Keeping the Scholar in Scholarship: Exploring the challenges of entrance scholarship students at Simon Fraser University

By

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To my partner Stephen, without whom I would not have

found my voice.

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Introduction

At a Registrars' conference held many years ago, a speaker was describing how difficult it was for Harvard University to decide who, among many superbly qualified applicants, should be accepted. One of the conference organizers captured the audience's reaction in his summary remarks: "As for Harvard's problems, I wish we all had them."

As the post-secondary-bound population increases, many Canadian universities face similar difficulties. The selection of students has become considerably more difficult as the increase in the number of applicants is paralleled by growth in the number of highly qualified applicants. The wealth of available information has resulted in a level of sophistication among this elite group of applicants who have educated themselves about the program offerings of numerous universities, the possible career opportunities available upon completion of their chosen degree programs, and the scholarship and other financial aid opportunities available to them. They have worked their way into the enviable position of being able to select a university that fits both their academic interests and their financial expectations. A quiet competition brews between Canadian universities to woo these bright young students to their campuses. To attract them, entrance scholarships are offered, often funding students for the full length of their degree programs. An offer of ten, twenty, or thirty thousand dollars, along with a guarantee of on-campus residence does much to sway the decision-making processes of these elite students.

One factor that remains something of a mystery to Simon Fraser University's new entrance scholarship recipients is the expectation that they maintain outstanding academic performance during the course of their undergraduate studies. This may not, at the outset, seem to demand serious consideration, given that each of them has graduated or will graduate at the top of the class. But many students, including scholarship holders, struggle to make a successful transition from secondary school to university. At Simon Fraser, many of these outstanding secondary school graduates are unable to maintain the academic standards as outlined by the entrance scholarship program requirements.

Making the Move

The transition from secondary school to university is one of the most significant changes students will make in their pursuit of knowledge in the formal education system. From kindergarten to grade 12, students move about in a supportive environment that provides structure, direction, counsel and security. The post-secondary environment, on the other hand, is a world of ambiguity where students drift in and out at will and are almost entirely responsible for their own learning. The transition is, more often than not, riddled with the challenges of adjusting to a new environment. Such challenges include living away from home for the first time, adjusting to new teaching methods and class sizes, learning how to manage more demanding school loads, and making new friends. Having been awarded a scholarship for outstanding performance in the secondary school system in no way guarantees scholarship students immunity from these and other challenges faced by first

year university students. Scholarship students bear the added burden of living up to an additional set of expectations outlined by the University's scholarship program and all of the social pressures that are associated with holding a major entrance scholarship.

A rather tardy realization by scholarship students is that the scholarship is only in part meant to reward their achievement at secondary school. The primary intent of the scholarship program is to recognize their potential in subsequent academic work. For most, being honoured by the University, celebrated at secondary school graduation ceremonies, and toasted by proud parents, represents the culmination of a tremendous effort at secondary school. The reality, is though, that it is just the beginning of a new journey for them. It is a journey of education, growth, learning and discover, which, unlike most other students, will be scrutinized with each step. Every semester the University reviews student performance to determine those who have met the renewal requirements and will continue to receive scholarship funding and those who have not.

The Entrance Scholarship Program represents a substantial financial commitment to scholarship students, the benefits of which are reaped by both the student and the University. In exchange for an ongoing overall average of A- on Simon Fraser University course work students are provided with funding which, in many instances, exceeds both tuition and on-campus residence costs. Such handsome financial reward is often enough to allow students the opportunity to focus their attention solely on their studies without the added pressure of also holding a part-time job. Others may find that this subsidy represents the only source of funding available to finance

their post-secondary education. In any case, the benefits to the student may seem quite obvious in terms of the financial support provided for them, whereas the benefits to the University may not. Selection of scholarship candidates at Simon Fraser University is rigorous, considering not only outstanding academic performance but also school and community involvement, leadership, outstanding achievements in sports, music, and the arts, as well as a wide array of other accomplishments. Such rigour aids in the recruitment of students who have the greatest potential to contribute to the university community, both in the classroom and beyond. Simply stated, scholarship students help in maintaining the academic and overall standard of the University.

While Simon Fraser University recognizes the need to support these students who have been actively recruited into our academic programs, accountability for their success has been somewhat elusive, primarily due to the size and complexity of the organization. In the university environment it is all too easy to dismiss students once the administrative or academic unit has delivered the services they are meant to provide. In this case, once scholarship students' initial needs are met by Student Recruitment, they are left to meander their way through departments, faculties and other administrative services without much concern about how they are fairing. It is generally not until their grades have suffered and they have fallen out of the scholarship program that they return to Student Recruitment to seek assistance.

The Benefactor

Student Recruitment is a small unit within the Office of the Registrar which has informally been termed the "front door to the University." In most instances, students' first contact with Simon Fraser is with one of the Student Recruiters whose primary function is to provide the connection between new students and the University. This is particularly true for scholarship students, with whom personal contact is initiated and maintained throughout the adjudication and award process. Students are invited to campus in the early stages of the process to chat with faculty and staff and learn more about the community of which they are about to become a part. As the scholarship process progresses, contact with students becomes more personal. More time is spent, at an individual level, dealing with specific interests and concerns. Scholarship students, perhaps more so than any other group of students, are provided with outstanding personalized service in an effort to attract them to the University. Almost immediately upon their arrival, however, they are turned out with the general university population and the personalized service with which they were wooed to the University ceases to exist.

It is disconcerting, as the scholarship advisor, to see the gap which exists between scholarship students' initial contact with the University and the other services and supports that the University has to offer. In my experience, scholarship students have neglected to access useful university services for fear that they may be seen as being undeserving of their scholarships. These services would include: lectures on how to succeed at university; seminars in study skills, time management, and coping with stress; and orientation gatherings. While one could argue that entrance scholars arrive at the

University already possessing such skills, the performance statistics compiled each year would suggest otherwise. The attrition rate in some entrance scholarship programs is as high as 50%. Students least likely to succumb to attrition are those who have been selected on both academic merit and extra-curricular achievements. These students selected on their *well-roundedness* appear to have mastered the art of balancing work and play. The group most likely to fall prey to attrition are the student athletes whose athletic endeavors generally take precedence over their academic endeavors.

To date, Student Recruitment has not been an active participant in the journey of our entrance scholars, and yet we are aware of how each and every student is progressing. Such a passive approach can be frustrating particularly when students, beaten down by academic distress, finally return to our office to seek assistance. They come in search of concessions on the scholarship requirements that they were not able to meet. From celebration to consternation, Student Recruitment makes a final effort at assisting the scholarship student.

This scenario illuminates one of the challenges faced by Student Recruitment. That is, beyond our initial *recruitment* role, at what point does our responsibility for the student end? This question has been the subject of much debate within our small unit. The consensus which has emerged in each instance is that resources should permit our role to extend well beyond the initial contact with students and involve contact with the students throughout the tenure of their entrance scholarships. However, the mitigating factor in determining whether or not to develop programs to assist entrance scholars continues to be a lack of fiscal resources.

Purpose of the Study

This study is based on the premise that Student Recruitment has an ongoing commitment to entrance scholarship students which extends beyond current involvements. While there is ample research which explores the transition of the general population from secondary to post-secondary education, the present study examines the transition experiences of high achieving students who have come to Simon Fraser University on entrance scholarships. The intent of the study is to better understand how Student Recruitment might assist in enhancing the learning experiences of scholarship students.

The study is organized into four chapters: Chapter One provides a rationale for pursuing a qualitative inquiry into the challenges experienced by entrance scholarship students as they find their way in the post-secondary environment; Chapter Two refers to the literature which deals with adjustment considerations in the process of transition to post-secondary education; and Chapter Three contains the focal point of the project, which is an exploration of experiences and challenges which impact on the academic successes of entrance scholars at SFU. In the concluding chapter, implications are drawn from the study, specifically in relation to developing a more mindful approach to the delivery of the entrance scholarship program.

Method or Madness

Over the past ten years, as the coordinator and administrator of the entrance scholarship program, I have had the opportunity to make many informal observations of entrance scholarship students. It has not been uncommon for

students to arrive in my office looking for the opportunity to discuss the challenges they are experiencing and how those challenges are affecting their academic performance. In the sanctuary of my office many students have felt safe to share their most debilitating concerns.

As I began to ponder the notion of studying this group in a more formal way, my first instinct was to abandon this previous form of inquiry and pursue one which, to my mind, was more tangible. In the project planning phase I decided that the approach best suited to my criterion would involve a two-tiered process. As a preliminary activity I would use a focus group to generate themes for use on a questionnaire. The resulting questionnaire would then be sent to the entire population of entrance scholarship students in order to provide a comprehensive picture of their experiences. And with that I proceeded.

The Focus Group

To provide structure for the focus group discussion, I utilized the Nominal Group Technique which is a method meant to provide clarity and understanding among the viewpoints expressed by the members of the discussion group (Goggin, 1996). After introductions and a short preamble to orient the ten participants as to the objectives of the meeting, I presented a single question on a large piece of poster paper: "What are some of the challenges scholarship students experience as they make the transition from secondary school to university?" The participants were instructed to respond silently and personally by answering the question as many times as possible

in the following ten minutes. Each response was to be written on a large yellow sticky note and set aside.

After the ten-minute limit had expired and most of the sandwiches had been devoured, the respondents were invited to post their scribed sticky notes on the blackboard. The items would migrate to the poster board once we had established that each participant clearly understood the item. To that end, we began to flesh them out by systematically posing questions of interpretation and clarification for each item. As the items made their way to the poster board, categories where created under which each item would be posted. For example, one item to be posted was "not always sure of where to go to get academic help." For this item we created a category called "support," under which all subsequent items of a similar nature would be posted. Once all of the items were posted, nine categories had been created. They were: transition, information, work load, support, courses, GPA, pressure, grading, and time management. The final step was to prioritize our posted list. Under each of our nine categories, the participants were invited to rate the importance of each category by indicating whether it was a high priority need, mid priority need, or low priority need, using 3, 2, and 1 respectively. With that they returned to the board to post their small coloured stickies marked 3, 2, and 1 and the prioritization was complete. Once the last participant left the room I sat back and heaved a sigh, reveling in the fact that the old adage "there is no free lunch" had proven to be quite untrue today. A scrumptious sandwich tray, with cookies and juice, had provided me with all of what I needed to proceed to the next phase of the study.

Shifting Gears

As I contemplated the next stage of the inquiry, I began to have doubts about the value of the data that I would collect as a result of the questionnaire. I could not come to terms with the usefulness of a quantitative analysis for this particular study and, on reviewing the audio tapes from the focus group activity, I couldn't help but feel that something valuable existed in the dialogue from our exercise. It took me some time to realize that I had gone directly to designing a method of collecting data before I had even established a philosophic framework for the project. With that I began to reconsider why I was doing what I was doing and, what it was that I truly wished to investigate. I knew I was not interested in empirical facts; I did not want to know to what extent or under what conditions something was happening, nor was I setting out to solve a problem, in the normal sense of the word. My desire was to create a forum through which students could express their concerns and challenges, such that a more mindful approach to administering the scholarship program might be made possible. After going full circle I returned to the very thing which I had dismissed in the early stages of the project. That is, the wisdom one can gain from listening to the experiences of others.

