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Returning Women's Workshop and Retention of Returning Women Students

Kimberly E. Lamb
Portland State University

THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Kimberly E. Lamb for the Master of Science in Sociology were presented February 3, 1998, and accepted by the thesis committee and the department.

COMMITTEE APPROVALS:

Kathryn A. Farr, Chair

Lee J. Haggerty

Johanna Brenner

Mary K. Kinnick
Representative of the
Office of Graduate Studies

DEPARTMENT APPROVAL:

Robert W. Shotola, Chair
Department of Sociology

ABSTRACT
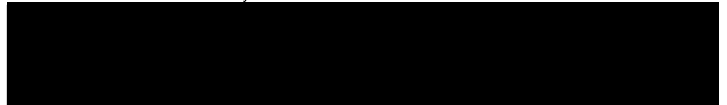
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Kimberly E. Lamb for the Master of Science in Sociology presented February 3, 1998.

Title: Returning Women's Workshop and Retention of Returning Women Students.

This thesis investigates the retention of returning adult women students by examining: 1) demographic and motivational backgrounds of women who attend a university Returning Women's Workshop and women who do not; 2) retention, bonding, and support measures for the two groups of women; 3) student evaluations of the various Workshop components. The thesis also describes the history of the Workshop and the Women's Study Program.

A telephone survey was conducted of women who either participated in the Returning Women's Workshop or attended the University during the same selected years. All the women surveyed were over the age of 24 and had attended Portland State University during the Fall term of 1990 or 1991. Workshop participants and non-participants were chosen to allow comparison between students receiving and not receiving the resources from the Workshop. Two years were chosen to allow for any difference in Workshop leadership.

RETURNING WOMEN'S WORKSHOP

AND

RETENTION OF

RETURNING WOMEN STUDENTS

by

KIMBERLY E. LAMB

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Follow up interviews were conducted with five women who had expressed strong feelings either for the University or the Workshop. These interviews helped clarify and enhance data from the surveys.

The findings indicate that women who attended the Workshop were more likely than non-attendants to be freshmen, and to be apprehensive about returning to school, but feeling supported at home. Attendees were also more likely to be older and to have a higher household yearly income. Although the graduation rates between Workshop participants and non-participants were similar, the graduation rate for apprehensive women who attended the Workshop was much higher than that of their counterparts.

All of the components of the Workshop received high evaluations, but the highest praise reflected both in the survey and interviews had to do with meeting other women, sharing personal experiences, and having a sense of belonging. Although retention rates appear to be the same whether or not the woman attended the Workshop, the open-ended survey questions and interviews showed the Workshop to have a major positive impact on the participants' experience at PSU.

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the 1960's many women started returning to colleges and universities to continue an education that was previously halted due to family responsibilities, finances, and other such things. These women brought with them a number of responsibilities and roles which produce stresses and needs not normally found in traditional-age students. To retain this special group of students, universities have developed a variety of services and programs. There is evidence that support groups for returning adult students increase social bonding which increases campus involvement and possibly enhances retention. Portland State University (PSU) developed a Returning Women's Workshop in 1977 with the goal of enhancing social bonding, campus awareness and retention. Although the Workshop has been offered for almost 20 years, there hasn't been a thorough look at its impact on the women who have participated. This thesis involves such a comprehensive look.

During the women's movement in the 1960's, women became increasingly aware that they had certain rights and that one of those rights was an education. Women started returning to school after time breaks to raise families and/or follow a husband's employment. During this time, the civil rights movement was strong and

eventful. Students wanted to learn about what they were seeing and experiencing on and around the campus (Brenner, 1997).

In 1969 a number of students first approached Professor Nona Glazer of the Sociology Department at Portland State University, requesting a class about women. She knew little about the women's movement and had only recently become aware of women's issues during a Sociological Women's Association meeting in San Francisco in 1969 in which she was exposed to a women's caucus. Because the Sociology Department would not at that time schedule such a class, Professor Glazer developed and taught a class about women as an extra load in the Department's lounge. The class was so large she had to separate the students into two groups for discussions. She taught this class two times, and still more students became interested (Glazer, 1997).

In 1970, Professor Glazer introduced Sociology of Women, the first real Women's Studies course to appear at Portland State. It was the students in this course and in her previous overload course who became interested in continuing the study of women in society. Professor Glazer had heard of possible funds available to support courses and research on women. Professors Nancy Hoffman and Nancy Porter of the English department joined Professor Glazer in drafting a proposal for a research institute and Women's Studies program. At the same time a group of interested women (consisting of faculty, students and community members) met and decided to organize a weekly lecture series on topics related to women and open it to the University and community. They also surveyed PSU faculty to locate women professors who could ask their department chairs for permission to teach courses on

women in their own departments. Lectures were arranged through the Educational Actives Office, and faculty, students and community women shared the program responsibilities (Barham, 1995). Professor Glazer gave the first of these lectures (Glazer, 1997). Audience participation was emphasized during these lectures, and the response was so great that courses were guaranteed for the following term (Barham, 1995).

The group printed and distributed their own descriptive catalog for spring 1971 registration and established a "shadow" Department of Women's Studies. This was the first such program in the state of Oregon. During the summer of 1971 the group sought funds to pay students, faculty and community members to teach, to pay office staff, and to purchase supplies. They also provided official course descriptions in the University catalog. At the suggestion of several academic deans, a Certificate in Women's Studies was developed, thus "legitimating" the program. By fall of 1972 over 40 courses had attracted more then 2000 students, and in 1976 the first courses in the Women's Studies Program approved by the Oregon Board of Higher Education were taught (Howe, 1976, p. 93, cited in Barham).

The reasons for and goals of the Women's Studies Program appear to be many. According to Professor Glazer, the Program developed out of a response from the students. She felt that "there's a community of women [who were] unrecognized and ignored in the curriculum and there [were] no courses that address the issues that women experience." It was her goal to give her female students "a sense of their intellectual power" by teaching them that they were capable of "learning hard stuff."

Professor Glazer states that goals of the Women Studies classes were as numerous as the number of teachers (Glazer 1997).

Eventually it was decided that a workshop, in the form of a class, would be developed as a way of introducing returning women to the University and feminist thought. According to the past schedule listings, the first Returning Women's Workshop was offered in 1977. It appears that the course was taught by faculty until the University underwent major budget problems in the early 1980's. At that time Professor Brenner, who had been hired in 1982 as the Women's Studies Program Coordinator, asked students to teach the class for academic credits. Professor Brenner saw the benefits of having "peer" teachers and has kept that format to date (Brenner, 1997).

One of the first two students to teach the Workshop in 1984 was Dee Thompson, currently a counselor for PSU's Career Center. She and the other student, Gisele Tierney, currently an instructor in PSU's Speech Department, used a format similar to that of the past faculty instructors. They dealt with issues around roles, expectations, and anxiety, and had a number of presentations by various departments. They brought to the class a number of feminist theories which they had been exposed to in the first Women's Studies core class, Introduction to Women's Studies. Thompson (1997) reported that she liked having a "feminist awakening" in the class and felt it was positively received. She said there were always a few students who didn't care for the feminist perspective, but that most women enjoyed having their experiences validated.

Professor Brenner, the present Coordinator of the Women's Studies Program, feels that the purpose of the Women's Studies courses, even today, is to make women aware that their experiences aren't isolated, but rather reflect those of many women. In the case of returning adult students, her message is that they "are older women now returning to school because women's oppression had told them they should stay at home and let that be their identity."

According to the Program's files and current employees, the phenomenon of adult women returning to school got underway at PSU in the mid 1960's, and the percent of PSU's enrollment of women over the age of 25 hovered at the 27% mark in 1977; it remains there today. With changes in work force needs[1], it might be expected that more women will return to the universities. It is important then to have programs in place to help these women adjust to school.

Since 1977, the Returning Women's Workshop's goal has been to help women adapt to the academic world and succeed in obtaining their degree (retention). The Workshop is now conducted as a one-term class with two peer teachers who plan the curriculum and lead discussions. The curriculum is designed to help the participating women learn about the campus and its resources, get a feel for classroom speaking, learn time management, develop skills for essay tests, develop networks, and learn about the transition process of returning to school. Because returning women students

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[1] The American Society for Training and Development estimates that by the year 2000, 75% of the work force will need retraining (Twigg, 1994).

are usually at some stage of transition when they restart school, the class is set up for discussions and advice concerning problems that may occur during transition.

Very little research has been done on the effects of the Workshop. A brief study, done in 1987 by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning(OIRP) at PSU, did show a higher two year retention rate for a sample of Returning WomenWorkshop participants than for the control groups. The three control samples consisted of the general returning female population at PSU over 24 years of age, men at PSU over the age of 24 years, and the general University population.

It has been the goal of the present research to see if there is a difference in retention rates, experiences, and educational satisfaction between women over the age of 24 who have attended the Workshop and women who have not. If indeed there is a difference, the hope is to find out what component(s) of the Workshop had the biggest impact. This research shows the differences between women who take the Workshop and those who do not, the differences in their experiences at PSU, and what the women who took the Workshop liked best about it.

The research should not only be beneficial to the Women's Studies Program and The Returning Women's Workshop, but should also be useful in the University's retention struggles.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The term "reentry women" refers to women returning to school after a lapse of time. In operationalizing "reentry woman" students, most studies include women who return to school after a period of time off and are 25 years or older. Reentry women have started coming back to universities and colleges in large numbers since the 1980's (Copland, 1988). By the 1990's two-thirds of the student population were reentry students, and over 50% of those were women (Carfagna, 1989). With a rise in the need for retraining, it's logical to assume that the number of women returning will continue to increase (Twigg, 1994).

Universities all over the nation have taken note that with a change in the student population comes a need for different services. Reentry women bring with them several roles and responsibilities not found in traditional students; for example: the roles of wife, mother, housekeeper, wage earner, community member and in some situations, caregiver for elder parents. For these students balancing roles requires assistance and understanding (Lewis, 1988). Support groups, mentor programs and workshops have sprung up to facilitate the transitions that reentry women face.

Models of Transition

The transition reentry women go through has been given a number of different labels and explained by many different theories. Pitman (1986) refers to this transition

as a stage of adult life, or a developmental stage. She refers specifically to Sale's (1978) model which relies on sociological role theory and on psychological development theory. The model encompasses physiological changes, social role transitions, cultural ideals and historical realities. Sales claims that roles are central to the major themes emerging at each stage of development. Her eight-stage model of adult female development includes: 1) young adulthood, 2) choosing life roles, 3) role completion, 4) readjustment, 5) becoming one's own person, 6) mid-life crisis, 7) mellowing, and 8) old age. Pitman concluded that the importance of these stages for reentry women lay in the transition period between ending one life phase and beginning the next.

Mezirow (1978) believes that transition occurs when a person's "meaning perspective" coincides with her or his reality. "Meaning perspective" is that which we hold as truth and determines the way we think, feel and perceive the world. "Meaning perspective" is drawn from our history, and we relive it over and over until we come to a time when we determine it no longer works. Transition is the reforming of our "meaning perspective." In changing, students move from what Mezirow termed "an uncritical organic relationship to a self-consciously contractual relationship with individuals, institutions and ideologies" (p. 108). Perspective transformation is precipitated by life's dilemmas and crises.

After studying reentry women, Mezirow (1981) further concludes that the following elements are found in the dynamics of transition: (1) a disorienting dilemma; (2) self examination; (3) a critical assessment of personally internalized role

assumptions and a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations; (4) relating one's discontent to similar experiences of others or to public issues-recognizing that she's not the only one with these problems; (5) exploring options for new ways of acting; (6) building competence and self-confidence in new roles; (7) planning a course of action (8) acquiring knowledge and skills for carrying out the new plans; (9) provisional efforts to try new roles and to assess feedback and (10) a reintegration into society with the new "meaning perspective."

