

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS OLDER  
THAN AVERAGE UPON ENTRY INTO  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA?

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study attempted to determine the expectations held by students older than average upon entry into The University of Arizona. Another goal was to identify the expectations that were confirmed during the students attendance at The University of Arizona. The final goal was to gather profile information about students older than average attending The University of Arizona.

For the purposes of this study, students older than average were defined as 25 years of age and older; and expectations were defined as anticipations or perceived notions about the University environment.

Twenty-two men and twenty-eight women volunteered to complete a questionnaire and participate in the study to comprise a total sample of fifty.

Results showed that the typical student older than average in this survey was White/Caucasian, married, employed, degree-oriented, and with some previous college experience. The data also revealed that more expectations were held than actually confirmed in each of the four cluster areas, i.e., personal, social, career, and academic expectations. Results indicated that personal and social expectations were more often confirmed than career and academic expectations.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

"Indeed, the walls of the traditional 'ivory tower' appear to be crumbling. America's love affair with its highly restricted, differentiated, institutional system of education is rapidly being questioned and re-examined. The campus-bound, age-limited, degree-focused and cubic mentality of the classroom are being pressed to give way to wider approaches to knowledge utilization" (Leagans, 1978, p. 27).

There seems to be ample research and evidence supporting the fact that students older than average (25 years of age and older) are returning to school for a variety of reasons. This adult population brings with them a set of expectations and a diversity of needs unlike the traditional 18-22 year old student. The central questions become: What are the expectations of students older than average? How do they differ from traditional students? What is higher education doing to attract this new clientele? How adequately is the present system of higher education serving the needs of this new adult population? What implications do these findings have for the future of higher education?

Adult students beyond the traditional college age of 18-22 comprise the fastest growing population in higher education today. These students now represent 48% of a total college enrollment of some ten million (Maeroff, 1975). According to an October 1977 U. S. Census Bureau Survey of

educational trends for the current school year, the number of college students over the age of 25 has risen from 3.7 million to 4.1 million (The Arizona Daily Star, 1978).

Frank Antinoro (1978), an analyst in the Office of the Vice President for Planning and Budgeting at The University of Arizona, reports that students older than average, as defined by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, as those students 25 years of age and older, now constitute about 35% of the total university student body, or approximately 10,000 students.

There are many reasons for the increased numbers of older students attending institutions of higher education. Some of the psychological and social factors contributing to this adult student boom are: the rapidly expanding modern labor market, the need to update skills and acquire new ones, three-to-five major career changes (Bolles, 1977), an increase in leisure time, early retirement, a decrease in the family size which allows parents to devote more time to their own self-improvement (Maeroff, 1975), the personal satisfaction of obtaining a degree, and finally, a basic need to escape the routine of a highly structured environment (Cass, 1975).

An adjunct to the psychological and social factors contributing to the increased enrollments is the adult developmental stages of growth. For example, Erik Erikson



(1950) proposes eight stages of development which focus on crises--turning points--in the life span. More specifically, the last three stages of his developmental theory occur during the adult stages of growth, (i.e., intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair). According to Erikson (1950), optimal development is characterized by a sequence of eight successful resolutions. Perhaps a return to formal education by many adults is related to the desire for increased satisfaction with life, work, and self.

Gail Sheehy, author of the book Passages discusses the predictable crises of adult life. Of particular importance is her passage identified as "catch 30"--the passage spans from ages 28-32. Sheehy (1976) feels that almost everyone wants to make some alteration in one's life at this stage because the choices made were an outgrowth of the twenties and they may not be appropriate for this present stage of development.

Finally, the return to school may indicate movement toward self-actualization for some adults. Maslow (1954) proposes a hierarchy of needs, i.e., physiological, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization that characterize stages of growth. According to Maslow, each need must be successfully met before the next level can be achieved.

Concomitant with the psychological, social and developmental factors contributing to this adult student boom, many adults upon entry into college bring with them a set of personal expectations or perceived notions about the college environment. Recent research in psychology indicates that the expectations which an individual brings to a given situation significantly influence how he/she experiences and copes with that situation (Pervin, 1977). The variety of adult expectations accompanying a return to a formal educational setting has significant implications for higher education in terms of delivering services to a rapidly growing student population. If colleges and universities are to continue to be attractive to potential students, they are going to have to give more and more attention to the expectations older students hold. Gleazer (1977) notes that institutions which learned how to adapt to people's needs were most successful. The purpose of this study, then, is to determine what expectations students older than average have upon entry into a university, specifically The University of Arizona.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There appears to be ample research supporting the fact that students older than average are returning to school in great numbers for a variety of reasons. Recently, more attention has been given to this adult population because of the sharp decline in total college enrollments and the prospect of these adult students as the new "consumers" of higher education. As a result, in compiling a review of the literature no single work was directly related to this topic of study. Several related aspects include the following: the numbers and characteristics of students that fall into the parameters defined within this study; some attitudes and reasons for returning to school; several needs assessments conducted nationally; and finally, what specific colleges and universities are providing for the older-than average student.

In 1975, the Census Bureau estimated that there were almost 120 million Americans age 25 and older, 56% of the total United States population. Forty-seven percent of the 25 and over age group were males, and 11% were racial minorities (Erickson, 1976).

What percentage of these 120 million adults are currently engaged in some type of educational activity? Two national surveys conducted in 1972 responded to this question: (a) The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) suggests that about 12% of this group were engaged in some type of educational activity during that year; (b) The Response Analysis Corporation and the Commission on Non-traditional Study suggests that the proportion engaged in some type of education may have been as high as 22% or 23%. According to these surveys, it appears at least 14 or 15 million Americans, aged 25 or over, are engaged in some kind of educational activity (Erickson, 1976).

