Factors Influencing Persistence of Adult Students in High School Completion Programs

Joan E. Garbarino
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FACTORS INFLUENCING PERSISTENCE OF ADULT STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMS

by

Joan E. Garbarino

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
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Western Michigan University
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FACTORS INFLUENCING PERSISTENCE OF ADULT STUDENTS IN HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAMS

Joan E. Garbarino, Ed.D.
Western Michigan University, 1992

This research was conducted to contrast adult persisters' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers to high school completion.

Institutional factors included staff support, curriculum, student services, and logistical considerations. Situational factors were family and friend support, time, employment, and health. Dispositional factors included attitudes toward education, academic preparedness plus expectations, and satisfaction.

Completers who graduated and noncompleters who dropped out before graduation were surveyed. Statistical analysis allowed the researcher to test differences between the perceptions of persisters and dropouts in regard to eleven factors found in the three major barriers. It also revealed differences of perceived importance of the three overall barriers.

The hypothesized differences between the perceptions of adult persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of staff support, relevant curriculum, logistical convenience, time, health, personal attitudes, academic preparedness as well as expectations and satisfaction are supported by the survey data using an alpha level of .10. However, no differences between
the two groups concerning the importance of student support services, friend and family support and employment were found.
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Factors influencing persistence of adult students in high school completion programs

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Western Michigan University, 1992

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DEDICATION

For My Children
Gary and Steven

Their Spouses
Sandy and Michelle

and
My Grandchildren
Alexander, Stephanie and Erin
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My sincerest appreciation to Joyce Napoli whose expert clerical skills produced this document.

Thanks for the counsel and encouragement of my family and many friends.

I thank God for the physical health and mental capacity to complete such a task.

Joan E. Garbarino
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

If anyone has a right to occasional spasms of pessimism, it is the adult educator...By dint of ceaseless appeals he has succeeded in getting some small fraction of the masses into his classroom. They seem pleased; but one drops out because his friends have organized a bridge tournament; another because the class hour hurries him intolerably with his dinner...a third because it is simpler to buy a book - which he seldom does - and read up - which he virtually never does. There is indeed a core of the faithful, but if one were to submit a test at the end of the course, how many would show understanding? The public school teacher has his own difficulties but the compulsory attendance law assures at least the physical appearance of the pupils...The adult student is a volunteer, and a short-termer at that. (Houle, 1964, p.225)

Cyril O. Houle (1964) quoted Alvin Johnson's 1935 writing expressing a concern about the attendance of adult students in enrichment classes. Fifty-five years later, adult education teachers lament the same concern.

The United States ranked forty-ninth among 158 member nations of the United Nations in its literacy levels when surveyed in 1985. Twenty-five million Americans could not read a letter sent home by their child's teacher. An additional 35 million adults read only at a level which was less than required to survive in society. Together that represented more than one-third of the entire United States adult population (Kozal, 1985).

Half the heads of households classified below poverty level could not read an eighth grade book. Over one-third of mothers who received welfare
checks were functionally illiterate. Of eight million unemployed adults, four to six million lacked skills to be trained in hi-tech jobs (Kozal, 1985).

Adult education is a safety net for illiterates and high school dropouts. It represents a second, third or fourth chance to resume the pursuit of a high school diploma. The adult dropout who returns, however, is a voluntary student unaffected by compulsory attendance laws. As attractive as the opportunity to complete high school is, absenteeism and student turnover is the most severe and endemic problem in adult education (Meizrow, Darkenwald, & Knox, 1975).

When only four percent of all adults who lacked a high school diploma entered educational programs (Kozal, 1985) and one-third of that four percent dropped out before completing their high school requirements, the seriousness of the situation is obvious (St. John Hunter & Harman, 1979).

We are living in paradoxical times. American schools are better equipped, better staffed and better administered than ever before in the history of public education. Yet, never before has the public been more unhappy, more verbally dissatisfied or more demanding of educational reform than in the past ten years. This historical era has produced such reports as *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This document was the result of the studies of a group of people, the majority of which were not educators. Their conclusions stated that schools were not doing the job which they were intended to do. They pointed accusing fingers at the high dropout rate and the growing number of graduates who are not literate. They concurred that students are not ready to join the work force. Such
accusations were further supported by William Buckley, Jr. (1989) who declared the United States will be a Third World Country by the year 2000 because the growing illiterate population will not even qualify to do unskilled labor.

Meanwhile, the national election brought to office a president who advertised himself as the Education President, so strong was his belief in the support of public education. In Michigan, the newly elected governor cut every budget in the state to bring about fiscal reform but left the education budget relatively unscathed because he declared that education was vital to the survival of the state. Such a dichotomy leads us to question why education is not working to its optimum potential at every level.

Mann (1987) identified four major movements (levels) in public education, i.e., elementary, secondary, adult and postgraduate levels. The first three levels focus on the acquisition of one credential, a high school diploma. Theoretically, when the requirements for the diploma have been fulfilled, the graduate obtains the potential for a richer, more fulfilling life, better earning potential and the tools to continue growing and developing as a human being. As strong as these incentives are, they do not motivate all students to complete high school. Dropout statistics point out that nearly one third of our secondary school population chooses to leave before graduation.

Adult education classes that service those high school dropouts offer the second opportunity to acquire the same credential providing all the same rewards. Returning to high school as an adult, however, brings no guarantee of successful completion. Barriers to completion exist for adults...
as well as for teenagers. What are these barriers? Do adults who complete adult high school programs perceive these barriers in the same way that adult noncompleters perceive them?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contrast the perceptions of adult persisters and dropouts as to the importance of the barriers that prohibit the successful completion of adult high school programs.

The focus on a unique sample, i.e., adult high school completion students, distinguishes this research from others that study similar factors as they affect Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Education Development (GED), enrichment, community college and university students. Definition of these groups is found in Appendix A. Michigan is one of three states in the United States whose tax structure allows adults to take free classes for high school credit. When adult students fulfill the school district's graduation requirements (attained credit in a number of academic and elective courses, which is systematic and accumulative), they may receive a high school diploma.

Adult students shared a common goal and a common history when they enrolled in high school completion classes. As teenagers they began a four year academic and vocational program. The common goal was to obtain a high school diploma after participating in a number of academic experiences a sufficient number of times and demonstrating mastery of a prescribed selection of concepts. Barriers to completion interfered with the goal. The students were forced or chose to abandon the goal.
The goal of the school was to provide a variety of academic and vocational experiences that would prepare the student for the world of work or further education. When the barriers to completion pushed the goal out of reach two failures occurred. The school failed to provide a complete high school experience for the student. The student failed to exit with sufficient skills and documentation to live to his/her greatest potential.

The adult high school offers another opportunity to turn the individual's and the institution's failure into success. Adults of any age can begin again. The adult high school program provides a new structure within which to sidestep previous barriers and take a new path toward the goal of graduation. The goal is not only to provide a diploma but to avoid another failure for the individual and the institution. Barriers to completion still exist, some identical to those present during the first attempt and some unique to the new time and place. To succumb to these barriers a second, third or fourth time is a heavy burden for the student and the adult education program.

Darkenwald (1981) listed the detrimental consequences of dropout to the adult student. First, the student feels a deep sense of loss. The goal of high school completion has slipped through his/her fingers, again. Frequently, a contingent goal, such as a job promotion, is forfeited, too. Time and energy put into the registration process and class attendance is sacrificed. The student may feel a sense of personal loss. All these negative factors foster anger and frustration at self, the system, and sometimes, even innocent bystanders. The compounding of negative attitudes may result in the decision never to attempt this goal again.
The cost of failure to retain students is high for the adult education agency. Dissatisfied adults have many ties to community groups that the school defines as part of its clientele. Poor publicity can result in diminished support, lower enrollments and a tarnished reputation. Teachers and administrators are evaluated (and evaluate themselves) partly on the basis of dropouts and attendance rates. A high attrition rate can threaten jobs, feeling of efficacy and a program's existence. Adult students generate financial resources for the school district. Jeopardized funding in an enrollment-driven economy threatens many adult education programs (Darkenwald, 1981).

The barriers to completion are present for all students as they begin another attempt at completing their high school education. Some will succeed. Some will experience another failure. It would appear that persisters and completers may perceive these barriers differently.

**Barriers to Persistence**

This study classifies the factors that encourage or discourage persistence into three categories utilizing Cross' (1981) subheadings of institutional, situational and dispositional barriers to persistence. Institutional factors are the personnel, practices and procedures in the school program that encourage or discourage student persistence. Situational factors are those events occurring in the student's personal life at the time he/she is enrolled in an academic program. Dispositional factors are the attitudes and self perceptions about oneself as a learner and about the concept of education that help or hinder student persistence.
Institutional Barriers

Irish (1978) studied a group of college business education students and created a prediction equation that correctly identified persister or dropout student status in 72.3% of the cases. Reinforcers that occurred in the classroom, including teacher and fellow students, were the best predictors of dropout or persistence. Darkenwald (1981) identified the competence and supportiveness of teachers as well as the behavior of other students as relevant variables in determining persistence of Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Educational Development (GED) students.

Balmuth (1988) studied adult education curricula and concluded that courses taught without consideration of their relevance to adult student needs and desires caused lack of participation. Likewise curriculum that did not provide immediate success and student progress encouraged the wavering student to drop out. Houle (1964) and Martindale and Drake (1989) also concluded that attempting to force child centered curriculum on adults caused voluntary adults to leave programs.

Darkenwald (1981) identified certain social-environmental factors that encouraged persistence of adult learners. Included in the list were the availability of transportation and child care. Not only did it influence attendance and performance but strengthened motivation and satisfaction. The National Advisory Council on Adult Education criticized counseling techniques in adult education programs. The Council concluded that the counseling staff took little time to discover why students return and did no curriculum planning to support student goals (Walden, 1975). For the
purposes of this dissertation, student services are defined as transportation, child care and counselor support.

The importance of keeping student needs as the focal point of program planning has much support in the literature. When time or class location was inconvenient to student lifestyles, students ceased to participate (Boshier, 1973; Darkenwald, 1981; Knox, 1987; Martindale & Drake, 1989; Warren, 1973). Parking, lighting and security precautions also took a toll on participation and persistence.

Institutional factors (support, curriculum, student services and logistical considerations) confront all adult education high school completion students. This present study will attempt to contrast the perceptions of adult completers and non completers as to the importance of institutional factors.

Situational Barriers

Darkenwald (1981) stated that one of the most important variables to affect adult student persistence was social-interpersonal reinforcement, such as encouragement from spouse, children, peer and reference groups. Conversely, discouragement from any of these supporters weakened the chance of continuing in adult education programs. Lewis (1984) identified adult students as high risk when they were surrounded by people who loved them the way they were and did not want them to change (constants) and people who kept putting the students down and inhibiting their efforts (toxics). One of the conclusions of his study was that support was as important as any other supplemental service such as counseling.
transportation, and child care to insure persistence patterns of undereducated adults. The lack of family support and/or overt attempts to discourage attendance was nearly always adequate interference to cause a lack of persistence in adult education (Stodt, McGinty, & Klepper, 1987).

Many studies have revealed that barriers concerned with time restrain students from persisting in adult education. Knox (1987) pointed out that when time demands conflicted in a student's life, the time needed for education was the first casualty. Using the Deterrent Participation Survey with military personnel, Martindale and Drake (1979) found the six highest barriers to student persistence were related to time. Balmuth (1988) added that the combination of hours required on a job and in the classroom robbed students of the stamina to make academic progress. Lack of progress encouraged them to drop out.

Any change in job status (getting one or losing one) was found to be a deterrent to Adult Basic Education (ABE) class attendance. Both situations were found to be laden with anxiety and uncertainty. Students could not handle this and class responsibilities simultaneously (St. John Hunter & Harman 1979). At the same time, students who were in well-established positions often cited new job schedules, over-time opportunities, and job related travel as an excuse for classroom absenteeism and dropout (Noel, Levitz, & Saluri, 1987; Wlodkowski, 1986). Employment appears to have a great influence on student persistence.

School attendance adds a new dimension to an adult's life. It is a major commitment of time and energy. Such a commitment requires a high energy level and good health of the student and the people for whom
he/she is the primary caregiver. Balmuth (1988) and Darkenwald (1981) concurred that many adult non graduates displayed low physical and emotional stamina. Such a deficit played havoc with a student's motivation to persist in the quest of a high school diploma. Health issues are major deterrents and are included in the list of situational barriers to persistence.

Social-interpersonal reinforcement, time, employment, and health issues (situational factors) impact on adults' personal lives. Situational factors flow over into their roles as students. Do adult students who successfully complete high school completion programs perceive these factors differently than adults who eventually withdraw from such programs short of graduation? This research will attempt to answer that question.

**Dispositional Barriers**

Dispositional factors fall into two categories, attitudinal and academic preparedness. One segment of Cross' (1981) Chain of Response Model pointed out that poor previous educational experiences as well as indifferent or negative attitudes toward education blocked voluntary involvement. Unpleasant previous learning encounters left many scars that discouraged persistence (Cross, 1981; Houle, 1964; Knox, 1987; Martindale & Drake, 1989; Meizrow et al., 1975; Noel et al., 1987; St. John Hunter & Harman, 1979; Stodt et al., 1987; Warren, 1973). Self-confidence also played a major role in assuring persistence (Darkenwald, 1981). Taylor and Bass (1985) in their study of 62 Adult Basic Education (ABE) students, concluded that individuals who were inclined to associate the receipt of reinforcements
(outcomes) as being dependent on their own behaviors (actions) more readily completed the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program. The personal commitment of these students to their own educational needs gave them the power to persist. Finally, Hazelwood (1983) found a significant relationship between Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Educational Development (GED) students with high self perception and consistent attendance in classes.

Lack of adequate academic skills deterred adults from persisting in a learning environment (Beaudin, 1982; Noel et al., 1987; Stodt et al., 1987). Insufficient study skills, note taking skills and organizational techniques for time or work encouraged drop out behavior (Houle, 1964). Many adults did not feel they had the ability to take responsibility for their own learning (Knox, 1986).

Other dispositional factors that affected the student's ability to persist in the learning situation were the individual's expectations of the learning experience, particularly in regard to outcomes or benefits, and satisfaction with the learning experience which was determined principally by how individuals, at a given point in time, evaluated it in relation to their expectations (Darkenwald, 1981). The Expectancy-Valence Model (Rubencon & Hoghielm, 1978), assumed that learners persisted if they perceived the learning activity as satisfying an important need (positive valence) and if they expected to succeed (positive expectancy). If expectancy and valence were both highly positive, persistence was predicted. If the learning experience was highly valued, but one encountered difficulties with learning, persistence was problematical.
Attitude toward education, academic preparedness, expectations and satisfaction (dispositional factors) can act as barriers while adults pursue their high school diplomas. This study examined the perceptions of adult graduates and dropouts to determine if there is a difference in how they view these barriers.

