mess again and school's starting.

The one person in your life that loved you unconditionally.

(long pause, off in her own world thinking ..)

So, I'm gonna circle back to the question - How did you make a decision to go to COT?

P4. 54. I didn't want to tell Grandpa I was on academic probation. I don't like confrontation./

55. They were going to accept me there. I always thought I do not want to go to a 4-year school! I could finish in 2 years and people, there are 15-20 people in a class, at the most 25 people. I feel like I can do it.

You can do the smaller classes – more attention.

P4. 56. I don't know – I go to my math class and I love my teacher. You could ask him the dumbest question in the entire world and he would be like, “that's an awesome question, here's the answer and here's how you do it”./

57. The retention lady was like, you shouldn't have been in the math classes you were in. I was in MAT 117 and I'm not good in math. I nearly failed math in high school. I should have been in MAT 005 and got a B. I have my teacher next semester for MAT 100 and he knows me. And it was so hard to be in a math class where the lady didn't even speak English.

51. She works all summer, but not during school year.

52. School is not P4's “thing” but she is doing well at COT.

53. She is living at home currently, which is not going well. Her mother told her the dog could not stay and had to go to the farm in Darby. She feels like her dog “loved her through her hard times.” Once again, she feels her life is a “big mess” just as school is starting.

54. She hid the fact that she was placed on academic probation because she does not like confrontation.

55. She went to COT because she felt she could succeed with smaller classes.

56. She loves her math teacher and class.

57. Her retention counselor told her freshman first semester she was advised to take the wrong math class, which she failed, twice. P4 thinks she failed because she could not understand the teacher – a non-native speaker. This caused her more depression.

She was Asian. I didn't even know what she was saying. If you are teaching American kids, speak English. How can I get it, if when I ask questions and am trying, I can't even understand her when they are trying to help me? Its not going to work! I was so mad. I was like NO! That's when I got depressed and didn't go anymore.

Why bother – can't understand her!

P4. 58. I only liked 2 classes freshman year; Native American Studies – loved it – got an A – with Dr. Price. I freaking love it. If I go back, that's my concentration. I love it, love every minute of it – went every day.

What was it?

P4. 59. I like lecture classes, he's hilarious. I loved it. He had some books, but I didn't read all that much. I loved it./

60. I get discouraged, because all my friends are good at math and science – that's what I saw in them. They're good at what I'm horrible at. I wasn't good at it. It came easy to them. I always had a problem cuz I was in low math and my friends were in advanced calculus. I have a pride issue, and I don't ask you to help me with math – but they would. I think I didn't see that they had problems cuz they got good grades. They can't have a problem with anything. I didn't find out one friend had a problem with English until freshman year cuz when took the writing exam and she got in a lower level writing class. They went home with 4.0s and I went home with 2.5. Made me feel bad. Why can't I be like you guys? I've known you since I was 3./

61. I've always felt that people, like my brother, have stuff they are good at. I don't have anything I'm good at. My friend has languages, my brother is good at everything he does – he has 4 letters! My mom is like, you hate everything. I don't hate everything; I just don't know what I want.

Sounds like you have a better understanding – you're getting an AA degree, doing well -maybe you'll go back to UM – maybe not.

58. P4 “freaking loved” 2 classes freshman year, including Native American Studies, and attended class every day.

59. She liked lecture classes but didn't read the text assignments all that much.

60. She feels “discouraged” because her friends seem good at school and it comes easy to them. It hurts her pride to ask for help.

61. P4 feels like everyone but her has “stuff they are good at”. She doesn't know what she wants.

<p>P4. 62. At some point after I reach that point, I'll figure it out. I've been thinking about it. If I get in nail school in Hamilton. I'm interested in that. If I do that I have a back-up thing, if I go to UM and don't do well, I have something that will make me money. I don't know if I'll do it./</p> <p>63. I don't think any of us know what were doing. But at least I feel better about that part. Like seriously, when I went to college for the first time, I was like "hell, no!"</p> <p>Sounds like you didn't really make the decision to got to school, your parents did; you didn't really make the decision to leave UM, the school made the decision for you.</p> <p>P4. 65. Well, no. They put me on probation second semester. I'm not good at it, I don't want to be there, and I'm wasting people's money. It was nice to have the money, I don't have to work so much, I don't have to worry about bills. It was nice to have it. I'm not gonna have that, I will have to work a lot./</p> <p>66. So, when I moved out-of-state, my job there I had health insurance and got paid a lot every week, like \$12 an hour. It was easier, but I couldn't go to school and work as much as I did at the bank./</p> <p>67. It's hard to balance the two, impossible, especially when you're like depressed. I look like crap, I don't want to go to work, I want to lay here and do nothing.</p> <p>Stay in bed and hide from the world.</p> <p>P4. 68. I felt bad for my friends cuz they were there, they saw it, its just like, too much for them to handle, to go to school and take care of me cuz I couldn't take care of myself. I'm ruining my friends life, my life, taking Grandpa's money. I could have gone again, but I was like, I'm not going to do well, so why bother. Nobody can help me.</p> <p>Did you think about or get help at UM, like get tutoring, talk to a counselor?</p> <p>P4. 69. You know, I didn't think of it until Cec at COT. I did not know we had people to help students figure out stuff. Obviously, they need</p>	<p>62. P4 is trying to figure out what to do as far as a career after she earns her AA – go to nail school or to UM.</p> <p>63. She feels better about not knowing what she will ultimately do.</p> <p>65. She is not good at school, but enrolled so she could get rent money from her grandpa and not worry about bills or work so much.</p> <p>66. Working full-time in away from home was easier, as she was not balancing school and work.</p> <p>67. She finds it "hard to balance" school and work, especially when fighting depression.</p> <p>68. Her friends couldn't help her, it was too much for them. She felt guilty for "ruining" her friends lives, her life, and taking her grandpa's money." She felt like nobody could help her.</p> <p>69. P4 did not realize UM had people to help students figure out academic and career goals and wonders if she is the only student who did</p>
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<p>to inform people there is help. I didn't know that! I knew about Curry, that's all and from my English teacher. I didn't know there was anybody helping. Do any of the other students you're interviewing know that? Do people except me know that? I don't think so. I didn't know. They should make more people like Cec – you know, like when you have advising every semester. You should meet with people who can really help you figure it out./</p> <p>70. Also, when I started, I was an accounting major. Absolutely not! The accounting in high school was so different from college accounting. I was not informed of that. I was good at it in high school. In college, it was way different. I was, Hell no! It was hard. Native American Studies was easy – I got an A on every test.</p> <p>So, you like the softer sciences, rather than the harder ones like math and science.</p> <p>P4. 71. I like to take notes, to write. He wrote them on the board, I copied them. That's how I study too, I rewrite my notes. I would rewrite the notes. And I liked it, it was interesting.</p> <p>You figured out a study skill!</p> <p>P4. 72. It was how I learned my lines in drama in high school. Figured it would work with school.</p> <p>Did you think of drama as a major?</p> <p>P4. 73. I thought of drama, but I'm also - I get stage fright, but I'm still good at it.</p> <p>You like to write things, liked drama, like kids, like English, Native American Studies, smaller classes .. (she went to the bathroom) We've got about 5 more minutes and I want to return to your experience, feelings freshman year.</p> <p>P4. 74. I felt pressure, it wasn't what I wanted to do and I didn't know why./</p> <p>75. I was lost./</p> <p>76. Everyone was going and I felt pressured by everybody. I was like calm down, calm down, get away from me./</p>	<p>not know it.</p> <p>70. She began college as an accounting major but did not realize high school accounting [bookkeeping] was not the same as college accounting.</p> <p>71. She learned to study by taking notes and rewriting them.</p> <p>72. She used the method she learned to memorize drama lines to study in college.</p> <p>73. She thought about becoming a drama major but gets stage fright.</p> <p>74. Freshman year, she felt "pressured" to go to college and did not want to.</p> <p>75. She felt "lost".</p> <p>76. She went to school because her friends were going and she felt "pressured".</p>
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<p>77. I was overwhelmed. I just cried and got freaked out – what am I going to do? My face would break out, I would get depressed. I felt broken, then my boyfriend. I was such a happy, happy person – then this.</p> <p>Where'd that person go?</p> <p>P4. 78. I don't know. I still look back and say, where is she? (laughter)/</p> <p>79. That year, my x-boyfriend of 5 years got married. We dated from 7th grade - junior in high school. I went to that and then it was my 19th b-day party and I didn't have fun, and two days after that my boyfriend broke up with me and then school.</p> <p>Wow – hit after hit to the self-esteem / heart.</p> <p>P4. 80. Yeah, and then, “you suck at school, too”./</p> <p>81. Oh, and I'm fat – that's sweet, freaking awesome – why go to school if I can't even put on a pair of pants. Seriously! You're supposed to be the pretty girl, freshman girl and sweet, your pants aren't zipped.</p> <p>(Laughter) Now that's attractive.</p> <p>P4. 82. Especially when I was the cute high school girl and my friends are still skinny girls/</p> <p>83. Another big thing, hey – just thought of it – alcohol, right here. It's a depressant and I'm happy for like 20 minutes, then crash. We were all friends with my boyfriends' friends and that's where we'd go to drink. I drank every single day, so much its ridiculous, ridiculous. It did not help – well for a little bit.</p> <p>Alcohol made you happy for a bit, but we make stupid decisions sometimes.</p> <p>P4. 84. And wake in the morning and feel worse.</p> <p>So, when you were making the final decision to leave school. You were feeling ...</p> <p>P4. 85. <u>Numb</u>. Second semester, I don't care. I'm not going to go. I cried so much./</p> <p>86. My mom came over, but she is very</p>	<p>77. P4 felt “overwhelmed” and became depressed. She had been a “happy, happy person” before her boyfriend broke up with her and she began college.</p> <p>78. She did not know where she went that year.</p> <p>79. She experienced deep loss freshman year – lost her x-boyfriend and her current boyfriend.</p> <p>80. She lost self-esteem through failing academically.</p> <p>81. She lost self-esteem by gaining weight and not feeling pretty.</p> <p>82. She lost her self-concept as the “cute high school girl”.</p> <p>83. She started to drink every day.</p> <p>84. The drinking made her feel worse.</p> <p>85. She felt “numb” second semester and no longer “cared”.</p> <p>86. Out of concern, her mother came to see her,</p>
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<p>critical./</p> <p>87. My dad would come over and I wouldn't be at school and he'd be like, what are you doing? And I'd be, I'm not going. I'm not going cuz I'm crying, look at me. /</p> <p>88. I was numb./</p> <p>89. My boyfriend moved away. So, I decided to move away too. Things got better.</p> <p>Moving away helped.</p> <p>P4. 90. Yeah. I figured out, I need to go to school. I'm bored. Do it for myself. He's gone.</p> <p>You're going for you now.</p> <p>P4. 91. Yeah.</p> <p>So, here's a silly question. If you were the boss of you, you were your own advisor and you're a freshman; how would it be different – what would you tell you?</p> <p>P4. 92. I don't know. (giggle) Good question.</p> <p>Well, if you did know ..</p> <p>P4. 93. I would be like, maybe college isn't good for you right now. Come back when YOU want to do it. That's what I'd say. If I were an advisor, I'd be honest. You're not going to do well for someone else and it's going to make you feel bad, so come back when you are ready. Rather than, "yes, you need it." Do you know what I'm saying?</p> <p>Yes, I know what you're saying. It sounds like you feel angry about being pushed.</p> <p>P4. 94. It makes me mad, you have to do this. I don't have to do it. You need a degree. Well, maybe I'll go to college when <u>I</u> want to go. My parents didn't go and my grandpa, he's a freaking millionaire and he didn't graduate college. People push it down your throat and I finally figured it out. I don't have to do what you are telling me to do. I can waitress the rest of my life and be happy if it's what I want to do. I would rather people tell me, "You shouldn't be here". UM wasn't for me.</p>	<p>but was critical.</p> <p>87. Out of concern, her father came to see her and wanted to find out what was going on.</p> <p>88. She felt "numb".</p> <p>89. Things got "better" when her boyfriend moved away, she quit school and moved.</p> <p>90. Moving away helped her figure out she "needed to go to school" as she was "bored". P4 now wants to "do it" for herself.</p> <p>91. She is going to school for herself now.</p> <p>92. She's not sure what she would tell herself if she were her own advisor.</p> <p>93. She realizes that college is a decision she has to make for herself, rather than someone else. If you do college for someone else, "its going to make you feel bad".</p> <p>94. She is mad that she was pushed to go to college and ultimately failed. She sees her parents and grandpa's success without a college degree.</p>
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<p>But, COT is for you?</p> <p>P4. 95. Yeah. It's completely different. Smaller classes, got study skills/ 96. I would have been almost done now, but nobody told me. They were, you need to do this, that. I was 18, a big push-over. Somebody should have been, you don't have to go to college right now. I decided to come back on my own – didn't have to. I feel like people take advantage of you because you are young and they can tell you what to do because you did that in high school. / 97. You have to do it on your own for yourself.</p> <p>Well, that about sums it up – seems like we have to do college on our own, for ourselves to be authentic – to be happy. Well, we're over our hour and I don't want to keep you. Do you have any final thoughts?</p> <p>P4. 98. I'm glad I got to say all this; it feels good to say it. / 99. I hope you don't think I'm stupid. / 100. Can I talk to you if I have problems next year?</p> <p>Sure – you'll have Cec and now you know me. So, you're no longer alone on your journey. Thanks for your time – you shared some really good thoughts.</p>	<p>95. COT is good for her with smaller classes and her new study skills. 96. At 18 years of age, she felt like a “push-over” and did what people told her. She feels like they took “advantage” of her young age.</p> <p>97. P4 believes she must do college for herself.</p> <p>98. P4 is happy to have had an opportunity to discuss her feelings about freshman year. 99. She does not want the interviewer to see her as “stupid”. 100. She asks to have the opportunity to talk to the interviewer in the future if she encounters problems at UM.</p>
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P4 (DW) -Level Three, Narrative Based on Emergent Theme