The two 1972 surveys estimated the number of adult students enrolled at traditional two or four year colleges as somewhere between 4.5 and 5.8 million. It is important to note that four year colleges' and universities' adult activity decreased, while the two year colleges gained over a million adult students during that same period, a 65% increase (Erickson, 1976).

During 1976, 1.2 million persons over the age of 35 were enrolled in college programs across the country. Of this number, more were women than men (698,000 vs. 489,000), and the majority were part-time students and members of the working force as well (Young, 1977). The Census Bureau reported that enrollments of women in all types of colleges had

increased at a greater rate than enrollments of men over the past five years (Gleazer, 1977). Similarly, in The New York Times (Maeroff, 1978) reported in a winter survey of education that in 1977 female enrollments rose 6.5% and male college enrollments rose 0.4%. These statistics indicate that women are rapidly growing consumers of higher education.

To summarize the characteristics of students that fall into the parameters of this study, a review of the literature reveals a startling dichotomy between traditional and adult students and illustrates the variety of behaviors that distinguish each group, according to Hameister and Hickey (1977, p. 2).

<u>Traditional</u>	<u>"New Majority"</u>
1. Continuing in school.	1. Returning to school.
2. Learning history strongly influenced by formal education.	2. Learning history strongly influenced by formal education.
3. Familiar with educational routine.	3. Unfamiliar with educational routine.
4. Primary time commitment to school; full-time student.	4. Time commitment to family and job; part-time students.
5. Adequate communication and study skills.	5. Frequent deficiencies in study and communication skills.
6. Minimal work experience.	6. Relevant work experience considerable.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 7. Micro frame of reference for a more orderly input of new ideas.                   | 7. Micro frame of reference based on life experience.   |
| 8. Frequently no clear vocational goal.  | 8. Frequently clear vocational goals, but not necessarily related to educational program.           |
| 9. Educational goal is to receive a B. A./B. S. at minimum.                          | 9. Educational goal may be to receive a degree, but may also be to get licensed or certified.       |
| 10. Speed of performance and peer competitiveness affects learning activities.       | 10. Concept mastery and accuracy more important than competition--frequently viewed as threatening. |
| 11. High academic grades play a significant role in obtaining meaningful employment. | 11. Academic grades not significant in terms of present employment situation.                       |
| 12. Clear idea of how he/she compares with academic performance of fellow students.  | 12. No accurate basis on which to judge his/her academic potential.                                 |

Hameister and Hickey (1977) feel that based on these student dissimilarities, new systems for providing education should be developed rather than extending the existing system. Also, the fact that these student differences exist has been borne out by the research of Robert Gould, Gail Sheehy, and others describing life stages and differing needs and responses of adults as they move through the experiences of adult life (Siegel, 1978).

Review of the literature reveals some reasons why members of the 25 and over age group are going to college. The reports of Maeroff (1978), Darkenwald (1977), Astin (1977), and Young (1975) indicate that these persons are turning to college to learn skills for a job; make meaningful use of leisure time; attain more independence (especially women); for purposes of career development or advancement; and for social relationships.

Maeroff (1978), Eldred and Johnson (1977), and Krings (1977) do report some expectations held by older students. They indicate that adult learners expect to use their learning immediately, they expect flexible and individualized programs, and they anticipate receiving credit for life experiences. The authors conclude by stating that these expectations are generally not fulfilled.

Erickson (1976) reports that the most common reason for educational involvement is for occupational and career purposes. Erickson also found that the more education a person has the more likely he/she is to give job improvement or advancement as the main reason for attending college.

According to Barbara McGowan, a UCLA guidance counselor, adult students are often highly motivated, they have very specific goals; and most return to school to seek a better job. She feels only a small percentage of adults return to school for personal development (Schuman, 1978, p.18).

Similarly, Dr. K. Patricia Cross, a senior research psychologist for the Educational Testing Service believes that adults are very pragmatic. She feels adult students differ from the younger students in that the adults want to see the usefulness of what they are learning immediately, not in the distant future (Schuman, 1978).

A survey of returning women students at the Pennsylvania State University was conducted during the spring 1975 term. Fifty-three women had a variety of backgrounds but had many mutual concerns. The sample consisted of undergraduates and graduates, full-time and part-time students, and 92% were majoring in non-technical fields. Three-fourths had been away from formal education at least ten years, and 42% had made their decision to return within ten years after they first left. Some of the reasons these adult women cited for their return to formal education were as follows: to enter a new profession/develop a new skill; personal enrichment/intellectual stimulation; or obtaining a degree. Finances and commitments to the home were most often cited as obstacles in returning to school (Driscoll, 1975).

In summarizing the attitudes and reasons for returning to school, research indicates that adult motivations for continuing education may be described as follows: a desire to achieve practical personal goals; a desire to achieve personal satisfaction and other inner-directed personal



goals; a desire to gain new knowledge, including learning for learning sake; a desire to achieve formal educational goals, (i.e., degree, certification); a desire to socialize with others and/or escape from everyday routine; and finally, to achieve societal goals (Cross, 1977).

Cross (1977, p. 1) cites a recent data collection sponsored by state and national agencies to determine the characteristics and needs of adult learners and potential learners; the findings include the following:

1. Interest in adult education is related to socio-economic status.
2. Participation and interest in educational activities show considerable regional variation.
3. Adults have a pragmatic orientation to education.
4. The kind of education desired is related to adult life stages.
5. Education for adults must have high credibility.
6. Women are closing the educational gap but there is some evidence that today's voluntary and largely self-supporting adult education is widening the gap between caucasians and ethnic minorities and between the "haves" and "have nots".
7. There is a high correspondence between the "needs" identified in assessment studies and the component responses offered by non-traditional programs.