Kegan's (1984) constructive-developmental model illuminates the reentry phase of women's transition in terms of the move from third to fourth-order consciousness. (The first and second stages refer to childhood development.) The third order of consciousness is called the "interpersonal" or "mutuality" stage of development. It is within this level that the woman thinks, believes and acts on the premise that she "just is" a certain way and thus cannot control or change her responses. A woman at the third order of consciousness experiences herself as responsible for and affected by everything and everyone in her "psychological surrounding." This isn't something she chooses nor is she even aware of it.

In contrast, the fourth order of consciousness, or "institutional" stage of development involves a new perspective on her (and others') reactions, beliefs, experiences, values and relationships. These things are no longer "just the way I am." She can look at her former reality and see its contradictions and limitations. She can recognize that her thinking, beliefs and actions are not caused by someone else, but that she can examine, explore, control, and articulate her ownership of them. The woman in

the fourth order of consciousness can look at her relationships, work and community with more awareness. She realizes that her way, or her group's way, is not *the* right way, but *a* way. She will reconstruct her beliefs in light of a value system *she* creates (Kegan, 1984). This internal value system helps in facing the challenges of returning back to school.

Role Conflict and Management Research

Research on the dilemmas faced by reentry women shows an overwhelming consensus that managing multiple roles and dealing with role conflicts are the two most common problems. Unlike traditional students whose role as "learner" is the primary role, reentry women carry demanding and time-consuming roles such as wife, mother, housekeeper and wage-earner. Lewis (1988) believes that "many returning women are pulled in several (and often conflicting) directions by a seemingly endless stream of demands from work, family, friends and community" (p.7). She observes that it is not unusual for family and friends to oppose the woman's return to school. Because a woman is socialized to care for others to the point of putting her own needs last, she is torn between maintaining existing relationships and her lack of time for herself as a student. Peterson (1992) describes the reentry woman's transition as "straddling two cultures." It can mark a significant separation from the past, and as she begins to take on the symbols of the college culture, be it dress, taste in music, vocabulary or beliefs, she may be criticized for devoting time to school rather than family.

As far as household duties go, women feel that they still do most of the household chores even while attending school. Most of the student wives that Suitor (1987) studied felt that although their husbands claimed to do more work around the house, they still found themselves doing over their share. Most claimed that they had lowered their expectations of the cleanliness of the house as a way to cope. The husbands of those wives expressed unhappiness not only with the decline of their wives' performance of family roles, but with the fact that they themselves had to increase their contribution.

Introspective Concerns and Retention Support

Lewis (1988) continues with a description of personal concerns faced by reentry women. Many fear that they will not be able to compete with younger minds who have more recent educational experiences. Reentry women may lack self-esteem and confidence, and because of physical differences (of age) from the traditional student, they may feel self-conscious about their appearance. Reentry women also have "introspective concerns that are based on their own mental and emotional states. These concerns may be centered on financial pressures, on changing life roles as mothers or wives, on the realization that there is a finite amount of time remaining to accomplish goals, or on feelings of guilt that sometimes accompany a return to school" (p. 9). Retention is many times hampered by these internal conflicts.

The development of a "sense of voice" is the turning point, according to Tarule (1988), who found that women succeeded in school once they learned to speak in their

own voice. She feels that sharing conversation with other returning students creates a relational connection and thus shapes the student's approach to the school and conceptualization of the material she is learning. Tarule goes on to say that the woman gains confidence in herself as a "knower with a capacity to articulate and discuss her ideas" (p.32). The returning woman student is validated and supported through discussions and becomes a lifelong learner capable of monitoring her own learning needs and procedures.

Belenky et al. (1986) describe returning women for whom life has been "silent, abusive, and non-nurturing" as "received knowers;" the source of self-knowledge comes from others, not from within themselves. The knowledge they have about themselves is the knowledge they are told by others. These women learn by listening. They see themselves as careful listeners to ideas, thoughts and convictions of others, and while they can be open to listening and taking in knowledge, they often lack the confidence in their own ability to speak. They believe that the truth lies in others and possess little confidence that they may have knowledge to add to class. "Received knowers" are frequently surprised and relieved to hear others saying the same things they are thinking.

Women who are primarily "received knowers" flourish and celebrate in association with those like them (Belenky et al., 1986). "It is these kinds of relationships that provide women with experiences of mutuality, equality and reciprocity that are helpful in enabling them to disentangle their own voice from the voice of others (p38)." It helps to call forth in them a powerful sense of their capacities

of knowing. Belenky et al. further point out that as a "received knower" moves through stages into a "connected" or "balanced" knower, she can have a difficult time identifying the new source of knowing and articulating the process. She may be shaky about her judgment but is proud if others affirm her conclusion and opinions. Carfagna (1989) feels returning women both need and excel with a space to express their voices. She believes that returning women are more comfortable with learning situations that involve a feeling of connection with peers and teachers, where there is a feeling of cooperation rather than the competition frequently found in traditional classes.

French feminist writer Marquerite Duras (1973) wrote that we learn things by the way we see them. Men move quickly to impose their own conceptual schemes on the experiences of women. These schemes do little to help women make sense of their experiences, and they may further extinguish the experiences. Women must find their own words to make meaning of their experiences.

> Women have been in darkness for centuries. They don't know themselves. Or, only poorly. And when women write, they translate this darkness. Men don't translate. They begin from a theoretical platform that is already in place, already elaborated. The writings of women are really translated from the unknown, like a new way of communicating, rather than an already formed language (Duras as quoted in Belenky et al., 1986 p.203).

According to Belenky et al. (1986), women's courses in feminist theory help women translate their ideas from the darkness of private experiences into a shared public language which gives them the voice they need. They also believe that if educators allow knowledge to emerge from firsthand experiences, instead of imposing

their own expectations and arbitrary requirements, they encourage students to develop their own knowledge and thought.

Taylor (1989) feels that women who are engaged in achieving a fourth order of consciousness at times resist the very development of self-authorization that they seek. Sometimes this is because they fear losing the self they know or the relationships they are comfortable with, and sometimes because they feel overwhelmed. Taylor feels that reentry students need to build support and collaborative learning with peers. She feels that a woman in transition needs someone "in front of her, to guide her, to encourage her; face-to-face with her, to mirror her; and beside her as the.... [support person while she].... undertakes her own journey" (p.88).

Families of returning women play an important role in the women's education. Because of the time needed for studying, family members are needed to take over some of the woman's household duties. However, as mentioned, too many times the house-work is left up to the woman.

On a more psychological level, Taylor (1989) writes that as a reentry woman moves into a fourth level of consciousness, her connections need not be severed but only transformed. She found that reentry women do not appear to have lost their fundamental orientations toward their connections, but what has changed is their relationship to them. The women she studied had no desire to quit being a wife and mother, but they no longer wanted to "disappear" into those roles. Because of this, Kegan (1982) believes that if a spousal relationship has been built entirely on affiliation,

nurturance and identification, it may not stand the shift to distinctness, independence or acceptance of separate interest.

Redding and Dowling (1992) emphasize the necessity for family and institutionalized rituals to mark the rite of passage from non-student to student. The return to school not only marks a change for the student, but also disturbs the family. Their study found that rituals involving all family members made them feel part of "educating mom." These rituals help mark and lay out the various new and changed roles while comforting women who may feel guilty about "abandoning" their families. The rites help them to clarify the often conflicting duties and to manage, if not resolve, the turmoil.

The first ritual discussed was visits to campus with husband (or partner) and children. Formal visits to the campus can allay fears of both children and non-degree husbands. Allotting undisturbed time and a place for study is another important ritual for the student and the other family members, who need to "bridge the gap" between old and new behavior. The responsibilities of wife and mother are so powerfully entrenched in Western culture that without extraordinary efforts these roles are hard to change (Redding and Dowling, 1992).

Other important rituals are undertaken with an effort to preserve spousal and parental roles. Redding and Dowling (1992) point out that where normally the traditional student is forging independence and preparing to separate from her family, reentry women in intact marriages are struggling to build interdependence and have no intention of leaving. Rituals belong in the transition period and seem to anticipate the

reincorporation into family and society with the new status. Other rituals cited in their study include setting aside a particular night for "couple time" or "kid time," and making daily phone calls from campus to the spouse at work or kids at home.

Redding and Dowling (1992) feel that "moving participants to another point of view, to a different interpretation of their culture and to a new level in their society, is one of the major functions of rites of passage. Intelligently crafted ceremonies could assist in the formation of a new meaning perspective that eases the arduous journey of the reentry woman and her family to the day she is vested with her degree" (p. 235).

But for many women, families either do not exist, or are not supportive of their transition to school. For those women, programs can be very helpful. Mezirow (1978) feels that persons in transformation need other people for both guidance and support. He believes that programs and support groups offer a protected "staging area" in which to gain confidence and provide collateral opportunities to explore new life options. These programs and groups foster self-confidence through "counseling" with other women and through building from or expressing mutual ideologies of self-help and personal responsibility. Being with other women enables the reentry woman to "perspective take." Perspective taking, or the taking of other's perspective, is necessary for transformation because it enables the woman to recognize the difference between one's old viewpoint and alternative ones, and to decide which perspective is of more value given her situation. Even after restructuring one's reality and seeing the need for action, the determination to carry out one's plan may need special support and assistance.

Mezirow (1978) reiterates the need for transition groups and programs by pointing out that "moving to a new perspective and sustaining the actions which it requires is dependent upon an association with others who share the new perspective. Not only do you take their way of seeing for your own, but you must have their support and reinforcement to enable you to take action the new viewpoint reveals is in your interest" (p. 105). Mezirow feels that educational assistance is needed for women to acquire the skills and knowledge they have come to see as relevant. Self confidence needed for perspective transformation is often gained through a sense of competence and through a supportive social climate that encourages success and offers minimum risk.

There is evidence that belonging to a "primary" group in the work place helps alleviate work stress and brings renewed energy to the members (Olmsted, 1959). Hogg (1992) also found that the attraction or bonding one feels to a group will have a positive effect on their participation in that group. Group members who feel bonded will be more eager to conform and protect the goals of the group. Group cohesion helps people feel more secure, and they are more likely to release their unwanted stress productively through membership activities. Although school isn't a "work place," its structure, norms and goals can certainly be as stressful.

Successful Interventions

Robertson (1991) reports five recommendations for programs addressing retention of adult students: 1) understand the needs of returning women in their 30's

and 40's, 2) facilitate the integration of previous college work, 3) direct programs specifically to students who are "rusty" academically, 4) provide legitimate ways to receive credit for noncollegiate prior learning, and 5) support diverse styles of academic progress. Rendon (1994) also concluded, after conducting focus group interviews with 100 community college freshmen, that students are more successful when they are helped through the transition into college. She states that successful students most remembered incidents in which they experienced validation, and where faculty, staff, friends or family members actively reached out to them and affirmed them as capable.

Although journals are filled with theories and methods for understanding and evaluating retention outcomes, reports of actual program evaluations are scarce. There is some evidence that support groups and mentor programs facilitate various positive outcomes. For example, support groups at the University of South Carolina helped women deal with reentry, school demands and outside responsibilities and stresses. Jacob et al. (1983) found that those students who experienced more stressful life events at the beginning of school still had a harder time adjusting by the end of the semester, yet social support groups were of help. Lewis (1988) believes that because of the many stresses and "pulls" a reentry faces, the absence of institutional and personal support can make a difference between continuing participation or dropping out.