P4 was an average high school student and did not want to go to college, had no academic or career goals, but felt “pressured” and “pushed” by her parents. In addition, her grandfather offered to pay for tuition and her rent if she enrolled at The University of Montana. She did not want to go to college, but with her parents pushing her, her grandfather paying and all her friends going, she felt compelled to go. She questioned the need for a degree to be happy or financially successful because her parents and grandfather are *extremely successful* and do not have college degrees. She assumed that while all students except her knew what they wanted in life and had “stuff they were good at” she would register for classes as an Accounting major. She moved into an apartment during the summer prior to freshman year and met a boy – her first love.

First semester, P4 was advised to take a math course that was academically advanced for her and was taught by a foreign graduate student with a thick Asian accent and poor English language skills. P4 did not “understand one thing” the teacher said. She tried but found it so hopeless to learn that she no longer attended class. She took an accounting class and realized the bookkeeping classes she took in high school in which she succeeded, were nothing like college accounting. She knew she needed to change her major and contemplated drama, but didn’t know what to do. She felt like a failure for attending college without a goal, was attending for everyone but herself. She spent a lot of time eating or in bed crying and consequently gained a lot of weight, which increased her depression. She would spend time looking at high school photos and see a “really happy, really pretty” girl and wonder where that girl went. Complicating matters, her boyfriend “destroyed” her by breaking up with her and her parents were fighting so much over her they nearly separated. She felt a sense of “loss” of for her authenticity as a “happy cute girl”, as well as “overwhelmed” and completely “lost.” Between high school graduation and the end of the summer following her freshman year, she had moved seven times causing her seriously instability. She started a downward spiral into undiagnosed depression and began to drink heavily making things worse. At the end of first semester she earned a 1.5 GPA.

Beginning second semester freshman year, she felt all “alone” and was having a “really, really bad time, a really bad year.” Her boyfriend, who had become her best-friend, cast her aside. Her parents were pushing her and she was trying to “please them” but felt it was impossible. She was not getting along with her mother and knew moving home was not an option. Her mother was pushing her into the medical field and did not want her to go into education. P4 felt her mother had no confidence in her ability to become a teacher or to even recognize that P4 “hyperventilates” when near a hospital and her experience with children at summer camp. She knew she had to remain in school so her grandfather would pay her rent, yet she felt “guilty” for “wasting” his money. Her childhood friends were “doing their own thing” at UM and academically succeeding which made her feel like an “outcast” among her friends and a “disappointment to her parents.” She felt a loss of “pride” and “discouraged” because her friends found college easy. Additionally, she felt overshadowed by her a younger brother who earned good grades, was mature, and knew what he was going to do with his life. She felt “frustrated” and like “nobody could help” her.

While at The University of Montana, she felt that “no one cared” about her except her English teacher who noticed her depression, sought her out, and gave her a note for free counseling sessions at Curry Health Center if she wanted to go. Her x-boyfriend noticed her behavior and thought she was “crazy”, so he “drug” her to Curry to talk to a counselor, which went horribly. She was “overwhelmed and depressed” and felt all her life decisions were being forced upon her, even seeing a counselor. She felt “taken advantage of” by the school and her parents; as if she was too young to know anything and that she was a “push-over.” She felt “numb” and as if “no one cared”. The only course she liked was Native American Studies and attended every day. She found it “hard to balance” work and school, especially when depressed. At the time, she did not realize UM offers services to students to help with personal, academic, and career goals and felt as if she was the only student who was not aware of the services.

Her aunt and cousins suggested she quit school and move out-of-state to live with them and get a job which would solve all her problems. After a second semester of poor grades and being placed on academic probation, she took their advice and moved. She got a job and an apartment but it wasn’t working as well as she had hoped. She once again, felt alone. She became bored and realized she wanted to go to return to school, but this time for herself. She learned that going to school for someone else was a path to failure and self-anger.

During her time away from Missoula and UM, she shaped a solution which would make everyone happy – her parents, grandfather and herself. She would attend COT and earn a two-year degree and, if she wanted, transfer back to main campus to study to become a teacher. She loves the smaller classes and one-on-one attention at COT, earned a 3.2 gpa and is “really proud” of herself. She learned the math course she was advised to take freshman year first semester was two levels too high for her abilities. She credits her success to working with a retention counselor, having a “clear goal”, feeling “connected”, and being secure with career and academic options an AA degree offers. She recently moved home and unfortunately, is beginning to feel like her life is once again a “big mess” and is starting to worry.

P4 was “glad” to talk about her experience and it felt “good” to say everything although she was worried the interviewer would think her “stupid.”

Data Analyses, Levels One-Three

P5 (MR), Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

<p>Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.</p> <p>P5. 1. OK. Um, well, to start with, the fact that, I realized the first couple weeks, business wasn't the route I wanted to take in life. So, that really started, put my feelings in the wrong direction as far as wanting to go to class. I was thinking I wanted to change my major. Everything was fine but the business class was boring, Business 100./</p> <p>2. And, um, I'm not really big on 150 kids in a classroom, no one-on-one contact at all. You just sit and listen and watch boring movies all the time. /</p> <p>3. I felt like I didn't have an actual stance in the class, like talking back and forth with the professor and ask questions and what not./</p> <p>4. More than that, trying to just pay attention with so many people in the room. /</p> <p>5. He would say things over and over./</p> <p>6. I took Public Speaking, not big on that. Intro to Algebra, Math 117 and I struggled with that anyways./</p> <p>7. I signed up for classes on line, no Orientation, and my Uncle was there, he kinda helped me out /</p> <p>8. and I thought about doing whatever the 100 level-math class and figured I could do it. I should have gone another route. I had been away from math for a few years.</p> <p>Your Uncle Brian advised you?</p> <p>P5. 9. Yeah, he's at the COT./</p> <p>10. I thought about the COT but figured I was in for the long haul, <i>go big or go home</i>, might as well do the four-year program, that's how I've always done things. Kicked my butt a little</p>	<p>1. After the first few weeks of school, P5 realized business was not the route for him. This realization changed his feelings about wanting to go to class, especially his business class.</p> <p>2. The large classes bored him and he missed the one-on-one contact with faculty.</p> <p>3. He did not feel he had a place in the class.</p> <p>4. He could not pay attention in class with so many students.</p> <p>5. The teacher repeated himself.</p> <p>6. P5 struggled with two of his courses: public speaking and math.</p> <p>7. He did not attend Orientation. His uncle helped him with his on-line registration.</p> <p>8. He had not taken math courses for a few years and thought he could pass 100-level math, rather than remedial math.</p> <p>9. His uncle is at the COT.</p> <p>10. He considered attending the COT but felt he should complete a four-year program which kicked his butt.</p>
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<p>bit.</p> <p>So, math kicked your butt, wasn't your thing, but you were giving it a shot.</p> <p>P5. 11. No, not my thing at all. I took Billiards and something else, what was it? Math, Business, Public Speaking.</p> <p>Did you attend Orientation?</p> <p>P5. 12. No. (became quiet, looked out the window)</p> <p>So, let's revisit how it all started - you go to COT and your Uncle Brian helps you pick all your classes.</p> <p>P5. 13. Right. I didn't do it the conventional way. I didn't do Orientation, didn't take the English aptitude test so I couldn't take English that semester – no big deal.</p> <p>Did you finish first semester?</p> <p>P5. 14. No, I didn't, I didn't. About half-way is when I really started doing poorly in math and once that started to happen, see, if I don't stay right on top of things I get behind and there's no way possible I can catch up./</p> <p>15. And, uh, Public Speaking, it sucked going forward and saying I don't have my speech done, so no sense going to class.</p> <p>So, you just stopped attending classes?</p> <p>P5. 16. I stopped going cuz I didn't get my speech done./</p> <p>17. The teacher never, not a single one, pulled me aside in class to even ask me if I was doing ok or where I was.</p> <p>How'd that make you feel?</p> <p>P5. 18. Well, it didn't make me feel very good I felt kinda they just pushed me aside. I didn't know if they immediately didn't like me./</p> <p>19. The business class, there were so many kids./</p> <p>20. Oh, I took Econ that's what the other class way.</p>	<p>11. Matt kicked his butt. He also took billiards, business and public speaking.</p> <p>12. He did not attend Orientation.</p> <p>13. He skipped freshman orientation and taking the English aptitude test.</p> <p>14. Half-way through first semester, P5 started doing poorly in math and could not stay on top of things. He fell behind and could not catch up.</p> <p>15. He did not want to go to class and say he did not finish his speech and found no sense in continuing to attend class.</p> <p>16. He stopped attending because he did not finish his speech.</p> <p>17. Not one of his teachers pulled him aside to ask if he was ok or how he was doing.</p> <p>18. He felt pushed aside and that his teachers did not like him.</p> <p>19. In his business class, there were many students.</p> <p>20. He also took microeconomics.</p>
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You took Econ your first semester freshman year? Oh geeze ..