Summary

This research is conducted to contrast persisters' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of barriers to high school completion. Institutional factors considered are staff support, relevant curriculum, student services and logistical program considerations. Situational factors studied are family and friend support as well as time, employment and health considerations. Dispositional factors researched are student attitudes about education and academic preparedness, as well as student expectations and satisfaction with the academic experience. The review that follows discusses more thoroughly these three barriers.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Cross (1981) quoted some harsh words from theorists who are both friends and critics of adult education. Their criticism was aimed at the lack of theory in adult education. Boshier called adult education a "conceptual desert." Meizrow complained that the absence of theory was a "pervasively debilitating influence." Only three percent of the articles appearing in Adult Education between 1950 and 1970 discussed theoretical formulations. Cross warned that, "Theory without practice is empty, but practice without theory is blind" (1981, p.109).

Cross (1981) classified obstacles to learning under three headings: institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers. Analyzation of each of these barrier types has been carried on providing a number of different answers and different perspectives. Surveys by interview or questionnaire gave broad coverage, showed a faith in the capacity of people to analyze their own behavior and was useful in identifying different barriers for various population subgroups. Surveys may underestimate the importance of dispositional barriers. Human nature dictates that a student feels more comfortable pointing out that the cost of education hindered attendance rather than the student's own disinterest. Experimental methodology had the advantage of studying what people actually did rather than what they said they might do. No matter what methodology is utilized, it is more difficult to find out why people do not do something than why they do.
The three learning barrier types are the basis for identifying the factors this study utilizes to investigate persistence in adult education classes. In this section each barrier type (institutional, situational, and dispositional) will be defined. Each barrier consists of a number of factors that further clarify it. The research that supports each of these factors will follow the definition. Institutional barriers are further defined as staff support, relevant curriculum, student services and logistical factors. Research concerning family and friend support, time, employment and health will further clarify situational barriers. Dispositional barriers are also defined in terms of attitudes toward education, academic preparedness and satisfaction and expectations.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers are those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage adult participation or persistence in educational pursuits. Most of the institutional barriers are related to either the nature of the program or the training of the staff. Cross' (1981) survey revealed that institutional barriers discouraged 10 to 25% of the potential learners.

Staff Support

An instrument to predict dropout from evening business education classes was developed by employing reinforcement theory and the functional analysis of behavior (Irish, 1978). Effort was made to identify potential reinforcers of attendance, their importance, and their actual or estimated frequency of occurrence. Three sets of reinforcers were identified:
those that took place in the classroom (ten items); those that occurred while
the student was attending class but outside the classroom (fifteen items); and
those that took place on the job as a result of skills acquired in the class (nine
items). Total reinforcement for each subject was determined by multiplying
importance and frequency of occurrence ratings for each of the 34 reinforcers
and summing the results. Those persons who experienced greater positive
reinforcement did, in fact, tend to persist. A prediction equation was
developed that correctly identified subject status (persister or dropout) in
72.3% of the cases.

The virtue of this model was its simplicity and the inclusion of three
major classes of variables: reinforcers that occur in the classroom, outside
the classroom concurrently with attendance, and anticipated reinforcers such
as goals, expectations, or benefits (Darkenwald, 1981). Significantly, the in-
class reinforcers seemed to be the best predictors of dropout and persistence
than out-of-class or anticipated reinforcers. The model's simplicity was, at
the same time, its major failing. Reinforcement theory was useful in
predicting behavior, but it failed to provide satisfying explanations of the
process or dynamics that lead to overt behavior.

Darkenwald (1981) reported that teacher characteristics such as age
and social class were unimportant variables in relationship to adult student
participation and retention. Teacher competence in subject matter and
ability to relate to students as adults, not children, was extremely important
to student retention. Teacher behavior as evidenced by the support shown
to the adult student was equally important.
Teachers yielded great power and carried heavy responsibility to orchestrate learning in such a way that it was enjoyable, met the student's expectations, and provided some degree of success and progress early in the learning experience (Beaudin, 1982).

Dickenson and Clark (1975) applied Houle's three learning orientations to the adult education classroom environment. Teachers needed to know if a student was goal-oriented (using the learning experience as a means to accomplish an objective, i.e., to learn to speak in public), activity-oriented (taking the class for a purpose other than to solely learn content, i.e., to get a degree), or learning-oriented (seeking knowledge for its own sake). Unless students were directed toward and satisfied with their initial learning they did not elect to continue the experience.

Teachers needed to create environments that broke down the barriers that students brought into the classroom (St. John Hunter & Harman, 1979). Students were burdened with cultural and linguistic limitations, fear of failure or rejection, and distrust of educational institutions. Some even feared success because of what it would do to their personal relationships or what it would demand in terms of future decision making. Much of the student's information had been gained from electronic media as a substitute for the written word and they feared the implications of their lack of academic experience. Seldom was a student bringing a singular situation into the classroom but a multiplicity of interrelated variables (Noel et al., 1987).

Teachers who nearly always were trained in the teaching of children were faced with a need for new adult oriented teaching skills. In the
meantime, teachers felt the administratively applied pressure to maintain large attendance numbers to secure funding. Teachers and counselors often could not relate to the realities that their students were dealing with in everyday life and failed to supply the support needed to guarantee attendance.

Walden (1975) stated that the National Advisory Council on Adult Education declared the major adult student persistence problem was a lack of trained personnel capable of teaching undereducated adults. Students complained that they were treated like children and were seldom praised and encouraged by staff. Tolerance of their beliefs, customs and mannerisms conflicted with the teacher's middle class values. The expectation was that because they were adults, they should learn quickly. The reality was that they could not. The high structure and lack of flexibility in the classroom was a turn-off.

Conti (1985) analyzed teaching style by assessing the Principals of Adult Learning Scale (PALS) and adult student achievement. It was found that teaching style significantly influenced student gain. However, the results were situation specific. Learner centered instruction was more beneficial in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom while a teacher centered environment proved better in a General Education Development (GED) preparation class. The General Education Development (GED) preparation class enrolls a more academically advanced student than the Adult Basic Education or English as a Second Language class. The more student gain demonstrated, the better was the attendance in both types of classes.
Darkenwald's (1975) study of the effects of the obvious variable, teacher's race, and holding power of adult students revealed that teachers of the same race as the student body had much lower attrition rates. However, it was interesting to note that the major thrust of the curriculum was not reading, writing and mathematics in isolation. Emphasis was placed on a nontraditional functional learning, i.e., survival skills. Teachers served as positive role models and related better to the students' cultural and experiential backgrounds. Students reported that they felt less threatened and this type of teacher encouraged openness and candor. Another interesting facet of the study was that teachers of unlike race who taught the same type of relevant curriculum displayed similar holding power in their attendance records.

Verner and Booth (1964) added some interesting observations to barriers to participation. They spoke of negative forces that pervade from society and from within adult education, itself. When society placed acceptable limits on education such as receiving a General Education Development (GED) certificate, being able to read at a certain level, etc., the concept of lifelong learning lost credibility. Continuous growth and the acquisition of different skills had a low value. People felt less compelled to pursue education and began to feel satisfaction or became reconciled with their status.

The leadership for adult education came from the parent institution which often did not support it beyond its fiscal benefits. The role and function of adult education in the parent institution was marginal. Adult education was not seen as an institutional responsibility. Programs
specifically designed for the nonparticipant were so radically different from
the institutional pattern that it was often rejected by the parent body. This,
of course, was the ultimate hinderance to participation. No one can
participate or persist in something that does not exist.

Based on the research that verifies the importance of adequate
support, the first of four hypotheses dealing with institutional factors
influencing adult high school program completion is formed: There is a
difference in the degree of perceived importance of staff support as an
institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by
students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Relevant Curriculum

Curriculum choice was another major factor that influenced student
holding power. Londoner (1972) stated that students whose goal was a high
school diploma tolerated academic classes, while sometimes questioning
their utility, because academic classes were a diploma requirement. Adults
enrolled in vocational classes to prepare for a job left when employment did
not materialize.

Balmuth (1988) warned that disparity between program goals and
student achievement resulted in dropout. He continued that program goals
were rhetoric designed to secure legislation and funds from a Congress that
knew little about its educationally and economically marginal constituents.
Programs that provided course choices that had no relevance to the student's
present needs or desires closed for lack of attendance. Furthermore,
programs whose curriculum was not designed to reveal immediate success
and student progress, likewise failed because the voluntary student chose to leave (Houle, 1964; Martindale & Drake, 1989; St. John Hunter & Harman, 1979).

Martindale and Drake (1989) concluded that public schools resisted changes in concept and organization necessary to serve disadvantaged adults. Curriculum appropriate for children, even disadvantaged children, was not an acceptable curriculum for adult students. While adults did not verbalize this, their disapproval was manifested by their decision not to return.

In view of the influence of an adult centered curriculum on student persistence, the second institutional hypothesis evolves: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of relevant curriculum offerings as an institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Student Services**

Social-environmental forces that facilitate or inhibit student persistence such as the availability of transportation and child care are major institutional factors (Darkenwald, 1981). These factors influence attendance and performance and probably strengthen motivation and satisfaction.

The National Advisory Council on Adult Education criticized "moonlighting" counselors who neither took time to discover why students returned nor planned appropriate curriculum to support student goals. Without individualized plans, students experienced little success toward
their goals as they worked on each task. Frustration occurred and the students left (Walden, 1975).

The profile of the typical Adult Basic Education (ABE) and/or High School Completion (HSC) student was usually one of low socioeconomic status. Finances for reliable transportation were scarce. If educational opportunities could not be reached, they were not used. Public transportation was less available when students resided in suburban and rural areas (Noel et al., 1987). Cross (1981) and Darkenwald (1981) concluded that transportation was a major institutional barrier to adult education particularly to the elderly, the poor and the disabled.

Child care, also, was a frequent barrier to attendance. Children too young to be left alone or an ill child placed heavy demands on adult students. Economic disadvantages robbed students of other options when these circumstances prevailed (Darkenwald, 1981; Meizrow et al., 1975; Warren, 1973).

The well documented conclusion that the availability of a number of student services promotes student persistence supports the third institutional hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of student services as an institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Logistical Factors**

Classes scheduled for the convenience of the institution or the staff were empty classrooms. Adults did not participate when the time or
location was inconvenient to their lifestyle (Boshier, 1973; Darkenwald, 1981; Knox, 1987; Martindale & Drake, 1989; Warren, 1973). Even logistical considerations such as lack of parking facilities reasonably close to classrooms, insufficient lighting and the absence of security precautions took a toll on participation and persistence.

Anderson and Darkenwald’s (1979) research concluded that programs that spanned over twenty meetings and classes that met more than once a week discouraged attendance.

The influence of logistical considerations on student persistence leads to the fourth and final institutional hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of logistical conveniences as an institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Situational Barriers

Situational barriers are those barriers arising from one’s situation in life at a given time. Students struggling against situational barriers may be challenged by problems of money, time, personal responsibilities, job, child care, transportation, study restrictions, physical and mental health problems, or lack of support.

Family and Friend Support

Darkenwald (1981) identified the social-interpersonal reinforcers such as encouragement from spouse, children, peer and reference groups as very influential factors in predicting student persistence.
Lewis (1984) studied persistence in ABE programs that was influenced by institutional and personal support systems. Support systems were identified and the impact that they had on students' lives was analyzed.

A sample of 214 students in a Connecticut Adult Basic Education program were interviewed to (a) determine the range and types of personal institutional supports and counter-supports available to students and (b) to discover how the presence of such supports contributed to student participation. Counter-supports were defined as negative reactions and non-supportive feedback such as subliminal messages, rebuffs, overt acts and prohibitions aimed at negating or forestalling the individual's educational endeavors.

The interview consisted of a number of inquiries into the quality of the support roles that certain individuals played in their lives as students. Consideration was given to the support provided by a spouse, children, family, friends, significant others, an employer, teacher, counselor, an agency and any other person the student wished to define.

A typology was adapted from Seashore's (1979) work on support networks. Types of people who made up these networks were categorized as:

1. Rooters - people who encouraged the students' efforts.
2. Constants - people who loved the students as they were and did not want them to change.
3. Resources - people who assisted the students and provided services and information.
4. Challengers - critical evaluators, mentors, and role models who pushed students to progress and suggested even further achievements.
5. Toxics - people who kept putting the students down and inhibiting their efforts. (Lewis, 1984, p. 76)

The interview information highlighted the multiple and often conflicting roles played by those who had an impact on the lives of the students. Sources of encouragement or discouragement were spouse, children, family, friends, significant others, employer, teacher, counselor, agency and self. Spouses, family, children, significant others and friends were the greatest advocates (rooters). Ironically, friends and family also formed the largest group that urged students to remain in the fold and not go to school (constants). Children were dedicated supporters and urged their parents to persist.

In assessing the institution's role, teachers were perceived as the major resources for students, and ranked third as rooters and challengers. This points out that though important, friends and family members are a more primary force than teachers in encouraging classroom participation. In this study counselors were identified only marginally by students as a resource or rooter.

Respondents ranked themselves as being their own worst enemies (toxics). Many identified themselves as toxics and constants saying their lack of self-esteem and self-confidence inhibited their progress and success.

Lewis (1984) identified those students surrounded by constants and toxics as high risk students. One of the conclusions of the study was that support was as important as any other supplemental service such as counseling, transportation and child care to insure persistence patterns of undereducated adults.
Martindale and Drake (1989) identified family problems as one of the three highest adult educational barriers. Low socioeconomic status prohibited adequate prenatal care and medical attention for children. Parents frequently dealt with family health problems as a number one priority and relegated class attendance to a lower priority.

Leaving the home environment repeatedly to attend class often was accompanied by guilt feelings. Sometimes this guilt was inflicted by family members and, for others, it was a self-infliction. The normal family routine was inevitably changed when one member was consistently involved in a nonfamily activity (Hurkamp, 1969). Such circumstances often led to the choice to drop out.

Finally, the lack of family support and/or the overt attempts to discourage attendance was nearly always adequate interference to cause a lack of persistence in adult education (Stodt et al., 1987).

The many examples in the literature depicting the importance of family and friend support as a major factor influencing adult student persistence serves as the basis for the first of four hypotheses dealing with situational factors influencing adult high school program completion: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of family and friend support as a situational factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Time**

Many studies have revealed that barriers concerned with time restrain students from participating and persisting in adult education. Knox (1987)
pointed out that adults' lives were boxed in by time restraints. When these restraints were balanced against the time demands of education for classroom attendance and independent study, education frequently was the loser.

Using the Deterrent Participation survey with military personnel, Martindale and Drake (1979) rank ordered the ten highest barriers to adult education participation. Among the ten were: (1) no time to study, (2) required too much time away from family, (3) could not attend regularly because of other scheduled demands, (4) it took too long to complete and, (5) it would take away from leisure time activities.

