



Retention planning for the future : challenges facing the rural land-grant university in the twenty-first century

by Janet Courtney Stryker

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Adult and Higher Education

Montana State University

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**Abstract:**

Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach combining significant research, expert testimony and insights from campus-based practitioners, this study applies qualitative futures research to the area of college student retention at rural land-grant universities. Exploring the range of social and economic influences on retention in public higher education and the range of long-term planning options available to retention administrators, managers and practitioners, this study anticipates how choice, chance and selected socio-economic trends combine to create a scenario for retention management at rural land-grant universities. The study identifies retention challenges facing rural land-grant universities in the twenty-first century and develops an institutional plan for college student persistence which will assist administrators and practitioners in anticipating and accommodating these changes.

Employing three distinct phases of analysis, this study synthesizes a broad view of future socio-economic challenges in order to provide a progressive, full-spectrum analysis of present and future retention challenges for individuals involved in university management, programming and planning. The research analysis process occurs on three levels allowing the study to be comprehensive as well as multifaceted. The exploration of future retention trends at rural land-grant universities is conducted within the context of eight major categories: social trends; economic concerns; issues of public perception and accountability; technological innovations, integration and utilization concerns; changing demographics; trends in college student enrollment; faculty culture; and the evolving mission of the rural land-grant university. The review of significant literature represents the most formalized documented ideas regarding the prevailing socio-economic trends impacting retention at rural land-grant universities. A prospective study with interview data from four national retention experts adds a less formalized, more idealized approach to the topic tailored to the rural land-grant university tradition. Finally, a larger data set from sixteen campus-based practitioners adds an informal pragmatic layer to the analysis providing insight into the day-to-day realities of retention planning at rural land-grant universities. Contributing their opinions, based on present realities embedded in the historical, political and socio-economic trends unique to their institutions, campus-based retention practitioners present suggestions and examples for implementing retention theory in an informal practical fashion ranging from immediate efforts to strategic long-term planning.

Combining the issues of future trends, retention and new directions for rural land-grant universities, this report outlines both the retention challenges administrators, managers and practitioners may face in the future and the planning methods which may assist them with their long-term retention endeavors at the point of intersection between future socio-economic trends and persistence issues at rural land-grant universities. Beginning with a brief consideration of the theoretical underpinnings of the college student dropout and persistence phenomenon and an overview of the historical basis for the land-grant university tradition, the report focuses on the most evident social and economic trends and/or challenges impacting college student retention in the rural land-grant university setting. A qualitative futures-based methodology which relies extensively on the use of information and telecommunications

technologies provides a framework for data collection and analysis. A series of planning and programming recommendations is outlined for each socio-economic trend as well as a fourteen-step long-range plan for retention management at rural land-grant universities.

**RETENTION PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE: CHALLENGES  
FACING THE RURAL LAND-GRANT UNIVERSITY  
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

**by  
Janet Courtney Stryker**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree**

**of  
Doctor of Education  
in  
Adult and Higher Education**

**MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY-BOZEMAN  
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## ABSTRACT

Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach combining significant research, expert testimony and insights from campus-based practitioners, this study applies qualitative futures research to the area of college student retention at rural land-grant universities. Exploring the range of social and economic influences on retention in public higher education and the range of long-term planning options available to retention administrators, managers and practitioners, this study anticipates how choice, chance and selected socio-economic trends combine to create a scenario for retention management at rural land-grant universities. The study identifies retention challenges facing rural land-grant universities in the twenty-first century and develops an institutional plan for college student persistence which will assist administrators and practitioners in anticipating and accommodating these changes.