Campbell and Campbell (1997) report a successful faculty/student mentor program in which mentored students showed a higher GPA rate (2.45 vs. 2.29), more credits per semester (9.33 vs. 8.49), and lower dropout rates (14.5% vs. 26.3%). The

goal of the faulty/student mentor program was to offer information, support and guidance to the students.

Russel and Thompson (1987) evaluated a program in which peers helped first year students at a large Canadian university. Although retention wasn't measured, satisfaction and involvement on campus were examined. The authors found that the students who were contacted by peers reported both more satisfaction and involvement than the group who had no such contact. Similar to this study was a qualitative study conducted by Hampton and Norman (1997), who looked at the experiences of students who participated in a peer counseling team. These students reported a sense of "community," felt the group enabled them to feel somewhat "equal" within a hierarchical institution, and thought that the peer group was an important forum for learning.

One residential college developed a telephone network on their campus as a means to support adult learners. Vanderpool and Brown (1994) found that the phone-supported group did not have higher GPA's as hypothesized, but did have a significantly higher retention rate than the control group.

Boudreau and Kromrey (1994) conducted a longitudinal study of retention and academic performance of participants in a freshmen orientation course. This introductory level course was offered to freshmen during their first semester of attendance. The goals of the course were: 1) assessing personal strengths and setting goals, 2) learning time management, 3) reviewing study skills, including memory development, reading, note taking and test taking, 4) developing communication skills

for handling interpersonal relationships, and 5) learning about on and off campus resources. Retention rates (retained through the first year) were significantly higher (average of 70.9% vs. 62.7%) in each of the four cohorts they studied, but graduation rates were only slightly higher for participants than non-participants. Three of the four participating cohorts reported higher GPA 's and credits completed than did the non-participants.

There is some evidence, then, that intervention programs can promote student satisfaction, retention and GPA's. Not all the programs described above resulted in positive outcomes across measures. Taken together, however, theories and evaluations suggest that some sort of face-to-face group support is valuable for returning women students.

The Need for Support

When women return to school they face a number of challenges and changes. Managing roles and transitions can be overwhelming, and in many situations, support can mean a matter of staying in school or dropping out. While these various illustrations of the transition process and the need for social support are informative and applicable to returning women generally, it's also important to mention that there are women who go through school, move to a high consciousness, and handle roles with little or no support. Many of these students were raised in households where going to college was so ingrained that returning to school is almost instinctual and anxiety-free. There are also women who have little need for external support, and, for

whatever reason, internally have the power to handle change. But for those students

who need support, both universities and students appear to reap benefits from having

facilitated groups and/or programs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the current research was to examine the Returning Women's Workshop's effect on women's bonding, involvement, affection, GPA, retention, and over-all experience at Portland State University (PSU). Data were collected from telephone surveys of women's retrospective testimony about their experiences at PSU.

In addition to the surveys, I interviewed a convenience sub-sample (n=5) of the returning women, using open-ended questions for further elaboration of Workshop components and effects, and as a further check on the relationships suggested by the survey data. It was, for example, possible that some women did not have college graduation as a goal but rather had another motive for college attendance, and I wanted to explore this possibility. It was also feasible that latent functions of the Workshop, such as building friendships, were stronger determinants of retention than more manifest functions such as learning about campus resources, reading articles, etc.

Based on the literature, I believed that a number of the components associated with the Workshop would be reported as having given participants a sense of bonding. I believed that there would be reports of feeling a "oneness" with similar women, as well as reports that students found comfort and confidence from discussing personal, situational, and academic issues. My intention was to find out what feature(s), manifest

and/or latent, of the Workshop brought about the most cohesion, thus having the most

effect on the dependent outcomes. Finally, findings from the 1987 Workshop study

referred to earlier are reported.

Sample

The study design involved a cross sectional survey of college women ages 24

and above. For this study re-entry or returning adult woman student is defined as over

the age of 24 and beyond the age of what is considered to be a "traditional college-age

student", and not based on any prior college attendance. Two samples were drawn

from the data set collected by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP)

on PSU students. The first consisted of the entire population of women, over the age

of 24, who attended the Returning Women's Workshop in the fall of 1990 and 1991.

The second was made up from of random sample of women, over the age of 24,

entering PSU the same two years, but not attend the Returning Women's Workshop.

This time period was selected because it gave time for the students to have completed

their degree (survey data were collected in 1996) and reduced the possibility that the

women had moved away from the area. I chose two different years so that I could

include women in Workshops conducted by different peer leaders. For each year then,

there was a random sample of those who did not attend the Workshop and the entire

population of those who did. The final sample given to me from OIRP included 29

women who attended WS120 in 1990, 26 women who attended WS120 in 1991, 34

women who entered PSU in the fall of 1990, and 30 women who entered PSU in the fall of 1991 (N=119).

I later learned that these lists were drawn from a "frozen" file which meant no updates had been done from the time they left school. In other words, even if the student were to update a phone number, these samples would not have reflected that change. Because I was not given social security numbers, nor did I have access to the University's main data base. I was unable to check for updated information. As I started making phone calls to the women, I discovered that 53 of the numbers were no longer valid or disconnected and six of the names were without an accompanying telephone number. I left messages on nine answering machines, and three with household members other then the potential respondent; no one called back. One women refused the interview; one women was too ill to talk, and one woman wasn't over the age of 25 when she took WS120. The remaining nine phone numbers were never answered by a person or answering machine. From a previously drawn sample (in-which OIRP mistakenly included WS120 students), I eventually completed telephone interviews with four additional woman who had not attended the Workshop bringing the final sample to 20 WS120 participants and 20 non-participants.

Telephone Surveys

The survey instrument (see Appendix A for a complete copy of the questionnaire) included questions concerning bonding, retention, university involvement, enrollment in graduate school, and feelings about the Workshop. To

measure bonding I derived questions from the literature on connections and bonding (e.g., Hogg, 1992; Mezirow 1978). Specifically, I inquired about the number of people the respondent knew by name, her feelings of being cared for, and the number of arranged meetings she attended for studying and socializing. The bonding measure also contained questions about loyalty and attachment to school (adapted from OIRP study, 1993). University involvement included questions about student groups and attendance at campus events. Respondents were also asked whether or not they had applied for graduate school at PSU or elsewhere. Questions concerning the quality of the Workshop called for an assessment of the various components as well as over-all general feelings about it.

Because returning women come with varying economic and cultural backgrounds, goals, anxiety levels, support systems and resources, I asked questions which would allow me to consider external situations as they might relate to retention and graduate school attendance. These questions also allowed me to compare my sub-samples for similarities.

Finally, demographic data, including age, income, marital status, class status, number of hours worked on the job, and household size at the time of entrance at PSU, also with racial identity, GPA while attending PSU, and levels of parents' education were collected on each respondent.

I pre-tested my survey on three women over the age of 24 who attended school at PSU. The pre-test indicated that two questions were difficult to understand. I changed these questions and had no further problems with them. By the 10th survey I

also discovered (from the qualitative information I was getting from the women) that during 1990 and 1991 there were no returning women's support groups or returning women's mentors. During the years I was studying, both projects were being arranged, and it was in the following two years that both programs started. For the remaining participants, I dropped the two questions concerning the support groups and mentors.

Personal Interviews

At the end of each telephone survey I asked the women if they would be willing to meet with me for a face-to-face interview. I also made a note on their survey if I felt they would make a good interview candidate, i.e. able and willing to give articulate, in-depth information. After completing all the telephone interviews, I re-called the sub-sample of potential personal interview candidates and met with the ones who were still willing to meet. My final personal interview sample included three women who attended the Workshop and two who did not.

I met with two of these women in their homes, one in a coffee shop, one at a neighborhood park, and the fifth on the PSU campus. The purpose of the interviews was to 1) help explain findings from the surveys and 2) provide elaboration of themes identified in the survey. The personal interviews (see Appendix B for a complete copy of the interview guide) gave women the opportunity to tell me about their initial feelings when planning to return to school, their experiences the first few days of classes, their feelings and experiences at PSU, their on and off-campus support systems, and, for those who attended the Workshop, their experiences and feelings

toward the class. I also asked the women if there was anything the campus could have provided which would had made a difference for them.

Data Analysis

My analysis was of both quantitative (survey) data and qualitative (personal interview and open-ended survey questions) data. I also took a look at the findings from the 1987 Returning Women's Workshop retention study which examined short-term retention of Workshop participants and non-participants.

The sample names were numbered, and surveys were marked with the corresponding numbers. The quantitative data were coded and entered into a data base in SPSS for Windows. An index for bonding was created using the responses to questions on: 1) the number of people known by name; 2) the number of arranged meetings for studying and socializing attended; 3) the number of campus functions attended; 4) feelings of being cared for; 5) recommendation of PSU to a friend; 6) consideration of or transfer to another school; and 7) overall affection and rating of PSU. Indexes were also developed for off-and on-campus support. The off-campus support index was constructed from responses to questions about feeling supported by parents, children, spouse/partner, employer, and friends; having other off-campus support systems; and how extent of time on household duties changed after starting school. The index for on-campus support was made up of responses to feeling cared for and supported by PSU faculty, staff and fellow students; other on-campus support

systems; and social comfort on campus. The off- and on-campus support questions came from the OIRP retention study (1993).

The three indexes were created by giving each response a value of 1- 4. The one question with five values (how often did you attend student campus functions?) was recoded into four by combining the two smallest values. The responses to questions with two choices (yes or no), were given a value of four for the "positive" answer and zero for the "negative" answer. After totaling each student's response values, the range of scores was divided into four subgroups and ranked as very bonded, bonded, somewhat bonded and not bonded.

Crosstabulations on and frequencies of the quantitative data were calculated in order to describe the demographic data on and anxiety levels of the two subgroups, and to include as controls to the analysis of the outcomes.

Responses to the open-ended questions were either given a numerical code or collected into MS Word, depending on whether or not answers were amenable to quantification. The qualitative survey data were examined for themes and illustrations of themes. Answers given a numerical code were entered into SPSS with the quantitative data. The personal interviews were transcribed and marked with the woman's identifying number. Like the qualitative survey data, the personal interview material was examined for themes and examples of themes.

Limitations of the study

The biggest limitation of this study was the number of accessible participants. The response rate of 28% (n=40) limits the ability to statistically assure that this sample represents the actual populations. Because the statistical differences with two samples of this size would have to be extremely large to reach significance, my findings can only be suggestive. Small sample size also restricts causal analysis. The extent to which outcomes were a function of demographic and other characteristics that respondents brought to the re-entry experience vs. workshop participation could not be sufficiently determined. Indeed, there were notable demographic differences (e.g., class status, number of children at home, marital status) between the workshop participants and non-participants.

Second, the sample was limited to two academic terms, Fall 1990 and Fall 1991, with the assumption that the WS120 classes conducted during those two terms were representative of all WS120 classes. However, several of the respondents reported that in one of the four classes, a group of students distracted the class from the scheduled topics and also that many of the married women felt uncomfortable because of "male and marriage bashing."

Because women re-entering college come with different goals, expectations, assumptions, academic abilities and needs, the quasi-experimental format of this research placed limits on measuring the true effects of WS120. Moreover, actual support levels and bonding experiences are hard to measure. Even with valid and reliable measures of these subjective phenomena, the retrospective format is

problematic. For example, a person's current situation and level of satisfaction can influence her perspective on past experiences.