Such an experience was shared with me by one of the focus group members who approached me at the end of our meeting to thank me for inviting her. She told me that losing her scholarship had been a very deflating experience for her and that although she had been somewhat hesitant to accept the invitation she was now very pleased that she had. The focus group had allowed her to bring closure to the ordeal of losing her scholarship by giving

her the opportunity to provide feedback, share her frustrations and, as she said, "maybe help future scholarship students."

I decided to build on this dialogue by extending a similar invitation to a larger group of scholarship students. These students would be asked to share a specific incident that illustrated the difficulties of adjusting to university life. Rather than simply filling out a survey, as students are often asked to do, I felt that this approach would give voice to their challenges in a way which had not been done before by our program. My challenge would be to synthesize the data that was returned and present them in a way that might assist in a better understanding of the experiences of scholarship students by allowing the reader to *re-live* them through the text.

While it took some time to arrive at this new method of inquiry I was pleased to have finally found a way to study the scholarship students which deeply interested me. Researching lived experience has captured the minds and imaginations of many before me. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) guiding words suggest that examining the phenomenon of lived experiences entails re-learning to look at the world by re-awakening our own basic experiences of the world. It was that very re-awakening that I had hoped to engender as a result of this study.

Van Manen (1990) posits that phenomenological research involves a deep questioning of the way in which we experience the world. Unlike the natural sciences, which aim to categorize, taxonomize, or explain behaviour, phenomenology seeks to understand what is essential to our being in the world; it requires a connection to the world rather that than a stance of

scientific objectivity. My intent in pursuing this line of inquiry was to increase the mindfulness of those administering the program by allowing them to become more connected with the experiences of the students for whom the program supports. Through the act of reflecting on and attempting to describe their lived experiences, this phenomenological approach would reveal the essence of those experiences. Phenomenological writing would provide the means to construct an evocative description of those experiences through the textual expression of their essence.

The translation to text would be done through the use of narrative. Richardson (1990) tells us that "narrative is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation. People can apprehend the world narratively and people can tell about the world narratively" (p. 21). My intention was to create a storied text which would combine a succession of incidents into one unified episode based on the students' writings. This device was given credence by Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) who suggest that "narrative is the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and action of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes" (p. 5). It was clear to me that a narrative approach would provide powerful access to the students' experiences through the use of actors in a plot.

I was relieved to surface after having spent considerable time in the depth of human science research literature in search of the position of my work in relation to others. I emerged comfortably nestled between phenomenology and narrative inquiry.

Having settled the foundational concerns of the project I returned to the practical issue of how to collect the students' responses. For this, the answer was not hiding deep in the cavernous spaces of the library but sitting right before me. My computer would provide the perfect means through which to communicate with the students. Electronic communication is made very easy at SFU, given that all students are assigned e-mail accounts and have ample access to computing equipment. This medium would not only serve as a cost efficient means to proceed but it would also provide the opportunity for me to continually encourage students to participate, particularly if the initial response rate was low. The only remaining concern was confidentiality as some students may not have wished to be identified when submitting their stories. This concern was easily addressed by expanding the use of electronic technology to include a Web site through which students could submit their contributions with complete anonymity.

Study Participants

The invitation to submit a descriptive experience that expressed the challenges of adjusting to university life went out to 580 students, from first to fourth year, whose e-mail addresses were compiled to form a listserv for use in this project. Students were selected on the sole criterion that they had been eligible for entrance scholarship funding at some point in the last five years. Essentially, that meant that the group consisted of both students who were currently eligible for scholarship funding and those who were not.

From the information and anecdotes collected I began to build composite profiles based on similar themes and experiences. The stories, presented in

Chapter Three, were created by weaving the responses together. They do not represent any one particular student, but are the combined characteristics and experiences of many students.

CHAPTER TWO
FROM ADJUSTMENT TO INTEGRATION

While much of the assessment that occurs at university is done through formal evaluation, the more significant outcomes of the university experience cannot be measured by grade point average. The years a student spends at university are years of self-discovery. Their academic journeys will help to broaden their intellectual backgrounds and expose them to new challenges. They will become more tolerant, inquisitive and ultimately more mature. Consistent with this notion of growth and maturity, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education presented a number of themes that emerged from a re-examination of the purpose of higher education in the United States. The report concluded that the purposes of higher education are:

- the provision of opportunities for the intellectual, aesthetic, ethical, and skill development of individual students, and the provision of campus environments which can constructively assist students in their more general growth and development;

- the advancement of human capability in society at large;

- the enlargement of educational justice for the post-secondary age group;

- the transmission and advancement of learning and wisdom;

- the critical evaluation of society — through individual thought and persuasion — for the sake of society's self-renewal. (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973, p. 1)

This journey, however, is not always an easy one. It is often hindered by family and peer pressures, intimidation and a lack of a sense of belonging, particularly in the first year of university. Many students take some time to

recognize that college instructors have considerably higher expectations than secondary school teachers and that grade point averages are often lower as a result. It is a common experience for students to find that they are working harder and doing better work than was done in secondary school and yet they are earning lower grades. Students who get off to a slow start in this transition process by receiving lower marks than expected will often become discouraged when they see the gap that exists between their academic average and that which is required for scholarship eligibility. This discouragement is magnified as they begin to understand the ramifications of the cumulative grade point average system and look at the grades they must achieve in future courses to realize a substantive change in their cumulative average.

As an advisor to entrance scholarship students I often speak with those who have not managed to maintain the academic requirements as outlined by the scholarship program, namely the expectation of an overall grade point average of 3.60 (A-) within the first year. Students who do not meet this expectation are not failing in the conventional sense although their disappointments and concerns at not performing up to expected standards are real and often quite poignant.

There is a paucity of research on the academic performance and transitional concerns peculiar to undergraduate scholarship students. One case study was found that reviewed the effect of renewable scholarships on student persistence. This study showed that renewable scholarship funding had a positive influence on student performance. The primary factors which were attributed to student performance were relief from financial concerns, mutual

institutional/student commitment, and the sense of responsibility that accompanies honor and recognition (Woodward, 1988). Although this study proposes to look at the persistence of scholarship students, it is unclear whether the factors identified are actual determinants of persistence. It could be speculated that student persistence was high as a result of the selection criteria used to identify the study group as scholarship winners in the first instance.

Looking beyond scholarship students to the general undergraduate population, a vast body of literature comes into view. The relevant research can be categorized, for heuristic purposes, into three broad areas of influence on academic performance. They are academic, social, and personal or emotional adjustment to the university environment.

Academic aspects of adjustment have received by far the most attention in empirical studies. These studies have defined academic adjustment in terms of the students' cognitive development, perceptions of satisfaction with the academic environment, ability to take action to meet educational demands, and interaction with faculty. More recently an interest in social adjustment has captured the attention of researchers. Social adjustment has been defined as the informal interactions between students and faculty, the staff they encounter, and peers. Some studies have also included extracurricular activities under the rubric of social adjustment. Emotional adjustment has received attention particularly in studies which look at the effect of counselling in the post-secondary environment. In this context emotional adjustment is concerned with such developmental challenges encountered by students as psychological distress, anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression.

These areas will be explored in the context of the initial adjustment to university life and in terms of how each area affects students' continued academic successes. To provide a focused picture of the adjustment process factors such as the impact of parental support and parents' views of academic success will be touched on briefly but will not be presented in great detail. Concerns such as these are important in providing a context for this study, however they are beyond the scope of the present project. This project proposes to look closely at the manageable, institutionally-bound factors which can be influenced and improved through the development of co-curricular programming specifically designed for the academic promotion of scholarship students.

Academic Adjustment

Entrance scholars enjoyed a great deal of academic success prior to their arrival at Simon Fraser University. In most instances they represent the top academic performers in their secondary schools, yet many of them struggle upon arrival at the University. Lindgren (1969) attributes the inability of these previously high performing students to perform at the post-secondary level to one of two causes: a deficiency in one or more skills such as study habits or time management, or a difficulty that is attitudinal or emotional in nature. These two types of shortcomings are generally interrelated, one often reinforcing the other. Lindgren goes on to discuss the attitudes that students adopt toward learning and how those attitudes impact on their ability to perform at university. He found in his research that students were all too often in search of acquiring better techniques of learning rather than focusing

on the attitudinal or emotional changes that must precede or accompany any effort at learning. Having spoken with many scholarship students, however, I have come to understand that their concerns over acquiring better techniques is secondary to their emotional concerns as they relate to adjusting to the university environment and the added pressures associated with holding an entrance scholarship. Some of the environmental difficulties that have been expressed by scholarship students relate to adjusting to new evaluation methods, experiencing different styles of instruction and, generally speaking dealing with a higher set of expectations.

Assessment

An important area of academic adjustment for post-secondary students is in relation to the assessment methods used by the institution. Becker, Greer, and Hughes (1968) generated some pioneering research which provides a theoretical construct to help explain why university students behave as they do in situations emphasizing competitive grade-getting. According to their studies, students from the University of Kansas viewed grades as the currency of the academic realm. Grades were considered to be the only things that were valued by the institution. Students' collective responses to this fact amounted to what the authors termed the "grade point average (GPA) perspective." This perspective was not unique to in-class activity; the consensus was that the entire campus life seemed to revolve around the GPA perspective. The authors believed that the main consequence of the GPA perspective was a displacement from the goal of learning to the goal of obtaining good grades. They claimed that "the chief obstacle to a more scholarly approach by students to their academic studies is their belief that

they must give first priority to the pursuit of grades" (p. 138). They found that in many cases students would struggle with a conflict between knowledge and pursuing good grades. They state that "if students follow their desire for knowledge they neglect some of the tasks they must perform if they are to get good grades; if they make their grades, they feel that they have sacrificed some possibilities of intellectual growth to the system" (p. 144). They also found that many students avoided extra-curricular activity altogether for fear that it would impinge on their ability to pursue the grade point average requirement.

More recent studies were done which utilized the basic tenets of the GPA perspective but broadened the scope of the research (Rabow, Radcliff-Vasile, Newcomb, & Hernandez, 1992; Rabow, Choi & Purdy, 1998). The authors asked questions regarding the impact of the GPA perspective and to what degree students felt that their grades actually reflected their intellectual abilities. They concluded that, in fact, students did not feel that their grades were an accurate reflection of their intellectual abilities and that improvements in their objective GPAs were due to strategic applications of the perspective. Rabow, *et al.* (1998) go on to suggest that, whereas the GPA perspective arises in response to the academic demands of university life, the greater part of academic adjustment (and the determination of the GPA perspective) has to do with the attitudes and motivations of the students themselves.