Employing three distinct phases of analysis, this study synthesizes a broad view of future socio-economic challenges in order to provide a progressive, full-spectrum analysis of present and future retention challenges for individuals involved in university management, programming and planning. The research analysis process occurs on three levels allowing the study to be comprehensive as well as multifaceted. The exploration of future retention trends at rural land-grant universities is conducted within the context of eight major categories: social trends; economic concerns; issues of public perception and accountability; technological innovations, integration and utilization concerns; changing demographics; trends in college student enrollment; faculty culture; and the evolving mission of the rural land-grant university. The review of significant literature represents the most formalized documented ideas regarding the prevailing socio-economic trends impacting retention at rural land-grant universities. A prospective study with interview data from four national retention experts adds a less formalized, more idealized approach to the topic tailored to the rural land-grant university tradition. Finally, a larger data set from sixteen campus-based practitioners adds an informal pragmatic layer to the analysis providing insight into the day-to-day realities of retention planning at rural land-grant universities. Contributing their opinions, based on present realities embedded in the historical, political and socio-economic trends unique to their institutions, campus-based retention practitioners present suggestions and examples for implementing retention theory in an informal practical fashion ranging from immediate efforts to strategic long-term planning.

Combining the issues of future trends, retention and new directions for rural land-grant universities, this report outlines both the retention challenges administrators, managers and practitioners may face in the future and the planning methods which may assist them with their long-term retention endeavors at the point of intersection between future socio-economic trends and persistence issues at rural land-grant universities. Beginning with a brief consideration of the theoretical underpinnings of the college student dropout and persistence phenomenon and an overview of the historical basis for the land-grant university tradition, the report focuses on the most evident social and economic trends and/or challenges impacting college student retention in the rural land-grant university setting. A qualitative futures-based methodology which relies extensively on the use of information and telecommunications technologies provides a framework for data collection and analysis. A series of planning and programming recommendations is outlined for each socio-economic trend as well as a fourteen-step long-range plan for retention management at rural land-grant universities.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

For nearly six decades, researchers in higher education have been studying the phenomenon of degree attainment for undergraduate students. This study of "student persistence" which began with an extensive consideration of college student dropout characteristics and, with the seminal work of Vincent Tinto (1975) and others (Astin, 1975), has since transcended the bounds of simply enumerating dropout traits into a holistic consideration of the process of attrition and retention from a student-institution interaction perspective. In fact, retention rates and satisfaction survey data have become key indicators at many colleges and universities of overall institutional effectiveness (Astin, Korn, Green, 1987). While the study of student persistence--the manner in which students matriculate, remain enrolled, earn a degree or drop out--is not new, the reasons for examining this phenomenon take on special significance as a new millennium approaches. According to Oscar Porter (1990) in his report on *Undergraduate Completion and Persistence at Four-Year Colleges and Universities*, the challenges faced by institutions of higher education may be perplexing and disheartening when considered from a turn-of-the-century vantage point. Porter states, "students are likely to be older, non-Anglo, poorer both financially and educationally; and, of course, there probably won't be as many of them" (p.1). Attending to the diverse needs and meeting the subsequent demands of this new wave of students will be the central challenge for college student retention planners, programmers and managers as the next millennium progresses.

In a more detailed account of retention-related trends and concerns in higher education, the recently released *National Student Satisfaction Survey* (July, 1998) underscores Porter's predictions by indicating overall student satisfaction is declining at America's higher education institutions. Students have become increasingly concerned about the ris-

ing costs of tuition and are demanding increased accountability from their colleges and universities. Further, many students, traditional and nontraditional, are seeking more cost effective and efficient ways of accessing and attaining postsecondary education. The "exploding availability and capability of advanced technology-based teaching and learning" has prompted much discussion about creating "virtual universities" which exist only in cyberspace ("The Western Governor's," 1996, p.8). For colleges and universities interested in staying technologically competitive during the next ten to fifteen years, issues of student retention, attrition and persistence take on an entirely different perspective when viewed from the vantage point of a "virtual university."

While financial, technological and demographic changes will have a great impact on postsecondary institutions across the United States, it is the public institutions which will need to change and adapt the most to both fulfill their missions and meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. In fact, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges ("Facts About," 1997) documents that more than one third of all students enrolled in postsecondary degree programs in the United States are currently enrolled in four-year public institutions.