St. John Hunter and Harman (1979) concluded that not only did time interfere with the student directly, but the lack of classroom and counseling time made it impossible for the teacher and counselor to become involved with the student, personally. Thus, out of school problems that hindered attendance did not get the attention of professionals who might offer options and viable solutions.

Houle (1964) pointed out that the adult student's lifestyle was such that the demands of education caused fatigue. In this physically weakened state, the student more readily procrastinated and saw accomplishment of the goal beyond a reasonable time frame. He further characterized the typical Adult Basic Education (ABE)/High School Completion (HSC) student as a poor organizer of time. Without this skill any number of tasks, including education, were left undone. Balmuth (1988) added that students lacked both physical and emotional stamina required by long hours at work and in class. The slow progress they experienced encouraged dropout.
In view of the effect that time restraints have on adult student persistence, the second situational hypothesis evolves: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of time as a situational factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Employment**

Students who entered classes and were not consistently attending often cited new job schedules or an opportunity to work overtime as their excuse (Noel et al., 1987; Wlodkowski, 1986).

St. John Hunter and Harman (1979) noted that any change in job status (getting one or losing one) became a detriment to Adult Basic Education (ABE) class attendance. Both situations were laden with anxiety and uncertainty. Students could not handle this and their class responsibilities simultaneously.

The research conclusions that student persistence is often linked to employment factors accounts for the third situational hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of employment as a situational factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Health**

The typical profile of the adult non graduate includes such characteristics as lower socioeconomic status due to unemployment or entry level position salaries and low level physical and emotional stamina.
(Balmuth, 1988; Darkenwald, 1981). These typical disadvantaged adults were characterized as biologically deprived (Long, 1983). This group displayed a high incidence of birth defects, illness and poor dietary habits.

Lack of physical and emotional strength breeds physical and emotional illness. Prospective students who take on the added responsibility of class attendance, study obligations, and test performance drain their already limited stamina resources. While they may not have the option of walking away from a needed source of employment in this condition, it was much easier to turn their backs on the educational commitment.

Adult students who have few financial resources put their limited salaries into medical care for their ill children. Rarely is extra money available to hire someone competent enough to handle medical emergencies so that a parent can attend adult education classes. Single parent households are particularly stressed when children are ill or somehow disabled.

The obvious effects of health on adult student class attendance leads to the fourth situational hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of health issues as a situational barrier influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Dispositional Barriers

Dispositional factors are those attitudes and self-perceptions about oneself as a learner that hinder joining or remaining in an educational program. Cross (1981) stated that dispositional factors are underestimated
in survey data. They were mentioned by only 5 to 15% of survey respondents. The methodological problem of social desirability interfered in the data. It was more acceptable to offer a busy schedule as an excuse for nonparticipation than to say one was too old or lacked ability. In addition to the social desirability issue, there was the other problem that respondents who said they were not interested in further education were dropped from further analysis. The reasons behind their lack of interest could have contributed much to the study of dispositional barriers.

In this study, effort is made to pursue students who are no longer participating in classes. Their input is solicited and included in the data for analysis.

**Attitudinal Factors**

**Cross' Chain-of-Response (COR) Model (1981)**

Cross (1981) offered the Chain-of-Response (COR) model to help organize existing knowledge about participation and persistence of adult learners. The framework is depicted in Figure 1.

The model assumed that participation in a learning activity was not a single act, but the result of a chain of responses, each based on an evaluation of the position of the individual in his/her environment. Behavior is a "flowing stream" rather than a series of discrete events. Forces for participation began with the individual and moved to external conditions with forces flowing in both directions.

Point A, self-evaluation, helps to determine motivation for achievement. Education is achievement motivated. Persons
who lack confidence in their own abilities are unlikely to volunteer for learning which would threaten their self-esteem.

Attitudes toward education, point B, arise directly from past experiences of others with whom the potential student is involved. Poor previous educational experiences or indifferent or negative attitudes toward adult education block voluntary involvement. Pleasant experiences and positive support encourage a learner to seek new experiences.

Point C, goals and expectations, operates on the premise that if a goal is important and is likely achievable through adult education, motivation at point C is strong. If the goal is weak or the likelihood of success in doubt, motivation decreases accordingly. Expectancy is related to self-esteem. If self-esteem is high, an individual expects to be successful, whereas less self-confidence breeds doubt of success. This is indicated by the reverse arrow.

Figure 1. Chain-of-Response (COR) Model.

Point D refers to times of special sensitivity to learn certain things. It corresponds to transition periods in the life cycle or to sudden dramatic life changes that trigger latent desire for education.

As a potential student reaches point E in the Model, strong motivation can overcome modest barriers. For the weakly motivated, modest barriers may preclude participation.

Point F in the Chain of Response (COR) model, accurate information, allows the potentially motivated student to be linked to the appropriate opportunity. It involves recruitment efforts on the part of the educational institution and awareness of the recruitment effort on the part of the student.

Educational institutions enter at point F, trying to reduce barriers and increase opportunities. A motivated person has probably reached point E without being touched by the institution. The unmotivated student was wiped out by negative forces someplace in the Model before the school became involved. The internal psychological variables affecting self evaluation and attitudes toward self evaluation are the real reasons for nonparticipation. The impact of low self-esteem on participation is awesome.

The purpose of a theoretical model as broad as the Chain-of-Response (COR) model was not so much to explain and predict adult participation as it was to organize thinking and research. It was formulated to stimulate new research and improve practice.

Adult learners often have had unpleasant learning experiences. These have left scars of fear, failure, humiliation, anxiety, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, uncertainty and self-doubt (Cross, 1981; Houle, 1964; Knox, 1987;
Martindale & Drake, 1989; Meizrow et al., 1975; Noel et al., 1987; St. John Hunter & Harman, 1979; Stodt et al., 1987; Warren, 1973). Such a litany of negative feelings produced, not only by educational errors, but also by related life experiences, are not fertile ground for sowing the seeds of literacy and graduation credentials.

Some students were labeled voluntary drops. They contended that they had accomplished what they came to class to do. They were satisfied with their present status and felt no need to continue. Continued education was a low personal priority. Often the voluntary dropouts claimed academic boredom, uncertainty of future goals and dissatisfaction with instruction or administration (Beaudin, 1982; Houle, 1964; Knox, 1987; Noel et al., 1987; Stodt et al., 1987).

The study of locus of control and course completion in Adult Basic Education (ABE) classrooms (Taylor & Boss, 1985), involved 62 adult learners in Ottawa, Ontario Canada. Since completion of programs would seem to depend on personal commitment, it was hypothesized that locus of control would be related to course completion. The subjects responded to an 11-item modification of the Rotter I-E Scale early in the semester.

Rotter stated that people vary in the degree to which they recognize a contingent relationship between their own behaviors (actions) and resulting reinforcements (outcomes). Certain people, externals, generally believe that reinforcements are controlled by forces external to themselves such as fate, chance, luck or powerful others. Other people, internals, tend to believe that their own behaviors are the primary factors in receipt of reinforcements. For them, control rests within the power of the individual. Rotter also stated
that locus of control is a result of the history of reinforcement patterns experienced by an individual.

As depicted in Table 1, learners who completed the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program were more internally controlled than those who did not complete. Those individuals who were inclined to associate the receipt of reinforcements as being dependent on their own actions and behaviors more readily completed the three month program.

Data were analyzed with two independent variables: completion and reading level (beginner, intermediate, and mature). The means and standard deviations of locus of control scores are located in Table 1.

Data were analyzed using a two-way analysis of variance (unweighted means) with locus of control scores as the dependent variable. Completers were more internal than noncompleters (\(F = 17.03, df = 1/50, p < .001\)).

Learners who completed were able to overcome situational barriers and the frustrations of academic learning. Individuals who did not complete did not conquer these barriers. The researchers concluded that adults who can be taught to increase their feelings of self-efficacy, have an opportunity to change their external orientation to an internal orientation. Their chances of class completion will be enhanced.

Hazelwood (1983) concluded in her study that there was a relationship between how students in both Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Education Development (GED) classes rated themselves and their persistence. Students with higher self perceptions proved to be the most consistent class attendees.
Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Locus of Control for Reading Level and Completion Rate (N=56)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Level</th>
<th>Completers</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Noncompleters</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Mean*</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Mean*</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The higher the mean score, the more likely the student perceived behavior controlled by external forces.

Research for the first of three hypotheses dealing with dispositional factors influencing adult high school program completion is based on the many studies that deal with the importance of personal attitudes toward education and their influence on student persistence. There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of personal attitudes toward education as a dispositional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Academic Preparedness**

Lack of adequate academic skills deterred adults from returning to the school scene (Beaudin, 1982; Noel et al., 1987; Stodt et al., 1987).
Potential students doubted their ability to cope with the learning process and to keep pace with their peers. Academic unpreparedness surfaced in the form of complete illiteracy, low reading levels, test anxiety, and deficit writing skills. Some were also undiagnosed learning disabled (Knox, 1986).

Houle (1964) maintained that most uneducated adults did not know how to learn. They lacked study techniques, note taking skills, organizational techniques for time or work and did not know how to apply themselves to the task of learning. They claimed that concentration was difficult and study was a distasteful burden. Knox (1986) pointed out that many adults did not know how to take responsibility for their own learning.

The influence of academic preparedness on adult student persistence leads to the second dispositional hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of academic preparedness as a dispositional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Expectations and Satisfaction**

The actual learning experience, or more accurately, how it was perceived, in turn monitored individuals' continuing evaluation of it. To the extent that the learning experience was evaluated as congruent with initial expectations of it (or perhaps with revised expectations) satisfaction was likely to be high. Conversely, incongruence between initial expectations and the individual's perception of the learning experience probably contributed to dissatisfaction. Finally, satisfaction or dissatisfaction, as it developed
cumulatively over time, led either to persistence or dropout (Darkenwald, 1981).

Rubencon and Hoghielm's (1978) Expectancy-Valence Model assumed that a person's choice of activities resulted both from the value attached to the result of his/her actions and of the expectations of being able to carry out the action in question. Figure 2 graphically describes the basic model. Learners persisted if they perceived the learning activity as satisfying an important need (positive valence) and if they expected to be able to complete or cope with the learning activity (positive expectancy). If expectancy and valence were both highly positive, persistence was predicted. If both were low or one had a value of zero, then dropout was predicted. Although abstract, this model recognized the importance of barriers, internal and external, in accounting for dropouts (Darkenwald, 1981). If the learning experience was highly valued, but one encountered difficulties with learning or regular attendance (examples of expectancy factors), persistence became problematical. The model's deficiency was the lack of definition for the factors that influenced valence and expectancy. The researchers have not yet presented data to support the model's validity.

Based on the research that verifies the effect of student expectations and satisfaction on persistence, the final dispositional hypothesis is formed: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of expectations and satisfaction with the learning experience as dispositional factors influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.
Summary

The literature review has focused on three specific areas, i.e., institutional factors that foster or hinder persistence, situational factors that encourage or discourage persistence, and dispositional factors that lead to successful completion or dropout status.

The institutional factors illustrate the importance of staff support, relevant curriculum, adequate student services, and flexible, extensive logistical considerations. The following hypotheses are related to institutional factors. The first four hypotheses of this study are based on this evidence.

**Staff Support:** There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of staff support as an institutional factor influencing adult high...
school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Relevancy of Curriculum:** There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of relevant curriculum offerings as an institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Adequate Student Services:** There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of student services as an institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Logistical Considerations:** There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of logistical conveniences as an institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Next, the situational factors depict the importance of family and friend support, time pressures, employment and health. The findings form the basis for the next four hypotheses.

**Family and Friend Support:** There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of family and friend support as a situational factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Time:** There is a difference in the degree of importance of time as a situational factor comparing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.
Employment: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of employment as a situational factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Health: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of health issues as a situational barrier influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Finally, the dispositional factors consider the impact of attitudes, academic preparedness, expectations and satisfaction. These research findings are the basis for the last three hypotheses.

Personal Attitudes Toward Education: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of personal attitudes toward education as a dispositional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Academic Preparedness: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of academic preparedness as a dispositional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Expectations and Satisfaction: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of expectations and satisfaction with the learning experience as dispositional factors influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.
CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Population and Sample

The population studied is adults who return to school with the objective of earning a high school diploma. Specifically, the study addresses both the successful completers and the dropouts. Successful completers are defined as adult students who earn sufficient high school credits to earn a high school diploma. They are graduates. Non completers are defined as adult students who enroll in the high school completion program, earn at least 1/2 credit (60 hours of attendance and a passing grade), but are not actively enrolled in the 1990-1991 school year. The sample is adult students of the L'Anse Creuse Public School Adult Education program located in Mt. Clemens, Michigan.

The L'Anse Creuse School District, with an estimated population of 37,000 and an area of 37 square miles, is situated 20 miles northeast of downtown Detroit, within Macomb County. The district includes one township, Harrison, and portions of three other townships; Chesterfield, Clinton, and Macomb, and a small section of the city of Mt. Clemens. According to the 1980 census, the townships ranged in population between 16,000 and 77,000 and the number of households varied from 5,000 to 25,700. Unemployment in the townships in 1988 ranged between 8.1% and 8.6%, a figure about one percent above the county average (Sterling, 1989). The
district is a suburban, white, working class community. Located on Lake St. Clair, it has attracted a small percentage of middle class professionals who live mostly on or near lakefront property.

The L'Anse Creuse adult education program began in 1980. State law allows any adult over sixteen years of age who no longer attends dayschool to enroll in the adult education program of his/her choice without cost. Adults are not restricted by geographic district boundaries. Thus, the sample represents broader parameters than are indicated in the district demographics. A large number of program participants come from the neighboring Mt. Clemens school district. These students are largely of a lower socioeconomic level than L'Anse Creuse residents and represent a greater number of minority students than those who reside in the L'Anse Creuse district.

Two hundred fifty completers and two hundred fifty dropouts were randomly selected, utilizing a systematic selection procedure. This was accomplished by examining student files organized alphabetically and selecting every third name from the completers' files and every sixth name from the dropouts' files.

Instrumentation

Data are collected using a researcher developed survey. The survey is designed to record the perceptions of dropouts and completers concerning the relative importance of institutional, situational and dispositional barriers as they affect student persistence. A five point Likert type scale is used, ranging choices from strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree to
strongly agree. Each choice is assigned a numerical value as follows: strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). A score of zero is assigned to the response, "undecided," since a respondent who selects "undecided" neither agrees nor disagrees with the statement. Undecided items are not included in the calculation of the mean for that particular factor.

Statements are worded to measure the respondent's perception of the importance of each of the institutional, situational and dispositional barriers. In order to ensure a greater likelihood of creating an instrument that is representative of all opinions or attitudes about the factors, the instrument was field tested by five adult education staff members, including two administrators, a counselor, a teacher, and a paraprofessional. Each staff member has at least five years experience in the field of adult education. Item analysis by these experts assures the identification of ambiguous items and double-barreled items. The survey examined in the field test listed all the statements about one barrier in sequential order. This assisted the reader in seeing the barrier category (institutional, situational or dispositional) as a complete concept.