An inquiry concerning women's needs and/or expectations of the Returning Women's Workshop would have been useful in considering its appeal and outcomes. Also of interest would have been an examination of reasons why returning women who knew of WS120 did not take the course.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

Findings from the survey and personal interviews with returning women students are presented in this chapter. Information about why the participants returned to school, their experiences at Portland State University (PSU), their experience in the Returning Women's Workshop (WS120), and their academic achievements will be presented. The students were divided into two groups, those who participated in WS120 and those who did not. Following a description of the sample, findings will be presented on who attends the Workshop, the differences between Workshop and non-Workshop participants, retention rates (including a description of retention rates found in an earlier study), and an analysis of the various components of the Workshop.

Demographic Data

As indicated in Table 1, the women surveyed for this research were diverse in age and income. Of the 40 women, 19 (47.5%) were 35 years and under when they returned to school (15 or 78.9% of these did not attend the Workshop.) Seventeen (42.5%) were in the 36-45 age category, (12, or 60% of those did attend the Workshop); four (10%) were between 46-55 years, and they all attended the Workshop.

Almost half of the women (47.5%) had an annual income over $20,000 (42.1% participated and 57.9% did not) upon returning to school, but a substantial number (40%) had an income at the time of return that was below $10,000.

Race was coded from a self-identification open-ended question. "White" was identified by 90% (n=36) of the women, while 5.6% (n=2) identified as African American and 5.6% (n=2) as Asian American. All of the non-participants identified as "white."

Marital status at re-entry was divided into two groups: (1) married, committed and/or living with someone, and (2) single (never married), divorced, separated and/or not living someone. Seventy percent (n=14) of the WS120 participants compared to 55% (n=11) identified in the first group.

Working was the norm, with 95% (n=38) holding jobs when they returned to school. However, only 20% of the women worked over 31 hours a week. Fifty-eight percent of the women had children living at home when they re-entered school. The six (30%) women who reported living alone as well as the four (20%) living with over four other people at the time of re-entry, all attended WS120. Of those women who attended the Workshop, fewer than half (45%) had children at home; among non-participants, the majority (70%) had children at home.

Transferring into PSU as a junior described 80% (n=16) of the non-WS120 participants and coming in as a freshman identified 70% (n=14) of the participants. Slightly under 2/3 (65%) of the WS120 women said their mother's highest degree of education was a high school degree while half of the non participants reported the same. Half of all the women said their father's highest education level was either grade school or some high school education. Only two (5 %) reported a mother who had

graduated from college and four (10%) a father with a college degree. All the women reporting a parent with a college degree attended the Workshop.

Most of the women surveyed, then, were between the ages of 25 and 45 when they returned to college. Over half of them lived with a yearly household income of less than 20,000, and the majority racially identified themselves as white. A little under two-thirds of the women were married/committed and well over half worked between 21-30 hours a week at a job. The majority of women started PSU as either a freshman or a junior, and more of them had children living at home than not. Well over half of the women had mothers with a high school degree and fathers with only a grade school or some high school education.

Table 1: Selected Demographic Characteristics of the Sample at Time of Returning to School

| | | Attend WS120? | | |
		Yes	No	Total
Age	35 yrs. & under	20% (4)	75% (15)	47.5% (19)
	36-45 yrs.	60% (12)	25% (5)	42.5% (17)
	46-55 yrs.	20% (4)		10.0% (4)
Annual Income	Over 20,000	40% (8)	55% (11)	47.5% (19)
	10,000-19,999	20% (4)		10.0% (4)
	5,000-9,999	30% (6)	20% (4)	25.0% (10)
	Below 5,000	10% (2)	25% (5)	17.5% (7)
Racial Identity	European (white)	80% (16)	100% (20)	90.0% (36)
	African American	10% (2)		5.0% (2)
	Asian American	10% (2)		5.0% (2)

Table 1: Continue

		Attend WS120?		
		Yes	*No*	Total
Marital Status	**Married/Committed**	70% (14)	55% (11)	62.5% (25)
	Single, Separated, Divorced	30% (6)	45% (9)	37.5% (15)
Class Status	**Freshman**	70% (14)		35.0% (14)
	Sophomore	10% (2)	20% (4)	15.0% (6)
	Junior	20% (4)	80% (16)	50.0% (20)
Work Status (by # hours per week)	**11-20**	33.3% (6)	30.0% (6)	30.0% (12)
	21-30	33.3% (6)	60.0% (12)	45.0% (18)
	31-40	33.3% (6)	10.0 (2)	20.0% (8)
Children at Home	**Yes**	45% (9)	70% (14)	57.5% (23)
	No	55% (11)	30% (6)	42.5% (17)
Father's Highest Degree of Education	**1-8 grades**	30% (6)	20% (4)	25.0% (10)
	Some High school	20% (4)	35% (7)	27.5% (11)
	High School Graduate	20% (4)	20% (4)	20.0% (8)
	Some College		25% (5)	12.5% (5)
	Bachelor	20% (4)		10.0% (4)
	Post-Graduate Degree			
Mother's Highest Degree of Education	**1-8 grades**	10% (2)		5.0% (2)
	Some High school		30% (6)	15.0% (6)
	High School Graduate	65% (13)	50% (10)	57.5% (23)
	Some College	15% (3)	20% (4)	17.5% (7)
	Bachelor			
	Post-Graduate Degree	10% (2)		5.0% (2)

Who attends the Workshop?

Knowing who attends the Workshop is helpful in designing services for adult returning women and in developing recruitment and retention strategies for such students. It also allows for comparison between attendees and non-attendees.

It appears that older women are more likely than younger women to attend WS120. All four of the women 46 and older in the study group attended the Workshop, and of the 17 women between the age of 36-45, about 70% attended the Workshop. A lack of academic confidence due to age or having been out of school for a long period of time could motivate older women to either seek support or a class which sounded "student-friendly." A view frequently expressed by participants in the Workshop during the personal interviews is reflected in one women's comment:

> I did everything I could think of to prepare because I was so scared that I wouldn't be able to study anymore or that my brain had gone dead. I wasn't the best student in the first place, so I was really worried.

However, further analysis suggests the importance of a third variable, available time.

Of the 23 women who had children at home when they returned to school, 14 (70%) did not attend the Workshop. One recurrent comment by those who didn't attend the Workshop was their lack of time. Racing to and from PSU to care for children seemed common. As one woman put it when referring to getting kids to school on time, "I always felt like I was running to get to class and home on time...I'm sure they offered a lot more than I took advantage of because of time, like the WS120 class."

The amount of college credit, thus college experience, a woman has also played a role in attendance of the Workshop. As shown in Table 1, all of the 14 women coming into PSU as freshmen attended the Workshop. However, of the 20 women coming in as juniors, 80% (n=16) did not attend WS120. One of the reasons for this could again be a lack of academic confidence among the newer students. But the lack of non-required course credits available for juniors who wish to graduate in two years could also be a contributing factor. The Returning Women's Workshop is a lower division class, and many students coming in as a junior need upper division classes. When I asked one woman about WS120, she told me

> I had heard about a class like that, but to be honest, I didn't have the time. I really couldn't afford to take any more lower-division classes, and I didn't have time to take another class; I had things mapped out so that I could graduate as fast as possible; I didn't want to go into debt any more then necessary.

Over half (56%) married and/or committed women attended the Returning Women's Workshop, while only 40% of the single, separated and/or divorced women participated. All the married and/or committed women reported feeling either "very supported" or "supported" by their mate.

Other differences between Workshop and Non-Workshop attendees

Women who felt apprehensive about returning to school were more likely than others to attend the Workshop. As shown in Table 2, of the 25 women who felt either somewhat or very apprehensive, about 2/3 attended the Workshop, while almost 3/4 of

those who felt very-somewhat comfortable returning to school did not attend. One woman told me:

> I felt like a little school girl. I swear I didn't get any sleep worrying about if I could find my classes, what people would think with this graying lady walking on campus, [and] if I was really doing the right thing. I scheduled my classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays so I had WS120 on my first day and I'm so glad. I had just had another class and it felt so overwhelming that by the time I got to WS120 I was ready to quit. There was this room full of women who honestly looked older than me and they looked just as scared. It was refreshing to see that I wasn't the only one and that I wasn't crazy for doing this!!

Table 2: Comfort with returning to school by WS120 attendance

		Comfort with Returning to School	
		Somewhat-Very Apprehensive	Somewhat-Very Comfortable
Attend	**Yes**	64% (16)	26.6% (4)
WS120?	**No**	36% (9)	73.3% (11)
Total		100% (25)	100% (15)

The data also show that those with more transfer credits are less apprehensive. Of the 26 women who transferred with 45 credits or more (at least sophomore status), one half rated themselves as somewhat-very apprehensive, while 85.7% of the freshman rated themselves in this category. It is possible that one reason all of the freshman, but only 1/3 of the sophomores and 1/5 of the juniors attended the Workshop, is because they hoped the class would ease their apprehension. Indeed, 12 of the 16 apprehensive Workshop participants were freshman. Also noteworthy is the fact that of the nine apprehensive non-Workshop participants, six were juniors.

Few differences emerged between Workshop attendees and non-attendees regarding the reasons for returning to school: i.e., gaining a broad-based general education, preparing for a career, changing careers, increasing potential income, meeting family expectations, receiving a college degree, meeting other people, enriching your life, and preparing for a graduate or professional degree. As shown in Table 3, the highest level (percent of the respondents affirming) of importance was given to receiving a college degree, changing careers, and enriching life, respectively. The participants in WS120 were more likely to give high importance (very important) to enriching their life (70%) than non-WS120 participants (25%). However, the overwhelming majority of both groups rated "enriching life" as either "very important" or "important." The two groups also differed regarding the incentive of meeting other people; with 20% of WS120 participants but no non-attendees attaching importance to it.

An open-ended question asked if there was any other important reason for returning back to school that wasn't listed. "Personal goal" was the top response (6 participants and 8 non-participants). Other responses were "life long dream," "setting an example for kids," and "learning," "growing," and/or "building self-image".

Table 3: Reasons for Returning to School by Workshop Attendance

Reasons		Attend WS120?		Total %
		Yes	**No**	**Responses**
Broad-Based Education	**Very Important - Important**	60% (12)	70% (14)	65% (26)
	Somewhat - not Important	40% (8)	30% (6)	35% (14)
Meeting Other People	**Very Important - Important**	20% (4)		10% (4)
	Somewhat - not Important	80% (16)	100% (20)	90% (36)

Table 3: Continued

		Attend WS120?		Total %
		Yes	**No**	**Responses**
Enriching Life	Very Important-Important	90% (18)	85% (17)	87.5% (35)
	Somewhat - not Important	10% (2)	15% (3)	12.5% (5)
Preparing For a Career	Very Important - Important	60% (12)	95% (19)	77.5% (31)
	Somewhat Important	40% (8)	5% (1)	22.5% (9)
Changing Careers	Very Important - Important	90% (18)	95% (19)	92.5% (37)
	Somewhat Important	10% (2)	5% (1)	7.5% (3)
Increased Income	Very Important - Important	60% (12)	70% (14)	65% (26)
	Somewhat - not Important	40% (8)	30% (6)	35% (14)
Receiving College Degree	Very Important - Important	100% (20)	95% (19)	97.5% (39)
	Somewhat Important		5% (1)	2.5% (1)
Prepare For Graduate Degree	Very Important - Important	40% (8)	45% (9)	42.5% (17)
	Somewhat - not Important	60% (12)	50% (10)	57.5% (23)
Meeting Family Ex-pectations	Very Important - Important	30% (6)	50% (10)	40.0% (16)
	Not Important	70% (14)	50% (10)	60.0% (24)
Other Reasons*	Personal Goal	40% (6)	61.5% (8)	50.0% (14)
	Life-long Dream	6.7% (1)	23.1% (3)	14.3% (4)
	Example for Kids	20% (3)		10.7% (3)
	Personal Growth	33% (5)	15.4% (2)	25.0% (7)
Highest Degree Intended	Masters	40% (8)	45% (9)	42.5% (17)
	Bachelors	50% (10)	55% (11)	52.5% (21)
	None	10% (2)		5.0% (2)

*Based on open-ended question

Eighty percent of those who attended WS120 reported feeling somewhat-very apprehensive when they first returned to school, while only 45% (n=9) of those who didn't attend the Workshop reported such feeling (see Table 4). All of the WS120 "partnered" participants reported being very supported or supported by their partners and children, while only 1/3 of the "partnered" non-WS120 participants reported supportive mates, and slightly fewer reported children who were neutral or not supportive. Table 4 also shows that when asked about their top concern while in school, the largest percentage (50%) of WS120 participants reported finances while slightly over half (55%) of the non-participants reported academic performance.