According to C. Peter Magrath (1996) in his report to the Kellogg Foundation on the Future of the State and Land-Grant Universities entitled *The Challenges and Opportunities for Land-Grant Universities in the Twenty-First Century*, land-grant universities in particular face a crisis of confidence as the dawn of a new era approaches. To best meet this crisis, Magrath posits, "universities must adapt and change" (p.17). State and land-grant universities "must recognize the new realities of diminished public resources while forthrightly facing [their] shortcomings" (p.18). Speaking specifically in terms of the broader demands facing land-grant institutions, Magrath continues with a description of the primary challenges these universities need to address:

Clearly, these include our need to use faculty time more productively, our obligation to pay more attention to undergraduate students and to become full-time collaborators with public schools, and our duty to link research discoveries and educational insights with our states and communities in partnerships that strengthen our economy and society. And we dare not be afraid to use the new technologies--most of them spawned in our universities--to improve how we teach, learn, and

communicate in a world not defined by campus boundaries or restricted by towers built of ivory (p.17-18).

In order for land-grant universities to best perform their "unique and vital mission as the intellectual and educational service centers for America in the twenty-first century," they must be financially stable and maintain public confidence (p.18).

Consistent with the decline in student satisfaction and the general erosion of public confidence mentioned above, public colleges and universities "have been challenged by their various constituents to demonstrate student success" (Sanders & Burton, 1996, p.555). In order to best meet the challenges of accountability from a "consumer satisfaction" perspective, many public colleges and universities have chosen to measure and demonstrate their successes in terms of retention and graduation rates. Using retention and graduation rates as an indication of productivity and outcomes, universities attempt to speak to students, community members, legislatures, and other constituents in a way which directly addresses public concerns. By demonstrating positive retention rates and graduation outcomes, public colleges and universities hope to assuage rising consumer anxiety and persistent questions concerning the operational efficiency of their institutions and the quality of the undergraduate education they produce.

Quantitative accountability measures focusing on retention and graduation rates, however, are not enough to convince a discerning public that institutions of public higher education are fulfilling their missions. According to Pamela Arrington (1994), Director of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities/Sallie Mae National Retention Project, "for those who look beyond simple measures of accountability, the real test of institutional effectiveness resides in how well it fosters student learning and achievement" (p.1). Land-grant institutions in particular have a history of being very successful in affording access to higher education for a broad range of traditional and nontraditional students. While this has had a great impact on the creation of more higher education opportunities for a wider range of students, it has not been equally efficacious in keeping those students in school and bringing them to graduation. In other words, *access* has not always meant *success* for many of the students in land-grant institutions. Land-grant universities that are aware of the financial, technological and demographic challenges which their students will be facing and how these challenges relate to fostering student achieve-

ment will be able to help a larger proportion of their students attain the educational outcomes they desire.

Understanding how to convert access into success is one of the keys to any retention effort. To be successful in their retention endeavors, land-grant universities "will need to focus on strategies for effecting institutional change" (Arrington, 1994, p.1).

[Institutional] change cannot be achieved by superficial means. It will require fundamental reform of campus cultures to support diversity and conversion of the learning environment from a teacher-centered one to a learner-centered one (Arrington, 1994, p.1).

Not only must land-grant institutions prepare for external economic, technological and demographic challenges, they must also turn inward to redefine themselves and their missions. Given the wide range of changes and challenges projected for college student retention as higher education enters into a new century, it is crucial to the success of public colleges and universities--specifically rural land-grant institutions--that they be able to meet the retention challenges they will face in the year two-thousand and well beyond.

While it is critical for all land-grant institutions to plan carefully for the retention problems they will be facing in the next ten to fifteen years, rural land-grant institutions in particular will be faced with a unique set of challenges resulting from the specific geographic, demographic and cultural conditions which define them as a distinctive educational subgroup. Characteristically, most rural land-grant institutions are located in small towns where the university is the primary "industry." The surrounding communities are generally agrarian and politically conservative making it especially important for the institution to demonstrate student success and fiscal efficiency. Finally, many of the land-grant universities in this rural educational subgroup have the special function of being one of the few access points to the national information technology and telecommunications infrastructure for many rural Americans.