Motivation Theory

Student motivation has long been considered an important factor in the determination of academic performance. The nature and extent of the link between motivation and performance has been explored extensively. According to Weiner's (1974) attribution theory, expectancies, emotions, and performance at achievement tasks are determined by the attributions one makes to outcomes on prior achievement tasks. These attributions are viewed from two dimensions, which have been labelled by previous researchers as locus of control (internal *vs.* external), which refers to the degree of influence over cause, and stability (fixed *vs.* variable), which refers to nature of the cause which may be relatively enduring or change by situation and over time. Perceived causes of success and failure are further attributed to ability, effort, task, and/or luck. For example, attribution to good luck as an explanation for passing an exam would be thought of as an external, unstable attribution. The attribution to ability for the same passing grade would represent a stable, internally perceived cause. With this model Weiner has established that causal ascriptions influence both the expectations and consequences of success and failure. This causal ascription theory may be sufficient to explain the performance of students who have assimilated into the university and have established a frame of reference based on their post-secondary performance. But since this theory is primarily based on perception of outcomes from previous performance it may not, in itself, be adequate to explain the plight of first year students who have little or no post-secondary performance record to draw upon.

Zimmerman (1996) has done extensive research in the area of student motivation from the perspective of his self-regulation theory. He described self-regulation as the degree to which individuals are metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally proactive participants in their own learning process. Within his theoretical framework he has developed the self-regulatory cycle that assists students to observe themselves and evaluate their effectiveness, set goals and use learning strategies, self-monitor changes, and adjust their strategic methods. This model is cyclical because self-monitoring on each learning trial provides information that can change subsequent goals, strategies, or performance efforts. Zimmerman believes that this cycle gives students a sense of personal control that has been shown to be a major source of intrinsic motivation to continue learning on one's own. His model has been used effectively in grade school where the process can be applied and practiced effectively in a classroom setting. The grade school classroom is an ideal setting for the development of self-regulation techniques as learners require a great deal of monitoring and assistance in the earlier stages of self-regulatory development. From my own experience I have found that many scholarship students have arrived at the University with good self-regulation techniques. It is important for them to do so as the university is not the ideal setting for this type of learning to occur. One of the primary reasons is that students are exposed to a number of different instructors in a single day. The lack of instructor continuity creates a much more challenging environment in which to begin teaching self-regulatory techniques.

Expectancy theory can be simply expressed by stating that the motivation to act is a combination of the perceived attractiveness of future outcomes and the likelihood that one's actions will lead to these outcomes. Thus,

motivating students to put forth an academic effort depends on their perception of the benefit of the performance required and their belief that exerting the required effort will actually lead to higher performance. Scholarship funding does provide an attractive benefit to students for outstanding performance, however it does not guarantee that even the most concerted effort will result in high academic achievement. A scholarship attrition rate of as high as fifty percent in some programs at Simon Fraser seems to substantiate this concern.

Reward Motivation

Motivation by reward is another angle from which researchers have studied academic performance. Conflicting studies have emerged which, on one side, suggest that offering rewards motivates positive behavior and, on the other side, suggests that the fixation on reward can actually impinge negatively on an individuals' ability to perform. The former reward system has been described at length by behaviorists in the field of education who believe that students will perform at their maximum if some type of compensation is offered to acknowledge or reward their performance (Kohn, 1993). Skinner (1961) was the major proponent of reward theory. His research indicated that if a reward of some kind followed certain desired behavior in a timely manner, then that behavior would increase in frequency. This well-proven phenomenon was termed "positive reinforcement" by Skinner.

More recent research has questioned the wisdom of behaviorism. New studies have shown that in many instances rewards actually undermine achievement by focusing students' attention on their performance and

creating performance-anxiety (Kohn, 1993). This notion was impressed upon me in an exchange with one of SFU's scholarship students who was visiting the office to discuss the conditions of an appeal for his scholarship disbursement. He told me of the time he spent at school in his own country and how much he enjoyed his schooling experience. In the relaxed and comfortable atmosphere of the familiar he excelled without any difficulty. The opportunity to study abroad came with the offer of a major entrance scholarship from SFU, but with this opportunity came overwhelming responsibility. With each exam he would work himself into a fretful state thinking that this exam had to go well or his GPA would suffer and he would let everyone down. This, unfortunately, became a self-fulfilling prophesy. In this student's case, the reward which was meant to motivate and celebrate his performance was the very thing which impaired his ability to perform well academically.

Several theories have been developed to account for some of the detrimental effects of rewards. The Yerkes-Dodson law suggests that an optimal combination of arousal and performance exists for any task. Initially studies were done on rats which were systematically starved in an attempt to make them work harder to retrieve pieces of cheese at the end of a maze. It was found that starving the rats only worked to a point after which their performance began to suffer (McCullers, 1978). Although the conceptual leap to humans may seem somewhat elusive, the principles developed can be demonstrated in such activities as test taking, job performance, competitive sport, and concentration games. In these activities optimal performance is associated with moderate levels of challenge. For instance, test takers perform well if they have a moderate degree of anxiety, but not if anxiety is

increased by the responsibilities of holding an entrance scholarship to the point where one cannot perform to the expected standards.

Other studies of the effect of reward on performance can be found in the area of children's discrimination learning. A foundation study in this area was done by Miller and Estes (1961). In this study "Bill" and his twin brother were presented as line drawings to a group of third grade children. The children, divided into three incentive groups ($.50, $.01 and no incentive), were then given 100 trials to say which drawing was of Bill. Consistent with the Yerkes-Dodson law, both incentive groups made more errors than did the group that was offered no incentive.

While there are merits to the abandonment of operant thinking there are also limitations to the more recent behavioristic theorizing. It would be a mistake for a major post-secondary institution to discontinue their entrance scholarship program based on these new research findings. It is important, however, to remain mindful of these findings by creating an environment which purposefully helps students become engaged in their university tasks. Programming which recognizes the value of extrinsic rewards balanced against the need for fostering intrinsic motivation would appear to provide the most desirable conditions for success in university studies.

Self-Efficacy

When recalling their time at university many people will refer to such tasks associated with pursuing undergraduate studies as writing exams and papers, reading a plethora of books and articles, and dedicating many hours

to studying. But one of the more profound requirements of university education is adjusting to change. Students who learn to cope and engage in the new environment will be those who are best armed to succeed. This is a recurring finding in studies that have been made of students before and after their university experience (Trent & Medsker, 1968). These personal alterations are essentially related to maturity and are characteristic of students who have become stronger and more competent as a result of their university studies.

One factor which impacts students' abilities to succeed is that of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy has been defined by Bandura (1989) as the belief in one's capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and course of action needed to meet given situational demands. Self efficacy theory was developed within the framework of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977a), and is founded on the tenet that people's perceptions of their own capabilities influence how they act, their motivation levels, their thought patterns, and their emotional reactions in demanding situations. From this description it appears that perceived self-efficacy relates to specific domains of activity, not specifically with personal characteristics, but with the interaction between person and task. Thus a person may regard herself or himself as quite capable in one area, such a studying for exams, but much less capable in another, such as writing a paper. Simply stated, self-efficacy has to do with whether or not students believe they can have success in an activity.

The area of self efficacy becomes a point of interest in this research project as a result of many studies which have shown that individuals with high self-efficacy pursue challenging goals, seek new solutions and persevere in difficult

task assignments (Locke & Latham, 1990). This is of particular concern to Simon Fraser University which has recruited these gifted young students in part because of the potential contributions they can make to the university community. Since its inception the University has struggled with a "commuter campus" label which may not provide the sort of life and excitement boasted by other residential campuses. The University relies heavily on the students themselves to take on new opportunities and challenges which will ultimately benefit the university community as a whole. Conversely, studies have shown that individuals with low self-efficacy pursue lower levels of performance. Doubt and uncertainty during task performance undermines their concentration, and they give up easily when faced with difficult tasks (Tuckman & Sexton, 1992). This is obviously not a desired state given the need for student involvement within the university community.

Many scholarship students have come technically prepared to deal with the requirements of undergraduate study, yet they begin to question their own abilities as they compare themselves to others for whom it seems so effortless. Most have come from an environment where they were the celebrated few at the top of their class. But once all the scholarship students amalgamate in the university environment the top echelon suddenly seems much higher than ever. It has been proven that perceived self-efficacy, or confidence in abilities, influences performance and it is that very performance which is reviewed to determine continued eligibility within a scholarship program. I have seen many students who have arrived at the University very confident in their abilities but after only a few weeks their confidence was seriously shaken.

Bandura (1989) presents a theory which may help us understand why some students develop or maintain confidence in some areas but not in others. His theory is concerned with specific self-efficacy as it relates to particular activities or tasks. He does not deal with the notion that someone might have a general sense of self-efficacy which colours all beliefs about all actions. He does believe that focusing on specific areas of self-efficacy provides a much better tool for predicting actual behavior and specifically in predicting the direction and extent of changes in behavior. Bandura's theory may be helpful in identifying specific areas of concern for scholarship students. These areas can be more rigorously investigated and will likely provide a good portrait of the scholarship students' strengths, weaknesses and needs. One of those needs which has become apparent in my interactions with scholarship students is their need to feel that they *belong* in the university community. Making a good social adjustment to the university has been shown to be a critical factor in the academic performance of post-secondary students.

Social Adjustment

Kegan (1982) has written about the tension between our sense of individuality and our need to attach to community. He sees the optimal community as one that serves as a holding environment for individuals as they change, expand, develop and struggle with the competing agendas of the self and the community. The university has the potential to be such a community.

A growing body of literature suggests that social adjustment to the university environment may be as important as academic factors when predicting student persistence. Important elements of social adjustment include becoming integrated into the social life of the university, forming a support network, and managing new social freedoms. Social adjustment appears to be a critical factor, particularly for students who are at risk of falling prey to attrition. The common thread that runs through the attrition studies done by Spady (1971), Tinto (1975), Pascarella (1980), and Bean (1980) is that social integration is necessary for student persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (1979) identified lack of integration into the university environment, due to insufficient contact with members of the institution, as perhaps the most important predictor of student withdrawal.

Tinto's (1987) model for student attrition has been used as the conceptual framework for persistence studies for the past twenty years. His model revolves around students' ongoing interactions with both the academic and social systems in and around the university. Central to Tinto's model are interactions with both students and faculty in the formal academic and informal social settings. Tinto postulates that attrition occurs when students are no longer socially integrated with other members of the university community and when students no longer hold similar values to those reflected in the institution's functioning.

A similar model was developed by Spady (1971) that accommodated the interactions between students (their abilities, attitudes, expectations, dispositions, etc.) and the expectations and demands of fellow students, faculty, administrators, and the curriculum. If the discrepancy between the

student and the environment is too great, the student may not be able to become assimilated into the academic and social systems of the institution. On the other hand, the rewards (grades and intellectual development) of the institution may be insufficient to provide the satisfaction that the student needs. If either of these situations persist, withdrawal may result.