Table 4: Comfort, Support and Concerns by Workshop Attendance

		Attend WS120?		Total %
		Yes	No	of Responses
Comfort with Returning to School	Very-Somewhat Comfortable	20% (4)	55% (11)	37.5% (15)
	Somewhat-Very Apprehensive	80% (16)	45% (9)	62.5% (25)
Support of Partner	Very supported-Supported	100% (14)	68.8% (11)	83% (25)
	Neutral-Not Supported		31.3% (5)	17% (5)
Support of Children	Very supported-Supported	100% (16)	71.4% (10)	86.7% (26)
	Neutral-Not Supported		28.6% (4)	13.3% (4)
Top Concern	Finances	50% (10)	20% (4)	35% (14)
	Academic Performance	20% (4)	55% (11)	37.5% (15)
	Employment	10% (2)		5.0% (2)
	Family	10% (2)		5.0% (2)
	Parking	10% (2)	25% (5)	17.5% (7)

Only 30% of those who attended the Workshop reported feeling supported on the campus,(none reported feeling "very supported."). Of those who did not attend the Workshop, 55% reported feeling either very supported or supported while 20% reported neutral and 25% no support.

Table 5: Index Measure of On-campus Support by WS120 Attendance

		Attend WS120?		
		Yes	No	TOTAL
Index of On-Campus Support	Very Supported		45% (9)	22.5% (9)
	Supported	30% (6)	10% (2)	20% (8)
	Neutral	60% (12)	20% (4)	40% (16)
	Not Supported	10% (2)	25% (5)	17.5% (7)
TOTAL		100% (20)	100% (20)	

Of those women who felt very supported by their off-campus support systems, 57.1% (n=4) attended the Workshop. Of those who felt very supported or supported off campus, just over half (n=12) attended the Workshop while just under half (n=8) of those who felt neutral or no support attended.

Table 6: WS120 Attendance by Index Measure of Off-campus Support

		Index of Off-Campus Support				
		Very Supported	Supported	Neutral	Not Supported	Total
Attend WS120?	Yes	57.1% (4)	50% (8)	44.4% (4)	50% (4)	50% (20)
	No	42.9% (3)	50% (8)	55.6% (5)	50% (4)	50% (20)
TOTAL		100% (7)	100% (16)	100% (9)	100% (8)	

An additional interesting finding involved the question about changes in household duties. Of the 38 women responding to this question, 50% reported having to do more housework then before returning to school, while only 34.2% reported doing less then before. Fifty-five percentage of non- WS120 participants reported doing more housework while 40% of the participants reported doing less than before returning to school.

In summary, compared to non-attendees, the women who attended the Workshop were older, more likely to be married/committed and to be freshmen. They averaged more hours a week at a job and were more likely to not have children at home. WS120 participants were also more likely to be apprehensive about their return to school.

The majority of the women surveyed chose "receiving a college degree," "changing careers," "enriching my life," and "preparing for a career" as the top reasons for returning to school. The percentages between Workshop participants and non-participants for the first two reasons varied only slightly. However, participants were much more likely then non-participants to attach importance to "enriching my life" and less likely to attach importance to "preparing for a career."

Both WS120 women and non-WS120 women reported feeling supported by parents, but WS120 women reported more support from children and their marital partners. Workshop participants listed finances as their top concern while in school, and non-participants listed academic performance.

Indexes representing the women's perception of on-and off-campus support indicated that women who did not attend the Workshop reported more on-campus support. Reports regarding off-campus support were similar for participants and non-participants.

Outcomes

Retention

The crosstabulations showed that the difference in graduation rates between participants and non-participants was minimal(see Table 7). Non-Workshop participants had a higher graduation rate from PSU, and while WS120 participants and non-participants had approximately the same transfer rate (50% participants, 55.6% non-participants), WS120 participants had a higher rate of graduation rate from an institution other than PSU.

Table 7: Graduation Outcomes by Workshop Attendance

		Attend WS120?		
		Yes	No	Total
Graduate from PSU?	Yes	40% (8)	55% (11)	47.5% (19)
	No	60% (12)	45% (9)	52.5% (21)
Graduate from Other School?*	Yes	100% (6)	80% (4)	90.9% (10)
	No		20% (1)	9.1% (1)
Total Graduation Rate		70% (14)	75% (15)	72.5% (29)

*of those who did not graduate from PSU

Of the 16 women who rated themselves as apprehensive and attended the Returning Women's Workshop, six graduated from PSU, and six transferred and graduated from another school, making for a 75% graduation rate (see Table 8).

Apprehensive non-Workshop participants' graduation rates were only slightly lower, with two graduating from PSU and four transferring out and graduating from another school, making the total graduation rate 67%.

Table 8: Graduation outcomes for apprehensive women

		Apprehensive About Returning to School		
		WS120-Yes (n=16)	WS120-No (n=9)	Total
PSU Graduate	Yes	37.5% (6)	22.2% (2)	32% (8)
	No	62.5% (10)	77.8% (7)	68% (17)
Transferred Graduate*		37.5% (6)	44.4% (4)	40% (10)
Total Graduation Rate		75% (12)	66.7% (6)	72% (18)
Total Number		16	9	25

* All of the students transferring graduated from their other school

The graduation rates for WS120 participants and non-participants, then, are fairly even. However, non-participants were more likely to graduate from PSU, while participants had a higher graduation rate from another school. For the women who enter PSU feeling apprehensive, women attending the Workshop had a higher graduation rate then those who did not attend.

<u>Retention in the 1987 OIRP Study</u>

In the spring of 1987 the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (OIRP) conducted a 7-term cohort study to compare the retention of women who attended the Returning Women's Workshop, non-participating women over 25 years old, men over 25 years, and a random sample of Portland State University students. Three sets of sub samples were drawn from the Fall 1984, Winter 1985, and Fall 1985 terms. The study also looked at the number of bachelor degrees awarded to each sub-sample at the end of the two-year period (see Table 9).

Table 9: Term-by-term Enrollment and Number of Degrees Awarded: 1987 Returning Women's Workshop Retention Study

Term Selected	Sample	Enrollment							# of Degrees Awarded
		F '84	W '85	S '85	F '85	W '86	S '86	F '86	
Fall '84	WS120 Women	17	15	14	13	13	10	9	1 Bachelor's
	Non-WS120 Women 25 yrs. +	17	12	9	7	7			
	Men Over 25 yrs.	17	11	9	5	4	4	4	5 Bachelor's
	Random Sample of Students	17	11	10	10	10	7	4	3 Bachelor's
Winter '85	WS120 Women		8	8	8	7	7	5	2 Bachelor's
	Non-WS120 Women 25 yrs. +		8	6	4	4			
	Men Over 25 yrs.		8	5	5	4	4	2	2 Bachelor's
	Random Sample of Students		8	6	7	6	5	3	3 Bachelor's
Fall '85	WS120 Women				13	12	11	10	
	Non-WS120 Women 25 yrs. +				13	9			
	Men Over 25 yrs.				13	10	9	6	2 Bachelor's
	Random Sample of Students				13	10	9	8	2 Bachelor's

Source: Office of Institutional Research and Planning, 1987

The first cohort sample of WS120 women had a 53% retention rate from fall 1984 through fall 1986, while the following two had 62.5% and 76.9% rates

respectively. All three of the non-WS120 women cohorts had a 0% retention rate by Fall 1986 while the cohorts of men over 25 had 24%, 25% and 46% respectively. However, because the present study did not trace retention from term-to-term, and the OIRP study did not follow the students through to graduation, it is impossible to make a meaningful comparison of the studies.

Bonding

At first glance there don't appear to be any bonding differences between WS120 participants and non-participants. As reflected in the Index of Bonding shown in Table 10, both groups were equally divided between 'very bonded-bonded' and 'somewhat not bonded-not bonded.' However, only 10% of the participants, but 40% of the non-participants were in the lowest category, i.e. not bonded. Moreover, there were differences in both the specific questions pertaining to bonding and the characteristics of the women sampled.

Several questions were asked to measure dimensions of bonding. When asked how often they stayed after school to talk or study with other students, those who did not attend the Workshop reported doing so (talk and study) more often. Slightly over half of non-participants said they talked with other students 1-2 times a week or 1-3 times a month while only 30% of those who attended the Workshop reported doing so. On the other hand, studying after class with other students was reported more frequently by those attending the Workshop than by those who did not attend. As shown in Table 10, 45% of the non-Workshop participants reported belonging to another PSU student group but only 20% of WS120 participants reported such group

affiliations. When asked how many names the women knew by the end of the first term, 60% of the WS120 participants reported knowing 10 or more names while 30% non-participants reported the same.

When asked if they ever considered transferring to another school, 60% (n=12) of the Workshop attendants said they had not. Those not attending the Workshop were more evenly split with 45% (n=9) reporting "no." When asked to rate their level of social comfort on the campus, the women who did not attend the Workshop reported a slightly higher level, with 90% (n=18) reporting feeling very to somewhat comfortable. Those who attended reported feeling very to somewhat comfortable in 70% (n=14) of the cases.

The women who attended the Workshop rated the friendliness of their fellow students more highly than the non-attendees. Eighty percent rated the other students as very friendly to friendly. Only 60% of the non-WS120 participants gave these positive ratings. When asked if they ever recommended PSU to a friend, all of the WS120 participants who answered (n=18) reported they had. For those who did not attend the Workshop, 70% reported they had recommended the University to a friend.

Both groups of women gave similar high ratings regarding affection toward PSU. Either "loved PSU" or "liked PSU" was selected by 60% of WS120 participants and 50% of non-participants. When asked to rate PSU overall, the Workshop participants gave the top two ratings 77.8% of the time, the non-participants, only 50% of the time.