The statements are divided into three categories, i.e., factors that relate to institutional barriers (personnel, practices and procedures in the school program that encourage or discourage student persistence), situational barriers (events that occur in the student's personal life at the time he/she is enrolled in the program), and dispositional barriers (attitudes and self perceptions about oneself as a learner and about the concept of adult education).
Each of the factors has between two and six statements per factor which addresses the content of that one factor. Survey statements 1, 11, 18, 28 and 44 are concerned with the factor of staff support. Relevant curriculum includes statements 2, 19, 24 and 38. Inquiries about student services are found in statements 3, 12, 34, 40 and 42. Logistical considerations are found in statements 13 and 25. These statements are all in reference to institutional barriers.

Statements 4, 20 and 29 are concerned with the factor of family support. Time includes statements 5, 14, 21, 32 and 37. Employment is covered by statements 6, 15 and 26. Health issues are found in statements 41, 43, 45 and 46. Situational barriers are addressed by these statements.

Statements 7, 16, 22, 30 and 36 include perceptions on the factor of personal attitudes. Academic preparedness includes statements 8, 9, 17, 27, 33 and 39. Finally, issues of expectations and satisfaction are covered in statements 10, 23, 31 and 35. These statements are all in reference to dispositional barriers.

Survey statement content is based principally upon review of the literature related to adult student persistence and consultation with experts in the field. The survey statements that pertain to a particular factor are arranged in random order to avoid any response set on the part of the subjects. A mean score is computed for each of the eleven factors on the survey.

Coded surveys were sent to a random sample of L'Anse Creuse Adult Education persisters and dropouts. An enclosed personal letter encouraged a prompt response and guaranteed confidentiality. Follow-up letters and
surveys were sent to nonrespondents. Phone calls were then attempted to all dropouts who still had not responded. A copy of the cover letter is found in Appendix B. The follow-up letter is found in Appendix C, and the survey in Appendix D.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher developed survey lacks the proven validity of a well-established instrument. This is corrected by having the content validity of the item pool field-tested by adult education experts. A pilot study using presently enrolled students, followed by item analysis, adds support to the instrument's validity. The possibility of omitting independent variables significant topersisters or dropouts is corrected by providing open-ended statements in the pilot study. The subjects in this pilot study added any factors not included that they considered necessary for clarity and completeness.

The major limitation of the study is constricted external validity; results cannot be generalized to all adult education programs. Generalizability is confined to suburban programs serving about 1,000 students with a full time equated (FTE) membership of approximately 750.

The reliability of the instrument is enhanced by using multiple statements that address each barrier category. A reliability coefficient for the instrument is calculated using a split half method corrected using the Spearman-Brown prophecy formula. This coefficient is calculated for each of the eleven factors (staff support, curriculum, student services, logistical considerations, family support, employment, time, health, attitudes toward
education, academic preparedness and expectations and satisfaction) as well as the three major barriers (institutional, situational and dispositional). The 46 items on the survey are randomly split into "A" and "B" item groups for each of the eleven factors enabling the comparison of two means for each factor. The split into the "A" and "B" item groups is described in Table 2.

Table 2
Groupings for Split-half Reliability of Survey Instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Factors</th>
<th>Individual Factors</th>
<th>A items</th>
<th>B items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>Staff Support</td>
<td>1 &amp; 28</td>
<td>11, 18, &amp; 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum Offerings</td>
<td>2 &amp; 24</td>
<td>19 &amp; 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>2, 12, &amp; 40</td>
<td>34 &amp; 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logistical Considerations</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>Family &amp; Friend Support</td>
<td>4 &amp; 29</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>5, 21, &amp; 37</td>
<td>14 &amp; 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6 &amp; 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>41 &amp; 45</td>
<td>43 &amp; 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td>Personal Attitudes</td>
<td>7 &amp; 30</td>
<td>16, 22, &amp; 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Preparedness</td>
<td>8, 17, &amp; 33</td>
<td>9, 27, &amp; 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations &amp; Satisfaction</td>
<td>10 &amp; 31</td>
<td>23 &amp; 35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

The data of interval scores obtained from each of the 216 completed surveys ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4) are recorded on an individual survey data form. One form was completed for each respondent. A mean score is calculated for each of the eleven factors using the responses given by each graduate and dropout who responded to the
survey. Provided at least one response is made on any of the statements related to a factor, a mean is calculated. Only a total lack of response to all the statements pertaining to a single factor results in no mean score being calculated.

Means are transferred to three group data forms. There is one form each for persisters responding by mail, dropouts responding by mail and dropouts responding by telephone. All dropout responses (mail and telephone) are initially treated as a single group. Later the responses are used as separate units to perform a t test for independent means measuring differences between mail and phone responses. The mean scores produced by each respondent for each of the eleven factors are recorded on the group survey data forms.

Eleven one-way ANOVA's are completed producing a test of differences between persisters and dropouts in their overall perception of the importance of each of the eleven individual factors. The resulting data serves as support or lack of support for each of the eleven hypotheses.

Although no hypotheses are stated to predict differences between persisters and dropouts in their overall perceptions of each of the three major barriers, i.e., institutional, situational, and dispositional, a second set of three one-way ANOVA's is performed for this purpose.

This two step analysis permits the researcher to test the hypothesized differences between the perceptions of persisters and dropouts in regard to the individual factors within each of the three barriers. It also examines the differences of perceived importance between dropouts and graduates of the three overall barriers.
In addition, a $t$ test for independent means is performed to determine if the responses of the dropouts by mail differ from those obtained by phone. It is necessary to see if the subjects' responses are different due to personal communication with the researcher by phone as compared to the impersonal, anonymous mail response.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Survey Distribution

Two hundred fifty coded surveys each were sent to randomly selected L'Anse Creuse Adult Education graduates (persisters) and dropouts (non-completers). Dropouts varied from one year, one time enrollees to students who had re-enrolled six times. Eighty-three (33%) graduates and 36 (14%) dropouts returned the survey within three weeks. A second mailing produced 34 (14%) additional returns from graduates and 33 (13%) additional returns from dropouts. A total of 117 (47%) graduates and 69 (28%) dropouts responded to the survey by mail. Thirty-five (14%) graduate surveys and 20 (5%) dropout surveys were returned because the students had moved and the post office had no forwarding address.

An attempt was then made over the next eight weeks to reach all of the 161 dropout non-respondents by phone and conduct the survey in this manner. Thirty-six successful contacts were made. Six of these former students did not wish to participate. Unsuccessful phone contact attempts included messages left on answering services that were not returned (11%), students no longer at available numbers (41%), lines disconnected (28%), numbers now unpublished (12%), students now in mental institutions or jail (.01%), parents unwilling to reveal former students new phone numbers (.01%), and students who did not have phone numbers when originally
registered (7.98%). Survey data (mail and phone) were collected from 99 (40%) of the dropouts.

To confirm that the phone responses were not influenced by personal contact with the researcher, a t test for independent means was performed comparing mail and phone response means for each of the eleven barriers. Phone responses (personal contacts) were compared with survey mail responses (impersonal, anonymous contacts) of the same group of subjects, dropouts. With the exception of the factor health, no differences were noted using an alpha level of .20. A summary of the t test for independent means can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 compares the mean scores of mail and phone dropout respondents for each of the eleven factors. Means, standard deviations and probability for each of the factors indicates that, with the exception of health issues, no differences were noted between mail and phone responses using an alpha level of .20.

Validity

A thorough search of the related literature serves as a basis for creating the survey instrument. The three barriers for creating the survey are adopted from Patricia K. Cross' extensive research on adult learners. The eleven factors relating to the major barriers are gathered from the research of many adult education theorists. Their expertise contributes to the construct validity of the survey instrument.

Content validity is supported by a field test followed by a pilot study. The original survey was field tested by five people who had at least five
Table 3

Summary of t Test: Perceived Importance by Dropouts of Institutional, Situational, and Dispositional Factors as Measured by Mail and Phone Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Support</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.398</td>
<td>.479</td>
<td>.247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.263</td>
<td>.630</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Offerings</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.269</td>
<td>.469</td>
<td>.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.292</td>
<td>.482</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.162</td>
<td>.463</td>
<td>.258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.277</td>
<td>.454</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistical Considerations</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.312</td>
<td>.486</td>
<td>.337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.417</td>
<td>.527</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Friend Support</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.545</td>
<td>.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.991</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.085</td>
<td>.473</td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.112</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2.715</td>
<td>.692</td>
<td>.983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.718</td>
<td>.720</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.074</td>
<td>.446</td>
<td>.117 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.917</td>
<td>.468</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Attitudes</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.042</td>
<td>.389</td>
<td>.717</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.073</td>
<td>.390</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Preparedness</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.243</td>
<td>.470</td>
<td>.568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.303</td>
<td>.516</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations &amp; Satisfaction</td>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.214</td>
<td>.426</td>
<td>.911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.224</td>
<td>.380</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p < .20
years experience in the adult education field. A former Communications Specialist for Adult Education at the local Intermediate School District gave major assistance revising the complete format of the survey and rewording all statements to be much more "reader friendly." An Assistant Superintendent for Community Services added statement 42 to the final survey and assisted in rewording statements 15, 16 and 31. The wording in the original survey was in the third person. The final document was written in the first person. An Adult Education counselor added statement 46 concerning self esteem, statement 44 speaking to warm classroom atmosphere and pointed out that numbers 33 and 36 on the original document were redundant. An Adult Education teacher provided a number of clarifications. The word "support" was replaced with specific instances where support was demonstrated such as being "treated like an adult" and "giving encouragement." The original phrase "ability to schedule time" was replaced with statement 5, "I had time to go to school and fulfill my personal obligations." The original survey statements 29 and 30 which were written in the third person, i.e., "a strong desire to graduate" and "a feeling that a student is ready to learn," were rewritten in the first person as seen in final survey statements 16, 22 and 31. She also added statement 43 which addresses personal problems in a student's life. An Adult Education paraprofessional pointed out that the survey was written far above the reading level of the average Adult Learning Center student and assisted with the simplification of language and thus, greatly reduced the length of the survey.
The revised survey was then piloted on ten students attending the L'Anse Creuse Adult Education program. Upon completion of the survey, their input resulted in further refinements. An additional direction to check only one column was added. The words "at home" were added to statement 32 to differentiate between school study time and homework study time. In statement 40, the words "clerical staff" were replaced by the word "secretaries." In statement 1, the word "teacher" became plural and the added qualifier "for the most part" was inserted because the students stated that one poor experience did not negate several positive encounters.

Each subject was asked to respond to 46 statements on the survey. The 46 statements were randomly arranged. Each statement referenced one of the eleven factors that affect adult student persistence. When a subject failed to respond to all the statements concerning one factor, a mean could not be computed for that factor. This was considered to be an insufficient response for that factor by that particular subject.

In this study there were nine insufficient responses. Statements 4, 20 and 29 were concerned with the factor of family support. Two graduates, two dropouts answering by mail and one dropout answering by phone did not respond to these statements. Statement 6, 15 and 26 covered information about the situational factor of employment. Three persisters (graduates) did not respond to these statements. Finally, statements 41, 43, 45 and 46 addressed the situational factor of health. One graduate failed to respond to these four statements.
There was a possible total of 2376 means to be calculated from the survey returned by 216 subjects. The missing nine responses (means) represent .37% of that possible total.

Reliability

Surveys were received from 216 subjects. Split-half reliability coefficients are calculated for each of the eleven individual factors and corrected using the Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula. Table 4 summarizes the corrected split-half reliability for survey items dealing with each of the eleven factors.

The five survey statements dealing with staff support have a split-half reliability of 0.53 corrected to 0.69 using the Spearman-Brown formula. The four statements addressing curriculum have a split-half reliability of 0.18 corrected to 0.31. The five survey statements concerned with student services have a split-half reliability of 0.25 corrected to 0.40. The last institutional factor, logistical considerations, utilizing two survey statements has a split-half reliability of 0.37 corrected to 0.54 using the Spearman-Brown formula.

The three survey statements dealing with family and friend support have a split-half reliability of 0.35 corrected to 0.52 using the Spearman-Brown formula. The five statements addressing time have a split-level reliability of 0.58 corrected to 0.74. The three survey statements concerned with employment have a split-half reliability of 0.07 corrected to 0.13. Finally, the last situational factor, health, utilizing four survey statements...
has a split-half reliability of 0.21 corrected to 0.35 using the Spearman-Brown formula.

The five survey statements dealing with personal attitudes have a split-half reliability of 0.11 corrected to 0.19 using the Spearman-Brown formula. The six statements addressing academic preparedness have a split-half reliability of 0.68 corrected to 0.81. The last dispositional factor,

Table 4
Corrected Split-Half Reliability for Survey Items Dealing With Each of the Eleven Individual Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Split-half Reliability a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Support</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Offerings</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logistical Considerations</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Friend Support</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Attitudes</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Preparedness</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations and Satisfaction</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a = Corrected using Spearman-Brown Formula

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expectations and satisfaction, has a split-half reliability of 0.39 corrected to 0.56 using the Spearman-Brown formula.

The varying \( n \) values for each of the eleven factors are due to the fact that in order for a split-half reliability to be calculated for a particular factor, it was necessary to have both an A-item and B-item mean for a subject. Consequently, if a subject failed to respond to all of the statements used to calculate either the A or B item, this subject's response is not included in the calculation. Consequences of the varying \( n \) values are discussed in Chapter V.

Split-half reliability coefficients were calculated for each of the three overall barriers using the Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula. The sixteen survey statements dealing with institutional barriers have a split-half

Table 5
Corrected Split-Half Reliability for Survey Items Dealing With Each of the Three Overall Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Split-half Reliability a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors</td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>826</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>835</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors</td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>814</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td>A items</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors</td>
<td>B items</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\( a \) = Corrected using Spearman-Brown formula
reliability of 0.39 corrected to 0.57. The fifteen survey statements addressing situational barriers have a split-half reliability of 0.29 corrected to 0.45. The fifteen survey statements concerned with dispositional barriers have a split-half reliability of 0.32 corrected to 0.49 using the Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula. These reliability coefficients are summarized in Table 5. Since the overall barriers are a compilation of four factors for the institutional barrier, four factors for the situational barrier, and three factors for the dispositional barrier, the corresponding n values reflect this increase.

Hypotheses

The following discussion describes the results of the statistical analyses of the data compiled from the 216 returned surveys. Of the 500 original surveys distributed, 43% were completed by mail or through telephone contact. One hundred seventeen surveys were completed by graduates and 99 were completed by non-completers (dropouts).