One way in which students can quickly become assimilated into the university environment is to live on the campus. Comparisons have been done between residential and commuting students and have revealed that living on campus increases the opportunity for integration and results in better academic performance (Chickering, 1974). The influence of commuting on academic performance may, however, differ with age. Younger students may be more negatively affected by commuting because of missed opportunities for social and academic integration occurring on-campus and in the residence halls. Students living away from campus, particularly those students who remain in the family homes, may miss the opportunity to be exposed to, and come to appreciate, cultural diversity. A sign of social integration is when students become comfortable in expressing their own views and begin to appreciate the divergent views of others.

Extra-curricular activity has been mentioned in academic performance studies, yet, for every study which shows on-campus extra-curricular activities to have a detrimental impact on academic performance (Rabow, *et al.* 1992), there is an opposing study which reports no significant relationship between activities and academic performance (Camp, 1990).

Recently Tinto (1998) reviewed a vast body of research on student persistence and presented the idea that, by and large, we do know what factors influence persistence. Institutions have developed a variety of retention programs (e.g., freshman year seminars and mentorship programs) to affect student persistence, however no significant curricular changes have been implemented to accommodate these findings. Tinto demonstrates, through previous research findings, how academic and social adjustment interact with one another and how persistence is more likely if both forms of adjustment occur. He goes on to argue that the integration of academic and social adjustment provisions should extend beyond the student services delivered by an institution and into the formal curriculum. Learning communities should be created which allow students to become more actively involved in one anothers' learning and promote shared connected learning. One way this could be accomplished is by grouping courses such that a cohort of students can progress through a number of common subjects together. Courses linked together would be done in a deliberate manner based on a common theme which connects them. This would not only provide students with the ability to connect socially by taking common courses, but it would also create an academic link which gives meaning to the connection of the courses themselves. Tinto claims that these are fundamental changes which should replace traditional retention programs offered outside the classroom — programs which generally do not reach the students for whom they are designed. A true learning community should foster a more coherent educational approach which promotes better academic and social integration and may ultimately reduce the need for retention programs.

Chickering (1993) articulated a comprehensive model for student development which delineates seven vectors, all of which impact on, or are influenced by, social development. The model was developed in an effort to provide a conceptual schema for educators such that they might educate the whole student and not simply satisfy the academic needs of students.

The first vector, *developing competence*, encompasses three areas: intellectual competence, which relates to the development of students' intellectual and cognitive abilities; physical and manual skills, which are more pertinent to tactile performance; and interpersonal competence, which extends into the social realm.

Managing emotions addresses the need for students to acknowledge, accept and manage the range of emotions that accompany the changes and challenges faced by all university students.

Moving through autonomy to interdependence suggests that students should develop independence which in turn allows them to develop interdependence. Chickering states that "the recognition and acceptance of independence is the capstone of autonomy" (p. 140). Autonomy is a key concept within this vector as it is not until one has developed a sense of autonomy that one can come to appreciate the autonomy of others. The appreciation and respect of another's autonomy is what creates the space for interdependence.

Tolerance, an appreciation of differences, and a capacity for intimacy all lie at the heart of *developing mature interpersonal relationships*. Tolerance implies a willingness to expand the often narrow ways in which we view the world to

encompass divergent views and ways of thinking. A requirement of tolerance
is, as Covey (1989) has expressed it, seeking first to understand. Tolerance is
of particular importance in the university environment where original
thinking and freedom of speech are encouraged and valued and where
students converge from many different backgrounds and cultures into one
academic and social milieu.

The concept of *establishing identity* has captured the interest of many
researchers, and the precepts that have emerged share some common themes.
The development of positive identity is a multifaceted notion of "becoming"
which includes: becoming physically and emotionally comfortable in one's own
skin, defining one's self in a social, historical and cultural context, self-
acceptance, and a measure of self-esteem.

Many students enter the university without a clear idea of what they hope to
gain from the experience. *Developing purpose* suggests that these students
gain an increased ability to be intentional about their decisions and choices,
and that they learn to clarify goals and make plans.

The final vector is *developing integrity* which is closely linked with the
development of identity. Integrity requires that personal values and beliefs
provide the foundation from which to guide behavior and that personal values
should become congruent with socially responsible behavior.

Chickering believes that in order to educate students, without simply
becoming a dispensary of services, institutions must adopt a developmental
philosophy at the core of their operations.

Emotional Adjustment

For many students the onset of university life coincides with the changes of late adolescence. This environmental shift can present challenges to students' adaptive strategies and coping mechanisms as they negotiate their way through late adolescence into adulthood. Many of the studies that have appeared which consider students' emotional well-being have considered this shift from the perspective of the changing familial structure and the emotional impact that has on the student. Researchers (Austin & Inderbitzin, 1983; Fulmer, Medalie, & Lord, 1982) have hypothesized that many college students' emotional difficulties may, at least in part, be symptomatic manifestations of the struggle for separation from their parents that frequently arises during this period.

Attachment theory has been used to understand how late adolescents manage such developmental challenges as the transition from home to college. According to Ainsworth (1989) and Bowlby (1982) an attachment is a disposition to seek contact and proximity with a specific individual, especially in times of distress. This theory emphasizes the importance of significant emotional bonds for healthy development and adjustment. It is generally thought of as a long term affectionate bond between people; with attachments occurring between caregivers and children.

Attachment is thought to promote instrumental competence or adaptive behavior. Studies with children have found that those who are securely attached, in contrast to insecurely attached children, are better problem-solvers, more enthusiastic and cooperative in learning tasks, more competent

among peers and experience better emotional adjustment (Ainsworth, 1989). University counsellors are realizing that it is important to understand the quality of attachment relationships and the potential impact of attachments on the concerns that students present and the counselling process.

One of the most supportive advocate groups for gifted and talented students are parents. But, this support can also create additional emotional distress for students depending on the parents' concept of academic success. Some parents of academically talented students have been accused of pushing their children to achieve unrealistically high levels (Elkind, 1981). They do not necessarily encourage them to be their best, but instead pressure them to attain exceptional levels of achievement. From my own advising experience parents from specific ethnic backgrounds seem most commonly to be those who focus excessively on external indicators of academic success. This may, however, speak to a cultural difference in academic values; and one which has not been explored to a great extent in the literature.

In a study conducted by Archer and Lamnin (1985) an open-ended questionnaire format solicited information regarding both academic and personal stressors on a university campus. They derived thirteen academic and fifteen personal stressor categories. The major personal stressors identified were: intimate relationships, parental conflicts, finances and interpersonal conflicts with friends. Roberts and White (1989) added to this list living conditions, appearance, roommate conflicts, meeting others, and not having enough free time. The results of these studies highlight the educational implications of high levels of psychological distress for undergraduate students. By providing the stimulus of new knowledge, the

university experience challenges students' existing level of development. For students to truly take advantage of this developmental opportunity they need to tolerate the temporary loss of balance necessary as one level of understanding is relinquished and a new one created.

Gardner (1983) developed an elegant theory of ways of understanding, or multiple intelligences, which includes linguistic, musical, bodily kinesthetic, and personal intelligences (one of which resembles emotional intelligence). Simply stated, reasoning which takes emotions into account is part of what can be considered emotional intelligence. It has been described as follows:

> A different way of being smart. It includes knowing what your feelings are and using your feelings to make good decisions in life. It's being able to motivate and remain hopeful and optimistic when you have setbacks in working toward goals. It's empathy; knowing what the people around you are feeling. And it's social skill — getting along well with other people, managing emotions in relationships, being able to persuade or lead others. (O'Neill, 1996, p. 6)

While many of us consider emotions, and perhaps emotional intelligence, as an inert part of our being, Goleman (1994) suggests that one of the reasons late adolescents are so poor at this basic life skill is that society, as a whole, has not placed adequate value in educating youth on such fundamentals of emotional competence as dealing with anger, conflict resolution, empathy, and impulse control.

Toward Student Development

Having investigated the literature surrounding student academic performance at the post-secondary level it is clear that performance is affected by many factors beyond those which are deemed *academic*. This is particularly true in the first few years of university when students are making the adjustment to the new environment. Although this discussion has been separated into specific areas (academic, social, and emotional or personal adjustment to the university environment), it is evident that any clear separation of the three areas is conceptual rather than experiential. In almost all instances adjustment in one area influences or interacts with aspects of adjustment in another area. For example, if a student is struggling to understand course material, which at first blush appears to be an academic concern, it may be because that student has not developed the confidence to engage in a dialogue with the course instructor. The ability to communicate effectively has often been studied under the guise of social adjustment, however in this case the delineation between social and academic concerns becomes quite blurred. Examples such as this can be found over and over again, demonstrating the interaction between the domains in the adjustment process.

To adjust to the university environment students must be prepared to engage in a process of change so as to match or fit the new environment. We have explored this fit in such a way that as each area of adjustment unfolds a new layer of understanding is created allowing us to interpret the transition process in a much more meaningful way. It then becomes clearer that

integration only occurs to the extent that students are able to adjust academically, socially and emotionally in the new environment.

After having carefully sifted through the research to better understand the peculiarities of the adjustment process I was still left with the feeling that a fundamental piece was missing. That is, our ability as institutional partners to assist in the transformation of the lives of those who pass through the institution. Although much of what is presented here is empirical, more and more research is moving from the normothetic to the idiographic. Idiographic research may be more helpful in guiding our attempts to understand students as individuals, with unique needs, concerns, and challenges. Tompkins (1996) is an ideal example of the latter type of researcher who has gone in search of a re-awakening toward the human experience. She writes:

> What I would like to see emerge in this country is a more holistic way of conceiving education — by which I mean a way of teaching and learning that is not just task-oriented but always looking over its shoulder at everything that is going on around. Such a method would never fail to take into account that students and teachers have bodies that are mortal, hearts that can be broken, and spirits that need to be fed. It would be interested in experience as much as in book knowledge, and its responsibility would be the growth of whole human beings, in harmony with the planet the world and with one another (p. xiii).

It is that interest in experience which has been the driving force in this research project. In the following chapter we will begin to fill in the missing piece by investigating the students' experiences as they lived them rather than as we might conceptualize them. We will begin with our own experiences and use that internal frame of reference to more deeply understand the transition process through the lived experiences of others.

CHAPTER THREE
SITTING IN THE RESEARCHER'S CHAIR

It is a little odd sitting in this big chair. Although I find myself here quite deliberately, I feel a bit like Goldie Locks testing the chair out for size. Why would I have such an experience when I have been sitting in this same chair for years? Perhaps it is not the chair itself, rather the reason for sitting in the chair, that has suddenly made it seem larger than usual. It is a curious feeling, one which I am certain I could only explain after having lingered in the space for a while.