Table 10: Bonding and Bonding Components by Workshop Attendance

		Attend WS120?		Total %
		Yes	No	of Sample
Index of Bonding	**Very bonded - Bonded**	50% (10)	55% (11)	52.5% (21)
	Somewhat - not Bonded	50% (10)	45% (9)	47.5% (19)
Overall Rating of PSU	**Great - Good School**	77.8% (14)	50% (10)	63.1% (24)
	OK - Bad School	22.2% (4)	50% (10)	36.8% (14)
Affection Rating of PSU	**Loved - Liked PSU**	60% (12)	50% (10)	55% (22)
	Got what I needed- Didn't care for PSU	40% (8)	50% (10)	45% (18)
Recommend PSU?	**Yes**	100% (18)	70% (14)	84.2% (32)
	No		30% (6)	15.8% (6)
Look Into Another School?	**Yes**	40% (8)	57.9% (11)	47.5% (19)
	No	60% (12)	45% (9)	52.5% (21)
Social Comfort on Campus	**Very - Somewhat Comfortable**	70% (14)	90% (18)	80% (32)
	Somewhat - Very Uncomfortable	30% (6)	10% (2)	20% (8)
Other PSU Groups?	**Yes**	20% (4)	45% (9)	32.5% (13)
	No	80% (16)	55% (11)	67.5% (27)
Names Known by end of First Term	**10 or More**	60% (12)	30% (6)	45% (18)
	5-9	10% (2)	45% (9)	27.5% (11)
	1-4	30% (6)	15% (3)	22.5% (9)
	None		10% (2)	5% (2)

Another way of analyzing bonding is by looking at sub-groups of the study

participants. Of the 16 women who felt apprehensive returning to school and attended

the Workshop, eight rated themselves as bonded to the school (data not shown). Of

the nine women who were apprehensive and did not attend the Workshop, only two rated themselves as bonded. In the personal interviews and from open-ended survey questions, WS120 participants expressed a sense of bonding with the women in the class. In many cases, bonding was reported to be the best part of the Workshop. When I asked what her favorite part of WS120 was, one woman told me: "Well of course, getting together with other women my age, ... talking about things and feeling like I belonged somewhere." Bonding was also significantly related to class status (i.e. junior, sophomore, freshman). The women re-entering with a higher class status felt more bonded.

Bonding Summary

Compared to non-participants, WS120 participants stayed after class to study more often, knew more names at the end of the first term, gave higher rating of friendliness to PSU students, recommended PSU to friends more often, had a higher over-all assessment of PSU, and, of those who felt apprehensive about returning to school, had a higher bonding index.

The women who did not attend the Workshop reported staying after class more often to talk to other students, had more affiliations with other student groups and felt more socially comfortable on campus than did the Workshop participants. But more of these women reported considering transferring out of PSU.

Other Outcomes

The WS120 participants appeared to earn a higher GPA for work done at PSU. As show in Table 11, 43% of the participants, compared to 25% of the non-participants, had GPA's of 3.6 - 4.0. Only 1/4 of the participants' GPA's, compared to 45% of the non-participants' were below 3.1.

Table 11: Reported GPA's While Attending PSU

		Attend WS120?		
		Yes	**No**	**Total**
GPA While at PSU	**3.6-4.0**	43.8% (7)	25% (5)	33.3% (12)
	3.1-3.5	31.3% (5)	30% (6)	30.6% (11)
	2.6-3.0	12.5% (2)	45% (9)	30.6% (11)
	2.0-2.5	12.5% (2)		5.6% (2)
TOTAL		100% (16)	100% (20)	100% (36)

Only seven of the women had applied to graduate school; of those, five had not attended the Workshop

A higher percentage of the non-attendees (45%) than the attendees (20%) reported that they belonged to another PSU student group. One of the reasons for this difference may be that the WS120 women felt like they already belonged to a group and did not need another. One WS120 woman described the Workshop as:

> ...a place where you can go and do some debriefing about maybe feeling frightened because you have a test coming up and you haven't taken a test in maybe 20-30 years,...maybe your partner hasn't been particularly supportive, or you're having trouble with your kids, or whatever. It was just a safe atmosphere to kind-of let your hair down as opposed to the other classrooms where it's curriculum based and the

professors don't generally really care or really want to hear that you're having problems.

Assessment of the Returning Women's Workshop

Workshop attendees were asked to assess the different components of the Workshop in terms of their usefulness. Table 12 shows the usefulness ratings. (As indicated by the numbers in the "total" column, not all of the 20 attendees assessed each component.)

Table 12: Ratings of Returning Women's Workshop Components

Components	Very Useful-Useful	Not Too Useful - Useless	Total
Assigned Reading Articles	90% (18)	10% (2)	100% (20)
Learning Campus Resources	80% (16)	20% (4)	100% (20)
Math Anxiety Discussions	75% (12)	25% (4)	100% (16)
Public Speaking to Class	77.7% (14)	22.2% (4)	100% (18)
Test Taking Skills	85.5% (12)	14.2% (2)	100% 14
Time Management	71.4% (10)	28.6% (4)	100% (14)
Campus & Library Tours	70% (14)	30% (6)	100% (20)
Writing Skills Lessons	62.5% (10)	15% (6)	100% (16)
Journal Writing	80% (16)	20% (4)	100% (20)
Fellow Student as Facilitator	80% (16)	20% (4)	100% (20)
Learning Transition Process	70% (14)	30% (6)	100% (20)
Sharing Personal Experiences	90% (18)	10% (2)	100% (20)
Getting to Know Other Women	100% (16)		100% (16)

Most of the components of the Workshop were rated highly. Of special interest is the finding that "getting to know other women" was one of the most useful parts of the Workshop. Interviews and open-ended questions confirmed the importance of this connection for these women. One women told me:

> Initially I think I was intimidated because of my age. When I enrolled in school, like the first day, it seemed like I had tunnel vision. I didn't see anyone over 18. In my eyes, I was like the only person and I was in my early 40's. So one of things it (the Workshop) reinforced for me was that there were other people in school that were my age. And as we got to talking it's not like there were just the 10-15 of us that were in the class, but there's a huge number of older students. It made me feel better with the camaraderie of people around that were my age.

When asked to rate the Returning Women's Workshop overall, 70% (n=14) said they were very satisfied or satisfied, while only 30% (n=6) said they were somewhat disappointed or disappointed.

Participants were also asked what, if anything, about the Workshop they would like to see changed. The majority (95%) reported no desire to see things change. Only a few (n=3) complained about "male bashing." (All of these women attended the same class; attendees' responses to open-ended questions and interviews revealed highly unusual discussions in this class). Two women said they would have liked more time for sharing of personal issues/problems.

In sum, all of the Workshop components received relatively high ratings from the women. The top components were the assigned readings, learning about campus resources, journal writing, having fellow students as facilitators, sharing personal experiences and getting to know other women. The open-ended question regarding the

53

best part of the Workshop resulted for the majority in descriptions of sharing personal experiences and getting to know other women. When asked if there was anything about the Workshop they thought should be changed, most had no suggestions. When asked to rate the Workshop overall, roughly 75% of the women gave the Workshop positive ratings.

Interview Data

Five women, three WS120 participants and two non-participants, were interviewed. Two interviews took place in the interviewee's home, one in a coffee shop, one in a city park, and one on the campus at PSU. The interviews averaged 20 minutes and were tape recorded. The five women were chosen because of their strong expression of feelings either towards PSU or the Workshop, and their willingness to be interviewed.

Questions included a description of their feelings about returning to school, their experiences during the first few days at school, their support systems on and off campus, their overall feelings about PSU, and for those who attended the Returning Women's Workshop, their experiences in the class and their impression of it.

The interviews were first transcribed into a word processing program. Second, concepts were identified within, and question categories' frequencies tallied (see Table 13).

Table 13: Frequencies of Categories and Concepts by Workshop Attendees (N=5)

Category	Concepts	Attend WS120? Yes	No	Total
Reasons return-ing to school	Returned to school to increase income	1	1	2
	Returned to school to fulfill life dream	3	1	4
	Total for Category			**6**
Feelings and Concerns about Returning to School	Felt lack of off-campus support	3	1	4
	Felt excited but scared to return	3	1	4
	Worried about academic performance	3	1	4
	Worried about being only "older" student	2	0	2
	Considered received support as "luck"	1	0	1
	Waited until kids in school to return to college	1	2	3
	Total for Category			**18**
Assessments of WS120	WS120 calmed nervousness	2	n/a	2
	WS120 offered fun/easy class for relief	3	n/a	3
	WS120 offered friendship	3	n/a	3
	WS120 gave feeling of belonging	3	n/a	3
	WS120 gave feeling PSU cared for them	2	n/a	2
	WS120 felt comfortable to share honestly	3	n/a	3
	WS120 was a "support group" for them	2	n/a	2
	WS120 introduced needed resources	2	n/a	2
	Total for Category			**20**
Thoughts on WS120	Highly recommend WS120 to others	2	1	3
	Would not have made it without WS120	3	n/a	3
	Total for Category			**6**
Thoughts on School	Found college to be stimulating	0	2	2
	Total for Category			**2**
Reasons for not attending WS120	Had no time for WS120/very tight schedule	n/a	2	2
	Couldn't afford to take lower division classes	n/a	2	2
	Ignored resources/help offered by PSU	n/a	1	1
	Total for Category			**5**

The most common responses given when asked about returning to school were goals of fulfilling life long dreams, feeling a lack of support from family and friends, worrying about the ability to academically perform, and feeling excited but apprehensive. All the Workshop participants reported these four items as did a non-participant who shared that she wishes she had sought out campus resources. Even the other non-participating interviewee, who did not express these thoughts, acknowledged the value of the Workshop for a large number of returning women. She was a graduate student at the time of the interview and felt that her confidence was not shared by most returning adult women. She highly recommended the Workshop to other women although she herself did not participate.

One of the questions asked of the two non-Workshop participants had to do with suggestions for resources or other material things they could have used. Both women mentioned easier/closer parking. One said that more transferable credits would have lightened her undergraduate workload. The other said that the high tuition was a barrier.

One of the non-Workshop participants expressed fear of returning to school while the other felt very comfortable. The apprehensive woman felt she couldn't take time for the lower division credits involved with WS120, and also said that she ignored the resources offered to her by the University. She expressed a desire to become more "involved" in the University when she returns for graduate work.

One of the WS120 participants was quick to point out that the reason she hadn't graduated had nothing to do with PSU or the Workshop. She was having personal problems which no amount of assistance from the University could solve.

It was also during these interviews that I learned about the "unusual" WS120 class that she attended. From the information she gave, and reports given by others during the surveying, it appears a few of the students in the class "took over" the class agenda. Some interpreted the agenda as a "support group" while others saw it as a "bitch session" in which men and their wives were degraded. Several of the married women from this particular class mentioned feeling uncomfortable during class discussions.

The personal interviews supported the survey data. All of the interviewed Workshop participants reported apprehension about returning to school, while only one of the non-Workshop participants did so. This latter woman later reported that she had not sought out the resources that might be available to her. The two women who did not attend the Workshop gave "lack of time" and "no need for lower division credits" as their reasons for not participating in the Workshop.

The most common themes in the personal interviews had to with the women's desire to return to school in order to fulfill a life long dream, their feelings of a lack of support from family and friends, their concerns about the ability to perform academically, and their feelings of excitement but apprehension.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The majority of the women participating in this study identified themselves as "White" with household yearly incomes of less than $20,000; they came into PSU as a freshman or junior, and they worked, but less than 30 hours a week. More women had children at home when they re-entered college at PSU than not, and more women were married/ committed than not. Differences between the two samples are only suggestive because of the sample size. The size also restricts causal analysis.

Compared to non-attendees, women who attended the Workshop were older, more likely to be married/committed, more likely to not have children at home, averaged more hours a week at a job, and were more likely to be freshmen.

Although feeling apprehensive was the norm for all the women, those who attended the Workshop were more likely than non-attendees to feel apprehensive. Mezirow (1981) identifies the first element in the dynamics of transitions as "a disorienting dilemma." Lewis (1988) confirms that many women are pulled in several and often conflicting directions by work, family, friends and community. It may be that the majority of the "apprehensive" women knew, consciously or unconsciously, they needed support in this major change, and thus enrolled in WS120.