Some of the specific retention-related challenges rural institutions may face as the twenty-first century approaches include creating a climate where racially, ethnically and culturally diverse students will feel comfortable in a predominantly homogeneous setting; providing financial and other support to students and, in some cases, their families who have had to relocate to a small college town; and providing quality intellectual and

developmental experiences in an often fiscally conservative environment. Exploring and planning for the special retention challenges which rural land-grant institutions share is an area which merits serious consideration as these institutions, along with other land-grant universities, redefine their missions and services to meet future demands.

### Problem

There is a paucity of higher education research which examines student achievement issues in terms of attrition, persistence and retention at rural land-grant universities. Specifically, no comprehensive qualitative analysis has been conducted regarding the retention challenges rural land-grant institutions face as they consider planning for the next ten to fifteen years. Further, there has been no holistic examination of retention plan development from a land-grant university perspective. Essentially, retention studies have not addressed three key issues. First, the specific needs of rural land-grant institutions have not been considered within a retention planning and programming framework. Second, higher education research has not looked to the future in terms of the retention challenges which may appear on the horizon for public higher education meeting the retention planning and programming needs of rural land-grant institutions. Finally, retention studies have not sought to develop an organizational plan which promotes and improves student persistence in accordance with the anticipated trends and challenges brought on by a new decade. This study addresses these three key issues and presents relevant social and economic megatrends as they apply to the rural land-grant university tradition.

### Purpose

Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach which creatively combined current knowledge, experience and understanding, this study applied qualitative futures research to the area of college student retention at rural land-grant universities. The goal of this type of futures research was not to attempt to predict what retention planning and programming would look like during the next ten to fifteen years. Rather, this study sought to explore the range of planning options available to retention administrators, managers and practitio-

ners, and how these planning alternatives might be "affected by the interaction of choice and chance" (Welch & Watson, 1979, p.2). The purpose of this research was to identify the retention challenges facing the rural land-grant-university in the twenty-first century and develop an institutional plan for retention which optimally anticipates and accommodates the changes rural land-grant universities face as they move into the next century. In light of the urgent need to focus on retention challenges and plan development for land-grant universities, this study had two primary objectives:

1. Based on expert testimony and research, this study uncovered and reported on the retention challenges rural land-grant institutions would be facing during the next ten to fifteen years; and
2. Developed an institutional plan for retention which would accommodate those anticipated changes and challenges while allowing the rural land-grant institution to realize its goal of improved student success.

This study was unique because it focused on future retention trends within a socio-economic context. The research also centered on institutional capacity and ability as the units of analysis whereas most research in retention primarily deals with individual student behavior. Ideally, this approach not only would bring to light the retention programming and planning challenges institutions would be facing in the future, it also would afford rural land-grant institutions the opportunity to address their retention problems using a holistic systems-based approach. This hybridized approach also might allow rural land-grant universities to employ a plan for retention which would anticipate the challenges of a new century while giving these institutions the means to measure the consequences of positive organizational change as they move from student access to student success and persistence models.

Utilizing current research as well as data collected from various national retention experts and retention practitioners at sixteen rural land-grant universities, this study synthesizes a broad view of future retention challenges in order to provide a full-spectrum analysis of what may lie ahead on the higher education horizon for individuals involved in retention-related programming and planning. This scenario is considered in five distinct phases of this report. First, the research report highlights current national trends in retention theory and programming through the examination of significant research literature;

national retention data; and prominent studies showcasing current socio-economic trends as they relate to retention. A précis of land-grant history is also included as a contextual background for the study. Second, the study discusses current retention models and plans as well as other relevant organizational plans which may be used to anticipate and accommodate future trends, challenges and changes in long-term strategic retention planning. Third, the report presents a summary of the retention challenges facing rural land-grant universities based on first-hand interviews with national retention experts. The specific views of rural land-grant university retention practitioners regarding the future trends in retention programming and planning is the fourth topic introduced in the study. Lastly, this study provides a functional plan for college student retention at rural land-grant universities which addresses and accommodates the retention challenges these public institutions of higher education may face at the turn of the century.