P5. (Laughter). 21. That was, economics, I'm horrible at charts and graphs and math and stuff. /

22. I had it in the top floor of that building – 200 kids in the class. And, I have a hard time when it's not interactive. /

23. So smaller classes – my buddy goes to COT and he says it's like high school size class, more comfortable so you can actually talk to one another and that.

So, let's circle back to just before school started - how were you feeling about it all?

P5. 24. I was pretty gung-ho the first week. It was good and I had my step-mom checking on me, meeting me for lunch, asking me how I was doing. I had it all together, I maintained the first couple weeks doing really well./

25. I lost my interest in partying and chasing girls and doing homework so as soon as that started to fade./

26. I stopped showing up for class and lost touch with that whole thing, my determination – that's it! Right there. Mid-way, it was slow leaving, pretty much/

27. I work and I had to put in as many hours as I could, so then the whole driving back and forth thing, it didn't work out well. Too much going on.

Trying to balance it all.

P5. 28. So, it was kinda a disaster from the get-go. A lot of things working against me./

29. I just quit going./

30. My Dad knew, somewhere along the line, but he didn't know for a long time. I was pretty embarrassed I dropped out so soon and didn't want to talk to anyone about it. By the time people started to find out it was too late and there was no point in talking about it. So, I slept in and forgot about it./

31. And then it didn't start kicking in till I had to pay my student loans. And I realized, shit, what did I do?/

32. I'm the kind of person who gets way out of

21. He was horrible at the charts, graphs and math in microeconomics.

22. His micro class was on the top floor with 200 students. He has a hard time with classes that are not interactive.

23. His friend attends COT and is in smaller, more comfortable classes similar to high school where students interact.

24. He was gung-ho and maintained the first few weeks of school and had the support of his step-mom.

25. He lost interest in partying, chasing girls and homework.

26. He stopped going to class and lost touch with school, as well as his determination.

27. P5 worked and drove back and forth to school. He found working in and driving to 30 miles back-forth difficult.

28. He felt a lot of things were working against him.

29. He quit going to class.

30. He was embarrassed and didn't want to talk to anyone about school. Once people found out he stopped attending, it was too late to fix it.

31. When his student loans became due, he realized the depth of what he had done.

32. P5 allows things to get out of sorts before

<p>sorts before I'll actually try to do something about it instead of figuring out what's wrong first and stopping it before it builds and builds and builds and by the time I actually have to do something it's three times as bad as it would have been.</p> <p>So, it felt like it was building and building and you couldn't figure out what to do about it except quit going to class.</p> <p>P5. 33. Yeah, I kinda thought about going for help a couple times, but I didn't know where to go. Did anyone care? Probably not./ 34. I lost my focus.</p> <p>Where'd it go?</p> <p>P5. 35. Ahh – I don't think it went anywhere in particular, I just lost it / 36. and I didn't know anybody in my classes and didn't have many friends.</p> <p>So, you don't have friends in class, someone to talk to, the classes are huge, nobody seems to care, so you walk away ..</p> <p>P5. 37. No one cares. I was pretty much just a ghost./ 38. They were on the ball for payment though. (laughter) Ghosts pay bills.</p> <p>Describe for me what it was like to discover that your goal, business, wasn't your thing?</p> <p>P5. 39. Well, it was just, I kinda went through an emotional change. My outlook on life shifted a little bit and I don't know why. I started to think that I didn't want to sit in an office all day long, that's not going to happen. So, that part was exciting cuz at least that way all my options were back on the table. I could look for something more like me, that I can express myself, not kiss the bosses ass.</p> <p>So, lots of options on the table. Which option did you take?</p> <p>P5. 40. Everything I believe now is so different. / 41. Right now, an option is the COT Culinary</p>	<p>he tries to figure out what is wrong and fix it, so it builds and builds and becomes three times as bad as it would have been.</p> <p>33. He thought about seeking help, but did not know where to go and felt no one cared. 34. He lost his focus.</p> <p>35. He lost his focus. 36. He did not know any students in his classes and did not have many friends on campus.</p> <p>37. He felt that no one cared and he was pretty much a ghost. 38. P5 noted that the University was on the ball for tuition payment, even from ghosts.</p> <p>39. He experienced an emotional change and his outlook on life shifted. He began to think he did not want to sit in an office all day which put his options back on the table. He wanted to find something that fit him better than business.</p> <p>40. What he believes is different now. 41. He is currently thinking about studying</p>
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<p>School. I love cooking. /</p> <p>42. If I had something to keep my interest, smaller classes and hands-on. It's crucial.</p> <p>I see your face light up and you're smiling, so you must be excited about the possibility.</p> <p>P5. 43. Yeah, in fact, I am, I definitely am. I can see myself doing it for once. For a long time, in the future I can see myself doing something in the field. Keep my interest up for a long time.</p> <p>Sounds important that whatever you do keeps your interest over time. When you look back on your life, was cooking key.</p> <p>P5. 44. No, not really. I help my step-mom cook and all that./</p> <p>45. But I was always outside running around, trying to hurt myself. If there's a career where you just hurt yourself, I'm all about that. It wouldn't be all that bad./</p> <p>46. I didn't take it personally; more than 75% of why I left was my own fault. But, things could have been done differently.</p> <p>Speaking of doing things differently - If you were to go back in time, and you are now your advisor, what would you say to you?</p> <p>P5. 47. Umm, let me think. I guess more than anything, keep your focus out of school on school, instead of getting out of class, running around, not doing your homework, doing video games, and not reading. Read your textbook, do your homework. Pretty much that's it.</p> <p>Sounds hard when you lost your focus – business.</p> <p>P5. 48. Yeah, well that and business wasn't my goal./</p> <p>49. All the time I was over my head. First couple weeks, getting into the swing of things. There's no way I can stay with it, when she rambles on./</p> <p>50. Everyone else gets it and I'm not going to be the only one. /</p> <p>51. The teacher mentioned 005 or 100, but I had no access to the internet, a convenient</p>	<p>culinary arts at the COT.</p> <p>42. He thinks he could be successful if he were in smaller classes, experienced hands-on learning and the subject kept his interest</p> <p>43. He is excited about culinary arts and can see himself and his future in that area.</p> <p>44. He helps his step-mother cook.</p> <p>45. As a child, he was always outside running around and getting hurt.</p> <p>46. P5 takes responsibility for 75% of his leaving college and recognizes things could have been done differently.</p> <p>47. If he could go back in time, he would encourage students to keep focused on school, read the textbooks, and do the homework.</p> <p>48. It was hard when he lost his focus and realized business was no longer his goal.</p> <p>49. He felt he was over his head and there was no way he could stay with it.</p> <p>50. He felt that the other students got it and he didn't want to be the only one not getting it.</p> <p>51. The math teacher offered access to the math lab, tutoring, and mentioned dropping to a</p>
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<p>excuse. She always, always made the math room available to everybody, but I couldn't get around to making it cuz I had to work or I was sleeping-in. Tutoring was available and I went once but it didn't help at all. If it would have helped I would have gone. If I started going from the get-go, I'd be in with all the kids not getting it./</p> <p>52. I didn't want to think about it.</p>	<p>lower level math. He felt if he had been with students not getting math, tutoring would have been helpful.</p> <p>52. He did not want to think about failing math.</p>
<p>So, you kinda avoided it by not going.</p> <p>P5. 53. Yeah. I had big plans of going to college./</p> <p>54. I was debating, cuz I had good scholarship opportunities for football, but things happened and that all went away. So. What happened in high school changed everything – one big stupid decision. Got myself into hot water. At that point I didn't know what I was going to do. I just wanted to start working and start over pretty much. Try to redefine myself, really. /</p> <p>55. And, I didn't for the first year, working didn't work for me. I finally got myself organized to do school./</p> <p>56. The business thing my family really wanted me to do. My aunt lives in Washington and does the SeaFair thing. She offered me an internship in Boise for the River Festival so I went there. It was the greatest experience of my life. I thought it was going to be public relations, but I ended up being an operations intern. It wasn't what I expected. I didn't learn anything, met cool people and did cool things.</p>	<p>53. He had big plans of attending college.</p> <p>54. He got into hot water in high school and blew his scholarship opportunities to play football. He wanted, at that time, just to start work and redefine himself.</p> <p>55. The first year out of high school, working full-time didn't work out for him, so he got organized for college.</p> <p>56. His family pushed business on him. He interned with his aunt at SeaFair in operations, but he thought it was going to be in public relations. It was a good experience, but it was not what he expected.</p>
<p>Did you learn what maybe you didn't want?</p> <p>P5. 57. No, that's when I started toward business and public relations because that's what she does and I could get a job in Seattle with her./</p> <p>58. I never went and talked to anybody about it. I never went to an Advisor./</p> <p>59. My Aunt told me, all I need is a two-year degree, some background. She said once I did that, she was begging me to come over and go to Bellevue Community College and get a two-year degree. But it would be the same thing again./</p> <p>60. Well, it would be smaller classes – but going to class where you don't know anybody,</p>	<p>57. He began in business with an aim of working in public relations like his aunt.</p> <p>58. He did not talk to anyone on campus and never met with an advisor.</p> <p>59. His aunt was encouraging him to earn even a two-year degree at Bellevue Community College after which she would hire him.</p> <p>61. P5 recognizes that a community college would have smaller classes, but he would not</p>