8. There is a great variety in non-traditional programs studied.
9. The trend is toward different forms of education and services for non-traditional learners as opposed to an expansion of traditional education to include adult learners.

A profile of learner needs was broken down into four main categories by Cross (1977, pp. 41-42):

- I. Administrative Accommodations
  - A. Need for alternate schedules.
  - B. Need for greater access to learning locations.
- II. Teaching/Learning Considerations
  - A. Need for appropriate learning methods and delivery of education.
  - B. Motives for learning/need for content appropriate to goals.
- III. Student Services
  - A. Need for financial assistance.
  - B. Need for information, guidance and advocacy.
  - C. Need for orientation to adult learning.
- IV. Measurement of Educational Accomplishments
  - A. Need for recognition and certification of non-traditional educational accomplishments.
  - B. Need for recognition of traditional learning.

Older students make up an increasing portion of college populations, especially at 2 year community colleges. Hanson and Lenning's (1973) research explored the goals, attitudes, and perceptions of college students in four different age intervals--the authors felt that adult students at different age levels may have distinct needs. The sample of students were in community college vocational-technical programs. In general, a greater need for help with improving basic skills rather than for personal needs was most often expressed by these adult students.

Several reasons given for attending college at a later stage in life included the following: job obsolescence requires retraining; desire for job advancement; company requirements for up-grading skills; more fullness of life and enjoyment; developing leisure time skills; and a need for stimulating activities (Hanson and Lenning, 1973).

It is obvious from the research that adult students have as many, if not more needs than the traditional 18-22 year old student; and these students naturally differ from traditional students by being older, married with family responsibilities, employed, highly motivated, and with some previous college experience.

A review of colleges and universities currently providing programs for students older than average revealed several interesting programs. In 1972, students at 69

California community colleges were asked to list the three goals which they felt should be emphasized by their schools. The consensus rating of this survey reveals a prioritization of (1) vocational preparation, (2) individual personal development, and (3) the creation of a sense of community cooperation, and trust on campus. It is significant to note that the community college faculty, administrators, and trustees agreed with this rating. However, administration of this survey on the eight campuses of the University of California yielded startlingly different results. Here, students, faculty, administrators, and regents prioritized: (1) research, (2) graduate training, and (3) knowledge in academic disciplines as the three goals to be pursued by their institutions (Cross, 1974).

Atelsek and Gomberg (1977) surveyed 642 institutions of higher education across the country gathering information regarding programs for older students. Results of the survey indicated that more than half of these institutions did not offer either instructional programs or community services specifically designed for older students (over 55 years of age). However, about one-third reported they had either made or were planning to make additions or changes in their adult programs.

Programs serving students older than average at some institutions across the country are as follows: Murphy and

Martin (1977) report that Piedmont Technical College in South Carolina developed a curriculum program for its student body, which averaged 28 years of age, to meet the needs of local industry and the regional community. School officials gathered input from current and potential learners, employers, community members, and members of faculty and administration; and from this information the school was able to present a relevant program for its students.

Eldred and Johnson (1977) reported on the University Without Walls program at the University of Minnesota. It is one of 35 such programs across the country which offers individualized, flexible programs of study that call for frequent interaction between students, project advisors, and members of the faculty. While such programs are not designed exclusively for the older student, many students older than average find such a program most satisfying to their needs.

"Maturity College" at the University of Texas at Dallas is representative of a program conceived for the older student. This college offers a flexible program of general studies for older students and has proven successful in fulfilling the educational desires of this population (Galerstein, 1975).

The Cross Generational Program at Bucknell University was established on the premise of "rate of exchange"--the reciprocal contribution of students and elderly to each

other's lives. The program is run by its participants, with advisory assistance from faculty and professionals in the field. Older students are utilized as resource persons for students conducting research on various aspects of older adults; and students and faculty function as co-workers. This approach allows students to view different methods and provides the elderly with a chance to feel appreciated, useful, and enrich their lives (Candland and Kerr, 1977).

Fordham University's "College at Sixty Program" is intended as a bridge into Fordham's liberal arts college, with an outlook and curriculum designed specifically for students older than average. According to Dr. Adamson, founder of the project, "many senior Americans could avoid the prospect of intellectual poverty at the 'frail elderly' stage of their lives, if they would only tap into the resources of the university while they are mobile and active." He explained that many elderly people were afraid to return to school, if not for financial reasons, then out of fear of being rejected by younger students (Williams, 1977, p. 12).

Most programs offered by colleges and universities in the United States appear to be geared towards the retired (older than 55 years of age) person(s). Research would indicate that this movement needs to permeate through all levels of adult learners in order to adequately meet the needs of this new and rapidly growing consumer of higher education.

While a review of the literature produced little information directly related to this study, it did reveal information that provided further insight into the problems of students older than average and their attitudes regarding a return to a formal educational setting.

The literature search provided a comprehensive view of the number and characteristics of adults that fell into the parameters of this study. It also revealed significant information regarding motivations for returning to school, as well as identifying specific needs of this adult population. Finally, several institutions currently sponsoring programs for older than average students were discussed.

It is clear from the research reviewed that "learning is a lifelong experience, it doesn't end at 22" (Lenz, 1977, p. 18).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

#### Description of Subjects

The sample group for this study was selected from the population of students older than average (25 years of age and older) enrolled in a traditional academic program at The University of Arizona. Students were contacted at the libraries, student union, classes, and campus grounds, and asked to complete the questionnaire. Twenty-two men and twenty-eight women comprised the total sample of fifty.