I dismiss this thought for the moment and turn my attention to the glare of my computer monitor. The cursor blinks impatiently at the top of the screen as if to beckon me into action. It is time to fix some of what I have been investigating onto paper. As I sit staring into this bright abyss, I feel anxious to get my fingers dancing on the keyboard and to run for the finish. But, I know I must find some comfort in this chair as the real work is only about to begin. I have come to appreciate and understand that the writing process in human science research, particularly phenomenology, does not merely enter the research as the final step. Van Manen (1990) writes that "creating a phenomenological text *is* the object of the research process" (p. 111). This is echoed by Barthes (1986) who suggests that "research does not merely involve writing: research is the work of writing — writing is its very essence" (p. 316). Perhaps this is why I am feeling a little apprehensive. The experiences of almost one hundred students have been entrusted to me and with them I must construct a text which brings meaning to those experiences. And so I take a deep breath and prepare to share my plan.

In this chapter I have set out to animate the students' experiences so that they might resonate with the reader, and that we might recognize them as experiences that we have had or could have had. As Van Manen (1990) suggests, I have borrowed other people's experiences and their reflections on their experiences to come to a better understanding of the significance of the challenges they have faced in their early semesters at Simon Fraser. From these borrowed bits of life I have constructed several vignettes which will serve as experiential case material on which we can reflect. Taking some literary license I have developed the plots which create the links between the responses of several students. As a mixture of real and unreal events, they are a rendering that blends details of actual accounts, together with fragments from my experience and imagination. At the close of each story I have presented a few direct quotes from other students who have shared similar experiences. Within the stories you may not find the traditional form of closure. You may have to pay closer attention to the nuances, however, in doing so the rewards will be forthcoming, for as we gain access to these experiences we will become more experienced ourselves.

Reading through the submissions, it occurred to me that I had encountered one of the difficulties which is common to this type of research. While many people can speak eloquently and with great ease, they are not necessarily able to adequately express those same thoughts on paper. It appeared that the need to do so had put considerable constraints on some students, preventing them from providing the sort of descriptive experiences that I was looking for. Many students resorted to dry factual statements which did not provide a

window into their experience. I returned to reflect on Van Manen's (1990) words.

> Let us examine, therefore, what meaning the idea of theme has for phenomenological description and interpretation in the human sciences. As we are able to articulate the notion of theme we are also able to clarify further the nature of human science research. Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure — grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of *seeing* (p. 79).

These liberating words gave me the freedom to continue reading but in a much more productive way. Rather than search for key words and common phrases, I began to read in search of meaning. As I read and re-read it became clear that these writings, which did not seem as if they would make their way into this text, were of much more value than at first they had appeared. It was not until I had dismissed the idea of establishing themes that the themes began to emerge. Having carefully sifted through each of the students' writing, I put the reading away and began to write. The following story emerged as an illustration of the overarching theme.

The GPA Perspective is Alive and Well

My goal? To become a drama teacher. I have known from a very young age that one day I would be the one doing the casting calls, the one in the wings directing pandemonius traffic, the one overseeing the construction of sets. I would be the orchestrator of all the school productions. After all, did I not spend the last 3 years of secondary school participating in every aspect of the performing arts program?

Not to mention getting straight As in all of my courses. Any university should be proud to have me in their program. And so, my search began.

Like Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz I was caught in a whirlwind of activity in the search for a university. There were documents to send, references to collect, essays to write, scholarships to apply for, and the waiting; oh the waiting! Finally, the letter arrived. The one I had been waiting for. On the top left corner, in small print, it said "Simon Fraser University." I selected Simon Fraser because it is said to have a very good fine and performing arts area and perhaps the best teacher education program in the province. And perhaps, in this letter, they had selected me as well. My heart pounded anxiously as I slid a knife into the gap at the back of the envelope. I pulled out a thick wad of paper and tentatively opened the flaps that stood between me and my university education. I blinked the excitement from my eyes so that I could focus on the words before me. The letter began, "Congratulations..." That was all I needed to see. I am going to be a drama teacher! I scanned through the rest of the page and impatiently put it aside to see if any other morsel existed in this parcel. And there it was, the other letter, printed on heavy yellowed parchment paper. I opened this one even more slowly. This one contained an even bigger prize. In my hand I held a voucher for a four-year scholarship which promised to pay for my entire education. With my goal clearly in mind and a bright future ahead I went off in search of my dream.

My studies started out well. With first semester grades nicely above the required average the scholarship money kept flowing. When it came time to register for second semester I decided to make a move toward expanding my horizons a little. My counsellors at school had always been harping on about getting a well-rounded education. With those wise words still lingering in mind I decided to venture outside my study area and register in a math course. Math (especially calculus) has very little to do with my career goals but, even so, I thought it would be a good move toward getting my well-rounded education. This was definitely not the case. The math course was a disaster! Oh sure, I learned a lot but I only ended up with a B. Down went my average, and away went my scholarship.

What a fool! If only I had stuck to my faculty and the courses that I was already familiar with. I would have saved a bundle; and this student loan I now have wouldn't exist. I regret taking that math class. The scar it left on my grade point average still haunts me. You would think that students would be encouraged to try something new but I wouldn't recommend it to someone with a scholarship; it's far too expensive. As far as my degree is concerned, I don't need those math credits, they didn't do me one bit of good. I wish I could just erase them from my transcript, but I can't.

It is not surprising to find the GPA perspective, as coined by Becker, *et al.* (1968), nestled at the core of many of the students' comments, particularly since they are immersed in a system that measures academic performance solely by grades. Although the GPA perspective was described as the means

by which students determine what they must do to achieve their desired grades, this story (which we will call Karen's story) and the anecdotes that follow provide an experiential context for what happens to students when they are either deeply entrenched in the perspective or are able to transcend it altogether.

Karen was seduced by the GPA perspective. It is what brought her the financial backing for her university studies and it is what she intended to employ to achieve her ultimate goal of becoming a drama teacher. However, as it often is with seduction, one looks back to see what has been left behind. Remembering the words of her school counsellor, and perhaps in a moment of abandonment, she registered in a course which she knew was not an area of strength for her. The result was the loss of her scholarship. Even now, semesters later, the deep regret that she expresses suggests that she has not been able to extricate herself from the GPA perspective and that further development of her own intellectual curiosity will likely suffer as a result.

While Karen's story is representative of some students, there are also those who have been able to move beyond the perspective and create their own view from which to position themselves in the world. Brad shares his outlook:

> I suppose I have clearly chosen to live my life to encompass more
> than just university. I have made decisions which have likely
> limited my capacity to excel at university. Perhaps if I had felt
> that I could have had a life outside university and still maintain
> the required academic standing to keep the scholarship I would
> have tried harder. I know many other people are able to do this,
> but I wonder, at what cost. My part-time job in the software
> industry has provided me with the kind of knowledge that no
> university course could replace. I have already opened the door
> on a career opportunity, something which most students aren't

even thinking about until after graduation. In this way, I do feel I am ahead of the game, so I do not regret not maintaining my scholarship at the cost of these opportunities.

The GPA perspective reflects the energy and time students give to organizing their lives around the attainment of grades, irrespective of other interests they might pursue. In Brad's case he has recognized the limitations of the perspective and adopted an attitude which still allows him to be academically successful but not at the expense of other opportunities.

Similar sentiments are shared by Ron who writes:

> The effort required to get an 'A' just isn't worth it. People have looked at me in astonishment when I have said this. They can't believe that a little more effort is not worth thousands of dollars of scholarship money. But I am in school to learn and enjoy myself, not just to work. I am simply not prepared to sacrifice my entire social life and my sanity. Achieving grades in the B+ range isn't all that bad if you ask me. I am happy with it and that's all that matters.

A slightly different experience is articulated by Andrea who has done what is required to achieve excellent academic standing, but feels somewhat wistful about the sacrifices that she has had to make to do so. She writes:

> I also strongly believe that education should not be solely about grades and/or money, and find that the care I have to give to maintaining my scholarship sometimes eclipses my educational experience, limiting the intellect, insight, and creativity that won me the scholarship and drove me to pursue further education in the first place.

While Andrea appears to be using the perspective as a tool to succeed in university, its value is kept *in* perspective. She indicates that her scholarship, which was awarded on the basis of both academic performance and extra-curricular achievement, is the very thing which now prevents her from pursuing similar challenges at university.

Learning the Game

When I started playing baseball I figured that it was just a matter of cracking the ball into the outfield every time up to bat and catching anything that came near me. My knowledge of the game has extended a bit beyond that now. Along with learning the rules, tuning into the subtleties of the game is what makes the difference between a good player and a great player. What I realized is that this is no different for university. I naïvely thought that it was going to be more of the same, only harder. Was I thrown a curve! A marking curve to be exact.

Confident in my abilities to rule the university, I brushed aside the 3.60 GPA needed to maintain my scholarship. After all, I was smart; didn't getting the scholarship prove it? I had no problem with workload; didn't passing eight courses in grade 12 clinch it? I could get high grades; didn't a high GPA throughout high school testify to it? So, two weeks into my first semester at SFU I was ready to roll down the mountain and never come back. I had registered in five courses, held two part-time jobs, and was busy trying to meet as many people as I could. With no teacher peering mindfully over my shoulder it didn't take long to fall behind in the readings. In fact, I didn't know I was

supposed to *read* the text books. And what about those things that appeared on the examinations that had never been discussed in the lecture? In high school we would be told to read a chapter of the text book for the exam and then the teacher would go over everything that was to be covered. At university, you're on your own. It never even dawned on me that one university course was not equal to one high school course; no one mentioned that. I didn't know what a style sheet was, what "TA" stood for, or how to send an e-mail. I ended up dropping a course, quitting a job, and spending countless hours trying to catch up with the workload.

My other big surprise? I had no idea that university was so competitive. I assumed that the competition would be much like it was in the past. I would do as much work as was required to get an 'A' and if anyone else was prepared to match that, they could. My first lesson was that getting good grades with no effort, like I did in high school, wasn't going to happen here. My second lesson was that even getting an 86% doesn't guarantee you an 'A'. Your final mark in class is relative to the performance of the other students in your class. If you are in a class with a lot of really bright people, like scholarship students, chances of getting an 'A' are very slim. This is the dreaded marking curve. The one that I always seem to be on the wrong side of.

Getting used to the new surroundings, terminology, and procedures is like a course in itself. In fact, I heard murmurings somewhere along the way that there is such a course. To have benefitted from it might have helped in that first fall semester when my cocky, swaggering, and

superior smile was quickly replaced by a frantic, panic-stricken, and ultimately stressed-out look. I only received half of my scholarship disbursements as the 3.60 bar was simply too high for me to reach. It was really good while it lasted, but now I am well-acquainted with more university student terminology; student loans.

As it is with many of life's transitions, making the change from secondary school to university requires some modification in the way we approach and think about things. Even if no conscious effort is put forth toward the deliberate acquisition of new knowledge, some learning usually results. I recall as a child cutting off the hard exterior of a golf ball to see what I might find. Inside was a tightly wrapped ball of elastic string. Not one to be satisfied with this discovery I began to unwind the string to see if there was anything beyond it. The size of this neat little ball was quite misleading because, in my unraveling frenzy, I accumulated an enormous pile of elastic. Finally, after miles and miles of this stretchy thin material, there it was, a solid dark coloured ball. It was not quite the treasure I had imagined. However, reflecting on this incident I realize that treasures are not only to be found at the end of a pursuit, rather there is as much to learn in the process of unraveling the ball as there is in determining what is at its' core. This idea is made clear by Vaill (1996) who suggests that learning "is a process not a state, and it occurs as both an overt observable behavior and as an inner condition of attitudes, ideas, and feelings" (p. 20). Although it is not a big issue in the greater scheme of things I no longer view golf balls in quite the same way.