This section addresses the hypotheses made concerning the eleven factors that may determine the perceptions of adult students on barriers to persistence. First, hypotheses 1A, 1B, 1C and 1D that refer to institutional barriers are stated. This is followed by a table demonstrating the relationship of perceived importance of this institutional factor and enrollment status (persister or dropout). Discussion concerning the data follows.

The discussion of institutional barriers is followed by restatement of hypotheses 2A, 2B, 2C and 2D that refer to the factors that comprise situational barriers. A table and discussion clarifying data concerning each
of the hypothesized differences between persisters' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of situational factors follows.

Next, hypotheses 3A, 3B and 3C that refer to dispositional barriers are stated. This is followed by a table demonstrating the relationship of perceived importance of the dispositional factors and enrollment status. Discussion concerning those data follows.

Finally, tables depicting the relationships between perceived importance of each of the barriers as a whole i.e., institutional, situational and dispositional, and enrollment status completes this section.

Institutional Barriers

Hypothesis 1A: Perceived difference of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the institutional barrier of staff support.

Table 6 points out the mean response to survey items 1, 11, 18, 28 and 44 relating to the perceived importance of staff support by 117 persisters is 3.55. The mean response to these same items by 99 dropouts is 3.36. Performing an ANOVA comparing the mean responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of staff support provides support for hypothesis 1A using an alpha level of .10. There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of staff support as an institutional factor as it relates to adult high school completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out. Persisters perceive the value of staff support as more important than do dropouts.
Table 6

Relationship Between Perceived Importance of Staff Support as an Institutional Factor and Enrollment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>.402</td>
<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.530</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10

Hypothesis 1B: Perceived differences of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the institutional barrier of curriculum.

Table 7 indicates that the mean response to survey statements 2, 19, 24 and 38 relating to the perceived importance of relevant curriculum by 117 persisters is 3.42. The mean response to the same items by 99 dropouts is 3.28. Performing an ANOVA comparing the mean responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of relevant curriculum provides

Table 7

Relationship Between Perceived Importance of Curriculum Offerings as an Institutional Factor and Enrollment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.439</td>
<td>.020*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10
support for hypothesis 1B using an alpha level of .10. There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of relevant curriculum as an institutional factor as it relates to adult high school completion by students who persist as compared to those who drop out. Persisters (graduates) perceive relevant curriculum to be of greater importance than do dropouts.

**Hypothesis 1C: Perceived differences of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the institutional barrier of student support services.**

Table 8 reveals that the mean response to survey statements 3, 12, 34, 40 and 42 relating to the perceived importance of student support services by 117 persisters is 3.29. The mean response to the same items by 99 dropouts is 3.20. When comparing the mean responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of student services using ANOVA, the F probability found is .165. Therefore, hypothesis 1C that states there is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of student support services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p > .10

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as an institutional factor as it relates to adult high school completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out, is not supported.

**Hypothesis 1D: Perceived differences of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the institutional barrier of logistical considerations.**

Table 9 shows that the mean response to survey items 13 and 25 relating to the perceived importance of logistical considerations by 117 persisters is 3.49. The mean response to the same statements by 99 dropouts is 3.34. Performing an ANOVA comparing the mean responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of logistical considerations provides support for hypothesis 1D using an alpha level of .10. There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of logistical considerations provides support for hypothesis 1D using an alpha level of .10. There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of logistical considerations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.506</td>
<td>.037*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10

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as an institutional factor as it relates to adult high school completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out. Persisters perceive logistical considerations to be of greater importance than do dropouts.

The hypothesized differences between the perceptions of adult persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of staff support, relevant curriculum and logistical conveniences are supported by the survey data using an alpha level of .10. However, no differences between the two groups concerning the importance of student support services were found.

Situational Barriers

**Hypothesis 2A:** Perceived differences of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the situational barrier of family and friend support.

Table 10 reports the mean response to survey statements 4, 20 and 29 relating to the perceived importance of family and friend support by 115 persisters is 3.17. The mean response to the same items by 96 dropouts is 3.02. Comparing the mean responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of family and friend support using a one way ANOVA, fails to support hypothesis 2A using an alpha level of .10.

It should also be noted that two persisters out of 117 and 3 dropouts out of 99 failed to answer any of the statements pertaining to family and friend support.

**Hypothesis 2B:** Perceived differences of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the situational barrier of time.
Table 10

Relationship Between Perceived Importance of Family and Friend Support as a Situational Factor and Enrollment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.767</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p > .10

Table 11 shows the mean response to survey items 5, 14, 21, 32 and 37 relating to the perceived importance of time by 117 persisters is 3.45. The mean response to the same statements by 99 dropouts is 3.09. Performing an ANOVA comparing the mean responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of time provides support for hypothesis 2B using an alpha level of .10. There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of time as a situational factor as it relates to adult high school completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out. Persisters (graduates) perceive that time is a more important factor than do dropouts.

Hypothesis 2C: Perceived difference of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the situational barrier of employment.

Table 12 reveals the mean response to survey statements 6, 15 and 26 relating to the perceived importance of employment by 114 graduates is 2.81. The mean response to these same items by 99 dropouts is 2.72. When
Table 11

Relationship Between Perceived Importance of Time as a Situational Factor and Enrollment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.452</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10

Comparing the mean response of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of employment using ANOVA, the F probability is .300. No difference can be found in the degree of perceived importance to employment as a situational factor between dropouts and graduates.

It should be noted that three persisters out of 117 failed to answer any of the items pertaining to employment.

Table 12

Relationship Between Perceived Importance of Employment as a Situational Factor and Enrollment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.659</td>
<td>.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.697</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p > .10
**Hypothesis 2D: Perceived differences of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the situational barrier of health.**

Table 13 shows the mean response to survey items 41, 43, 45 and 46 relating to the perceived importance of health by 116 persisters is 3.26. The mean response to the same items by 99 dropouts is 3.03. Performing an ANOVA comparing the mean responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of health issues provides support for hypothesis 2D using an alpha level of .10. There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of health as a situational factor as it relates to adult high school completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out. Persisters perceive health to be of greater importance than do dropouts.

It should be noted that one out of 117 persisters did not respond to any of the items pertaining to the situational factor of health.

Data supporting differences between perceptions of adult persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of time and health issues are

---

**Table 13**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10*
supported by the survey data using an alpha level of .10. No differences in the perception of importance of family and friend support as well as employment between the two groups were found.

Dispositional Barriers

**Hypothesis 3A: Perceived differences of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the dispositional barrier of personal attitudes.**

Table 14 points out the mean response to survey statements 7, 16, 22, 30, and 36 relating to the perceived importance of personal attitudes toward education by 117 persisters is 3.29. The mean response to these same items by 99 dropouts is 3.05. Performing an ANOVA comparing the mean responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of personal attitudes toward education provides support for hypothesis 3A using an alpha level of .10. There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of personal attitude toward education as a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.410</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10

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dispositional factor as it relates to adult high school completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out. Persisters perceive the value of personal attitudes toward education as more important than do dropouts.

**Hypothesis 3B: Perceived differences of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the dispositional barrier of academic preparedness.**

Table 15 reveals the mean response to survey statements 8, 9, 17, 27, 33 and 39 relating to the perceived importance of academic preparedness by 117 persisters is 3.36. The mean response by 99 dropouts is 3.26. When comparing the mean response of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of academic preparedness using ANOVA, the F probability found is .092. There is a difference in the degree of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>.092*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.482</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10

perceived importance of academic preparedness as a dispositional factor as it relates to adult high school completion by students who persist as
compared to students who drop out, is supported. Persisters regard this factor as more important than dropouts.

**Hypothesis 3C: Perceived differences of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of the dispositional barrier of expectations and satisfaction.**

Table 16 points out the mean response to survey statements 10, 23, 31 and 35 relating to the perceived importance of expectations and satisfaction by 117 persisters is 3.54. The mean response to the same items by 99 dropouts is 3.22. Performing an ANOVA comparing the mean response of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of satisfaction and expectations provides support for hypothesis 3C using an alpha level of .10.

Table 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persisters</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.445</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropouts</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10

There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of expectations and satisfaction as a dispositional factor as it relates to adult high school completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.
Persisters perceive expectations and satisfaction to be of greater importance than do dropouts.

The hypothesized differences between the perceptions of persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of personal attitudes toward education, academic preparedness, as well as expectations and satisfaction is supported by the survey data using an alpha level equal to .10.

Relationship Between Major Barriers and Enrollment Status

Institutional Barriers

Table 17 shows the mean response to all survey statements relating to the perceived importance of institutional barriers by 117 persisters is 3.44. The mean response to the same statements by 99 dropouts is 3.29. Performing an ANOVA comparing the responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of institutional barriers as a whole provides support that there is a difference between their perceptions of institutional barriers using an alpha level of .10. Although this is not

Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td>.005*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.372</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10

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hypothesized in the study, it is an interesting conclusion. Considering all the factors that make up institutional barriers, persisters perceive them of greater importance than do dropouts.

**Situational Barriers**

Table 18 points out the mean response to all survey statements relating to the perceived importance of situational barriers by 117 persisters is 3.18. The mean response to the same items by 99 dropouts is 2.96. An ANOVA comparing the responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of situational barriers as a whole provides support that there is a difference between their perceptions of situational barriers using an alpha level of .10. This also is not hypothesized in the study but supplies additional information for consideration. The persisters perceived that situational factors, as a whole, are more important than do dropouts.

Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.420</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>0.345</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10
Dispositional Barriers

Table 19 reveals the mean response to all survey statements relating to the perceived importance of dispositional barriers by 117 persisters is 3.40. The mean response to the same items by 99 dropouts is 3.18. An ANOVA comparing the responses of graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of dispositional barriers as a whole provides support that there is a difference between their perceptions of dispositional barriers using an alpha level of .10. Again, this is not hypothesized in the study but adds information for discussion. Finally, persisters perceive the value of dispositional factors as more important than do dropouts.

Table 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.340</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.331</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .10

Summary

This study was conducted by means of analyzing the results of a survey sent to 250 graduates and 250 dropouts of the L'Anse Creuse Adult Education Program. The survey inquiries were formulated using three
Table 20

Relationships Between Perceived Importance of All Institutional, Situational and Dispositional Factors and Enrollment Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Staff Support</td>
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<td>117</td>
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<td>.002*</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.530</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.439</td>
<td>.020*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.471</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Services</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.508</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Logistical Considerations</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.506</td>
<td>.037*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>Family &amp; Friend Support</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.767</td>
<td>.110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>.553</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>.452</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>.659</td>
<td>.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>.697</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.461</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.456</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td>Personal Attitude</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.410</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Preparedness</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.414</td>
<td>.092*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>.482</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations &amp; Satisfaction</td>
<td>Persister</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.445</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>.411</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .10

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barriers (institutional, situational and dispositional) as the basis for each statement.

One hundred seventeen surveys of graduates and 99 surveys of dropouts were analyzed. Table 20 shows a difference between dropouts and graduates in the perceived importance of the following factors using an alpha level equal to .10: staff support, relevant curriculum offerings and logistical considerations, (institutional barriers); time and health issues (situational barriers); and personal attitudes toward education as well as academic preparedness, expectations and satisfaction (dispositional barriers).

No differences were found between graduates and dropouts in the perceived importance of the following factors using an alpha level equal to .10: student support services (an institutional barrier), family and friend support, as well as employment (situational barriers).
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Sample Bias

Several issues should be addressed before generalizations concerning study results are formed. It is necessary to deal with such limitations as the effect of survey non response and survey volunteer response on the data, the effect of selecting subjects attending only one program, differences possible between written and phone responses, insufficient responses to some survey statements and survey respondents' reaction to the researcher.

Non Respondents and Volunteers

Of the 250 surveys sent to graduates, 117 responses were returned completed. Thirty-five surveys were returned because no forwarding address was available and 98 graduates apparently received the survey, but opted not to complete and return it. Thus, a little less than one-half of the surveys sent to the graduates could be utilized while processing the data.

Two hundred fifty surveys were sent to adult student dropouts. Sixty-nine dropouts responded by mail and 30 dropouts responded by phone, for a total of 99 responses. Twenty undeliverable surveys were returned without forwarding addresses. One hundred thirty-one dropouts probably received the survey but chose not to respond, limiting viable data
from dropouts to about 40%.

Non response problems to the first mailing were minimized by following the initial survey with a reminder letter and a second survey to all subjects. Dropout non respondents to the second survey were contacted by telephone in all instances that this mode of communication was possible. The severity of the problem of non response was somewhat minimized by the second and third contact attempts.

The generalizability of the findings was further curtailed by the fact that the respondents were volunteers. The fact that they held the program in enough regard to give feedback, either positive or negative, might affect the representativeness of the sample. Non volunteers may have differed with respect to the variables in the study.

**Program Subjects**

The subjects selected to answer the survey were students enrolled in one adult education program. All adult student data is confidential and it would have been very difficult for the researcher to gain access to student records in any other school district. Care should be taken not to generalize survey data beyond the parameters of the L'Anse Creuse Adult Education program. It would be necessary to survey students in large urban areas as well as those in rural districts before generalizing study results to students enrolled in such environments.
Written Versus Phone Responses

Thirty non graduates who had not responded to the mailed survey were willing to give oral responses. The researcher was the Director of Adult Education and was known personally by many of the respondents. The anonymity of returning a mailed survey was not available to subjects responding over the phone.

Personal contact may have influenced the dropouts' phone responses. To verify if this occurred, a t test for independent means was performed, comparing phone responses with dropout mail responses for each of the institutional, situational and dispositional factors. Except for health issues, no differences were noted at the alpha level of .20. Table 3 summarized the t tests for independent means of perceived importance of each of the factors as perceived by the dropouts who answered by phone and mailed written surveys. Written and phone responses do not appear to hinder generalization of study conclusions.

Insufficient Survey Responses

Nine survey statements received no response although a category choice of undecided was available for each statement. These non responses involved the factors of friend and family support, employment and health. Six persisters, two dropouts (mail respondents) and one dropout (phone respondent) accounted for the nine insufficient responses. The effect of this lack of information is difficult to gauge. If the survey were administered again, the directions should include the importance of responding to each statement.
Reaction to the Researcher

Respondents to the written survey received a signed cover letter from the researcher and returned the surveys to her, directly. Phone respondents were aware to whom they were speaking. In both cases, the fact that some of the survey respondents knew the researcher personally or by reputation must be a consideration in data analyzation. Such recognition could influence responses particularly when the statements could be interpreted as a critique of the L'Anse Creuse Adult Education program. Means might have been inflated by students who were not comfortable giving responses that might have been judged as critical of the program. The cover letter and the phone conversation assured the respondent that confidentiality was guaranteed. However, human nature might compel a respondent to act conservatively and refrain from lowering the mean score with a more honest appraisal of the survey statement.

Possible bias points out the necessity of carefully considering the danger of over generalizing the study data conclusions beyond acceptable limits. Acknowledgement of these limits has been stated. Conclusions based on these parameters as they apply to each hypothesis now follows.