All participants in the sample were: The University of Arizona students, 25 years of age and older, and enrolled in either undergraduate or graduate programs.

The age range for the respondents was from 25-64, with the mean age being 36.6. Sixty-six percent of the respondents were out-of-school ten years or less before enrolling in a full-time or degree program.

#### Description of the Instrument

In order to gather information about the expectations held by students older than average, it was necessary to develop a questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed using information obtained from the literature search, and with the supervision



of a faculty member of the Educational Psychology Department and the members of this thesis committee, at The University of Arizona.

The instrument was designed to gather profile information of the "typical" student older than average attending The University of Arizona; as well as, to identify the expectations these adults held prior to their enrollment and whether their expectations were confirmed during the course of their enrollment at the University. The questionnaire was field tested during the Fall registration 1978-79, by having twenty students older than average complete the questionnaire in order to provide feedback regarding specific items, clarity, and direction of the instrument.

Pages one and two of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) requested demographic data, i.e., age, sex, marital status, ethnic origin, primary financial support, etc., to yield profile information; and page three (see Appendix A) consisted of a list of expectations organized into four cluster areas, i.e., personal, social, career, and academic expectations.

Although the instrument was not tested extensively, there was ample content validity for this study as the expectations were selected from the literature search and organized into four cluster areas.

The researcher observed reliability along several dimensions, namely: all participants were aware that their participation was strictly voluntary; the purpose of the study was clearly defined on the Human Subjects Consent form attached to the questionnaire (see Appendix A); participants appeared to take adequate time to respond to the questionnaire; and finally, participants appeared to understand the questionnaire as evidenced by relatively few questions being asked of the researcher.

#### Procedure

Students older than average were contacted at the libraries, student union, classes, and campus grounds, and asked to complete the questionnaire.

The following explanation was given when requesting participation:

"I am conducting a study for a master's thesis on expectations held by students prior to their enrollment into The University of Arizona. Would you be willing to volunteer ten minutes of your time to respond to a questionnaire?" If the prospective participant gave an affirmative response, I asked "Are you a University of Arizona student, 25 years of age or older?" If the individual met all the criteria, the questionnaire was administered and the researcher remained with the participant until the questionnaire was

completed. The researcher thanked the participant for his/her time in responding to the questionnaire.

Fifty completed questionnaires were collected. Data were tabulated to determine the range in age, the mean and median age, the mean number of years out-of-school, and other pertinent profile information. Percentages were used to report the demographic data obtained, as well as the expectations held and confirmed by students older than average attending The University of Arizona.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

For the purposes of this study, fifty students older than average volunteered to complete a questionnaire, and participate in this study. The ages of the survey respondents ranged from 25-64. The mean age was 36.6 and the median age was 33.5. Sixty-two percent of the survey respondents were classified as undergraduates, while the remaining 38% were of graduate status. Eighty-two percent of the survey respondents were Arizona residents and resided off The University of Arizona campus.

#### Profile Information

As can be noted in Table 1, 72% of the survey respondents were between the ages of 25-40. It is interesting to note that of the total sample, 24% of the female respondents were between the ages of 31-40. Finally, 10% of the male respondents were between the ages of 25-30, with the same percentage (10%) occurring between the ages of 41-50.

Results from the ethnic group response indicated that 90% of the survey respondents were White/Caucasion. The small percentage (10%) of the remaining ethnic groups was characteristic of the percentage of these groups on The

Table 1. Distribution of Survey Respondents by Age and Sex

Age	Male		Female		Total	
	N	%total	N	%total	N	%total
25-30	5	10%	10	20%	15	30%
31-40	9	18%	12	24%	21	42%
41-50	5	10%	1	2%	6	12%
51-60	3	6%	4	8%	7	14%
61-70	0	0	1	2%	1	2%
Totals	22	44%	28	56%	50	100%

N = # of responses

%total = % of total sample (N=50)

University of Arizona campus, i.e., the total population at the University is 30,500: Black (314); Indian (178); Spanish (1,096); Oriental (229); and White (28,663).

Table 2 reflects the marital status of the survey respondents and results indicated that 50% of the respondents were married, 26% were single, 18% were divorced, and 6% were separated.

As can be noted in Table 3, 21% of the survey respondents indicated family support as the primary financial support. Thirty-four percent of the respondents were employed either full-time or part-time; and 30% were utilizing loans, grants, and/or scholarships. The remaining 15% indicated the following areas of support: savings account, G.I. Bill, V.A. Pension, and the Air Force.

Table 2. Distribution of Survey Respondents by Sex and Marital Status

Marital Status	Male	Female	N	Total %total
Single	7	6	13	26%
Married	12	13	25	50%
Divorced	2	7	9	18%
Widowed	0	0	0	0
Separated	1	2	3	6%
Total	22	28	50	100%

N = # of responses

%total = % of total sample (N=50)

Table 3. Distribution of Survey Respondents by Sex and Financial Support

Financial Support	Male	Female	N	Total %total
Family Support	5	11	16	21%
Full-time Employment	7	4	11	14%
Part-time Employment	5	10	15	20%
Loans	6	5	11	15%
Grants	3	4	7	9%
Scholarships	1	4	5	6%
Other	6	5	11	15%
*Totals	33	43	76	100%

N = # of responses

%total = % of total sample (N=76)

\*The total exceeds 50 because more than one response was allowed.

Table 4 represents the highest year completed in school prior to enrollment into The University of Arizona. The results indicated that 38% of the survey respondents had some prior college experience, 26% completed high school, and finally, 26% completed a bachelors degree.