In the preceding story, Jason is in the midst of unraveling the golf ball. He is struggling with a barrage of new experiences which, having arrived all at once, have taxed his existing abilities and forced him to rethink how he might approach these challenges. He has only just begun to realize that the skills developed which allowed him to sail through high school do not adequately translate to the university environment. We can imagine that many changes will take place as he makes the adjustments required to survive his first year of university. In contrast to the behavioral changes, Michael's academic incarceration demonstrates an attitudinal change taking place.

> The largest single shock by far has been adjusting to the various teaching methods, grading systems, and learning styles at university. I have found that I am both bored with the general nature of first year courses, and busy with the work required to evoke interest on my part and to obtain grades suitable to maintain my scholarship. I have found much of the undergraduate work uninspiring and more of a hurdle to overcome than a goal to reach for. This has more to do with my own values and aspirations than it does with the structure of undergraduate studies, which I am certain fulfills the needs of the majority of students. Nonetheless this has been a weighty source of anxiety for me. I came out of high school with direction only to find I have to serve four years before I am allowed to travel.

For Jenny, she has begun to understand and implement the changes necessary in her travels. She writes:

> I never really thought university would involve adjustment from high school life but it has. I think the most important thing I've learned (and am still learning) is how to budget my time more wisely; the more important the task (the higher the percentage of the grade), the more time I should spend on it.

For this group of bright young students, making the academic shift has been the greatest cause for concern. Langer (1997) presents a theory which may, in part, provide an explanation for the anxiety experienced by these students who, judging by their CVs, should have no difficulty at university. She suggests that overlearning can occur when we learn a skill and practice it to perfection. According to her theorizing, scholarship students may be freezing their understanding of a skill before they try it out in different contexts and adjust it to their own strengths. This is illustrated in Barbara's quote as she tells us that:

> University requires a lot of abstractions and presents many conceptual problems, neither of which I had experienced in high school. Needless to say, I have come a bit ill prepared.

Looking at the obvious, Barbara's example would indicate that she does not have the experience to tackle the elevated demands of university. However, viewing this anecdote from Langer's perspective, it is possible to speculate that the change itself has precipitated some anxiety, preventing Barbara from recognizing the skills that she does possess.

Kevin is also somewhat disillusioned when he faces a professor who expects him to have a much deeper knowledge of the subject matter than he feels is reasonable.

> In my first year physics course my professor proved every single formula he gave us using integrals and vector calculus. These activities must have been completely for his own entertainment, since it would be impossible for any of us to have taken courses yet that might have helped us understand what he was talking about.

Whether it is Langer's theory at play or something altogether different, Barbara and Kevin's quotes illustrate the other side of learning. It is as we learn and acquire new knowledge that we are reminded of how much we do not know. In a changing environment, this stark reminder can be overwhelming and often counterproductive.

Making Choices

When I was a kid my mother had cleverly figured out that the only way to deal with the blossoming intelligence of a toddler was to limit the possibilities. So, at about the age of three, in that delightful stage where children are very definite about what they will or will not wear, she would allow me two choices. On my bed she would lay out two of each clothing item upon which I would gaze discerningly. Would it be the blue pants or the red pants; the Barbie doll t-shirt or the plain white one; the underwear with the hearts or the ones with the flowers? By some unknown process of elimination I would get dressed. I wouldn't have dreamed of rifling through my drawers to find some other item as that was simply not permitted. It was this or that or nothing at all. This early lesson gave me a wonderful feeling of satisfaction and autonomy. In my mind, the outfit was my doing and no one else's. As I moved into adolescence the selections didn't expand much. I was almost always given two options from which I could select. Given that this had always been standard practice in our house it never occurred to me that there were many other options available. They just weren't being presented to me.

So now that I am only trained in decision-making between this or that, what happens if a third item is added to the list? Perhaps it is not quite that grim but I must admit I have experienced some decision making anxiety since I arrived here at university. The thing that I find most difficult is allocating time for all of the things that I am interested in. I do have a very strong commitment to my school work but it seems that there is a constant tension between that commitment and my desire to engage in activities outside of reading, reviewing, and regurgitating. I have always been very active in sports and, while I have not made it onto any of the varsity teams, I still have the opportunity to play competitive sport in the intramural leagues. An enormous tension exists with friends as well. I never imagined I would meet so many interesting people. Now, not only do I have to find time to spend with all my new university friends but I also have to find time for my other friends whom I am simply not prepared to leave behind.

As an adult, when I make choices between this and that I am not simply discarding an item of clothing that I could choose to wear another day. I am making sacrifices, compromises and trying to find balance. The most disconcerting part of this is that because there are only so many hours in the day a decision made to do one thing is usually at the expense of another. This is a phenomenon which my fellow university students and I are forced to come to grips with.

The way I rationalize it is this. I believe that I am in the best years of my life. While I do want to get a formal education, there is a whole

other education out there which is just waiting to be had. In many cases this other learning happens well outside the university walls. If I were to insulate myself here on the university campus I would never begin to experience the world which lies beyond. And it is that world which holds an infinite number of possibilities. I wonder how I choose now that I have so many choices?

The students studied in this inquiry range in age from about 17 to 25. From this demographic perspective we begin to understand that, in addition to making the transition to university, many of these students are also making the transition out of adolescence, where they are discarding childhood beliefs and where their adult attitudes and values are being consolidated. In the following anecdote James shares an experience where he has made choices but has failed to make a deliberate decision.

> I value my life outside of school. I have a job at a local restaurant, two younger brothers to take care of, and do volunteer work with kids and the homeless. In addition, I sing in a band, the church choir, and am involved in martial arts. I guess I'm too tired to study when I get home, my activities take up most of my time, not my studies. And I know it should be the other way around if I want to maintain my GPA. But, it's too hard to let go of any of my activities because I enjoy participating in all of them.

James's commitment to his extra-curricular activities has taken precedence over his university work. Although choices have been made we are given the impression that they have been made by default. That is, that James has not deliberated on a conclusion, rather he has taken a path which, by virtue of pursuing it, has eliminated the possibility of becoming completely engaged in

his school work. Sheryl, on the other hand, has made quite a deliberate

decision and understands the reasons for doing so. Thoughtful determination

is exercised in her decision-making process.

> As far as freedom goes, I made a decision early on that I did not
> want university to be simply an academic experience. I am sure I
> could have achieved the 3.60 GPA had I spent all of my time with
> the books, but frankly I think that destroys one's spirits. As such
> I became involved with a number of clubs at the university and I
> work part-time. But most importantly I have met new people
> and travelled around this amazing province with them. As far as
> I am concerned, it is not academics alone but the extracurricular
> things that make university an amazing experience. If this
> means that I lose my scholarship, then so be it.

Colleen demonstrates an added dimension to the decision making process by

sharing the emotional impact her decision has had on her. In her example she

in not simply choosing between this and that. In an attempt to deal with how

she feels about herself she has made a decision to value her accomplishments

even if they don't meet the expectations of those around her.

> I have found everything about first year difficult. You just have
> to learn to deal with it. It's part of life. Most people are in the
> same situation that I am and are just as scared as me. And
> while there have been moments where I have let the idea of
> disappointing my parents gnaw at me, I am proud of what I have
> done up to this point. I realize that I may have to take things a
> bit more slowly. I know I don't stand out like I used to but I am
> about to work my way up there again.

In contrast, Craig's comments show how even when we do make decisions

unstable choices can result in the vacillation between that which we have

chosen and that which was left behind.

I switched to part-time studies to support a 30 hour a week job so I could pay the rent. As a result I have been attending classes year round for the last year or more. This, too has been an interesting experience. The seriousness and responsibility I have created for myself has often left me to wonder if I have missed out on some of the fun most undergraduates make the time for.

The ability to choose is what it is to be human. It dates back to a plump red apple hanging tantalizingly from a tree. We know that if we pluck the apple from the tree some undesirable fate may await us, and yet if we leave it to hang we will not experience its delectable flavour. If only we had not spotted the apple in the first place. Then we would not find ourselves in such a compromising position. But, as it is in life, if you turn around in an orchard you are bound to come across another apple.

Making Changes

The prospect of becoming a university student was very exciting to me. This would be a whole new phase in my life. I was determined that I was going to do this thing like no-one had ever done it before. Not only would I excel in my school work, but I was going to eat properly from now on, get more exercise, get involved in everything I could and get as much out of this experience as possible.

The first day of school I rose out of bed just as the sun was beginning to peer through the slats in my blinds. I scurried frantically around my room, collecting bits of clothing that I had carelessly discarded onto the floor. It briefly occurred to me that I should add 'keep my room cleaner' to the new phase in my life list, but fortunately that

thought was easily dismissed. My backpack sat lopsided on the floor, packed with the clothing that I needed to make my appearance as a university student; a pair of faded jeans and a Tommy Hilfiger t-shirt. I slipped into my fitness gear, made a brief appearance in the kitchen for some sustenance and was off to collect my bicycle.

The air was crisp and sweet. What a wonderful day to start a new life! I strapped on my helmet, slid my feet into the toe straps on my bike, climbed aboard and sailed down the driveway. As I wound my way through the streets my legs seemed to find new strength powered by excitement and nervous energy. The distance between my house and the university hill seemed to be eliminated in short order. At once I found myself at the bottom of Burnaby Mountain looking up at my destiny. I paused for a moment to gaze up the mountain. My heart began to pound. Once I reached the top of this mountain my life would never be the same. With that I began the steep trek up the hill. As I rode sweat began to bead up on my forehead. With each rotation of my pedals the beads would grow larger and larger until they began to roll down my cheeks. I could feel the same happening on my chest and my back until I must have looked as frothy as a freshly prepared latté. Half way up the hill, my heart and my stomach had made their way into my throat. I wondered if I should stop and throw up now or if should wait until I reached the top.

My drunken weaving must have been a humorous sight for the passing drivers. But I would not succumb to their laughter. I would make it up this hill. But I couldn't. I just couldn't. I staggered off my bike,

threw it on the grass beside the road, and flung myself down beside it. I was certain that this was what death felt like. I knew I was about to die. As I lay in the grass, a pathetic spectacle for the passers-by to see, I watched the world above me spin senselessly as if flushing me down the loo like a bug.

I lay there for an eternity until death finally passed. The sky steadied and I was able to get to my feet again. I took a deep breath of the rising stench which engulfed me and climbed back on my bike. As I rounded the first turn a building came into view. What a glorious sight! I pedalled frantically knowing that this painful journey was about to end.