Purpose of the Study

The study was conducted to contrast the perceptions of adult education graduates and dropouts as to the importance of the barriers that prohibit successful completion of adult high school programs. Cross' three levels of barriers to persistence, i.e., institutional, situational and dispositional, were the basis for formulating a survey distributed to
successful completers and dropouts. Subjects rated the importance of these factors by selecting from a range of choices that included strongly disagree (a value of one), disagree (a value of two), agree (a value of three) and strongly agree (a value of four). The acquired data served as a foundation for the appraisal and restructuring of adult education programs. As funding for such programming is increasingly challenged and limited, it becomes fiscally expedient to support those factors identified by students as most influential in making their decisions to complete the requirements necessary to graduate.

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers have been defined as those practices and procedures of the educational program that exclude or discourage adult participation or persistence in educational pursuits. Such barriers are related to the nature of the program or the training of the staff. Thus, institutional barriers are the factors over which program administrators can execute the most control. The institutional factors that were considered in the survey and became incorporated into the first four hypotheses were staff support, relevant curriculum, student services and logistical convenience. The discussion that follows will explain what the findings were and how that data can be utilized to improve adult education programming. A consequence of high quality programming may be an increased number of successful adult completers.
Staff Support

Hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of staff support as an institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Data

The graduates perceived the importance of staff support as more important than the dropouts. However, both groups identified staff support in a "strongly agree" range. Staff support is therefore a factor to be considered in a program improvement plan.

Conclusions and Implications

The importance of staff support demands that the development of an environment that will advocate staff members who can care and nurture adult students throughout their returning school years is a top priority item. The responsibility to provide such staff training belongs at the federal and state legislative level, at the university level, and at the local adult education site.

State and federal legislatures control money and have the power to mandate rules and regulations that limit funds. Congress referees the competition for the monetary awards that hopefully will relieve the problems of unemployment, homelessness and all the other social problems facing our country. Illiteracy is also one of these major ills and is frequently
the cause of the other atrocities. It would seem reasonable that in working through political priorities, education should receive preferential status.

When the state and federal legislators come to an agreement that support of education at all levels including adult education is an investment that will, in turn, help to alleviate many other expensive crises, funds needed to train supportive personnel will be forthcoming. Building shelters for the homeless is a temporary relief measure. Educating a person to the point of being self-supportive is a permanent respite from poverty, unemployment and homelessness.

Staff development costs money, but when budgets that emenate from government agencies are lean, the inservice line item can be cut without immediate ramifications. Wages are still paid, books are still available and, on the surface, it appears that students are unaffected. However, this is a false sense of security. When an untrained staff does not offer the support needed by adult students, students will "vote with their feet" and leave the program. The institution supporting the adult education program comes up short on enrollment quotas and the success and even the life of the program is threatened. This becomes a lose-lose situation within the educational community and spreads to the broader community of unemployment lines. Government support is vital to fund the training of adult education staff members.

Financial support from legislators can only happen if the adult education community becomes politically active. Congress members should be invited to visit programs, converse with students and observe classes. Directors of adult education need to be in frequent contact with the members
of congressional educational subcommittees. What programs do and what they need in order to improve their services must become clear in the minds of senators and representatives. This may best be accomplished if programs unite their resources to support a lobbyist to protect and further adult education interests.

Universities who educate future teachers and counselors usually function in a child centered modus operandi. Potential educators choose between an elementary and secondary certification and possibly even a middle school endorsement. As such, they are taught curriculum and methods based on a pedagogical philosophy. Certain assumptions constitute pedagogy. A child's self concept is initially one of dependency. Young learners have a very limited amount of experience. Their readiness is based on biological development and although they learn many things, the time perspective for application of learned material is often postponed. A child's orientation for learning is subject centered. There are definite design elements in a child centered classroom. The climate is authority oriented where an adult teacher is responsible for planning, diagnosis of needs and formulation of objectives. Curriculum is designed in logical subject units and activities are evaluated by the teacher (Burnham, 1983; Knowles, 1978).

It is educators with this teaching foundation who eventually find their way into adult education classrooms. An outstanding teacher of children does not necessarily hold that status when teaching adults. The instructor may be teaching the same content, be it first grade reading skills or algebra, but this is where the similarities cease.
Nowhere in the college experience has the teacher dealt with the concept of androgogy. Unlike the child, the adult student's self-concept is one of self-directiveness. The adult has a rich data bank of experience to be used as a learning resource. What the adult wishes to learn demands immediate application and the adults' orientation to learning is problem centered. The design elements of an adult student classroom include a collaborative, informal climate utilizing a mechanism of mutual (teacher and student) planning, diagnosis of needs, objective formulation and evaluation. The adult sees activities as performance centered and demands task relevance. (Burnham, 1983; Knowles, 1978)

In addition to the assumptions and designs demanded in an adult student classroom, the psychology of the adult learner requires additional different orientations. The teacher or counselor of the adult high school completion student must be the advocate of a "kinder gentler education". This student brings varying amounts of emotional baggage to the classroom. A well trained teacher of adults counters this with sensitivity, encouragement and support to fearful but voluntary students. Counselors and instructors know that until these supportive human links are formed, no learning can take place. These students are adults who resent being treated in any manner that resembles the treatment afforded to children. Adult students are the equals of their adult teachers and counselors. Staff members whose entire orientation has been to accommodate the needs of children have a major adjustment to make when they become teachers of adults.
The teacher and counselor of adults must be trained to be so perceptive as to know where every student is on the hierarchy of human needs. The student cannot handle anything beyond that point at the moment (Burnham, 1983). Such openness, while honoring the unfamiliar values of some students or assisting in the solution of unfamiliar problems, requires intensive inservice training if not college course work.

Few colleges or universities offer psychology of adult learning, adult learning theory, adult curriculum methods or any literacy instruction for the adult student even as an elective in the School of Education. It is rare to find a course of study that would culminate in an adult education certification. Institutions of higher learning must reevaluate their teacher and counselor training based on community needs. K-12 populations are diminishing but adult learners are on the increase.

Thus, it falls primarily on the shoulders of the local adult education institution to train all adult education staff members particularly in their support roles. Time, money, and effort needs to be invested at every staff level from the clerical staff member who answers the potential student's first phone contact to the highest level administrator who approves a staff inservice budget allocation. Thought should be given to bringing adult education experts in at least twice a year to work with all staff members. To make these efforts cost effective, neighboring adult education programs can combine their staffs and share expenses. Paying all staff members at their regular pay rates gives a message that this training is considered of the utmost importance to building quality programs. Hiring practices should be in place that illicit the potential for a new staff member to be supportive of
the adult student and to consider the inservice training offered by the program to be a professional obligation.

Inservice training can be planned around a theme that will permeate all aspects of the adult education program for the school year. Such a theme might be "Care and Nurture Our Students and Each Other." This theme would advocate support at every level. The recruitment campaign would focus on the supportive atmosphere awaiting students. Recruiters would be trained to approach potential students with personal concern and not as impersonal recipients of printed brochures or phone calls. Clerical staff need to be trained to regard each inquiry they receive with patience and courteous, knowledgeable answers. Adult students may have difficulty following directions to school buildings to enroll or be unable to fill out registration forms independently. If a potential student is lost at this stage of the educational process, the student may be gone forever. Providing a potential student with a specific registration appointment and a follow-up reminder of that time and date expresses the fact that the program regards the student and his/her time as important. It also helps to reinforce the commitment to return to school, a commitment that may be less than firm due to fear and anxiety. An offer to provide free childcare during the registration process also adds to the students' initial impression that this program is concerned about him/her as an individual and not as a potential funding source.

The counselor is a professional whose entire orientation is one of support. However, few school counselors have the training to deal with peers rather than children. The counselor must be prepared to address such
issues as single parenthood and its demands on time and energy, lack of family and spousal support for adult students, poverty, unemployment, lack of transportation, fear of repeated academic failure and substance abuse issues, to mention just a few impediments that arriving adult students bring. Counselors are the first to realize that the role of student is not the primary function of most adult high school completion candidates. Counselors need the ability to juggle a number of issues before they can consider how many credits an adult student needs to graduate and how these classes can be worked into a student's limited free hours. A few minutes during a registration session will not provide the support a student requires. These problems and the others that will arise during the semester require a counselor to be available and ready with options and answers whenever the student requires it. The counselor is a major supportive resource. The adult education program has the obligation to provide the counselor with as many outside resources as possible to aid the student.

A counselor is often the referral agent. Therefore, the adult education counselor should have readily available every community resource that an adult student might require. Furthermore, the counselor needs to have the time to develop relationships with people in these referral agencies. Such agencies are local resources whose personnel can be brought to the adult education program and, frequently without cost, provide the inservice training counselors need to work effectively and efficiently. A university many miles from the work site cannot orchestrate this type of support, but the local educational institution can and must.
Teachers and paraprofessionals touch adult students frequently. In adult education classrooms, this may mean a once a week contact or five days a week. In terms of total hours of association with students, the teaching staff has more opportunity to care and nurture students than any other staff members. Teachers need, at the very least, two staff inservices each year to learn and update their skills of student support. Sometimes this means as much energy must go into "unlearning" child oriented approaches as is spent in assimilating new information. New adult education teachers may have the expectation that the presence of grown up adult bodies in the classroom guarantees that all the students know how to read, write, articulate, study, be punctual, sit quietly for several hours, remain until class is dismissed, and faithfully return for each class meeting. The inexperienced adult education teacher may feel that because disciplinary tasks are at a minimum compared to their K-12 experience, the only obligation to these adults is to present appropriate subject matter, test mastery and assign grades. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Until these adult students feel the comfort and stability that support and caring provides, the subject area is unimportant, unappreciated and unlearned.

Formal inservice training is not the only way that teachers can assimilate the importance of the concept of student support. Allowing teachers to observe in each other's classrooms encourages a new perspective particularly when the administrator carefully pairs the individuals to match a deficiency with an exemplary role model. Administrators receive many flyers advertising lectures and conferences. Passing on these professional growth opportunities to appropriate staff members and, when possible,
paying all or part of the expenses, is an excellent investment. Upon return from the conference, the staff member can write up a report and share handouts received with the rest of the staff. The financial investment for one person then brings training to many. Many professional journals provide information on adult student support. Routing these publications among staff members encourages new outlooks and underscores how important the concept of student support is in building an adult education program.

Finally, student support will become a natural outgrowth of staff support. The adult education administrator who cares and nurtures, listens, responds and acts in the interest of the staff builds an environment that encourages this support at every level. This requires that the administrative staff renew itself frequently by keeping up with new trends in support. Administrators can only give and share what they already possess.

Student support is extremely important to the success of adult graduates. It can act as the memory jogger for dropouts who may be vacillating between giving education another try and remaining in a passive stance. Student support involves every adult education staff member from the volunteer to the director. It requires formal, structured presentation and informal, casual exchange. The extent to which it is utilized by each staff member should certainly have a place in each person's annual evaluation.

Relevant Curriculum

Hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of relevant curriculum offerings as an institutional factor
influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Data

The data supported the hypothesis that there would be a difference between graduates' and dropouts' perceptions. The graduates perceived the importance of curriculum offerings as more important than the non completers. Bothpersisters and dropouts rated the importance of this factor in the lower range of the strongly agree choice.

Conclusions and Implications

Adult education students in the L'Anse Creuse School District require 18 credits to graduate. These credits include 3 English, 1 1/2 social studies, 1/2 government, 1 U.S. history, 2 mathematics, 2 science, 1/2 computer, 1 health, 2 vocational and/or fine arts and/or foreign language, and 4 1/2 electives. L'Anse Creuse has a vocational-technical center that offers a wide variety of medical, computer, business and industrial related curricula. Programs include auto body repair, small engine repair, auto mechanics, welding, drafting, auto CAD, horticulture, electronics, computer, typing, medical office assistant (clinical and administrative) and nursing. In addition, a complete selection of academic classes are offered. L'Anse Creuse students have a range of class choices well beyond the average adult education program in Macomb County. This fact is significant in interpreting the data concerning curriculum. Such a high mean score may
have been influenced by the fact that students have had a wide variety of selections and limits the generalizability of the data.

Students did, however, indicate that the applicability of subject matter learned and the feeling of success experienced upon class completion was important to both graduates and dropouts while enrolled in the adult education program.

The literature supports the fact that course content influences the chances of high school completion (Hurkamp, 1969). Tuesdell's (1975) research verified that students who thought course work was not helpful and applicable to daily living, dropped from the program fastest. These facts are significant in program planning of vocational and academic curriculum.

The choice of vocational curriculum should be dictated by the marketplace, particularly the local job market. Unemployed and underemployed students are more likely to complete programs that will culminate in job opportunities or will allow presently held positions to be upgraded. Program directors who dictate curriculum selections need to network with Department of Labor personnel and the local Chamber of Commerce to realize where the employment opportunities are and what skills are needed to be hired. Forming a vocational advisory committee composed of community business, industry and educational representatives will help insure consistent input. Programs must be willing to delete skills no longer in demand and/or update curriculum to meet the new needs of prospective employers. Vocational teachers must have the freedom to
occasionally leave their classrooms and be in touch with the workplace to insure that what they teach is applicable to the world of work.

Programs that do not have vocational centers need not be excluded from offering adult students job skills. Consideration can be given to forming working relationships with business and industry. During non-business hours work sites can be utilized as off campus classrooms using business and industrial equipment and supplies. Some financial reimbursement would be negotiated and acknowledgement of a business site supporting a training program could become an excellent source of public relations and advertising.

Academic curriculum is also a requirement for graduation. Teachers of adults need inservice training in the skill of making academic classes applicable to a student's daily living experience. Textbooks need not be followed page by page. Learning to complete income tax forms can be a useful mathematics lesson. The daily newspaper can be used as a government lesson, a social studies update, a vocabulary builder, an exercise in food budgeting, or a source of learning to read charts, graphs and maps. English classes can teach the art of good resume writing. Teachers need the freedom and encouragement to discard lesson plans used year after year and innovate their classrooms with useful, updated and participative content.

Adults can verbalize their needs. Distributing an index card to each student at the first class meeting and soliciting one thing each student wishes to know by the end of the semester gives an instructor an indication of what to incorporate into this semester's curriculum. A review of the cards during the final class assures that each student's request was honored.
Relevant curriculum is a factor that contributes highly to the success of adult education programs. Curriculum is a marketable item. The consumer, the student, needs an opportunity to tell the marketplace, the adult education program, what he/she needs. The student will buy (attend and complete) what is desired when the product (the curriculum) answers his/her needs.