However, the fact that the Workshop attendees had less college experience (being freshmen) may help to explain this higher level of apprehension. Re-entry

freshmen students not only bring with them the elements of transition; they also lack knowledge of the college experience, expectations of being a student, and perhaps confidence in their ability. Freshmen generally have relatively high dropout rates, so even though it was slightly lower than that of the non-attendees, the retention rate of the workshop attendees in this study was actually quite strong. On the other hand, because older students generally have higher retention rates than younger students, one could also argue that the older age of the workshop participants accounts for their higher graduation rates. Again, because the samples are so small in this study, the findings can only be suggestive, and causality is problematic.

It is also possible, and probable, that one reason returning women with more college experience (i.e., juniors and seniors) didn't attend the Workshop is that the Workshop is offered for lower division credits. Most of the women not attending the Workshop had children at home, giving them less time to spend on campus and also more pressure to complete school quickly. For women who are trying to "balance" their many roles, it is hard to justify money and time for taking a class which doesn't help meet graduation requirements.

Workshop attendees and non-attendees evenly reported "receiving a college degree" and "changing career" as a top reason for returning to school. For Workshop participants, "enriching my life" was also frequently reported, as was "preparing for a career" for non-participants. It's possible that the description of the Workshop was more appealing to women who are looking to enrich their lives than it is for women who are more focused on starting a career.

Workshop participants were also more likely than non-participants to report feeling supported by their marital partners and children. It would seem that those who don't feel supported would be more likely to seek a supportive class, but maybe those who don't feel supported seek more "academic" classes focused on their major (for most students, WS120 can only be used as an elective), again with the aim of completing their education as quickly as possible.

Women who attended the Workshop reported feeling less supported on campus than those who didn't attend. Again, it would seem that those who participate in such an intimate class would feel more supported. On the other hand, because they are freshman, they may feel they have fewer resources than other groups. It should also be noted that the women attending the workshop felt more apprehensive and thus may have felt less supported in the first place. Lower support could also be reported because WS120 takes a feminist look at issues such as sexism, socialization and depersonalization in large classes, it is possible that participants are more aware of "injustices" on campus.

The graduation rates for WS120 participants and non-participants were fairly even. The difference is in the institution from which they graduated. Non-participants were more likely to graduate from PSU, while for those who transferred, participants had a higher graduation rate from another school. Mezirow (1978) explains that people in transition need other people for both guidance and support. Programs and support groups offer a protective "staging area" in which people can gain confidence and opportunities to explore new life options. It could be argued that the Returning

Women's Workshop provided such a stage, thus helping its attendees both in graduating from PSU and in exploring other schools and succeeding. This theory would be especially true for freshman who tend to do more "exploration" when starting school.

The biggest difference in graduation rates was for women who felt apprehensive about returning to school. The apprehensive women who attended the Workshop had a much higher graduation rate than the apprehensive women who did not attend. This suggests that components of the Workshop, not accessed through other means by non-participants, assisted the WS120 apprehensive women in graduating. Through the Workshop women may have gained knowledge about the academic world which helped them succeed, and it is also possible that they gained the social comfort needed to express the knowledge they already possessed.

Although there was no notable difference in overall bonding levels between Workshop attendees and non-attendees, there were differences between specific sub-groups. For example, women who entered PSU as a junior felt more bonded to the school. Among the women who felt apprehensive about returning to school, those who attended the Workshop were more likely to report a higher bonding level than those who were apprehensive but did not attend the Workshop.

The women reported similar levels of affection for PSU, but Workshop participants gave higher assessments of PSU overall. Participants reported fewer thoughts of transferring to another school and higher friendliness of other students, and they were much more likely to recommend PSU to friends.

When Workshop attendees were asked about the different components of the Workshop, getting to know other women received one of the highest ratings. This could explain the fact that participants were less likely than non-participants to belong to other groups but still reported the same level of bonding. In other words, participants got their "need to belong" fulfilled through the Workshop.

Olmsted (1959) points out that belonging to a "primary" group helps alleviate stress and brings renewed energy to the members. Hogg (1992) furthers this by pointing out that the attraction or bonding which one feels to a group will have a positive effect on their participation in that group. It may be possible that the women who attended the Workshop felt bonded to PSU because they felt bonded to the Workshop, while non-Workshop participants felt bonded to PSU because of their participation in other school groups.

Those who attended the Workshop had higher self-reported GPA's than non-attendees. If Mezirow (1978) is correct in identifying women's transition groups as fostering self-confidence through "counseling" with other women and through building from or expressing mutual ideologies of self-help and personal responsibility, then it stands to reason that the women who participated in the Workshop (especially those who come into school apprehensive) would show higher signs of self-confidence through higher grades.

All of the Workshop components were positively evaluated by the Workshop participants. Receiving the most positive responses were getting to know other women, the assigned readings (the content of which is related to women's transition

and education issues), learning about campus resources, journal writing, having fellow students as facilitators and sharing personal experiences. The open-ended question asking for the best part of the Workshop resulted in the majority describing the sharing of personal experiences and getting to know other women. The majority of the women gave the Workshop positive ratings with very few suggesting changes for the class.

When comparing the components that received lower ratings with those receiving higher ones, it appears that the higher marks went to activities that are not usually addressed in traditional classes. The higher ratings also went to activities which are more "personal."

Carfagna (1989) feels returning women both need and excel when given a space to express their voices. She believes these women are more comfortable with learning situations that are less competitive (than in many traditional classes), and provide a feeling of connection with peers and teachers. Given the top-rated Workshop components, it appears WS120 meets Carfagna's criteria.

The personal interviews supported the survey data. Of the women interviewed, all but one woman reported feeling apprehensive and that woman did not attend the Workshop. The other non-Workshop participant reported a "lack of time" and "no need for lower division credits" as her reasons for not taking the Workshop. The most common themes in the interviews had to do with returning to school to fulfill a life long dream, lack of support from family and friends, concerns about the ability to perform academically, and feelings of excitement but apprehension.

Belenky et al. (1986) describe the importance of giving women a "voice." They discourage the exclusive use of survey data when studying women's lives because of the limitation it puts on women using their own words to describe their experiences. In their study, they conducted personal interviews and elaborated on their data with quotes and other qualitative commentary. It was through the personal interviews and open-ended questions that this researcher uncovered the two most common reasons for not participating in the Workshop: a "lack of time" both in a given a day and in terms of completing college, and "no need for lower division credits." Also uncovered was the highly unusual class in which several of the students were perceived as having taken over the class and moved the agenda toward "male bashing," thus making several of the married women feel uncomfortable. Combining close-ended questions with open-ended questions and personal interviews was very useful, and I would recommend this mixture in future research.

This study was limited by accessibility of subjects and a retrospective design. Relying on past out-dated records limited accessibility, and reliance on past memories may have affected the accuracy of the data. It would be useful to question returning women students on a more regular basis in order to determine their needs and assess the value of resources available to them.

Because it appears that students with a junior class standing are less likely than freshmen or sophomores to take the class, it would also be beneficial to determine the needs of these former students, and whether or not they would be interested in a Workshop given for upper division credit. Further study might also include looking at

other university populations and the availability and utilization of Workshops or classes for returning women students. Indeed, if the 1987 OIRP study is truly representative of university students, then it appears that men over the age of 25 could also benefit from a Workshop or class similar to the Returning Women's Workshop.

The findings from this study indicate that attending the Returning Women's Workshop is seen as beneficial by participants. It gives a feeling of belonging, provides a "support group," and introduces vital campus resources. The Workshop seems especially inviting to and successful for women who feel apprehensive about returning to school. The data show a higher graduation rate for women who are apprehensive about returning to school and attend the Workshop than for apprehensive women who do not attend. The workshop seems to be valued by its participants; it provides a place to build confidence and plays a role in having a satisfying campus experience.

Clearly, retention and graduation rates are an important consideration for policy makers as they engage in higher education planning and funding decision-making. But perhaps, policy makers should attend to additional measure of success. In this regard, the present study suggests that intervention programs such as the Returning Women's Workshop have a positive impact on returning women's educational experiences and perhaps beyond. Regardless of attained college degrees, the highest rating marks and most verbal praise of workshop components went to sharing personal experiences, getting to know other women, and gaining a sense of belonging. Thus it appears the workshop had a positive impact on the lives of the women who attended.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire Survey

How important was each of the following as a reason for returning back to school?

	Very Import.	Import.	Less Import.	Not Important	N/A
Gaining a Broad-based general education	1	2	3	4	9
Preparing for a career	1	2	3	4	9
Changing careers	1	2	3	4	9
Increasing potential income	1	2	3	4	9
Meeting family expectations	1	2	3	4	9
Receiving a college degree	1	2	3	4	9
Meeting other people	1	2	3	4	9
Enriching your life	1	2	3	4	9
Preparing for Graduate or Profession degree	1	2	3	4	9
Other (Specify_____)	1	2	3	4	9

What was the highest degree you intended to earn? ( ) none ( ) Associates ( ) Bachelors ( ) Masters ( ) Professional ( ) PhD ( ) Undecided

Initial background/goals/anxiety

How would you rate your comfort with returning to school? ( ) very comfortable ( ) somewhat comfortable ( ) somewhat apprehensive ( ) very apprehensive

When you first considered going back to school, how emotionally supported did you feel by the members of our household? ( )Very supported ( ) supported ( )somewhat supported ( ) not supported

Did you have any other off-campus emotional support systems? ( ) yes ( ) no
If yes, what_____

How was your time spent on household duties changed after starting school? ( ) more than before starting school ( ) same as before starting school ( ) half what it was ( ) quite-a-bit lighter ( ) taken over completely ( ) N/A

Women's study program involvement
Did you attend the Returning Women's Workshop (WS120)? ( ) yes ( ) no

      If no, did you know about it? ( ) yes ( ) no

Did you ever attend the weekly Returning Women's support groups? ( ) yes ( ) no

      If yes, how often? ( ) regularly ( ) 2-3x's a month ( ) 1x a month ( ) seldom

Did you attend any other Returning Women's functions? ( ) yes ( ) no

      If yes, how often? ( ) over 3x a month ( ) 2-3x's a month ( ) 1x a month
        ( ) seldom

Did you have a Returning Women's mentor? ( ) yes ( ) no

Involvement
Did you belong to any PSU student groups other than the Returning Women's groups
      previously asked about? ( ) yes ( ) no

How often did you attend student campus functions such as rallies, sports events,
      dances, etc. outside of classes? ( ) 3 or more times a week ( ) 1-2 times a week
      ( ) 1-3 times a month ( ) rarely ( ) never

How often did you stay after class, or arrange meetings, to study with other students?
      ( ) 3 or more times a week ( ) 1-2 times a week ( ) 1-3 times a month ( )
      rarely ( ) never

BONDING: Friendships
How often did you stay after class, or arrange meetings, to talk or socialize with other
      students? ( ) 3 or more times a week ( ) 1-2 times a week ( ) 1-3 times a
      month ( ) rarely ( ) never

How many students did you know by name when you first returned to school? ( ) 10
      or more ( ) 5-9 ( ) 1-4 ( ) none

How many students did you know by name when you finished your first term? ( ) 10
      or more ( ) 5-9 ( ) 1-4 ( ) none

How many students did you know by name when you finished your last term at PSU?
      ( ) 10 or more ( ) 5-9 ( ) 1-4 ( ) none

How would you rate the friendliness of the students at PSU? ( ) very friendly ( )
      friendly ( ) somewhat friendly ( ) not friendly ( ) N/A

Cared for
In regard to how much they cared about students, how would you rate the following?