<p>it's hard. /</p> <p>61. I probably, a big thing that would have lead to my success, would have been living in the dorms. Even if just one person I knew was going to school, and did homework together, so. I had friends, but none were in school – everyone getting together at the apartment having a good time and I had to read.</p> <p>All alone studying – not in the dorms, don't know anyone, don't know what I'm going to do ...</p> <p>P5. 62. Right. I didn't want to live in the dorms because I wasn't right out of high school, I was 20, too grown-up for that./</p> <p>63. I was overwhelmed trying to do all my math – 50 questions and a workbook at the end of the week. So, on Thursday you are really pushing, not like Monday when you should have done it in the first place. /</p> <p>64. I should have taken a study skills course or something. Or go and talk to someone, instead of registering on line for math, economics and public speaking, all at once first semester.</p> <p>Wow – overload!</p> <p>P5. 65. I might go to COT - talk to someone. /</p> <p>66. I jumped into the spring and I'd rather start in the fall. Not as many new students in the spring, they've been there a semester, so everybody knows everybody. It's like going to a new high school half-way through the year. /</p> <p>67. So, maybe next fall – sounds like a good time. I still have a few other things on the table.</p> <p>Other things?</p> <p>P5. 68. My buddy's aunt has a condo on the beach of Hawaii. She said we can come stay for free and work construction. There are jobs and you can make a bunch of money and live the life for a while. I'm not expecting it to go anywhere but it would be a good time. I'm focused on that kind of stuff, rather than the average life. I want to travel, see Europe, the whole world./</p> <p>69. When I feel trapped, I get grumpy./</p> <p>70. That's the problem with me and relationships – I want to be flying by the seat of</p>	<p>know anyone.</p> <p>61. P5 believes if he had lived in the dorms, he would have been successful because he would have at least one person to do homework with. The friends he lived with were not in college so when he had to study, they were having a good time.</p> <p>62. He did not want to live in the dorms because he sat out of college one year and felt too grown-up.</p> <p>63. He felt overwhelmed with math studies.</p> <p>64. P5 thinks he should have taken a study skills course or talked to someone, but not have taken math, econ, and public speaking simultaneously first semester.</p> <p>65. He is considering going to COT to talk to someone about attending school there.</p> <p>66. He began freshman year in the spring and felt like everyone knew everyone.</p> <p>67. He is considering re-enrollment next fall.</p> <p>68. He has an opportunity to work construction in Hawaii, but does not expect it to happen. He would like to travel.</p> <p>69. He gets grumpy when he feels trapped.</p> <p>70. He wants to be flying by the seat of his pants forever.</p>
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<p>my pants forever. /</p> <p>71. But, now's the time to make the decision if I'm going to do that or start school. /</p> <p>72. Do I want a stable life? Another friend of mine, he does granite and tile work and he said he would fund me to open granite and tile shop in Hawaii. He'd teach me to tile and granite work, and open a shop and I wouldn't have a problem running my own business. I can smooze pretty well, so there's that. /</p> <p>73. And I still might do something with art or something. I have the talent to do it, just have not taken art. My mom is an artist, went to school and a year in Venice art school. I'm not good at drawing, I'm good abstract painter.</p> <p>Maybe instead of Public Speaking and Econ and Math first semester, you could take an art class so you didn't feel so overwhelmed.</p> <p>P5. 74. Yeah, yeah. It would have been fun, great, creative and make me want to go./</p> <p>75. I'm not sure what I want to do, not a clue. Whatever comes up first. I might go to Hawaii at end of hunting season.</p> <p>What were you thinking when you decided, I'm out of here?</p> <p>P5. 76. I was thinking I'll be stuck at home the rest of my life. I was overwhelmed and frustrated and there was no reason, I wasn't getting anywhere. Might as well drop out and work. That brought my hopes down a little bit./</p> <p>77. The best thing, was that I found that after, I can get excited about something, there for 2 weeks, I was ambitious and I'm not an ambitious person./</p> <p>78. Once I start something, I finish. The starting part bothers me, unless it's out of control. But, starting something mundane, I can't. /</p> <p>79. You know, never once did I get a call wondering if I was dropping out or what I was doing or anything.</p> <p>Or, if you were dead.</p> <p>P5. 80. Now that you mention it, they could have cared a little bit more. Maybe they should have cared for some of their students. That's</p>	<p>71. P5 feels it is time to make a decision about what he wants to do or if he wants to attend school.</p> <p>72. He has an opportunity to start a tile and granite business in Hawaii.</p> <p>73. He has talent in abstract painting, although he has not studied art. His mother is an artist.</p> <p>74. If he would have taken an art class, it would have been fun.</p> <p>75. He is clueless about what he wants to do with his life.</p> <p>76. He was overwhelmed and frustrated, and going nowhere, so he decided to drop-out and work which brought his hopes down.</p> <p>77. While not an ambitious person by nature, he was proud of himself for getting excited and being ambitious about school for a few weeks.</p> <p>78. P5 finishes all that he starts unless it is mundane.</p> <p>79. He is bothered that he never received a call from the university asking if he was dropping out or what he was doing.</p> <p>80. P5 feels it was pretty bad that the university did not care more about him.</p>
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<p>pretty bad.</p> <p>Cared – done it differently.</p> <p>P5. 81. If I knew people – like a study skills – or somewhere everyone ... I don't know.</p> <p>Like high school homeroom?</p> <p>P5. 82. Exactly! Some kind of gathering, even if a few people got together, not friends, but get together instead of swallowing it all down inside./</p> <p>83. Just for the simple fact, if there were only twenty people in the class, interact with activities and what-not, people in the same course the rest of the 4 years, but you know someone, you're familiar with someone, you see them on campus and feel comfortable asking, "did you get that math, cuz I sure as hell didn't."</p> <p>Another student I interviewed said she felt like she was lost in a foreign country.</p> <p>P5. 84. That's a pretty good picture she painted. I exactly felt like that! Walking around I felt like that. Everyone walking around talking to someone, shit! I don't know you, have common grounds. I knew a couple people, but they weren't doing what I was doing./</p> <p>85. I was starting to wish I weren't in school or I was in school with buddies. That would have been cake – get together, hit the books./</p> <p>86. it would have been fun, even just a little bit of fun would have made a huge difference. Fun, a little fun. And, my math teacher, a skeleton, no personable, not funny, no sense of humor or imagination – it was just 1-2-3, wa-wa-waaa-wa-waa, sounds like a foreign language after a while. It's a tough spot.</p> <p>Did you ever get angry, feel disappointed?</p> <p>P5. 87. I was pretty disappointed that I didn't persevere – I quit, I don't quit anything.</p> <p>You were a football player – football players don't quit – they persevere through pain, anything. Football's about the team.</p>	<p>81. It would have been different if he had taken study skills or knew people.</p> <p>82. P5 felt that if students got together to talking about school, rather than swallowing it all down inside, it would be helpful.</p> <p>83. P5 thinks smaller, interactive classes would allow students to meet other students and feel [attached to] comfortable on campus.</p> <p>84. He felt that all other students knew someone and had common grounds, but him.</p> <p>85. He began to wish he was not in college or that his buddies were in college with him so they could hit the books together.</p> <p>86. If college would have been a little fun it would have made a huge difference. If the math teacher would have been more personable and funny, it would have been more fun.</p> <p>87. He was disappointed in himself that he did not persevere, as he does not quit anything.</p>
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<p>P5. 88. Supposed to. I was captain, quarterback. Huh (gentle laugh) – a quarterback without a team. I didn't think about it like that. On a team since I was little. You kinda, elementary school yard play football./</p> <p>89. If I played football it would have worked – you can't be failing. It would have completely pushed me to do it they have tons of help if anything happens. They have tutors and what-not. Yeah./</p> <p>90. Can't dwell on the past.</p> <p>Gosh, we've been talking about an hour ...</p> <p>P5. 91. Wait, I got one more major thing. Parking. Parking was probably one the biggest of all of them - the stress. I'm always late to everywhere I go. If you aren't a ½ hr before class, you might as well not go. I can't tell you how many times I drove around and couldn't find a place and I paid for that damn parking decal!</p> <p>Its so, frustrating and now you're late for class ...</p> <p>P5. 92. Yeah, why bother, why go. Go home./</p> <p>93. It was my own fault I isolated myself from the university population cuz I ... well, not entirely./</p> <p>94. There was no one helping me figure it out, especially for kids who just left home, to be cast out there and have no kind of anyone looking after you. You lose yourself pretty quickly. It was all or nothing – that's what it seems.</p> <p>I think we're at our hour ..</p> <p>P5. 95. No, we have 5 more minutes!/ 96. I think it would be better to have smaller classes / 97. and some kind of just, personal relationship kind of class where you learn stuff about jumping out into the world and how to approach school - pretty much socializing people to it all.</p> <p>How do to this thing.</p>	<p>88. P5 felt like a quarterback without a team his freshman year.</p> <p>89. P5 thinks that if he were on a football scholarship he would not have failed as athletes have tons of help, including tutors.</p> <p>90. He does not want to dwell on the past.</p> <p>91. Parking was a major stressor for P5 and made him late for class or contributed to him skipping class because he could not find somewhere to park.</p> <p>92. He went home when he couldn't find somewhere to park.</p> <p>93. He isolated himself from the university somewhat.</p> <p>94. He felt cast out without anyone looking out after him or helping him figure it out. He lost himself.</p> <p>95. P5 wanted to talk his entire 1 hour. 96. He felt, again, smaller classes would have been better. 97. He felt that a personal relationship type of class that teaches how to approach the world and school, and socializing students to school would be helpful.</p>
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<p>P5. 98. Yeah. Familiarize us. Make a friend or twenty! /</p> <p>99. Oh, I forgot I didn't have a computer and my math was on-line. You had to check your tests and stuff on-line, it's not like they passed the test back and you were like, oh shit, that's the one I did wrong. There's no way you can regress and make things less technological. At that point in time, I didn't have regular computer access /</p> <p>100. and I wasn't going out of my way to do it. I was slacking off.</p> <p>Not many computers in culinary arts - mainly knives!</p> <p>P5. 101. (laughter). That would be up my alley.</p> <p>How do you feel about leaving school, freshman year on the whole.</p> <p>P5. 102. It doesn't bother me anymore./</p> <p>103. I'm going to do something with my life.</p> <p>104. I learned I have to be more prepared. /</p> <p>105. It was a disappointment, but I learn from my mistakes about life in general from mistakes.</p> <p>What would you say to incoming freshmen?</p> <p>P5. 106. I would say, umm .. prepare yourself mentally as much as possible, its not easy. As soon as you recognize a problem as far as not understanding in class, go talk to someone, they'll help you figure it out. You can't do it on your own. Do your homework, stay focused. Figure it out, don't suffer through, it won't work out for you./</p> <p>107. I gotta do something eventually.</p> <p>It's hard to figure it out.</p> <p>P5. 108. I didn't know anyone else was struggling AND just knowing that others were struggling I might have searched out people and figure it out together. I'm sure I looked like I was getting it. So, maybe if things were put more out in the open it would be a big help.</p> <p>Things in the open like ...</p>	<p>98. He wanted to be familiarized with college and make some friends.</p> <p>99. P5 was hurt by not having a computer or regular computer access since his math homework was on-line.</p> <p>100. He slacked off.</p> <p>101. Culinary arts would be up his alley.</p> <p>102. He is no longer bothered re dropping out.</p> <p>102. He will do something with his life.</p> <p>104. He learned to be more prepared.</p> <p>105. Freshman year, dropping out was a disappointment.</p> <p>106. P5 would encourage other freshman to prepare themselves mentally, as it is not easy. To not try to do it on your own and to talk to someone once a problem is recognized. He would encourage them to do their homework, stay focused and not to suffer through it.</p> <p>107. He has to do something eventually.</p> <p>108. His freshman year, he did not know any other student who was struggling and that if he knew others were struggling, it would have helped him. He felt that the struggles students had were hidden.</p>
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<p>P5. 109. Important stuff, surviving college, how to pick classes, how to study, and I don't know./</p> <p>110. Just make students interact with each other, especially with guys – I noticed girls they're nice. Boys are mean to each other, if you aren't already in their circle. I try to be really social with everybody, I read them, I'll make myself and at least introduced myself – /</p> <p>111. but at school I was so frustrated, and pissed off I didn't want to talk to anybody. Ummm ... I don't know. /</p> <p>112. How does everybody know somebody on campus? Nobody talks in class, so you can't talk to anybody cuz they didn't raise their hand and have an opinion./</p> <p>113. That's another big thing – my family all around, they know. Now what will I do?</p> <p>You want to stay here.</p> <p>P5. 114. I want to be around. /</p> <p>115. So, culinary school I could possibly find something here and other than that my friend at COT business, maybe we could put our heads together and open something./</p> <p>116. We toss around ideas, we accomplish a lot together, we feed off one another.</p> <p>That sounds great.</p> <p>P5. 117. That's what makes it so hard, lots to choose from./</p> <p>118. I took Food Science in high school and got the best grade in class. I was always, get out of my kitchen, I'm cooking. We cooked 3 days a week. We made mayonnaise and supper dishes.</p> <p>I notice you wiggle in your seat a lot. How was it sit still in school?</p> <p>P5. 119. I hate sitting still, listening to people talk. I have to be interactive, hands-on./</p> <p>120. I could do drama, I did drama in high school. /</p> <p>121. I was just taking courses I needed to get there – to business.</p> <p>Geese – we're now way over 1 hour.</p>	<p>109. P5 thinks how to study, how to pick classes and hints on surviving college should be taught.</p> <p>110. He felt that student-to-student interaction was missing.</p> <p>111. He was frustrated and pissed off his freshman year with no one to talk to.</p> <p>112. He felt that everyone on campus knew somebody but him. He felt that if students raised their hands in class and stated an opinion, you could at least get to know them a little bit.</p> <p>113. His big extended family is here so he wants to stay here but doesn't know what to do.</p> <p>114. He wants to be around his family.</p> <p>115. Culinary arts would allow him to have a career and stay around home.</p> <p>116. He and his friend, Chris, toss ideas around for a business.</p> <p>117. P5 feels there is a lot to choose from in life.</p> <p>118. In high school, he took and liked food science class.</p> <p>119. He hates sitting still and listening to people; he needs interaction, to be hand-on.</p> <p>120. He likes drama and did it in high school.</p> <p>121. He was taking his general courses to get to business courses.</p> <p>122. He has lots of thoughts never expressed</p>
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P5. 122. Yeah, lots of thoughts never expressed to anybody. I would never talk to anybody. I didn't want to talk about it. /
123. You have to talk about it, you can't bottle it up inside, it adds to the pressure. /
124. You begin to think, nobody cares cuz you are in college you should be doing things on your own. That doesn't help at all./
125. I'm not doing what I should be doing cuz I don't know, I don't know.