### Delimitations

The focus of this study was limited to sixteen, medium sized, rural land-grant universities. A list of these universities appears below:

- |                                   |                                   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. University of Alaska-Fairbanks | 2. Clemson University             |
| 3. University of Idaho            | 4. University of Maine            |
| 5. Mississippi State University   | 6. Montana State University       |
| 7. North Dakota State University  | 8. University of Nevada           |
| 9. New Mexico State University    | 10. Oregon State University       |
| 11. University of Rhode Island    | 12. South Dakota State University |
| 13. Utah State University         | 14. University of Vermont         |
| 15. Washington State University   | 16. University of Wyoming         |

Based on nationally recognized sources of higher education data (AASCU, 1998, NASULGC, 1998), these peer institutions were chosen because they shared a number of similar characteristics. First, all of the institutions were federal land-grant institutions. Second, each university was located in a rural area (as defined in Chapter Three of this paper). Third, each of the universities in the study had a similar enrollment profile.

An exploration of the future trends and issues in retention programming for rural land-grant institutions was conducted within the context of eight major categories: social trends; financial/economic concerns; issues of public accountability; technological innovations, integration and utilization; changing student demographics; trends in college student enrollment; faculty culture; and the evolving mission of the rural land-grant university. Data was collected from two primary sources:

1. Nationally recognized retention experts (as defined in Chapter Three); and
2. Retention specialists at each of the selected land-grant universities.

Data collection was limited to a series of individual interviews in conjunction with specific descriptive and demographic statistics. Discussion related to future retention trends and issues rural land-grant institutions may face in the twenty-first century encompassed a period of ten to fifteen years unless otherwise specified.

### Plan of This Report

This study is unique in its consideration of future trends for retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities across the United States. Social and economic forces of change external and internal to the university are explored in three contexts, each adding to the information and insights gleaned from the others. The external categories of change which were explored included trends in society, the economy, public perceptions and accountability, and technology. Socio-economic trends internal to the rural land-grant university include demographic trends, student enrollment patterns, the culture of the faculty, and the changing mission of the rural land-grant university. The above eight external and internal social and economic trends provided the lens through which the future of retention programming, planning and management are viewed throughout this research report. This study engages a three-stage examination of these future social and economic trends by: (1) exploring the relevant and significant literature in each of the eight categories; (2) verifying and honing the future trend data from the literature review with nationally recognized retention experts; and (3) moving from a theoretical to a practical application of the eight categories with retention practitioners at sixteen rural land-grant universities. The Summary, Recommendations and Conclusions chapter synthesizes this

three phase examination process and presents a distilled view of retention plans for rural land-grant universities which may best anticipate and accommodate the major external and internal social and economic changes on the horizon for retention managers at these institutions.

This research report is presented in six chapters. The first chapter introduces the fundamental research questions for the study and demonstrates the need, purpose and procedures for the project. The second chapter presents a brief discussion of the theoretical foundations of college student retention as they apply to public colleges and universities and provides a brief historical consideration of the land-grant university tradition. This chapter also reviews the current social and economic trends and challenges impacting college student retention and, based on existing research, explores the new challenges public colleges and universities may be facing in the future. Chapter three describes the study's methodology beginning with the assumptions and rationale for a qualitative study design. Also included in the third chapter is a discussion of the study design; role of the researcher; the study parameters and data collection procedures; data recording and analysis procedures; analysis; and methods for verification. The fourth chapter of this study introduces the findings from a prospective study conducted with four national retention experts. This chapter contains excerpts from interviews with these national retention experts outlining their perceptions of what lies ahead in terms of future retention challenges and major socio-economic issues of concern. Chapter five introduces the findings from campus-based retention practitioners as they considered the future of retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities in light of the major socio-economic trends impacting their universities. An overview of current retention plans and models at these rural land-grant institutions also is included. Chapter six presents a summary of the research as well as recommendations, conclusions and implementation suggestions based on the results of the study. The chapter closes with suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Anticipating the future as it relates to the central theme of college student retention and retention programming at rural land-grant universities requires a solid foundation in retention theory as well as a broadly defined view of social and economic trends as they relate to public higher education. Predicting the intersection between college student retention theory and practice, and future socio-economic movements is the key to understanding and developing a scenario for long-term retention planning at rural land-grant universities. This chapter provides an overview of the broad issues and socio-economic trends which will influence college student retention or attrition and retention-related programming as our society and public higher education institutions respond to change.