Table 4. Distribution of Survey Respondents by Sex and Highest Year Completed in School Prior to Enrollment into The University of Arizona

Highest Year Completed	Male	Female	Total	
			N	%total
High School	5	8	13	26%
G.E.D.	1	0	1	2%
Some College	9	10	19	38%
Bachelors	5	8	13	26%
Masters	2	2	4	8%
Total	22	28	50	100%

N = # of responses

%total = % of total sample (N=50)

As noted in Table 5, 66% of the survey respondents had ten years or less pass since they were last enrolled in a full-time or degree program; and 34% of the respondents had eleven years or more pass since they were last enrolled in a traditional academic program. The average number of years that passed were eleven years.

Table 5. Distribution of Survey Respondents by Sex and Years Passed Since Last Enrolled in a Full-time or Degree Program

Years Passed	Male	Female	Total	
			N	%total
Under 4 years	8	8	16	32%
5-10	7	10	17	34%
11-20	3	6	9	18%
21-30	3	1	4	8%
31-40	1	2	3	6%
41-50	0	1	1	2%
Total	22	28	50	100%

N = # of responses

%total = % of total sample (N=50)

Table 6 represents the major field of study the respondents were enrolled in. Results showed that 26% of the survey respondents were from the College of Business and Public Administration; 24% were from the College of Education; 22% were from the College of Liberal Arts; and the remaining 28% were illustrated in the chart that follows.

As noted in Table 7, 48% of the survey respondents planned to obtain a bachelors degree; 32% planned to obtain a masters degree; and 14% planned to obtain a doctorate. It was interesting to note that a very small percentage (2%) was enrolled for some college experience with no plans to obtain a degree.



Table 6. Distribution of Survey Respondents by Sex and Major Field of Study

Area of Study By College	Male	Female	Total N	%total
Education	5	7	12	24%
Health Sciences	2	6	8	16%
Business & Public Administration	7	6	13	26%
Liberal Arts	6	5	11	22%
Fine Arts	1	2	3	6%
Agriculture	1	0	1	2%
Unclassified	0	2	2	4%
Total	22	28	50	100%

N = # of responses

%total = % of total sample (N=50)

Table 7. Distribution of Survey Respondents by Sex and Present Educational Plans

Present Educational Plans	Male	Female	Total N	%total
Some College	0	1	1	2%
B.A./B.S.	12	12	24	48%
Masters	6	10	16	32%
Doctorate	2	5	7	14%
Other	2	0	2	4%
Total	22	28	50	100%

N = # of responses

%total = % of total sample (N=50)

As noted in Table 8, 41% of the survey respondents indicated self as the most important factor in deciding to attend college. Friends played a greater role (9%) than did either children (6%), employer (5%), or media (1%) in the decision process. Thirteen percent of the respondents indicated parents as a factor; while 12% indicated spouse as the major factor in deciding to attend college.

Table 8. Distribution of Survey Respondents by Sex and Factors that Played a Significant Role in College Entry

Factors	Male	Female	N	Total %total
Self	18	27	45	41%
Spouse	5	8	13	12%
Parents	4	10	14	13%
Children	2	4	6	6%
Employer	2	3	5	5%
Media	1	0	1	1%
Counselors	1	1	2	2%
Friends	4	6	10	9%
Teachers	2	2	4	4%
G.I. Bill	5	1	6	6%
Other	2	1	3	3%
Total	46	63	109	102%*

N = # of responses

%total = % of total sample (N=109): More than one response was allowed

\* = rounding error

### Expectations of Students Older Than Average

An overview of the data pertaining to the four cluster areas (personal, social, career, and academic) of student expectations revealed that more expectations were held than were actually confirmed in each of the four areas (see Tables 9 through 12). This finding was consistent throughout each of the individual age groups within each of the four cluster areas. Results indicated that personal and social expectations were more often confirmed than career and academic expectations.

Table 9 revealed some significant information regarding the personal expectations of students older than average. For example, the personal expectation cited most frequently was to feel a sense of personal achievement (84% of the survey respondents expected this and 68% felt it was confirmed). Forty-four percent of the respondents expected to make up for lost opportunities and only 18% felt this was confirmed. Fifty-four percent of the respondents expected to feel more confident and only 38% felt this was confirmed. Twenty-four percent of the respondents expected to obtain financial assistance from the University, while only 12% reported this was confirmed. The greatest difference between expectations and confirmations in this cluster occurred within the 31-40 age group.

Table 9. Distribution of Survey Respondents' Personal Expectations by Percentage in Age Group

Age Group Personal Expectations	25-30		31-40		41-50		51-65		Total			
	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	%T	C	%T
To feel better about myself	6	4	17	14	2	2	5	4	30	60%	24	48%
Someone to help me solve problems and make decisions	2	1	3	1	2	1	2	0	9	18%	3	6%
To feel a sense of personal achieve- ment	13	10	16	13	5	5	8	6	42	84%	34	68%
To make up for lost opportunities	5	3	11	3	3	2	3	1	22	44%	9	18%
To feel more confident	7	4	12	9	3	2	5	4	27	54%	19	38%
To take time for self	3	2	8	7	1	1	3	3	15	30%	13	26%
To find new challenges	9	9	15	12	0	0	7	6	31	62%	27	54%
To be ignored by younger students	2	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	6	12%	2	4%
To find child care services	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	6%	0	0%
To obtain financial aid	4	2	8	4	0	0	0	0	12	24%	6	12%
Totals	51	36	97	64	16	13	33	24	197		137	