The day progressed pretty much as it had begun. I sat in class wondering if anyone else knew what the professor was talking about. I wandered the halls in search for rooms I never found. I stood in lines which had no beginning and no end. I drank coffee that tasted like mud. And my lunch! My lunch which had been packed in the spirit of the new phase did not even make a dent in my hunger. A few carrots, a granola bar and an orange seemed like a good idea this morning. Finally, at 3 o'clock, I straddled my bike and rolled silently down the hill with the events of the day swirling recklessly through my head.

The next day, I rose out of bed. My legs were sore, my back was sore, and my backside had taken a serious beating. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes, wandered into the kitchen and began making a real lunch. Into my lunch bag I stuffed a nice thick peanut butter sandwich, an

oversized chocolate muffin, a banana, and a juice box. I picked up my backpack filled with text books, note paper, pencils and pens, and hurried out the door. Today the air was not as crisp as yesterday, I thought, as I waited. But the day is fine just the same. I reached deep into my pocket and pulled out a handful of change. I counted it carefully just to make sure it was correct. Yes, it looked good. I heaved another deep sigh and waited for the bus to arrive.

One of the great temptations of change is to take on more than is necessary or desirable. In one great sweep Darlene was planning to change her life. But it did not take long to realize that such an expansive plan was, perhaps, a bit too ambitious to accomplish all in one breath.

Expanding one's diaphragm and inhaling a breath of air is one of the fundamental requirements to sustain life. Thomas adds another aspect to what was fundamental to his survival.

> It is about how a new student must leave his network of comfort and adjust to a more competitive and new mode of learning and living. It is about how a new student must realize that school is no longer everything; that there must be balance between the brain, the body, and the soul. And that in the end, it is the people, and not so much the studying that will help him survive — emotionally.

Francine has come to understand that change can play on our emotions when she states that "all of a sudden you are in class with all sorts of people who were at the top of their classes. You are not as special anymore."

Change often holds us close and, as Tanya has discovered, other times it sets us free. She begins, "I moved from Ontario, and found a certain kind of FREEDOM here . . ."

Change is one of the most reliable and constant factors in life and is foundational to the learning process. Vaill (1996) has defined learning as "changes a person makes in himself or herself that increase the know-why and/or the know-what and/or the know-how the person possesses with respect to a given subject" (p. 21). He is a proponent of the notion that we should adopt learning as a way of being. That is, learning should be an integral part of our mentality or our way of *venturing out into the world.*

CHAPTER FOUR
CONCLUSION

Finding our Place

The expression "venturing out into the world" conjures up images in my mind which range from walking to school for the first time to traveling to distant lands. But once our walk is no longer new and our travels are over is our admission into the world granted? The notion of venturing out gives us a platform from which to construct an understanding of how we find our place in the world which, for the purposes of this discussion, is defined as the comfort and connection we establish with our surroundings. It is not a physical space in which we can sit or stand. It is not static, rather dynamic. But our human nature compels us to go in search of it if we have wandered out into the unfamiliar. It is when we are able to re-establish comfort that we know we have found our place. But this too is ever changing. If we get too settled in our comfort without venturing out again we will become com*plac*ent. We all live with this constant tension between seeking and having found our place.

Like the horizon which lies in the distance on a clear day the possibilities that a post-secondary education can provide seem truly expansive. However, the terrain does not always extend as far as the eye can see. There are times, in this journey, where students find the horizon impossibly close, restricting their ability to see or move beyond their current station. One such barrier is the GPA perspective. The more negative effects of fully adopting the perspective are the limitations that it imposes on students' abilities to continue to move forward. Many students come to the university with the

expectation of exploring new subject areas and ideas only to find themselves retreating back to more familiar places in order to avoid the discomfort which is often associated with the perspective. In this retreat they call on previously established skills to guide them on their way. However, in doing so they often deny themselves the opportunity to enhance their skills to a level more appropriate to deal with the elevated demands of the new environment.

Each student reacts a little differently to the confines of the perspective. For some it is too daunting an idea to proceed into the unfamiliar when the stakes are so high. Their reputation, parental expectations and the University's financial contribution all ride on their performance. The perspective has created such a barrier that they are not even able to see beyond it, although some are able to remain within the confines of the perspective and find a certain comfort there. They soon figure out what is required of them and are able to perform to the expected standards. But many more of them succumb to the pressure that builds in this restricted space as manifested by their inability to maintain the grade point average required of them by the scholarship program.

Students who recognize that the GPA perspective exists but are still able to see that which lies beyond are also both successful and unsuccessful in the achieving the required academic standing. To them, the perspective does not exist as a barrier but an attitude that they can choose to adopt or dismiss. Some will use it as a tool to succeed by insuring that their studies take priority over other activities, while others will make choices which do not necessarily put their studies first. In either case, they know they are not bound by the perspective except by the choices they make.

Occasionally a student will not recognize the confines of the perspective or will simply dismiss it altogether creating their own view from which to position themselves in the world. Whether or not they meet the institutional definition of success is not of much interest to them as they have generally established their own means with which to measure their performance.

Not unlike travelling to a new country, students who have become a part of the university community are suddenly thrust into an environment with a new social order, a different culture, and new rules. Although it does take some time to get used to the new surroundings our most basic instinct is to try to fit in. The manner in which this fitting takes place impacts the degree to which students will find comfort. The measure of fit is generally articulated in terms of loose or tight. Students can be found dispersed all along this loose/tight continuum with varying levels of comfort. At one end, the snugness of fit can create a sense of academic incarceration. This discomfort often precipitates a desire to shed that which has caused the condition, however, it is understood that this cannot easily be done. With four years of study required to complete an undergraduate degree this condition is likely to persist. For students who continue to resist against the taut fit, chafing is bound to occur.

At the same marker on this continuum are the students who take comfort in the boundaries that are present at the university. They take solace in the fact that there is a relationship between the amount of work that is put into a course and the amount of reward that will be reaped. They immerse themselves to the level at which they hope to emerge.

At the far end of the continuum are the students who do not recognize what the university boundaries are and flail as a result. They feel anonymous, and disconnected. They are in danger of heightening their alienation if they are not able to plug into a network of support which includes family, friends, and university officials. For them having so few boundaries increases their angst as they are in constant wonder as to where to begin. For others, this freedom is a welcome change from the watchful eye of the secondary school. They are free to come and go as they please, attend class if they choose, work hard if they feel like it or slack off if they don't. Here you will find many students who have been led somewhat astray by the freedoms found at university. A typical profile of this student is one who spends the first year very engaged in social and extra-curricular activities. Then, in subsequent years, has tempered their social habits and settled into a more solid work routine in an effort to improve their academic performance. An alternate profile at this point on the continuum is the student who takes advantage of the many opportunities available at university. These are the students who have connected with professors and are assisting in research work, are active with environmental groups, write articles for the university newspaper, and generally recognize and take advantage of the many opportunities available.

The university environment can be quite insular for those students who choose to linger there and do not explore the spaces beyond. But, as many students have discovered much of what and how we learn exists outside of the university walls. The world which lies in the distance beckons some but does not seem to call out for others. The students who choose to ignore the call often find comfort within the university environment only to be faced again

with the struggles of transition as they make their way beyond. Others, who have ventured out on a regular basis become familiar and comfortable in and outside of the university. Their final trek away from the university is uninhibited by the difficulties of transition.

To plot our travels, we might draw a straight line on a page which extends from point A to point B. And, as was suggested by our metaphoric continuum, there would be students speckled all along that line. But this linear representation does not adequately illustrate the tensions that students experience which pull them from that line and place them in the surrounding areas. Even life within the university is filled with the tension of making decisions between that which lies to the right and that which lies to the left. And to make it more complex this multidimensional configuration of the placement of students continues to shift as students move up, down, in and out to find comfort, or back to retreat toward comfort. But whatever direction they choose they can only be found in one place at a time. This can be a frustrating experience for students as they attempt to balance the competing demands of university life.

The essence of venturing out is change. It is both a change that we make and a change that we experience. To make a change is most often to see a physical manifestation of that change as would happen if you left a room. To experience a change is to engage, or be engaged, in a process of change. It is to absorb the change by our physical senses; to understand it, to feel it, to sense it, and so on. This type of change is much harder to see as it may have an unclear beginning or an indeterminate end. However, if we allow the space for change and learn to linger there we may find a place which we might

otherwise never have known existed. There is not any one place that provides comfort. It is the degree to which we settle into the space which determines our comfort. Just as the researcher's chair seemed so large at first and now seems a better fit, so too will be the students' journeys once they feel confident to tarry in the spaces a while.

Making our Way

Scholarship students can generally be characterized as high performing individuals who have spent a great deal of their time, prior to their arrival at university, rehearsing and honing their skills. Their performance has been acknowledged by the grades they have received, praise from their teachers, accolades from their peers, and perks from their schools. Inadvertently, however, teachers, parents, and peers may be fostering a performative attitude in these students which, in some cases, proves to be limiting as they venture away from familiar places.

For students whose identity has developed as a result of gaining affirmation for that which they know, to receive a mark of inacceptance is to have their identity rejected. McPike (1998) writes, "In the world of school, identity is based on facts and figures as if the numbers could all be added up, divided, and a percentage of identity assigned. Such a resulting grade assesses the worth of that identity and the likeliness of its success within the system" (p. 2). Fear of exposing themselves to *not* knowing and suffering grades of inacceptance will often override scholarship students' desires to take academic risks. The successful ones, however, are those who are able to put aside their performative attitudes in exchange for more inquisitive, searching

attitudes. They are able to recognize that the evaluation process is not a measure of their identity rather a pre-determined set of rules that govern who will and will not succeed. To revert back to their old patterns of performance might serve them in the shorter term, however, to be truly successful they must learn to unravel the golf ball rather than to simply play with it.

Paying attention to the refined bits and pieces and taking pleasure in learning for learning's sake usually pays great dividends to students. In doing so, they are able to look at the obvious but understand what is behind it and why it is important. Their ability to engage with new subject matter rather than to sit as passive observers is what ultimately leads them to deeper knowledge. As they come to grips with the scholarly dimensions of their lives they will begin the metamorphosis from intellectual adolescence to intellectual maturity. Their grasp of the scholarly routine will provide the means with which to apprehend new knowledge. The more voracious their appetite for that knowledge, the stronger they will become in their ideas and, with strength comes scholarly fitness.

As a runner can achieve fitness by increasing the capacity of their lungs, so can a student who becomes open and inspired toward new learning become fit for the rigours of university life. This expansion will not be limited to a single organ, which in this case is a singular discipline within the academy, rather, it will be an expansion their intellectual possibilities.

Where do we go from here?

Scholarship students at Simon Fraser University should experience a sense of community with their entrance scholarship peers and others at the University.

In 1997 Student Recruitment initiated a mentorship program which has been instrumental in creating a *community* of entrance scholars at SFU. Currently this program, which is headed up by a group of students called "The Mindbank" organizes a few events each year which provide both social and professional development opportunities for scholarship students. This initiative should be expanded to include mentorship pods or individual mentorship connections. Mentorship pods could be achieved by selecting one senior student in a given program to meet with, and be a support contact for, several new students in that same program. This type of mentorship arrangement is more easily accomplished than an individual mentorship program, as there are usually a greater number of incoming students than on-going entrance scholars.