Final thoughts?

P5. 126. Get involved with students and their well-being. Make sure they are doing okay. Be a little bit of a parent, less of an institution. That's my final thought. Wow, we talked a lot.

I know it was hard for us to find a time to get together, but I want to thank you for so honestly sharing your experiences and feelings with me.

and didn't want to talk about it.

123. He must talk about it and not bottle it up; it adds to the pressure.

124. He began to think nobody cared and that because he was in college, he should do everyone on his own.

125. He didn't do what he should have been doing freshman year, because he didn't know what to do.

126. His final thoughts for the university are to get involved with students, check on their well-being, and ensure they are okay. Be a little bit more parent and less institution.

P5 (MR) -Level Three, Narrative Based on Emergent Theme

A poor decision during his senior year of high school caused the rescinding of P5's scholarship opportunities to play quarterback in Division II-A collegiate athletics. So, he took a year off of school to work and redefine himself. At the end of that year, he got himself "organized to do school" and began his freshman year as a "gung-ho" business major with it "all together" and "big plans for going to college." However, just a few weeks into the semester, he realized he was going "in the wrong direction" and was thinking of changing his major. He continued, however, as a business major to satisfy his family, yet mid-way through the semester lost his determination and "lost touch with the whole [school] thing." He felt an "emotional change" as his "outlook on life shifted" away from business. While he was confused, he was also excited because many academic and career "options were back on the table."

He was uncomfortable in the large classrooms of 150+ students and missed the one-on-one contact with teachers and the "back and forth" interactive discussions he experienced in high school. He found it difficult to concentrate with so many students in the classroom and felt all he did was "sit, listen, and watching boring movies." He wanted to belong, to be a part of the class, but felt like he did "not have an actual stance" in the class. He briefly considered transferring to the College of Technology because of the smaller class sizes, but decided to "go big or go home" and do the four-year program.

P5 did not attend freshman orientation or speak with an academic advisor; rather, his uncle, a teacher at the College of Technology, helped him register on-line. Because he did not attend Orientation, he did not take the English or math placement exams. He found himself struggling in classes, especially Math 117 and realized that because he had been away from math for so long, he should have taken Math 100 as a refresher. He was in "over his head" and "overwhelmed" and at a disadvantage without a personal computer at home. He realized he should have "taken a study skills course or something, or go and talk to someone." He found college lacked an element of "fun" and recognized a type of class was missing where students could "learn stuff about jumping out into the world and how to approach school;" a class where students interact with one another and learn the "important stuff, like surviving college, how to pick classes, and how to study."

P5 began his freshman year during spring semester and felt that "everybody knows everybody". He did not make or have many friends on campus and knew no one in his classes. It appeared to P5 that all the other students were walking around campus talking to someone with whom they had common grounds, but him. He believed that "all the other students got it" and he was the only one totally lost. He wished for a gathering of students so they could talk about their struggles and not be "swallowing it all down inside." He felt that no other students were struggling and that the struggles students faced were hidden by the university. Not having anyone to talk to about his academic struggles added to the pressure he bottled up inside. P5 felt if he had lived in the dorms he might have made friends and been more academically and socially successful. However, he selected not to live in the dorms because he "wasn't right out of high school and was too grown-up" for dormitory living.

About half-way through the semester, he began to do poorly in math and could not stay on top of things. He was not able to complete his speech for Public Speaking, so stopped going to class. He worked at the family business far from the University and discovered driving back and forth “worked against” him. He “lost focus”. He had problems with finding parking on campus and often was so late for class and stressed from driving around looking for a parking place, he would skip class and just drive home. He became “frustrated and pissed off.”

P5 allowed “things to get out of sorts before trying to figure out what is wrong and fix it so it became three times as bad.” He felt “trapped”, “overwhelmed”, “frustrated”, and became “grumpy.” He felt “disappointed” and “embarrassed he dropped out so soon and didn’t want to talk to anyone about it.” He felt his hopes dashed when he decided to terminate his education. When his family found out, it was too late. He didn’t realize what he had done until his student loans became due. He takes responsibility for 75% of leaving college, but recognizes that things could have been differently. He was “disappointed” that he did not persevere because typically he does not quit anything. He was trained in football, as captain and quarterback, to play through, to persevere and to lead. While at University of Montana, he felt like a “quarterback without a team.”

P5 felt uncared for, disliked, and “pushed aside” by faculty during his freshman year. He lamented that no teacher, “not a single one pulled me aside in class to even ask me if I was doing ok or where I was.” He thought about asking someone for help, but “didn’t know where to go” and did not believe anyone cared. He did not have “anyone helping him figure it out” and was “cast out there with no kind of anyone looking after him.” He felt that because he was in college, he was supposed to know what he was doing, but he didn’t. After he stopped attending class, he was sad that he “never once got a call wondering if he was dropping out or what he was doing.” He felt as if he were “just a ghost” and believes it is “pretty bad” the university does not “care a little bit more for some of their students.” He felt that the university should “get involved with the students and their well-being. Make sure they are doing okay. Be a little bit of a parent and less of an institution.”