E = expectations

C = confirmed

$$\%T = \frac{n}{50} \times 100$$

Table 10. Distribution of Survey Respondents' Social Expectations by Percentage in Age Group

Age Group Social Expectations	25-30		31-40		41-50		51-65		E	Total		
	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	C		%T	C	%T
To meet new people	13	12	16	14	2	2	4	3	35	70%	31	62%
To seek people with similar interests	11	9	15	11	2	2	4	3	32	64%	25	50%
To become involved with non-academic activities	3	1	10	5	1	1	2	1	16	32%	8	16%
To find a mate	1	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	5	10%	0	0%
To be intimidated by younger students	1	1	3	0	1	0	1	0	6	12%	1	2%
To find students their own age	4	3	2	0	1	0	1	0	8	16%	3	6%
Support from peers	7	6	6	4	2	1	2	0	17	34%	11	22%
Not to have time to socialize	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	3	6%	2	4%
Totals	40	32	56	34	10	7	16	8	122		81	

E = expectations

C = confirmed

$$\%T = \frac{n}{50} \times 100$$

Table 11. Distribution of Survey Respondents' Career Expectations by Percentage in Age Group

Age Group Career Expectations	25-30		31-40		41-50		51-65		E	Total		
	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	C		%T	C	%T
Help in planning and developing my career	10	7	15	9	2	2	5	2	32	64%	20	40%
To take courses to advance in my career	10	9	15	14	4	2	4	2	33	66%	27	54%
Alternative career	7	6	6	3	4	3	5	3	22	44%	15	30%
Obtain a degree	11	8	17	8	4	1	5	2	37	74%	19	38%
Knowledge for knowledge sake	3	3	9	6	1	1	5	5	18	36%	15	30%
Education would guarantee me a job	10	5	4	1	1	1	3	0	18	36%	7	14%
Someone to tell me what career to pursue	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%
Education would give me status and prestige	5	1	7	0	0	0	0	0	12	24%	1	2%
Totals	56	39	73	41	16	10	27	14	172		104	

E = expectations

C = confirmed

$$\%T = \frac{n}{50} \times 100$$

Table 12. Distribution of Survey Respondents' Academic Expectations by Percentage in Age Group.

Age Group Academic Expectations	25-30		31-40		41-50		51-65		Total			
	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	%T	C	%T
To receive academic advising and counseling	9	4	14	6	4	1	3	2	30	60%	13	26%
To find flexible class scheduling	9	5	12	6	3	0	5	3	29	58%	14	28%
Someone to show me around the campus	2	0	3	0	1	0	1	0	7	14%	0	0%
To have difficulty with my coursework	7	5	8	5	2	2	2	1	19	38%	13	26%
To study intensively	6	5	8	5	3	1	5	5	22	44%	16	32%
Faculty not to be interested in me	2	1	4	1	2	1	1	1	9	18%	4	8%
To find a diverse curriculum	7	4	11	8	0	0	2	2	20	40%	14	28%
To receive credit for life experience	3	1	10	4	4	0	3	1	20	40%	6	12%
Totals	45	25	70	35	19	5	22	15	156		80	

E = expectations

C = confirmed

$$\%T = \frac{n}{50} \times 100$$

As noted in Table 10, the social expectation cited most frequently by all age groups was to meet new people (70% of the survey respondents expected to meet new people and 62% indicated they did). Sixty-four percent of the respondents expected to seek people with interests similar to theirs and 50% reported they did. It was interesting to note that 12% of the respondents expected to be intimidated by younger students and only 2% indicated that this had actually occurred. A greater number of respondents expected to find support from their peers and to locate students their own age, than were actually confirmed. Finally, the greatest difference between expectations and confirmations in this cluster occurred within two of the four age groups, namely: 31-40 and 51-65.

Table 11 revealed that of 43% of the total number of career expectations held, only 26% were confirmed. The career expectation cited most frequently by all age groups was to obtain a degree (74% of the survey respondents expected to obtain a degree). Sixty-four percent of the respondents expected assistance in planning and developing a career, and only 40% felt they had received help. Thirty-six percent of the respondents expected their education would guarantee them a job, and only 14% felt this was confirmed. Similarly, 24% of the respondents expected their education would provide them status and prestige, and only 2% felt this was confirmed. The data suggested that adults who expected to take



courses to advance in their career did so. Finally, the greatest difference between expectations and confirmations in this cluster occurred within the 51-65 age group.

Table 12 revealed that of 39% of the total number of academic expectations held, only 20% were confirmed. The academic expectation cited most frequently was to receive academic advising and counseling (60% of the survey respondents expected this, and only 26% felt this was confirmed). Of equal importance was the finding that 58% of the respondents expected to find flexible class scheduling and only 28% indicated this was confirmed. Fourteen percent of the respondents expected an orientation to the campus and no one received this. It was interesting to note that 18% of the respondents expected the faculty to be disinterested in them as a student, and only 8% indicated this was true. Forty percent of the respondents expected to receive credit for life experience, and only 12% felt this was confirmed. Finally, the greatest difference between expectations and confirmations in this cluster occurred within the 41-50 age group.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Assessment of the results of this study revealed significant information about students older than average and their expectations regarding a return to formal education.

The sample studied at The University of Arizona was similar to ones discussed in previous research. There were more women than men sampled and some women were working while attending college (18% had either full-time or part-time employment).

The fact that 42% of the total respondents surveyed were between the ages of 31-40 may lend support to theorists who propose the developmental stages of adult life as a contributing factor in a return to formal education. Significant too was the response of 41% of the participants who considered themselves as the primary influence in returning to school, a finding consistent with the research of Northcutt (1978).