During the data collection phase of this project, the listserv which was established simply as a means to get my message to the entrance scholarship students, became an open forum for discussion. This was not entirely anticipated as the students were requested to either send their writing directly to me, or to submit it via the web site provided for them. The result was that all entrance scholarship students were receiving messages from those who chose to send them to the entire group. Although the students had the ability to remove themselves from the list, some voiced their frustration

regarding the number of messages that were cluttering their mailboxes. In response to their concerns, the listserv was shut down. The out-cry at terminating the impromptu discussion was a clear indicator that our scholarship students *do* need a way to communicate with each other. It is important for them to realize that others are experiencing the same pressures, challenges and frustrations. To that end, the implementation of a web-based discussion group should be considered. This discussion group could be accessed by all scholarship students as well as the "Mindbankers" who could initiate and moderate the discussions.

Each of the four Student Recruiters should take on some responsibility for the students that make up the community of scholars. Currently all recruiters attend events held in support of entrance scholars, however, their commitment should extend into the area of advising these students. This would give scholarship students the opportunity to make broader connections at the University and generally provide a broader base of support for them.

Student Recruitment's commitment toward the development of co-curricular programs should be demonstrated by offering scholarship students a range of development opportunities to aid in their continued academic success.

Simon Fraser University has a wealth of resources to draw upon which do not require any financial investment. Many faculty members, professional staff, and graduate students are prepared to share their time and expertise with scholarship students. These individuals could be called upon to do mini-seminars on topics which range from *how to get the most out of a course* to

surviving the first year of university. A non-academic curriculum should be established such that these seminars are offered at strategic times in the semester when students are most likely to need them. Consideration should be given to offering all co-curricular activities on a more consistent basis, rather than on the current *ad-hoc* basis.

Periodically, an assessment of students' needs should be done which inform the programs which are currently being delivered by the mentorship group. This needs assessment activity could be built right into the activities of the existing programs such that future programs are driven by the actual needs of the participants.

Students should be given the opportunity to contribute back to the scholarship program just as they would as alumni of the University.

University alumni are often called upon to contribute back to the University by means of their financial and personal support. Their ability to contribute in these ways gives them the opportunity to give something back to the institution that was instrumental in getting them on their way. Scholarship students can also make a contribution to the scholarship program through their personal support. Senior scholarship students should be invited to assist in the organization of events. Their attendance at events will also be instrumental in continuing to foster a sense of community among the entrance scholars. An invitation to become mentors to the incoming scholars will help to get the new students on *their* way. At events, such as the Scholarship Orientation, entrance scholars should be invited to share their stories, similar to the ones which have been furnished through this study, such that new

scholarship winners are able to make their own personal connection with the experiences of the students who have come before them.

Student Recruitment should engage in reflective practices such that a more mindful approach to the evaluation and administration of the Entrance Scholarship Program is achieved.

Simon Fraser University is a large organization that operates under the guidelines of policies, procedures, and protocol. As administrators of a program which is designed to support students we must resist the temptation to operate this program with efficiency as our primary motivator. It is important to ensure that proceduralist thinking does not prevail in the evaluation of our programs and to recognize that if we evaluate our programs from a human perspective, and make changes and additions accordingly, the benefits will be far reaching. Re-examination of our institutional practices which take the student into consideration will be a constant reminder that we are a "Student Services" unit and that our programs should be student centered rather than administratively driven.

Looking Anew

> At the heart of many theories of intelligence is a belief that it is
> possible to identify an optimum fit between individual and
> environment. However, how we interact with our environment is
> not a matter of fitting ourselves to an external norm; rather, it is
> a process by which we give form, meaning, and value to our world.
> (Langer, 1997, p. 137)

Langer suggests that each of us, as individuals, has a unique and different way of connecting and fitting into our world. It is that mindfulness toward individuality which I hope to inject into the further development and delivery of the Entrance Scholarship Program at Simon Fraser University. The project title, *Keeping the Scholar in Scholarship*, is two-fold in meaning. First and foremost, it is that we remain mindful of the lives of the students behind the scholarships — the students who have come to the University with all of their hopes and promise, but who have also come with unique challenges and concerns. And secondly, it means that in creating a more mindful approach toward the administration of the scholarship program, more of our scholarship students will realize academic success.

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APPENDIX A

Student Submission Web Site

SimonFraserUniversity

## Dean of Student Services and Registrar
Burnaby • British Columbia V5A 1S6 • Canada

WELCOME!

To Student Recuitment's Entrance Scholarship Research Project

We are very pleased that you have chosen to participate in this important research project. Your contribution will help insure the continued academic success of all SFU Entrance Scholarship students.

In text box below please tell us of an incident, situation, or sequence of events that illustrate the difficulties of adjusting to university life. Most helpful to us would be a vivid description of something that happened to you. In just a few paragraphs, and without identifying information, write about such an experience of difficulty from which we might gain insight into the challenges of adjusting to university life.
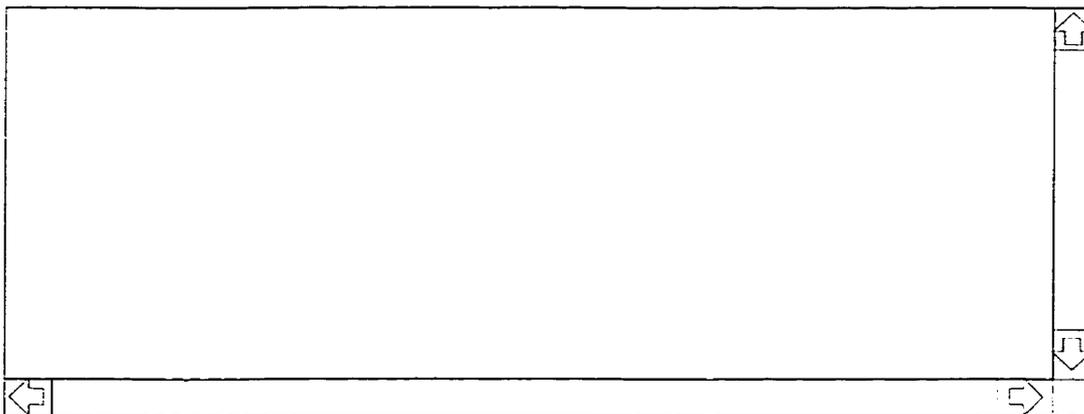
If you are satisfied with your entry please click the "Submit Response" button to send it on to us. The information you provide is completely anonymous and confidential. Accordingly, this form is not encrypted or otherwise secured.

Submit Response   **Please click just once.**

Clear field

This information is collected under the auspices of Royal Roads University and the Code of Conduct for Research Involving Humans. The information will be published as part of a masters thesis and used to provide recommendations for the development of co-curricular programming for entrance scholarship students at SFU. If you have any questions about the collection and use of this information, or would like to obtain a copy of the final document, please contact Michele Black, Student Recruitment, Office of the Registrar, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6, telephone (604) 291-4862, or by email at Michele_Black@sfu.ca. Concerns or complaints may be directed to Rick Smith, Director, Student Recruitment.

APPENDIX B

Student Response: Sample A

I managed to maintain the CGPA required to continue receiving my scholarship installments. Generally I found it easier to maintain my GPA as the semesters progressed. My first semester was by far the most difficult for me and I believe that if help is to be provided, it should focus on this semester.

My first semester GPA certainly reflected the transition from high school; I found very little help in adjusting to the different expectations of university, especially the lecture/textbook format in which things appeared on my examinations that hadn't been discussed in lectures. This concept was completely foreign to me, as I had never experienced it in high school. Information regarding this, and strategies for condensing and meaningfully interpreting not-discussed textbook information would be helpful. Also helpful would be encouraged initial interviews with academic advisors and former students regarding professors and general "reputations" of courses and their difficulties or level of abstract thought required. I must say here that I did not take an active approach to this, but rather assumed that I wouldn't have any difficulties (I took 18 credits of science/arts classes my first semester).

An inherent problem with students receiving scholarships I would guess is lack of intimidation of the university setting given our lack of difficulty with high school material (whether universal or not, I don't know). University standards certainly seem manageable to me now; my GPA remaining close to what it was in high school, however the different strategies and general information I have learned about certain classes/profs and methods of studying have been essential. A last point I must include involves my ignorance, first semester, of the meaning of CGPA (again I was not very active in obtaining information regarding it). My understanding of the grades required to maintain my scholarship was that I was permitted a 3.0 first semester, but that I had to obtain a 3.6 (semester) GPA for the remaining semesters. Somehow I missed the distinction between the two until about halfway through my second semester, when I discovered that my CGPA must rise from the 3.45 I received first semester to a 3.6. This added pressure was, needless to say not wanted.

Student Response: Sample B

I admit that first year was particularly challenging, and perhaps regular socials for scholarship winners would help in this regard. However, in response to many other students complaints about the CGPA requirements being too high, I am in disagreement. Yes, maintaining a high GPA is extremely challenging and stressful, but isn't that what makes being honoured with a scholarship rewarding? Personally, I wouldn't find it as satisfying, nor would I be as motivated to perform well, if the CGPA requirement was lowered. Sure, this means having to study hard and give up a lot of other things in life for the meantime, but in the long run I believe this is only to the benefit of students.

Student Response: Sample C

A few of the things that caused me the most problems.

My first year, I was not used to studying, being one of those high school students that coasted through all his courses and got excellent grades. When I started taking university courses, I didn't know I was supposed to read the text book, and my note taking skills were inadequate for the rate at which the material was being presented.

In my second semester I took 6 courses (19 credits). I never really knew just how much work that was going to be. I ended up not being able to keep up with all my courses.

Also the impersonal way in which the profs taught the material was completely different from what I'd been used to in high school where the class size was an average of 30 people.

There are also the social issues, trying to stay in contact with my high school friends, all of whom had graduated, and were working full time at a gas station or something similar. Feeling pressured to party with them as often as possible led to an inadequate amount of time spent on my studies.

I hope my answers to your questions help prepare future students that come to SFU on an entrance scholarship. I hope they have more success in their first year.

Student Response: Sample D

Well, no doubt you've got my name down as a person who lost their entrance scholarship after the first semester of attending SFU. I think maybe one of the key factors which attributed to this was the fact that I jumped right into five classes which included two four labs. Not only was this painful in terms of lots of class hours, but also I took the classes that my program recommended.

If I had to give a first year student advise, I would probably suggest four classes, at least for the first semester at SFU. It really is a huge jump from high school. I wish that I had these words of advise before I started. I lost my scholarship after the first semester here for not being able to pull off a grade point average of 3.0 (I was just under). I laugh now at the thought of not being able to achieve this but at the time I was devastated.

Anyway, I'm over it and I guess kinda relieved that I don't have to worry about the pressures of maintaining a scholarship....broke....but relieved.