Currently, he is pondering attending College of Technology this fall to study culinary arts as it interests him, it is hands-on, and the classes are smaller in size. He also has opportunities in Hawaii to work construction or open a granite and tile business. Pursuing a career in art is also a thought as he is a good abstract painter. He feels “now’s the time to make a decision” if he’s going to go to Hawaii, study art, or start school at the COT.

Data Analyses, Levels One-Three

P6 (RW), Levels One and Two (Spontaneous Meaning Units)

<p>Please tell me about your experience of deciding not to continue studies at The University of Montana. Share your thoughts and feelings, the negative, positive and the neutral, in as much detail as you remember, about your decision and experience of leaving college.</p> <p>P6. 1. Okay.. um .. let's see .. well, as soon as I graduated I knew, you know, I knew from my junior year in high school, I was probably going to UM. And so, that's what I thought I had to do and if I went to UM, my college was paid for. /</p> <p>2. So, um, I was, I'll go there – I'm sure something there will interest me. /</p> <p>3. So, as soon as I got out of high school applied there go accepted and went there./</p> <p>4. I was excited, I was ecstatic to go, move into the dorms, have the whole college experience./</p> <p>5. Alright roommate -could have paired me up a little bit better, but we got along. /</p> <p>6. Good dorm, it was the party dorm but um .. I kept to my own and didn't get too much involved in that. /</p> <p>7. And I said I was going to major in communications /</p> <p>8. and you know, even though you pick a major as a freshman, you don't take any classes in your major other than general education. I took about one and it was Into to Interpersonal Communications. It was the only class I took for my major, it was an alright class, but it wasn't really anything I was expecting./</p> <p>9. The reason I majored in communication is because I work well with people, I love talking to people, I'm a people person and get along with people great – you know .. do something with that./</p> <p>10. Went to class, class was alright, pulled out a high B in class and so I was like wow this is a totally different image than I had in mind./</p> <p>11. I was going through the school year doing general classes, get this over with./</p>	<p>1. P6 knew as early as junior high he would be attending UM and that if he did attend UM, his tuition would be paid for.</p> <p>2. He thought he would attend UM and find a major that would interest him.</p> <p>3. He applied, was accepted and enrolled at UM.</p> <p>4. P6 was excited to have the whole college experience and move into the dorms.</p> <p>5. He got along with his roommate.</p> <p>6. His dorm was the party dorm, but he kept to his own and did not get involved in the party scene too much.</p> <p>7. He decided to major in communications.</p> <p>8. First semester freshman year, he took mainly general education courses and one course in communications, which was not what he expected it to be.</p> <p>9. P6 declared communications as his major because he loves talking with people.</p> <p>10. He got a high B in his communications course but it was different than he imagined.</p> <p>11. P6 wanted to take his general ed courses and just wanted to get them over with.</p>
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<p>12. Nothing on campus was catching my eye at all. I was like I need to find something that will interest me a lot./</p> <p>13. So, it wasn't through the UM I heard about fire science program, I learned thru someone I work with got me interested. Told me more and more about it, I got more and more interested. I looked it up on web, did a great job of explaining it – basically, selling it to the person looking into it.</p>	<p>12. No academic majors on campus caught P6's eye and he felt the need to declare a major that would interest him a lot.</p> <p>13. He heard about fire science through someone at work and became interested. He researched the program which was well marketed.</p>
<p>As opposed to selling a communications degree?</p>	
<p>P6. 14. Definitely or any other degree. Fire science, you know, interests you so much – you wanna go into a burning building, help your community? I was like ... yeah, that's me!/ 15. I realized if I get a communication degree, it'll be a lot harder to find a communication degree job in Montana – I might have to go to a different state or whatnot and you know I figured I want to stay in Montana. / 16. I love Montana and I love my city and my state, fire fighting could be a great job. Excellent pay, home town thing, give back to the state that's done so much for you over the years. What better idea? / 17. The first semester frosh year, didn't even think about it – then winter break I started hearing about fire science./ 18. I was do I really want to do this? Do I want to be in the university? What am I gonna do? It didn't feel like I was moving along to get somewhere. / 19. Finally, I heard one of my friends from high school was in the fire science residency program where you live in the fire house two years while you go to school for it. I thought it was awesome./ 20. I applied to be a resident and I got accepted I already felt like I was on my way to doing something, to a career that I could actually do the rest of my life and it all fit together. This is me, this is hometown, this is MT– I loved it.</p>	<p>14. Fire science is “him”.</p> <p>15. He felt finding a job in communications in Montana would be difficult and that he might have to move, which he did not want to do.</p> <p>16. He loves Montana, his hometown and realized fire fighting is a good job, with good pay that gives back to the community.</p> <p>17. Freshman year first semester he did not think about dropping out, or a career in fire science.</p> <p>18. Freshman year first semester he questioned if he really wanted to do college or be at UM – he did not feel like he was moving to somewhere.</p> <p>19. A friend of his talked to him about the fire science program; P6 thought it would be awesome.</p> <p>20. P6 applied to fire science and was accepted into the program and residency. He felt that he found a career that he could do the rest of his life and stay in his hometown.</p>
<p>And, fire fighting is communications.</p>	
<p>P6. 21. It is, it is! I get to work with people every single day, every single day./ 22. And, so it felt right and the university never</p>	<p>21. He works, communicates, with people as a fire fighter-trainee every single day. 22. Fire fighting feels right; UM never made</p>

<p>made me feel like I was headed in the right direction to somewhere. That's why I stopped going and went to fire science.</p> <p>Did you feel part of the university?</p> <p>P6. 23. I was attached to being a Griz./ 24. I got to campus and it was, "I'll help you with this, you need tutoring, I'm your advisor I'll help you with that."/</p> <p>25. I was too nice a guy and said yes to everything, get involved in this, do this, oh boy. Granted, some of the stuff I did was really fun, being involved in the stuff at the oval was good. /</p> <p>26. I did Orientation – you know, here's your Griz card, it was more like here's the university, here's the great non-academic things, like Griz games, stuff at the oval, the UC to get involved. /</p> <p>27. I was, like you want me to have a fun great college experience but you aren't pointing out anything, emphasizing where I can go for a career. What job can I get w/ this degree? What specialized programs do you have for jobs?</p> <p>Did you take career tests or the one-credit Freshman Transition course?</p> <p>P6. 28. No I didn't take the one-credit Transition course but I kinda wish I did./</p> <p>29. I was a good student in high school, got 3.8 gpa and was incredibly involved – almost too much, but I liked it a lot./</p> <p>30. I wasn't ready for, I didn't realize, I wasn't ready for the difference between high school and college classes. High school classes you got more communication between your classes and you get to college and you got 200 kids in anthropology and you are, what the heck. You gotta do a lot of work on your own, and I did do a lot of work on my own. /</p> <p>31. It was difficult, but I pulled it out, I tried to be the best student I could be./</p> <p>32. Probably because the classes were so different from high school and more difficult, I didn't get involved in college as much as I did in high school. (shrugs shoulders)</p> <p>Remembering first semester frosh year, what was "difficult" which kept you from</p>	<p>him feel like he was headed in the right direction, which is why he dropped out.</p> <p>23. He was attached to being a Griz. 24. As a freshman, he was bombarded with help, tutoring, advising.</p> <p>25. He said yes to everything, got involved a lot freshman year and had fun.</p> <p>26. He attended Freshman Orientation but felt he was told only about non-academic things on campus to get involved with.</p> <p>27. He wanted to have fun, but wanted UM to point out what he could do for a career, what job he could get with a communications degree.</p> <p>28. He did not take the freshman Transitions course. 29. He was a good high school student, earned a 3.8 GPA and was incredibly involved.</p> <p>30. He wasn't ready for the lack of one-on-one communication in college as compared to high school or the level of independent studying and homework.</p> <p>31. P6 found freshman first semester to be difficult but he tried to be the best student he could be. 32. He did not get involved in college as much because the course work was so difficult.</p>
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<p>getting involved?</p> <p>P6. 33. Comm class .. what else? I had Math 117 which was a good placement for me. Didn't take math assessment test, went off ACT scores. It was too easy for me. Took anthropology with Richard Sattler, it was alright – it was long and boring, didn't make me want to go to class. I had science second semester. /</p> <p>34. I had geology – oh, yeah. It was an alright class with a young teacher, and for UM, at least, from what I've seen, he was a young teacher and I think he communicated with us and got across with us on a better level than other professors – he taught us so much more, he was younger, knew what we were feeling like, he got us.</p> <p>Sounds great.</p> <p>P6. 35. Yeah. I met lots of people through the dorms. Almost backed out, but Mom and Dad wanted me to do it. I liked it to a certain point, it had its ups and downs. Met so many great people, hang out even today, great guys. You gotta deal with people running in hallways at 3 am when you are trying to sleep – big disappointment.</p> <p>Thinking about your decision to come to UM.</p> <p>P6.36. Not much of a decision. I was pretty much expected to do it with my family./</p> <p>37. A lot of my family hasn't gone to school. My sister was only the 2nd one out of my entire family that has gone to college. She went to UM freshman year and left./</p> <p>38. It helped to have a sister know UM campus in a way. I basically figured it out on my own, she'd help me find a building or drop a class, or what kind of teacher should I take.</p> <p>Your parents were supportive?</p> <p>P6. 39. Yeah.</p> <p>Did anyone ever ask you about your college goals and dreams?</p> <p>P6. 40. I had no clue, no clue. I had plenty of</p>	<p>33. He took Comm, Anthro and Math, which were too easy for him but also long and boring.</p> <p>34. He had a young teacher for geology who communicated and “got” students better than other professors.</p> <p>35. He met a lot of new friends in the dorms. He nearly did not move into the dorms, but his parents wanted him to. He like the dorms somewhat, still is friends with some of the guys, but felt disappointed in the dorms.</p> <p>36. He was expected to attend UM by his family, so it wasn't a conscious decision.</p> <p>37. He and his older sister are the only two people in his family who have attended college. His sister dropped out after freshman year.</p> <p>38. His sister helped him a little bit to find his way on campus, to drop classes and suggest courses and teachers.</p> <p>39. His parents were supportive of him.</p> <p>40. He had no clue about his future.</p>
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<p>teachers in high school ask, and I'd say, I really don't know. I don't know./</p> <p>41. I had so many extra-curricular activities./</p> <p>42. So many teachers were appalled I didn't apply for scholarships. But I had college paid for already, why take someone else's money who needs it./</p> <p>43. Yeah, so, that was one thing that attracted me to go to school, if I have the money to go to school, why not use it? My grampa set up a trust fund way back when we were born so if you want to go to college in Montana, he'll pay; if you go out of state, he won't. He pays for living too, during school year, he pays for rent during school Summer – you're on your own. He pays for books. Money wasn't a question for me./</p> <p>44. Leaving UM wasn't about grades. /</p> <p>45. Leaving wasn't about missing friends cuz sometimes I wish I'd go out of state cuz I know too many people./</p> <p>46. I left because it didn't, nothing at UM made, nothing I did at least, I know you go to school you should feel you are doing something with your life./</p> <p>47. <i>Every day</i> I was thinking <i>what am I doing here? What am I doing with my life? Every day made me feel like I had no clue. /</i></p> <p>48. The first day I started fire science, I knew what I wanted to do, I knew what I would do. You get a degree in fire science. A degree and a career. You have to be careful – I was really skeptical. I was putting more commitment on a two-year degree and more energy into this, than a four-year, fancy college. It is, fire fighting, is one of the most competitive jobs in the US today. Its competition. If you want to get hired, you have to be on top of things, know everything, be very professional. You give your whole self and it takes a lot of time. You do residency – I have a shift to be on while I go to school. I am submerged, completely. And you know, its more stress on me being a resident, you start a residency, you start being interviewed. Anything I do in college program, I'm being watched. The instructors watch you in class and out of class. If I want to be hired in Montana, guaranteed in the department, somebody knows somebody who knows you./</p> <p>49. You can't hide like you can at UM.</p>	<p>41. He participated in many high school extra-curricular activities.</p> <p>42. He did not apply for scholarship because his tuition was paid – he didn't want to take someone's money.</p> <p>43. Having his tuition at any Montana school paid by a trust fund set up by his grandpa propelled him to UM. Money was not a question for him.</p> <p>44. He did not leave UM because of poor grades.</p> <p>45. He did not leave UM because he missed his friends. Sometimes he wishes he would have gone to school out of state.</p> <p>46. He left UM because he did not feel he was doing something with his life.</p> <p>47. Every single day he was thinking “what am I doing here and what am I doing with my life?” Every day, he felt like he had no clue.</p> <p>48. His first day in fire science, he knew it was what he wanted to do with his life. He would simultaneously be earning a degree and a career. His commitment, stress, and energy level directed toward the 2-year fire science degree he feels is stronger than that at UM. He is submerged in fire science.</p> <p>49. He felt that students can hide at UM.</p>
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It kinda sounds like going to UM was like getting into a car and not knowing where your were driving to and fire science, you know where you are going.