Consistent with previous literature was the finding that 38% of the participants had some college exposure and 34% held a degree; this result may be explained by the more success a person has with education, the more he/she desires to continue with his/her education. In addition, 94% of the

participants were planning to obtain a degree, which supports previous research that society today is degree-oriented.

Although the sample size was limited with respect to the total population of students older than average enrolled at The University of Arizona (10,000), the characteristics of those students sampled were very similar in profile to other adult students cited in the review of the literature. This sample represented the "new majority" of students enrolling in higher education today, and administrators may benefit by acknowledging this new consumer of education, as they are indeed different from the traditional 18-22 year old student.

An assessment of the data pertaining to the four cluster areas of student expectations (personal, social career, and academic) revealed that more expectations were held than actually confirmed in each of the four areas. It also appeared that personal and social expectations were more often confirmed than either career or academic expectations. Most of the expectations assumed by the researcher to be held by students older than average were responded to in varying degrees, which indicated the variety of expectations these adult students held about the college press. Specific expectations within each cluster area warranted special attention.

For example, the personal expectation results indicated the University was providing the climate desired

by these adult students to experience new challenges, to take time for self, and to feel better about self. Perhaps the University could facilitate the expectations for personal achievement, increased self-confidence, and making up for lost opportunities by offering personal development classes dealing with these issues.

Two other personal expectations deserved attention, despite the small number of responses, namely: (1) 24% of the participants expected to obtain financial assistance while only 12% did. Administrators need to re-define some of the parameters for financial assistance. Presently, financial aid is virtually non-existent for part-time, middle-income students, which includes many students older than average; (2) 18% of the participants expected someone to help them solve problems and make decisions, and only 6% found this to be true. Student personnel administrators need to investigate the availability of these services, as well as how this new population of adult students could best be served by student services.

With regard to social expectations, participants did meet new people, sought people with interests similar to theirs, found students their own age, and to some extent received peer support. While fulfillment of these expectations is in large part determined by students themselves, the University could enhance the possibilities of peer interaction

by actively promoting service clubs for these students and further personal involvement with and encouragement of these students by members of the faculty and administration.

Results indicated that career expectations were a major concern for many students older than average. The expectation cited most frequently by all age groups was to obtain a degree. The importance of this expectation does not lie so much in the pursuit of a credential as does the belief that education will give a person status, prestige, and guarantee them a job (a finding expected by 60% of the survey respondents and confirmed by only 16%). Perhaps the administration could increase confirmation of students' expectations by making their institutional goals clear to students who attend and pay the cost of supporting the University. This could include clarifying the institutions role in preparing its graduates for employment. In addition, this would allow students a realistic basis from which to align their career expectations regarding formal education and obtaining a degree.

Similar to the aforementioned problem was the finding that 64% of the survey respondents expected to receive help in planning and developing a career, while only 40% reported this confirmed, however, this problem faces many college students of all ages. The student older than average could expect greater communication and co-operation between faculty,

administration, and student services with regard to career planning and development. Faculty are probably in the best position to effect change in this expectation because they represent the linkage between the world of education and the world of work.

Academic expectations were the other area of major concern. Most frequently cited as an academic expectation by the total number of participants was to receive academic advising and counseling (60% expected this and only 26% felt this was confirmed). If the faculty is given the role of advising and counseling students, in-service training could be provided to enhance this function.

Consistent with the literature was the problem of scheduling classes and lack of orientation for these adult students. Perhaps the University could organize a special orientation program for this adult population and consider flexible scheduling of classes to accommodate this new group of students.

Finally, 40% of the survey respondents expected to receive credit for life experience and only 12% reported this confirmed. This appears to be a problem of articulation that demands immediate attention because of the diversity of backgrounds held by students older than average.

Response to the unconfirmed expectations in the four cluster areas could include the development of an initial

screening/assessment interview for students older than average with referrals made to the appropriate student services once expectations and needs are determined. This screening/assessment would emphasize the proactive rather than reactive approach to planning one's academic endeavors. The more congruence between student expectations and University environment, the greater the likelihood of continuing with a formal educational program.

Administrators in higher education are aware of the rapidly growing populations of students older than average in this country. Previous literature suggested some expectations held by these adult students that were not met. Results of this study indicated that this was also true for some expectations held by students older than average at The University of Arizona.

With the ever-tightening economic situation plaguing higher education today, college administrators are compelled to do everything they can to attract a greater clientele, and do as little as possible to alienate the clientele they already have. In order to accomplish this, colleges must address the expectations held by prospective consumers of the product they are selling. These students are unlike the traditional 18-22 year-old students, and have a diversity of needs. The student older than average is the fastest growing population in higher education today and this fact

should alert administrators to address their expectations and needs lest they lose them to another institution. Because of the rapidly growing population all across the Sun Belt, The University of Arizona may not face this problem for some time, but the adult student population on its campus has now reached 35% and is likely to grow higher. If The University of Arizona is to continue to attract members of this strongly motivated population, the University will have to seriously consider and address the expectations they hold.

#### Summary

The purpose of this descriptive study was to determine the expectations held by students older than average upon entry into The University of Arizona. Students older than average were defined as being 25 years of age and older; and expectations were defined as anticipations or perceived notions about the University environment. Twenty-two men and twenty-eight women comprised the total sample of fifty. An original instrument was developed in the form of a questionnaire, which was designed to provide information along two dimensions: profile information of the "typical" student older than average enrolled at The University of Arizona and identification of expectations held prior to enrollment and whether the expectations were confirmed upon attendance.