**Student Services**

**Hypothesis:** There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of student services as an institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Data**

The data did not support the hypothesis that there would be a difference between the graduates' and the dropouts' perceptions. However, both persisters and dropouts rated the importance of this factor in the lower range of the "strongly agree" choice. Thus, it is a factor well worth consideration when dealing with program improvement.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Student services can include a large number of supplemental support assistance. In this study transportation, childcare, and counseling was considered in the survey. Each of these services is addressed in the conclusions.
Transportation is usually considered the second largest budget item in a school district. It is exceeded only by staff wages. Transportation services for adults, if provided by the school district, is not only expensive, but can be a scheduling nightmare. Adult students reside both within and outside district boundaries. Some students do not have time to return home before attending class, coming directly from the workplace. Adult daytime programming can conflict directly with the needs of children to be transported during the day. The expense of fuel and contracted unionized drivers is often beyond the means of adult education programs. Adult education programs receive no categorical funds from the state for transportation needs.

Car pooling is less expensive and easier to coordinate. A simple computer program can help coordinate and match students with similar schedules. A giant local map at the registration site can be used to acquaint available drivers with needy riders. Riders and drivers can be identified with different colored pins and identification numbers. Counselors and clerical staff can assist matching needs and resources.

When student transportation needs persist, program directors can consider home study programs, classrooms within worksite areas and common living areas such as senior citizen housing. Send the teaching staff to the students when the students cannot reach the traditional classroom. Employers benefit as the workforce becomes better educated. Group home directors have another resource to fill empty hours for lonely residents.

Childcare is also an ever present need in adult education programs. It can appear in various forms, i.e., infant care, toddler, pre-school or school-
age children. Each of these childcare programs has unique needs depending upon the adult student clientele. To provide childcare services, preferably free of charge, requires careful planning. Part of the registration process should address childcare needs of students. When a student leaves the registration desk the administrator should know how many children the student will need serviced, the age range, how often, and the site most easily utilized. The compilation of this information serves as a basis for determining what kind of childcare the program can provide.

When the most pressing needs have been identified, the budget will determine how extensive the services can be. Baby sitting versus developmentally appropriate programming can be the difference between the minimum wage salary of a childcare provider as compared to the salary of a certified pre-school teacher. Programs that run in the evening may need furnishings such as cots. Some programs may require licensing by the state and be subject to annual inspection and evaluation. Toys, games, daily activities and exercise programs, equipment and snacks become part of the childcare plan. While all of these items require money, the absence of childcare for students who require this service will force them to leave the program or shop around until they find a program that does provide such conveniences.

Single parent families and financial need that demands that both parents work transforms childcare from an elective service to a required service. Offering the same service for a fee on a drop-in or contractual basis to community members who are not adult education students may help defray expenses for those who do attend classes.
As students become better acquainted they may choose to exchange childcare services with each other when their schedules allow. Care for sick children remains a parental function. In lieu of childcare services the program needs to provide alternate class times, make up assignments or other appropriate arrangements so the parent can care for the ill child and remain an active student.

The final student service required by adult students is the availability of a well trained counseling staff. Registration is only the beginning of the counselor-student relationship. Counselors should be trained to give academic, vocational and personal guidance to all students who seek assistance. Counseling services must be as integral a part of the program as teaching staff. Students should feel comfortable seeking available counseling at any time. Counselors need to be in and out of classrooms, in the break areas and know all students by name.

One of the first services that students need during the initial contact with the counselor is an Educational Development Plan (EDP). This process involves a review of the student's present academic status and a step-by-step plan to earn the credits needed to graduate. The discussion should include all options available to accomplish this goal considering the student's present lifestyle, available time, and career goals. This becomes the road map for the student, something concrete with which to begin the journey.

As circumstances change in the student's personal life and within the program, the counselor/student relationship should continue and grow. The counselor is the anchor that stabilizes the student when the goals become vague or the motivation wavers.
Occasionally, when difficulties arise that challenge the counselor's expertise, the adult education counselor must act as a referral agent to join the student with the appropriate agency or individual that will best address the student's needs.

Without the guidance staff, adult education students lack a very important support service. Transportation and childcare support services are also critical needs. It appears that both graduates and dropouts view support services as an integral part of a successful educational experience.

**Logistical Considerations**

Hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of logistical considerations as an institutional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Data**

The data did support the hypothesis that there would be a difference between the graduates' and the dropouts perceptions. Although the data supports differences concerning this factor, both groups saw this as an important consideration ranking logistical convenience in the lower "strongly agree" range. It is a factor worth some serious thought when program improvement is a consideration.
Conclusions and Implications

Time and place are items that students look at carefully when choosing a high school completion program and making the decision to continue the classes. Frequently, programs make logistical decisions based on tradition or what is convenient for administration and teachers. This can be a serious error. The first consideration must be the student.

The needs of students cannot be presumed but must be surveyed, documented and addressed. The program must be flexible enough to change, add or delete time schedules and program sites when the demand is recognized.

When a large part of the adult student population is the parents of elementary aged children, the best time to schedule adult classes may be to coincide it with the children's hours in school. Utilizing the same building where the children are in attendance could be an added bonus.

If a bulk of the adult students are factory workers, classrooms within the work site opening before shifts begin and/or at the end of a shift makes good sense.

Utilizing available sites near public transportation lines encourages students without cars to begin and continue the educational process. Consideration of weekend class offerings may encourage the student with a full-time job or pre-school age children to attend classes.

Institutional barriers are manageable factors because adult education programs have control over staff, curriculum, student services and logistical conveniences. The worst deterrents to addressing institutional barriers are complacency and lack of communication. Student needs must be identified
often as they can frequently change. Constant re-evaluation of institutional barriers can result in student satisfaction to the extent that adults who begin programs will have enough support to consider completion to be an attainable goal.

Situational Barriers

Situational barriers are those challenges existing in students' lives at the time they are attempting to enter and complete educational programs. These factors can exist before the student considers completing his/her education or can arise during the process. The adult education program has much less control over these factors than it does correcting institutional barriers. Frequently, students exit the program without sharing the situational barriers that have caused their decision to leave. The best the adult education program can do is to anticipate what may occur in the students' lives and provide as many mechanisms as possible to assist them in dealing with these problems.

Family and Friend Support

Hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of family and friend support as a situational factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.
Data

The data did not support the hypothesis that there would be a difference between the graduates' and the dropouts' perceptions. However, both groups rated the importance of the factor in the "agree" or low "strongly agree" range. Therefore, it is a factor worth consideration in designing improvement plans.

Conclusions and Implications

The return to adult education classes is rarely a decision made in isolation. The absence of the student from the family environment and the time needed to study varies family routine. Relationships are strained. The involvement of a family member in a process unfamiliar to peers and relatives can be met with suspicion and fear. What happens if education substantially changes the students' goals, personality or attitudes? If a relationship is already weak, will this additional stress be more than the student can handle? The path of least resistance may be the choice to drop out.

Much of the discomfort which prohibits family and friend support stems from a lack of information and a feeling of isolation. Programs can eliminate these problems by encouraging the involvement of family and friends. Early in the semester students can be encouraged to bring a spouse or friend to class. This serves not only as a source of information for the uninvolved partner, but as a recruitment tool for the program. The possibility that next semester both the student and the partner may attend classes is increased.
When holiday celebrations or special events such as speakers or student seminars are planned, it is an excellent opportunity to open these happenings to friends and relatives. Sharing the information later provides some common ground between the participants.

Counselors need to be aware that students may approach them with problems stemming from interpersonal relationships threatened by their school enrollment. The counseling staff will need the expertise to help the student and the family. This may require some inservice for the counseling staff. It is training that is well worth the investment. If the non school participant can feel his/her role of support is welcomed and appreciated it can become a win-win situation.

Time

Hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of time as a situational factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Data

The data supports the hypothesis that there is a difference between the graduates' and the dropouts' perceptions. Students who remained until graduation considered time issues in the mid "strongly agree" range. Dropouts, on the other hand, perceived the time factor in the "agree" range. Although the groups differed, each indicated that this is an important factor.
Conclusions and Implications

"No time" is the lament of students from high school age through graduate school. Little wonder that adults returning to high school completion classes join in this chorus. Perhaps it is not so much a matter of "no time" as it is "no time management." Decision making is a learned skill. How to balance the equation of available time and things to do is also a learned skill called time management. Strong organizational skills are not innate to all adult students.

Offering potential students an opportunity to learn the art of managing time obligations gives the student a head start on the problem. When a student registers for class, he/she can be offered an opportunity to learn some skills before beginning the semester. Incentives such as one absence without make up work involved or exemption from a homework assignment may encourage students to attend such a seminar. The content of the seminar needs to be structured around the common needs of adult education students, i.e., balancing home, family, work and school; planning classroom assignment completion; equalizing work and play; maintaining physical and mental stamina. Equipped with some sound time management principles before beginning a school commitment may be very helpful to the potential graduate.

Teachers can also help students exercise sound time management practices. Providing a syllabus at the first class meeting can provide students with an overall view of deadlines. Presenting the syllabus at each consequent class meeting reiterates the need to plan time for long term projects, outside reading and tests. Students, particularly those struggling
with low reading levels, need tips on how to handle a textbook. Unfamiliar vocabulary should be reviewed before assigning a reading assignment to save students time when reading independently. Teaching the advantage of reading summary paragraphs before and after reading chapters can increase comprehension skills and reduce reading time. A review of chapter and paragraph headings before reading gives an organizational preview before attempting unfamiliar material. When students are given study guides to accompany the reading assignments they stay focused and do not waste time remembering unimportant details. When reading together in class it is helpful to preface the reading with a probing question that will give purpose to the task. Students will learn to read and sort, i.e., give limited time to main ideas and important details and not be hung up on word by word reading and re-reading.

Teachers should not presume that students come equipped with library skills, research skills or time organizational skills of any kind. If time is taken to teach these things before giving related assignments that require this expertise, students will not be overwhelmed and can accomplish these tasks in a reasonable length of time.

Classes should be planned with consideration that adult students may be fatigued upon arrival. Frequent breaks, an opportunity to stretch, walk, take a coffee break and a variety of different modes of learning (lecture, group interaction, hands on, etc.) should be included in every class period to keep students active and alert throughout the class period.

Acknowledgement of each accomplished task and goal gives students the incentive not to procrastinate when the next more complex goal is
presented. Progress needs praise to continue. Helping students to be successful in a few attempts very early on in the school experience is an insurance policy for continued attendance and persistence.

**Employment**

**Hypothesis:** There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of employment as a situational factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

**Data**

The data did not support the hypothesis that there would be a difference between the dropouts' and graduates' perceptions. All subjects rated this factor in the disagree range. It should also be noted that this factor, employment, had the lowest split-half reliability corrected using the Spearman-Brown formula, i.e., 0.125. The probability that the statements in the survey did not convey the intended message is great. If the instrument were used again, the statements pertaining to employment issues should be reviewed, reworded and expanded.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Since the Adult Education program began in the L'Anse Creuse School District, the number of students receiving welfare assistance has varied between 20% and 50% of the total enrollment. These figures are based on a close working relationship between the Department of Social
Services (DSS) and the school district. DSS mandated many of its clients to attend classes to learn employability skills and to earn high school diplomas. Failure to attend resulted in sanction and termination of financial aid. At the time the survey was taken, DSS continued to provide benefits for students. While attending classes General Assistance (GA) payments were received by GA clients.

In October of 1991, newly elected Governor John Engler rescinded benefits for thousands of Michigan's unemployed General Assistance clients. If the survey had been received by unemployed students whose General Assistance benefits had been withdrawn, the importance of employment may have been reflected quite differently in the survey results.

Considering the low reliability coefficient for the survey employment statements and the fact that many students may not have felt the impact of unemployment without financial assistance, it is difficult to generalize on the perceived importance of employment issues. The intervening circumstances could have great impact on the survey results.

Health

Hypothesis: There is a difference in the degree of perceived importance of health as a situational factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.
Data

The data did support the hypothesis that there would be a difference between the graduates' and dropouts' perceptions. Both groups, however, rated the importance in the "agree" and "strongly agree" range. In the area of program planning, the issue of student health should receive some consideration.

Conclusions and Implications

Health is a very personal issue. How one cares for his/her physical and mental needs is an individual choice. The adult education program has concern for student health but its involvement cannot be judged by the student as pervasive.

The best way adult education programs can remove the barrier of poor health is to act as a resource of information. This can be incorporated into existing curriculum or be presented in the guise of guest speakers and student workshops. Health related written materials can become a lesson in the English or journalism class. While critiquing writing style or brochure layout, the health message is shared. Health statistics can become math lessons. Timely health issues such as AIDS and teenage pregnancy are natural additions to a psychology, sociology or family living class. Parenting issues and nutrition are in the health class curriculum. Fast food machines that dispense healthy choices of fruit, juice, milk, etc., can replace junk food machines in the student lounge areas.

Counselors and administrators should have access to public health agencies that can handle students' specific health problems. Teachers need
to be tolerant of absences due to poor health and willing to provide alternate assignments and occasional tutoring to students who have missed classes due to illness.

Although the situational barriers are less controllable by the adult education program, they cannot be ignored. A number of options are available to encourage family and friend support, to teach time management skills, and to raise the students' level of awareness concerning health issues.

Dispositional Barriers

Dispositional factors are the attitudes and self perceptions about oneself as a learner that a student must examine when deciding to become a student and/or to complete educational goals. Response to inquiries concerning dispositional barriers requires an individual to examine inner feelings, make self judgements and allow past hurts and embarrassments to surface. It demands a conscious decision to expose events that have been buried. It usually is an uncomfortable process. Self esteem is fragile. Human beings throw up protective devises to insure that self esteem (be it high or low) is left intact. Sometimes self deception is the only devise left to accomplish this. It is important to remember this as we examine data related to dispositional barriers. The study provided data concerning graduates' and dropouts' perceptions of the importance of personal attitudes toward education, academic preparedness and expectations and satisfaction.
Personal Attitudes Toward Education

Hypothesis: There is a difference in the perceived importance of personal attitudes toward education as a dispositional factor influencing adult high school program completion by students who persist as compared to students who drop out.

Data

The data supports the hypothesis that there would be a difference between the graduates' and the dropouts' perceptions. Although the data supports differences concerning personal attitudes toward education, it is noteworthy thatpersisters rated this factor in the low "strongly agree range" and the dropouts rated it in the "agree" range. Both groups perceive these attitudes as important.

Conclusions and Implications

Attitudes toward education are formed very early in life, even before a child has any formal schooling. First attitudes are a result of parent, extended family and environmental influence. As the child's social system extends, other people and experiences outside the home reinforce and/or contradict first attitudes. Human beings are a compilation of many "selves" i.e., physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, social and sexual (Milburn, 1986). All of these "selves" come into play when attitudes are formed. By the time each "self" has wrestled with an attitude formation, the attitude is entrenched and ingrained within the individual. Attitudes concerning education have had many years to take root before an adult returns to adult
high school. If the attitude toward education is poor, it is amazing that the student has returned to the school scene.