P6. 50. Oh, yeah. That's the great thing about it. It's taken me all this time and energy, its really stressful, but you know its going to be worth it.

Hm, wonder if you thought UM was going to be worth it? You said you always knew you'd go to UM, but when you were in high school or a little boy, did you have in the back of your mind, I don't want to go to UM, I want to be a fireman?

P6. 51. No (laughs). That's the crazy thing about fire science -- I never did./

52. I wanted to be like my dad. I wanted to be like my dad, not have the same job, but have what he has. He has a well-paying job, a hometown job. He grew up in Missoula just like I have. He has a wife, family, nice house, he loves his town, his community. I want the whole small-town, Missoula, picket fence, dog, kids, good job .. ahh, I'd love that, love that. Nothing better.

When you were at UM ..

P6. 53. It was like, how am I going to get that? I never knew how I would get that./

54. It was crazy. So many things being thrown at you. You can do this, and this. It was so confusing. Go this way, that way, do this first. /

55. I was overwhelmed, very overwhelmed. Lots of stuff thrown at you. Programs saying come with us, do this, do that; it was too much./

56. And, that's the thing with fire science, they aren't recruiting anybody. They want kids that come there cuz they want to be there.

While at the university it sounds like you were without solid direction.

P6. 57. I was ... unfocused and I guess, yes, I was directionless.

50. P6 feels that the time, stress and energy invested in fire science will be worth it.

51. He did not think UM was going to be worth it although he never thought about being a fireman before second semester frosh year.

52. He strives to be like his dad with a good hometown job, nice home, wife, family, dog, picket fence, kidsi – he would love that.

53. When at UM, he could not figure out how he would obtain all that his father has.

54. He was confused by all that was thrown at him in college, all the possibilities and being told to go this way, that way.

55. He felt very overwhelmed by all that was thrown at him about programs. It was too much for him.

56. In fire science, the program does not recruit students; students must want to be there.

57. At UM, he was unfocused and directionless.

<p>Did you ever think to ask someone on campus to help you find direction?</p> <p>P6. 58. No./ 59. I started asking people, what are you doing. What does your husband do? What do you do? How'd you get there? That helped me more than anything – talking to people who've been there and done it. I asked everyone, did you go to UM? I heard stories of how easy it was for them to get focused on what they wanted to do.</p> <p>You talked with firemen about fire science?</p> <p>P6. 60. Yeah. I will start at the bottom and move up, to Engineer running trucks and pumps and promotions will come along. I will go to Engineer, then Captain. I see those jobs. / 61. With communications do I build up to a certain point? Do I get hired and that's where I'm at. Do I have to start my own business? (shakes his head as if confused)</p> <p>Let's return to freshman year; how was it making the decision not to return to campus.</p> <p>P6. 62. Things were going well. I almost, that second semester, I never, I didn't finalize my decision to go to fire science until I registered and paid. I was stuck and it sucked./ 63. Second semester didn't mean anything to me. I only took 12 credits, geology, food and culture, Business 100 - I got good grades in all my classes.</p> <p>Hey - I taught Business 100 about work values, interests, academic majors and how they all relate to careers and lifestyle ...</p> <p>P6. 64. You came to class after I decided to go to fire science. I put some of the stuff you said, I reflected on my decision to be in fire science – I did take a good hard look at my decision to leave and be a fireman.</p> <p>So, you're going along well first semester..</p> <p>P6. 65. End of first semester, I started thinking about fire science and started talking to people at work about it and talked to a fireman. Then I found out a friend from high school, ahead of</p>	<p>58. He did not ask anyone on campus to help him find direction. 59. He began to find his own way by asking people what they do for a living and how they got there. He asked everyone if they went to UM and heard stories of how easy it was for others to find academic and career focus.</p> <p>60. He talked to firemen about their jobs and he can "see those jobs". 61. He could not "see" a job in communications – he wondered if he built up to a point, get hired where he's at, or have to start his own business.</p> <p>62. Freshman first semester went well. He did not decide to drop out and go to fire science until second semester was paid for – he felt stuck. 63. Second semester he had a plan – to leave UM. So he only took 12 credits, but he still got good grades in his courses.</p> <p>64. The researcher was a guest speaker in P6's Business 100 class to speak on career decision making. He took a good hard look at his decision to drop out and become a fireman.</p> <p>65. He started thinking about dropping out and fire science at the end of frosh first semester. He researched the field and found it was the 2nd most gratifying job in the US.</p>
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<p>me, dropped out of UM and is in the program. He loves it. It's the second most gratifying job in the US – I read a study.</p> <p>Sounds like personal value in a career, in your life, is important.</p> <p>P6. 66. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. It is!/ 67. Every time I love going on calls. A little old lady fell down, more than happy to go help her. Loved that.</p> <p>When you were making the decision to leave UM, how was it when you approached mom / dad and gramps?</p> <p>P6. 68. I approached them separately. They were kinda in the back of their minds, they thought, oh sure – now he's gonna try this. / 69. Then as I got into classes and got the residency, they thought, wow he is serious. I told them this is a great job. Now they are supportive./ 70. Grandpa – he's very supportive. I told him I was leaving UM and going to Helena to do fire fighting. All he said was take it serious and make me proud. Now, everybody's thrilled and I'm absolutely thrilled.</p> <p>So, looking back .. how would you have made UM different for you? You could have earned your four-year degree and continued on to become a fireman.</p> <p>P6. 71. I guess it didn't fit me./ 72. A lot of kids go to four-year universities and are really good at doing their own thing. They have a wide variety of careers to do. / 73. With me, I needed more direction – I needed to do something in life, I needed school for that. I wanted to work hard at that, be super at that and become that. / 74. With a four-year degree, when you major in something you don't focus on your major until jr or sr year. I was thinking general eds, sure you need then, you gain knowledge, but ...</p> <p>You sound career, end-product oriented.</p> <p>P6. 75. Oh, yeah, exactly! / 76. I wish UM had more programs like the</p>	<p>66. It is important to P6 to have personal value in his career. 67. P6 loves going on calls and recently helped a little old lady who fell down – he loved it.</p> <p>68. He told his parents he was dropping out separately. They doubted his goal to be a fireman. 69. After he began residency training, his parents became supportive.</p> <p>70. His grandpa is very supportive and wants him to take it seriously and make him proud. Now, his family is absolutely thrilled.</p> <p>71. He dropped out because UM didn't fit him. 72. He knows many students are successful at four-year schools finding career direction. 73. P6 needed more direction. 74. He did not want to wait til jr or senior year to focus on his major and to take general eds.</p> <p>75. P6 is very career oriented. 76. He wishes UM was structured more like a</p>
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<p>COT, more internships to get a feel for a job. / 77. What I'm doing is kinda an internship, a big one. I never thought about doing that – I regret it. It seemed like internships were really only advertised for older students and the business side of campus. Not a lot of stuff for communications. Business pushed it.</p>	<p>two-year COT. 77. In fire science, the residency program is like a big internship. Internships at UM were only advertised for older students in business, not for students in communications.</p>
<p>Did anyone say with a four-year degree in communications, you could be a fireman?</p>	
<p>P6. 78. Nobody said that to me and gosh it would help my chances of getting hired somewhere. / 79. There are guys in the fire dept that have a four-year degree. One guy has a four-year degree in Wildlife Biol, worked for FS for 10-years and volunteer for rural fire dept. There are guys with four-year degree and guys without them. I need an EMT basic, valid driver's license and high school degree. (pause)</p>	<p>78. No one told him, he could get a four-year degree in communications then go to fire science training. 79. There are a few fireman in-training with four-year degrees, but it's not necessary.</p>
<p>So, in my mind, I'm seeing you in second semester, thinking wow I'm stuck, paid my tuition planning to leave and go to fire science training. I'm wondering why you didn't think to switch classes – take EMT at or wildland fire science at UM or classes that would be more interesting to you.</p>	
<p>P6. 80. I didn't even know UM offered those classes. You're kidding? Why didn't someone tell me – wow. See – nobody ever – see, I didn't know, I didn't know.</p>	<p>80. Nobody told him UM offered foundational classes that would support a fire science degree.</p>
<p>Did UM fail you or did you fail UM?</p>	
<p>P6. 81. No, it wasn't the university's fault or my fault. I don't know. I guess. / 82. I looked at classes and they looked interesting. The classes don't advertise what they are presenting. / 83. I got a couple general education classes and only 1 is going toward my fire science degree. / 84. You know, I just didn't feel cared for by the university. / 85. I felt like just another chunk of change, more money in their wallet. I wasn't cared for and I felt like, alright give us your money, here's a card for food and Griz games, now go to class. It wasn't we're really gonna take care</p>	<p>81. UM did not fail him and he did not fail. 82. P6 feels the classes do not advertise what they are presenting [teaching]. 83. Only 1 course he took at UM has transferred to fire science program. 84. He did not feel "cared for" by UM. 85. He felt like "another chunk of change" – he wasn't cared for. He wonders if other students felt cared for.</p>

of you and help you out for this kinda of money. It didn't feel like I was presented with caring – maybe others were.