	Very caring	caring	Somewhat caring	not caring	N A
PSU faculty	1	2	3	4	9
PSU Staff	1	2	3	4	9
PSU students	1	2	3	4	9

How socially comfortable did you feel coming onto the campus and going to classes?
( ) very comfortable ( ) somewhat comfortable ( ) somewhat uncomfortable ( ) uncomfortable

Loyalty and attachment
Did you ever recommend attending PSU to friends thinking about going back to school? ( ) yes ( ) no ( ) N/A

While you were attending PSU, did you ever look into transferring to another school? ( ) yes ( ) no

How would you rate your affection for PSU? ( ) loved PSU ( ) liked PSU ( ) I got what I needed ( ) didn't care for PSU

How would you rate PSU overall? ( ) It's a great school ( ) It's a good school ( ) It's an OK school ( ) It's a bad school

School Support Systems:
How supportive of your educational goals were each of the following?

	Very supportive	support-tive	neural	not supportive	N/A
Parents	1	2	3	4	9
Children	1	2	3	4	9
Spouse/Partner	1	2	3	4	9
Employer	1	2	3	4	9
Fellow students	1	2	3	4	9
PSU Faculty	1	2	3	4	9
PSU Staff	1	2	3	4	9
Friends	1	2	3	4	9

Did you ever look for emotional support systems at PSU? ( ) yes ( ) no
If yes, what did you find? _____

How would you rate the following concerns as you attended PSU?

	No concern	low	moderate	high	N/A
Finances	1	2	3	4	9
Academic performance	1	2	3	4	9
Child care	1	2	3	4	9
Employment	1	2	3	4	9
Family	1	2	3	4	9
Parking	1	2	3	4	9
Transportation to PSU	1	2	3	4	9

Which of these was your top concern? _____ ( ) finances ( )
academic performance ( ) child care ( ) employment ( ) family ( ) Parking ( ) transportation to PSU

Workshop experiences: (for those who attended)
How would you rate your initial feelings about attending the Workshop?
( ) very excited ( ) somewhat excited ( ) somewhat leery ( ) leery

How would you rate you comfort while attending the Workshop?
( ) very comfortable ( ) somewhat comfortable ( ) somewhat uncomfortable
( ) uncomfortable

Please rate the following components of the workshop on their usefulness in achieving
your education goals?

	Very useful	useful	Not too useful	useless	N/A or don't remember
Time management training	1	2	3	4	9
Test taking skills	1	2	3	4	9
Writing skill listens (not journals)	1	2	3	4	9
Learning campus resources	1	2	3	4	9
Learning about transition process of returning to school	1	2	3	4	9
Journal writing	1	2	3	4	9
Public speaking to class	1	2	3	4	9
The assigned reading articles	1	2	3	4	9
Math anxiety discussions	1	2	3	4	9
Sharing of personal experience	1	2	3	4	9
Campus and library tours	1	2	3	4	9
Getting to know other women	1	2	3	4	9
Having fellow student(s) teaching the class	1	2	3	4	9

What would you say was the best part of the Workshop?

_____

How would you rate your overall satisfaction with the Workshop?

( ) very satisfied ( ) somewhat satisfied ( ) somewhat disappointed ( ) disappointed

How likely would you be to recommend the Workshop to other Returning Women?
( ) very likely ( ) somewhat likely ( ) somewhat unlikely ( ) unlikely

Concerning the Workshop, what, if anything, would you like see changed?

_____

Biographic:

Did you graduate from PSU? ( ) yes ( ) no

If no, did you transfer to other another school? ( ) yes ( ) no

If yes, what was the reason you choose another school? _____

_____

If yes, did you graduate from that school? ( ) yes ( ) no

If no on both, what is the reason you have not completed your degree?

_____

_____

If yes, did you apply to any graduate schools? ( ) yes ( ) no

If yes, where? _____

What was your mother's highest level of education? _____ ( ) n/a

What was your father's highest level of education? _____ ( ) n/a

What is your present age?_____

How many credits had you completed before going back to school?_____

Did you have a job while also attending PSU? ( ) yes ( ) no
if yes, how many hours, on the average, a week did you work? _____

What was your average total family income while attending school? ( ) over 30,000
( )20,001-30,000 ( ) 10,001- 20,000 ( ) below 10,000 ( ) N/A

What was your marital/relationship status when first returning to PSU?
( ) married/living w/ someone ( )committed/steady dating ( )divorced/single

What race or ethnicity do you most identify yourself as being?_____

Did you have children under the age of 18 living in your home while attending PSU?
( ) yes ( ) no

How many people were in your household when you returned to school? _____

What was your final GPA on work done at PSU? _____

Would you be willing to participate in a face-to-face interview with me so I could gain further insight into your college experience? ( ) yes ( ) no

What is the best time and place for us to meet? _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1) I'd like to hear what was going on with you and your life when you first thought about going to school.

2) How did you feel about going back to school?

3) Did you have a support system off campus?

4) Tell me what it was like on the first day of class.

5) Tell me about the next two weeks of school.

For those women who attended the Workshop:

6) Why did you take WS120 and what difference did it make in your experience of PSU

7) What would you say were the best things about the WS120 class?

8) Did you recommend the WS to other women.

For those women who did not attend the Workshop:

6) Where there services or resources that you would have liked to see offered at PSU?

7) Did you know about WS120? If so, were there reasons you did not attend?

For everyone:

8/9) Did you finish school?

9/10) Over-all what was your experience at PSU like?

10/11) Do you have any other thoughts about PSU, returning to school or WS120 that you'd like to share with me?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, hereby agree to participate as a respondent in the research project "Returning Women's Workshop and the Retention of Returning Women Students," conducted by Kym Lamb of Portland State University.

I understand that the study involves an interview of about one hour in which I will be asked questions about my experience as a returning woman student at PSU.

It has been explained to me that the purpose of this study is to learn about the effects of attending the Returning Women's Workshop and the factors associated with returning women's retention.

I may not receive any direct benefit from participating in this study, but my participation may help to increase knowledge which may benefits others in the future.

I understand that my participation in this study, or refusal to answer any specific questions, will not affect my relationship with PSU or its Women's Study Program.

Kym Lamb has offered to answer any questions I may have about the study and what is expected of me in this study. I have been assured that all information I give will be kept confidential and that the identity of all respondents will remain anonymous.

I have read the foregoing information and agree to participate in this study.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

If you experience problems that are a result of your participation in this study, please contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Grants and Contracts, 105 Neuberger Hall, Portland State University, 503 725-3417.

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH APPROVAL REQUEST SUBMITTED TO THE

HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH REVIEW COMMITTEE

AND

APPROVAL

Application to Human Subjects Research Review Committee

1. PROJECT TITLE AND PROSPECTUS:
    "Returning Women's Workshop and Retention of Returning Women Students."
Kym Lamb, Master Degree Student, Sociology.

ABSTRACT

Through quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews involving 100 returning women students, of which 50 attended the Returning Women's Workshop and 50 did not, this study will look at factors leading to social bonding to the university, university involvement, and retention (graduation) rates. A quantitative survey will first be conducted over the phone with each consenting student. Based on student consent and availability, a more in-depth face to face interview will be conducted on a smaller sub-sample for further insight and information. It is expected that the women students who attend the workshop will feel more bonded to the university, be more involved in university activities and have a higher retention rate.

The data gathered from the quantitative survey will be analyzed using path analysis to identify correlations between attending the Workshop and the three dependent outcomes (bonding, involvement, retention). The data will also be used to determine similarities between the samples. The data from the qualitative interviews will be used to further describe the effects of attending or not attending the Workshop, and to identify influencing factors not addressed in the quantitative survey.

Questions on the survey and in the interview will address the student's feelings about returning to school, emotional support on and off campus during school, the frequency of involvement in campus functions, number of campus friends, and feelings of connection to PSU. There will also be demographic questions and questions about academic achievement.

The findings from this study will be useful to the Women's Study Program through which the Returning Women's Workshop is designed and operated as well as to other retention programs on campus.

II. EXEMPTION CLAIMS. The proposed study appears to be exempt from complete review under category 3. The identity of the respondents will be needed for the initial survey and for the further interview, but each case will eventually be assigned a number. Respondents' identifying information will be kept in a completely separate file from the survey forms. Only the researcher will have the identifying names, but shall treat those names with confidentiality. The quantitative findings from the study will be reported in aggregate form only. The qualitative data will be treated with confidentiality and will not be link-able to any respondent. Once the analysis is completed, the identifying information will be destroyed.

III. SUBJECT RECRUITMENT. Subjects will be randomly selected by the Institutional Research and Planning at PSU. The subject will be contacted by phone for the quantitative survey. After an explanation of the study, oral consent will be requested. Only those students who consent will be asked questions. Once the survey is completed and until the desired number of interviews has been reached, the researcher will request a face-to-face interview. Only those students who agree will meet with the researcher. At the time of the interview a written consent form will be offered and only those students who sign will be asked questions.

IV. INFORMED- VOLUNTARY CONSENT IN WRITING. Respondents will be told from the beginning of the survey phone call that this study is voluntary and oral consent will be requested. For the qualitative interview the respondents will be asked to sign two copies of an informed consent at the beginning of the interview. The proposed consent form is included with this application. The respondent will keep one

copy and the interviewer will place the other copy in a file separate from the interview data.

V. FIRST-PERSON SCENARIO: "I received a phone call from a Sociology graduate student from PSU. She informed me that she was doing a study on returning women who attended PSU, and she got my name and number from the University. She told me she was conducting a survey and that participation is totally voluntary. I was assured that my identity would be confidential and declining the survey wouldn't affect any relationships with PSU and Women's Study program. She asked for my consent. I agreed and we proceeded with the questions. After I answered the questions she asked me if we could meet so she could conduct a face-to-face interview. She wanted more depth and information concerning my experience at PSU. I agreed and we met two weeks later. The survey lasted about 15 minutes."

"At the interview she explained her study again and asked me if I'd sign a consent form. I did and she asked me the questions. She asked me about my feelings upon returning to school, my support systems during school, and my experience with the Returning Women's Workshop. She concluded by asking me if I had anything I would like to add to the information I had already given. The interview lasted about an hour."

VI. POTENTIAL RISKS AND SAFEGUARDS. There is no expectation that participation in this study has any physical, social, economic, or other risks to the respondent. It is likely that a potential respondent who is very uncomfortable about sharing her experiences of PSU will refuse to participate in the study.

VII. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED STUDY. The benefits to this study include the availability of empirical data on the factors associated with retention of returning women students and the effects of the Returning Women's Workshop. There are no obvious risks associated with this study because the questions are not

invasive or of an extremely personal nature. The respondent will be told at the beginning of the interview that she can choose to not answer any question that is uncomfortable. The benefits considerably outweigh the risks in this particular study.

VIII. RECORDS AND DISTRIBUTION. The completed interviews will not be identified by respondent's name and will be kept in a file separate from the identification of the respondents. No names will be entered into the computer with data from the interview or survey. All the quantitative findings will be reported in aggregate form. The qualitative findings will in no way be link-able to the particular respondent. Confidentiality is assured in the presentation of the results of the study.

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
Research and Sponsored Projects

DATE: January 9, 1997

TO: Kym Lamb   SSN#:

FROM: Vikki Vandiver, Chair, HSRRC, 1996-97

RE: HSRRC Waived Review of Your Application titled, "Returning Women's Workshop & Retention of Returning Women Students."

Your proposal is exempt from further HSRRC review, and you may proceed with the study.

Even with the exemption above, it was necessary by University policy for you to notify this Committee of the Proposed research and we appreciate your timely attention to this matter. If you make changes in your research protocol, the Committee must be notified. This approval is valid for one year from date of issue.

cc: Maureen Orr Eldred
       Kathryn A. Farr, Project Advisor

waiver.mem