Adult educators need to be human relations experts to deal with the returning adult whose attitude toward education is less than positive. Attitudes are not isolated perceptions. Intermingled with negative attitudes toward education there likely are related feelings of low self esteem, questionable self worth, lack of self confidence, wavering self respect, a degree of self blame, or in other cases, placement of blame on others. Returning students display a variety of clues if these attitudes exist. The student whose words and actions display a blatant disregard for education is probably easier to deal with than the person who represses these feelings. The program may lose the second student and never know why.

It requires a great amount of patience to deal with negative attitudes. It also demands that the adult educator be willing to deal with this problem first and put the subject matter on hold. Most teachers who are content subject oriented find doing this is very difficult. It takes some time for the student to perceive that this new educational experience is not a replay of past experiences. Building a relationship of mutual respect and trust doesn't occur during the first class meeting. Some life-lines need to be repeatedly thrown out, such as encouragement, support, sensitivity to the student's past history and present situation, and the creation of enough immediate success to override any feelings of failure. These human links are far more important than building vocabulary, solving equations or reading maps.

The burden of dispelling poor attitudes toward education need not fall exclusively on the adult education staff. A wonderful resource to call
upon is the graduates of the program. Inviting them to return and speak to groups of present students is a good public relations move. They bring an unbiased view unencumbered by job security motives. They have been in the same position as the present student, dealt with similar problems, and accomplished the goal. They can relate very well to the students still in attendance.

Behavior modification, which is what occurs when attitudes are modified or changed, is not easy or always successful. Occasionally, time accomplishes more than our best efforts. Students arrive. They leave dissatisfied. Time passes and other circumstances act as the catalysts to produce change. They return again - changed to a greater or lesser degree and we can begin the process again.

**Academic Preparedness**

Hypothesis: There is a difference in the perceived importance of academic preparedness as a dispositional factor influencing adult high school completion by students who persist as compared with students who drop out.

**Data**

The data supported the hypothesis that there would be a difference between persisters and dropouts perceptions using an alpha level of .10. The response from both groups indicated that there was a "strongly agree" perception of the importance of academic preparedness.
Conclusions and Implications

Students return to school functioning at every academic level. They read at college level or pre-kindergarten. They can function in the calculus class or struggle with multiplication tables. Some verbalize like seasoned politicians and others will not show up if there is a remote possibility that they might have to speak before a group. This wide range of academic preparedness puts a heavy burden on the adult education program and lowers the success rate for students. Some students are a bit rusty and a quick refresher course puts them on track immediately. Others never learned the skills and must begin at square one. Both graduates and dropouts see academic preparedness as important to success. To insure success the program must guarantee good assessment, careful placement, a variety of curriculum offerings and multi level approaches, and a strong academic support system.

Although time consuming, the best student placement decisions are made after a student has been assessed as to his/her reading level and math ability. If done at the time of registration, the counselor can guide the student into classes that best accommodate his/her academic ability. Assessment efforts are only worthwhile if the results are interpreted correctly and the information is used in the decision making process. The responsibility of the counselor is to know the curriculum thoroughly, including text book reading levels, teachers' abilities to individualize instruction when necessary, the difficulty of course objectives and the likelihood that the student will meet with success in the learning situation.
Counselors can only suggest what is available. Program planning is challenged by the multiplicity of student achievement levels, budget limitations in planning a variety of class offerings and the credit requirements demanded for graduation. Some thought should be given to providing the largest variety of classes in the most economical manner. Combining regular classroom offerings with a learning center approach and supporting both with a tutoring program may be one plan to consider.

A traditional classroom can serve students with a variety of academic levels if the teacher is willing to make some modifications. In addition to a spread of reading and math grade equivalents, students vary in learning styles. Lesson plans need to be modified in such a way that each objective is presented in a manner that satisfies the auditory learner, the visual learner and the student who learns best through a tactile-kinesthetic approach. A variety of text books covering like subject matter, but written at different reading levels can replace the one subject - one text mentality. Encouraging study groups and demonstrating how best to structure and utilize them will help the students bond and build on each other's strengths. Inservicing teachers in the art of teaching reading skills to adults results in a staff that considers every teacher to be a teacher of reading. The English department now shares this responsibility with the science, math and social studies instructors. The student who needs support gets it no matter which classes are selected. The assistance is consistent, providing a continuity of instruction.

An individualized instruction learning center provides an environment totally dedicated to academic preparedness. All academic
subjects are taught in the learning center, including literacy skills. Each subject can be handled at any reading or math level K - 12. Progress is self-paced and the teaching staff circulates from student to student giving individualized instruction. Instead of twenty-five identical American History books on the shelf, five different books at five different reading levels are available. Students compete with themselves, rather than against each other. No one is asked to read aloud before fellow students. Daily progress is tabulated and the next assignment is written in the student's personal folder on a daily basis. Such a learning approach encourages independent learning and provides immediate success because assessments are matched with appropriate level materials.

A tutorial center that can be accessed by phone or personal visit is a support mechanism that can fill in any instructional gaps. Students who need support on a short or long term basis have an available resource to depend on. Staffing in such a center is critical to its success. The "jack of all trades" instructor functions best. Such a tutorial center is not always feasible, especially in small programs or programs with limited financial resources. For such a center to be successful, students must acknowledge their own needs, be willing to seek the extra help and experience success for their efforts.

The combination of good assessment, proper placement, a selection of appropriate classes that accommodate multi-level abilities and an opportunity for tutorial assistance creates an atmosphere that promotes academic preparedness. Without this supportive environment many
students will give in to discouragement and leave before earning their diploma.

Expectations and Satisfaction

Hypothesis: There is a difference in the perceived importance of expectations and satisfaction as a dispositional factor influencing high school completion by students who persist as compared with students who drop out.

Data

The data supported the hypothesis that there would be a difference between persisters and dropouts perceptions. The persisters more strongly considered this to be an important factor. However, the dropouts also rated this factor in the low "strongly agree" range. Expectations and satisfaction appears to be a factor worth including in a program improvement plan.

Conclusions and Implications

Expectation connotes an anticipation of some future benefit. Expectations can be formed based on a sound rational premise. Other expectations find their origins in false hopes or unrealistic desires. False hopes and unrealistic desires do not terminate in satisfaction. They culminate in disappointment and frustration. When educational expectations are formed based on misinformation or wishful thinking the potential student is set up for sure failure.
When the potential adult graduate enters the adult education high school completion program, he/she may have a rather vague expectation of what the experience will bring. On the other hand, the student may have very strong expectations about what this experience should be, how it should occur, and what the outcome should be.

Adult education personnel are faced with the problem of knowing every student’s expectations and modifying them to a realistic and attainable status. This is a heavy communication burden.

Open, honest, ongoing dialogue is the best asset the program can promote to address student expectations and satisfaction. The temptation is always great, especially while recruiting students, to paint a rosy, unrealistic picture of how easy it is to attain a high school diploma at any age. Pictures of smiling adult graduates belie the sacrifice and effort that precede receiving a diploma.

Encouraging students to overschedule in an effort to achieve an impressive enrollment count usually backfires. When the student suddenly feels overburdened, the tendency is to drop everything and forego the entire experience. The expectation was not to be overwhelmed and there is no satisfaction in burying a goal not achieved.

Program policies should be administered with consistency. Students will compare notes and become dissatisfied when they feel they have been treated differently or unfairly. There will always be the inevitable personality conflicts. If they are handled immediately, dissatisfaction may be averted.
Expectations and satisfaction are much more student controlled than any other barrier. They are the essence of the individual. Honesty and integrity within the adult education program are the best weapons to combat expectations which are unrealistic.

Summary

This study has examined institutional, situational and dispositional barriers to adult high school completion as perceived by graduates and dropouts. The hypothesized differences between the perceptions of adult persisters and dropouts concerning the importance of staff support, relevant curriculum, logistical convenience, time, health, personal attitudes, academic preparedness as well as expectations and satisfaction are supported by the survey data using an alpha level of .10. However, no differences between the two groups concerning the importance of student support services, friend and family support and employment were found.

The study should be expanded in the future to survey subjects living in an urban setting. It would be interesting to see if the results were comparable. The survey could also be restructured in the areas where there was a low reliability coefficient.

As national data reiterate the large number of teenagers who opt to drop out of high school, the need to keep adult education programs vital and excellent increases. In order to decrease the possibility of nurturing a second or third academic failure, adult education programs must have the means to minimize the barriers that prohibit high school completion. The penalty for dropout has many ramifications, i.e., unemployment, poverty, homelessness,
and low self esteem. If the responsibility to rescue high school dropouts from these insidious social ills falls upon adult education programs, it is equally as important to design programs that will prohibit the possibility of letting history repeat itself in another academic failure. Hopefully, the responses of graduates and dropouts will provide some guidance in this direction.
Adult Education: A process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular or full time basis undertake sequential and organized activities with the conscious intention of bringing about changes in information, knowledge, understanding, skills appreciation and attitudes. (Knowles and Klevins, 1987).

ABE: Adult Basic Education is a duplication, at an adult level, of an academic program at a level between kindergarten and grade eight, concentrating on skills of reading, writing and mathematics.

GED: General Educational Development is a multi-subject test offered to nongraduated students. In passing the exam, the student earns a high school equivalency certificate.

Adult Enrichment Students: Adults who enroll in classes for personal pleasure, or to learn a desired skill.

High School Completion: A duplication, at an adult level, of an academic and vocational program at a level between grades 9 and 12, resulting in the acquisition of a high school diploma.

Community College Students: Students who enroll in academic and/or vocational classes at a community college and upon completion of the curriculum receive an associate degree.

University Students: Students who enroll in a four year college or university program and upon completion of the curriculum receive a bachelor's or master's degree.

ESL Students: English as a Second Language students are foreign students whose native language is something other than English and who enroll in classes to learn to read, write and speak English.

Successful termination: The achievement of a high school diploma upon completing and passing the prescribed number of credit classes demanded to earn a high school diploma.
Appendix B

Initial Cover letter
January 7, 1991

Dear

I have not seen you since you were enrolled in classes at L'Anse Creuse. I hope you are finding much happiness in your present activities.

Your opinion is important to me. That is why I am asking you to respond to the enclosed survey. Your thoughts can help us make our adult education program a better place for adults to learn.

Please read each statement and place an X in the column that best describes how you felt when you were a student. Any answers you give will remain confidential.

Enclosed is a stamped return envelope in which to return the survey. I would appreciate your response by January 21, 1991.

Thank you for helping me and all our future students.

Sincerely,

Joan E. Garbarino
Director Adult Education

Enclosure
Appendix C
Follow-Up Cover Letter
February 4, 1991

Dear

Recently I sent you a survey asking for your opinion concerning your experience while attending adult education classes at L'Anse Créuse. You probably received it at a time when you were busy with many post-holiday activities.

Again, I'm asking you to help me evaluate our program. Hopefully, your opinions will help us improve the quality of our services. I truly value your thoughts. I would not be financing these mailings with my personal funds if I didn't think your thoughts made a difference!

Please read each statement and place an X in the column that best describes how you felt when you were a student. Your answers will remain confidential.

Return your response by February 15, 1991 in the enclosed stamped envelope.

If you have returned your survey since I wrote this letter, disregard this request and accept my thanks for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Joan E. Garbarino
Director Adult Education

Enclosure
Appendix D

Survey Instrument
Directions: Read each statement. Put an X in the column that best describes the extent to which you would have agreed with the statement while you were enrolled in the adult education program. Check only ONE column for each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement #</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. For the most part, my teachers treated me like an adult.</td>
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<td>2. The adult education program offered me a sufficient variety of classes.</td>
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<td>3. I had reliable, available transportation to get to school.</td>
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<td>4. My family encouraged me to complete my education.</td>
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<td>5. I had time to go to school and fulfill my personal obligations.</td>
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<td>6. I needed adult education classes to learn job skills.</td>
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<td>7. I had a bad school experience before I enrolled in adult education classes.</td>
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<td>8. I would have rated my reading ability as average or above.</td>
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<td>9. I would have rated my ability to take notes as average or above.</td>
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<td>10. I was satisfied with my adult education experience.</td>
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<td>11. My classmates were supportive.</td>
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<td>12. Counselors were helpful to me.</td>
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<td>13. Classes were conveniently located.</td>
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<td>14. Counselors were available when I needed them.</td>
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<td>15. I was unemployed, looking for work.</td>
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<td>16. I was ready to learn when I returned to school.</td>
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<td>17. I felt capable of concentrating on my studies.</td>
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<td>18. My teacher gave me encouragement.</td>
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<td>19. I received needed vocational training.</td>
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<td>20. My friend(s) encouraged me to complete my education.</td>
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<td>21. I was able to organize my time.</td>
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<td>Statement #</td>
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<td>22. I had a strong desire to graduate.</td>
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<td>23. Returning to school filled a need in my life.</td>
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<td>24. I felt successful when I completed a class.</td>
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<td>25. The time schedule of classes was convenient for me.</td>
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<td>26. Job obligations did not interfere with class attendance.</td>
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<td>27. I would have rated my ability to study as average or above.</td>
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<td>28. My teacher was well informed about his/her subject.</td>
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<td>29. My employer encouraged me to complete my education.</td>
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<td>30. I had a good school experience before I enrolled in adult education classes.</td>
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<td>31. I was confident that I would graduate.</td>
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<td>32. I had sufficient time to study at home.</td>
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<th>Statement #</th>
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<td>33.</td>
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<td>I would have rated my performance on tests as average or above.</td>
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<td>34.</td>
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<td>Available, reliable childcare was important to me.</td>
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<td>35.</td>
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<td>My adult education experience fulfilled my expectations.</td>
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<td>I felt I had the confidence to succeed.</td>
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<td>I received enough individual attention from my teacher.</td>
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<td>I was able to use information I learned in class.</td>
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<td>I would have rated my ability to write as average or above.</td>
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<td>40.</td>
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<td>The secretaries were helpful to me.</td>
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<td>On the whole, I was healthy while attending classes.</td>
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<td>42.</td>
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<td>Available food at break time was important to me.</td>
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43. On the whole, I had only a few personal problems.

44. My teacher provided a warm classroom atmosphere.

45. I was satisfied with my life during the time I was a student.

46. At the time I attended classes I would have rated my self esteem as average or above.

Thank you for your time.
Date: November 26, 1990
To: Joan E. Garbarino
From: Mary Anne Bunda, Chair
Re: HSIRB Project Number: 90-11-21

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research protocol, "Factors Influencing Persistence as Perceived by Adult Student Completers and Adult Student Non-Completers in High School Completion Programs," has been approved under the exempt category of review by the HSIRB. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the approval application.

You must seek reapproval for any changes in this design. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Uldis Smidchens, Educational Leadership

Approval Termination: November 26, 1991
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Buckley, W.F., Jr. (1989, October 1). Students have forgotten to apply themselves. *The Detroit Free Press*, p.3B.


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