If you were to go back in time, and you are your own advisor, how would it look different?

P6. 86. I'd tell freshman, go to Career Services and see by taking a career test or ask what you are leaning toward./

87. I would say you really need to think about what you want to do and when you know, take every single step. /

88. Figure out a job you want – not a major or degree. It's more important to figure out what type of job you want and work backwards to figure out what degree. If I'd have gone and done that, I would have been doing what I needed to do. To any student I would say go to Career Services – it was a mistake I made. I didn't know what I was doing./

89. I heard about counselors in Business 100, but nobody told me there was someone to talk to about what I wanted to do with my life. I wish I would have taken Business 100 first semester, I might have been more focused./

90. But, the fire department offers everything, job counseling free. Thursday nights we're trained at the station, learn to splint. I get \$1000 for school a year, and \$1000 a year for training. So, if I want to take an apparatus class in Lewiston, they will pay. They pay for education and that education is my career.

I'm so glad you found something – you light up. I'm trying to figure out how students come to make the decision, how they experience the decision of leaving campus.

P6. 91. I know a lot of kids that went to UM first year and then, they couldn't find a career or job they wanted to do, they went to COT. /

92. COT markets jobs not the courses. /

93. That's what COT Helena offered me – a degree that was a career, a job, a job I want to do. Diesel mechanics, nursing, radiology tech. More companies and places hiring, are looking for specialized training – not four-year degrees like communications. Hands-on work, practical training. /

86. If he could do it again, he would go to career services and take a career test.

87. P6 would tell new freshmen to really think about what you want to do and when you figure it out, take ever single step toward it.

88. P6 feels it is more important to work backwards from the career you want to the degree it takes. He feels he made a mistake by not talking to a career counselor.

89. It was in Business 100 that P6 learned there are career counselors on campus and felt that if he would have taken the course frosh year first semester, he would have been more focused.

90. The fire training program offers him job counseling, training and money for schooling.

91. He has friends that dropped out of UM and transferred to COT.

92. He feels COT markets jobs not courses.

93. COT offered him a major that is a career with specialized training.

<p>94. Focus in, focus in, focus in. What do I want to do – choice is nice, but when it comes down to it, you need a job - a specialized skill helps.</p> <p>Senior year of high school, did any teacher or counselor take you aside and have a conversation with you about your life?</p> <p>P6. 95. No./</p> <p>96. It was an expensive semester to figure out what I wanted to do./</p> <p>97. I'm so thankful for what I've been given by my grandfather. That's why you need to sit down and figure it out./</p> <p>98. If that means, taking a semester off. Talk to people, go to Career Services, figure it out. I never did that in high school./</p> <p>99. I was just going to college – no decision. When I got to UM, it hit me. I had to figure out what I was gonna do the rest of my life. Don't want to live with mom and dad.</p> <p>Oh dear, we've talked way over an hour ..</p> <p>P6. 100. I was overwhelmed, lost, directionless, felt uncared for, I was uninterested – things that did interest me, but nothing career wise that interested me. /</p> <p>101. High tech names and degrees but what were they. I went to COT, they said you wanna be a fireman – yeah – its simple.</p> <p>Wow – your eyes light up when talking about your education, fire fighting.</p> <p>P6. 102. I wasn't scared of college or disappointed in my experience. I enjoyed my year, had a lot of fun. Lived in the dorm, went to the games, and participated in stuff./</p> <p>103. I needed to talk to someone, not an advisor, not about classes, about my life.</p> <p>So, final words for UM, for my research.</p> <p>P6. 104. Change your advertising for students. Do it backwards – start from a career and go backwards to a degree.</p> <p>Thanks for your time, sharing your experience and your really honest answers. I wish you all the luck becoming a fireman.</p>	<p>94. He believes the key is focusing in on what you want to do in life – it comes down to you need a job.</p> <p>95. No high school teacher talked to him about his college or career planning.</p> <p>96. P6 sees freshman year as an expensive way to figure out what he wants to do with his life.</p> <p>97. He is thankful for the opportunity his grandpa gave him which allowed him to figure out his life.</p> <p>98. He thinks it is important to talk to people, go to career services, figure out what you want to do.</p> <p>99. He was swept into UM, it was not a decision; when he got to UM he realized he needed to figure out what to do with the “rest of his life”.</p> <p>100. He was “overwhelmed, lost, directionless, felt uncared for and uninterested” in a career.</p> <p>101. UM offers high tech name and degrees but P6 did not understand what they were. Fire science is simple – you become a fireman.</p> <p>102. He wasn't scared of college or disappointed in his collegiate experience. He enjoyed the year, had fun in the dorm, going to games, and participating in campus activities.</p> <p>104. He would like UM to change their advertising to students – start from careers and go backwards to degrees.</p>
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P6 (RW) -Level Three, Narrative Based on Emergent Theme

P6 knew from junior high school he was going to attend The University of Montana; his family “expected it” of him. As an excellent and extremely involved high school student he felt that after high school he was supposed to go to UM. Not one member of his family attended college except his sister who attended UM her freshman year and dropped out. To encourage higher education in the family, his grandfather set up a trust fund for his grandchildren to attend college tuition-free if they attended a Montana school. P6 did not know what he wanted to major in or what career he wanted to pursue, but felt “something would interest” him. He was “excited” to attend college and “ecstatic” to move into the dorms and have the “whole college experience”. He was assigned the party dorm, but didn’t get involved in partying too much. He and his roommate got along well-enough, but he made many new friends in the dorms, guys he still hangs out with. The lack of respect some students living in his dorm had for others, partying until early morning hours, disappointed him.

As he began his freshman year, he had “no clue” what he wanted to do. During freshman first semester, he declared a major in communications because he works and gets along well with people and loves talking to people. He was registered for general education courses and one communications course, which he felt was “alright” but wasn’t what he expected, it was totally different. He questioned if he could find a job in Montana using a communications degree or if he would have to move or start his own business. He questioned if he really wanted to earn a college degree, what he would do for a living, or if he wanted to attend UM. While he earned good grades first semester, nothing else on campus as far as majors or careers was “catching his eye.” He began to question people about their academic history and current careers, which is when he learned of fire science training. He researched the program, which did a good job of “selling it” to students. He applied and was accepted into the residency program.

The academic transition from high school to college was bumpy for P6, although he had been a solid high school student. He missed “communication” between teachers and students and was overwhelmed by classes of 200 students, as well as the amount of independent studying required. While he found the transition “difficult”, he tried “to be the best student” he could and got good grades. First semester “things were going well” so he registered for second semester, paid tuition, then decided to pursue fire science. Because he was registered and his grandfather had paid tuition, he completed second semester. He felt “stuck” and “it sucked” but he once again earned good grades. He did not get involved in many campus activities as he found that academic demands required most his time. He felt his courses were long and boring, except for geology which was taught by a young professor who “got” the students. He felt college was “crazy” with so many things being “thrown” at him and he felt “confused.” He became “very overwhelmed” and it became “too much.” He felt “unfocused” and “directionless.”

While attending UM, it never “felt right” and he never felt that he “was headed in the right direction”, although he was attached to being a Griz. He attended Orientation, participated in campus activities, talked with his peer advisor, and had fun. He felt the non-academic campus life was stressed during Orientation and in the dorms without any emphasis on career development or tying majors to careers. Dropping out of college was

“not about grades” or “missing friends”; P6 left UM because he did not feel like he was “doing something” with his life. UM didn’t “fit” him and he recognized he “needed more direction.” He wanted to “work hard” at something, “be super at that and become that.” Every day he thought, “What am I doing here? What am I doing with my life?” and every day he felt more clueless. P6 wants his life to reflect his father’s life - to have a good paying job, a nice house, wife, kids, dog, a picket fence and live in his hometown – he would “love that.” But, while attending UM majoring in communications, he questioned, “How am I going to get that?” He began to question people about their academic and career development. He put a lot of thought and “took a good hard look” at his decision to leave UM. He approached his parents and grandfather separately and at first they were disappointed, but now are “absolutely thrilled” with his decision to leave UM and become a fireman.

The first day he enrolled in fire science at Helena COT, he knew it was what he wanted to do as “a degree and career” even though he never once dreamed of being a fireman as a young boy. He is “submerged completely” in fire training and has “put more commitment,” “energy”, “stress”, and his “whole self” in residency training than he did while he was at UM, and knows it will be worth it. He loves going out on calls and helping people. In the fire science training program, P6 recognizes that “you can’t hide like you can at UM.”

P6 believes it was not his “fault” or that of UM that he dropped out, although he did not “feel cared for by the university.” He felt like “just another chunk of change, more money in their wallet.” He did not feel like he was “presented with caring, although maybe others were.” He felt “overwhelmed lost, directionless, uncared for and uninterested” while a freshman at UM. If he could he would like to tell freshman to “focus in”, visit with a counselor in career services, take a career interest test to understand “what you are leaning toward” and to “really think about what you want to do and when you know, that every single step toward it.” P6 believes UM could start backwards; start at the career and move backwards to a degree like COT which “markets jobs not the courses.”

He was not “disappointed” in his experience or sad about dropping out, as he “enjoyed” his year and “had a lot of fun.” However, P6 states it was “an expensive semester to figure out” what he wanted to do, but he is “thankful” for what he has been given by his grandfather. During his freshman year, as he struggled with his life, he needed someone to talk to, not his parents, or his friends, “not an advisor”. He felt desperate to talk to someone, not to talk “about classes, but about life.”