The sample studied was representative of students older than average discussed in previous research. More



expectations were held by these adults than were actually confirmed; personal and social expectations were more often confirmed than academic and career expectations. Finally, these findings hold implications for college administrators attempting to attract this new clientele to higher education.

### Recommendations

For others wishing to extend the findings of the present study, the following modifications are recommended:

1. Provide a research design in which random sampling may be obtained, so that generalization may be made to a larger segment of the population.
2. Design an instrument that would assess the expectations of students older than average prior to their actual entry into higher education.
3. Design an instrument to be administered through the mail to reach off-campus students; include a follow-up questionnaire or interview to assess the confirmation of expectations held prior to enrollment.
4. Compare the expectations held by students older than average with their perceived success/failure with their formal education at a university.
5. Compare the administration's perception of students older than average expectations with the expectations actually held by these adults.

6. Compare the expectations of students older than average who have had no experience with college and students older than average who have had some college exposure.
7. Identify students older than average who have dropped out during or immediately after the first semester to examine the cause(s) in relation to prior expectations.
8. Investigate the correspondence between expectations and programs offered by specific institutions.
9. Compare adult student expectations upon entering different types of institutions within a specific geographic location.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE AND  
HUMAN SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

Human Subject Consent Form

I am requesting your voluntary participation in the completion of this questionnaire. The purpose of this study is to assess the expectations of students upon entry into The University of Arizona. If you decide to participate please answer as many of the questions as you are able to answer with confidence. Completion of this questionnaire will indicate your consent as a willing participant in this study. All data received will be treated with anonymity and confidentiality. I am a Graduate student working on completion of my Master's Degree and your co-operation would be most appreciated. Thank You!

---

Diane P. Haaga  
(Researcher)

I have read the above statement and understand the purpose of the research being conducted. I realize that my participation is strictly voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without incurring ill will or affecting my university standing. I understand that this consent form will be filed in an area designated by the Human Subjects Committee with access restricted to the principal investigator or authorized representatives of the particular department. I also understand that I am free to share in the results upon completion of this study.

---

(Subject's Consent)

---

(Today's Date)

I would appreciate a few minutes of your time to check off the information on the questionnaire. Your cooperation is greatly valued and strictly voluntary. Thank You!  
PLEASE PRINT

- \*1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
- \*2. Address: \_\_\_\_\_
- \*3. Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Age: \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Sex: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Ethnic Group: Black/Afro-American \_\_\_\_\_  
 American Indian/Native American \_\_\_\_\_  
 Spanish Surnamed, Mexican American, Chicano, Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_  
 White/Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Please Specify)
7. Marital Status: Single \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_\_\_  
 Married \_\_\_\_\_ Widowed \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please Specify)
8. Where are you living while attending the U. of A.?  
 Off Campus \_\_\_\_\_ On Campus \_\_\_\_\_
9. Are you classified as an Arizona Resident?  
 Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_
10. What is your primary financial support:  
 Family support \_\_\_\_\_ Loans \_\_\_\_\_  
 Full-time Employment \_\_\_\_\_ Grants \_\_\_\_\_  
 Part-time Employment \_\_\_\_\_ Scholarships \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please Specify)
11. What was your highest year completed in school prior to your enrollment into the University of Arizona?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
12. How many years have passed since you were last enrolled in a full-time or degree program (not including continuing education or any special interest courses you may have taken)? \_\_\_\_\_

13. What is your present status at The University of Arizona? PLEASE CIRCLE ONE

Freshman      Sophomore      Junior      Senior      Graduate

Number of Units \_\_\_\_\_

14. What is your major field of study at The University of Arizona? \_\_\_\_\_

15. What are your educational plans at present?

Some college \_\_\_\_\_ Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
 B.A., B.S. \_\_\_\_\_ Doctorate \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please Specify)

16. Which person(s) or factors played a significant role in your college entry?

Self \_\_\_\_\_ Media \_\_\_\_\_  
 Spouse \_\_\_\_\_ Counselors \_\_\_\_\_  
 Parents \_\_\_\_\_ Friends \_\_\_\_\_  
 Children \_\_\_\_\_ Teachers \_\_\_\_\_  
 Employer \_\_\_\_\_ G.I. Bill \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please Specify)

\* The data will be numerically coded to ensure anonymity and confidentiality!

DIRECTIONS: Prior to my entry into The University of Arizona, I expected: (Check the statements below that applied to you before you enrolled in The University of Arizona.

#### PERSONAL EXPECTATIONS

- To feel better about myself
- Someone to help me solve problems and make decisions
- To feel a sense of personal achievement
- To make up for lost opportunities
- To feel more confident about myself
- To take time for myself
- To find new challenges
- To be ignored by younger students
- To find child care services
- To obtain financial assistance from the U. of A.

#### SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

- To meet new people
- To seek people with interests similar to mine
- To become involved with non-academic activities
- To find a mate
- To be intimidated by younger students
- To find students that are my own age
- To find support from my peers
- Not to have time to socialize with my peers

#### CAREER EXPECTATIONS

- Help in planning and developing my career
- To take courses to advance in my career
- To take courses for an alternative career change
- To obtain a degree
- To pursue knowledge for knowledge sake
- My education would guarantee me a job
- Someone to tell me what career to pursue
- My education would give me status and prestige

## ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS

- To receive academic advising and counseling
- To find flexible class scheduling
- Someone to show me around the campus
- To have difficulty with my coursework
- To study intensively
- The faculty not to be interested in me as a student
- To find a diverse curriculum
- To receive credit for my life experiences

Now that you have checked off the statements of expectations you held prior to your enrollment in The University of Arizona, go back and circle the ones that have actually happened to you during your attendance at The University of Arizona, e.g., (✓)



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