After conducting preliminary research regarding retention for this study, it became evident that planning for the future as it relates to college student retention at rural land-grant universities necessitated an exploration of literature from several different traditions. The purpose of this chapter is to address some of the central theories pertaining to college student retention and to provide a conceptual framework which explores the literature from four distinct traditions: public higher education, college student development, sociology and organizational theory. The first two disciplines provided the basic foundation for this study. By using public higher education history and theory combined with college student development theory, a definition of retention was established which guided the research within the context of the rural land-grant tradition. Related literature from sociological and organizational disciplines was used to develop a clear picture of the main socio-economic trends which may effect the future of retention at rural land-grant colleges and universities and to conceptualize a plan which would be most appropriate for retention planning at these particular organizations. This integrative literature review is presented

below in seven sections which trace the development and traditions of land-grant institutions within the U.S. higher education system; outline the basic theories regarding retention and present a working definition of the term for the purpose of this study; discuss the need for and impact of retention programming at rural land-grant institutions; give a perspective on the future and future planning in public higher education; review the external and internal socio-economic changes facing public higher education; and explore the organizational changes these schools must consider in order to adapt and plan for the future. The seventh and final section of this chapter reviews current retention plans as well as other relevant organizational plans which lend themselves to future changes within the rural land-grant university context. At best, predicting and planning for the future involves a great deal of educated guesswork and some luck. Hopefully, this chapter will challenge and stimulate the process of planning for college student retention as rural land-grant universities prepare for a new century.

### Historical Context

In order to plan for and successfully implement retention programming at rural land-grant institutions, it is critical to understand the nature, mission and intended function of the land-grant university within the context of the U.S. system of higher education. The following section presents a brief historical overview of the creation of the land-grant concept and specifically addresses the three-fold mission of these institutions which has become an established tradition in a consistently changing society.

The land-grant college or university can be defined as "an institution that has been designated by its state legislature or Congress to receive the benefits of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890" ("The Land-Grant Tradition," 1995, p.3). The original mission of the land-grant college had four primary components: to teach agriculture, military tactics, mechanical arts and liberal arts subjects so that members of the "working classes" could obtain both a liberal and practical education. Senator Justin Smith Morrill from Vermont sponsored the land-grant legislation and is widely credited for having ensured its enactment both in 1862 for the First Morrill Act and in 1890 for the Second Morrill Act.

In 1887, Senator Morrill clarified the purpose of the 1862 Act and, thereby, the purpose of the land-grant college by stating the following in his address to the Massachusetts Agricultural College:

The land-grant colleges were founded on the idea that a higher and broader education should be placed in every state within the reach of those whose destiny assigns them to, or who may have the courage to choose industrial locations where the wealth of nations is produced; where advanced civilization unfolds its comforts, and where a much larger number of the people need wider educational advantages, and impatiently await their possession....It would be a mistake to suppose it was intended that every student should become either a farmer or a mechanic when the design comprehended not only instruction for those who may hold the plow or follow a trade but such instruction as any person might need--with the world all before them where to choose--and without the exclusion of those who might prefer to adhere to the classics (quoted in "The Land-Grant Tradition," 1995, pp.5-6).

With the establishment of the land-grant university, Morrill's primary aim was to move the opportunity for higher education beyond the American elite to the "industrial classes" making a practical education accessible to all individuals.

As of 1999, there exists at least one land-grant institution in every state and territory of the United States including the District of Columbia. Several Southern states have two land-grant institutions resulting from the Second Morrill Act of 1890 which provided additional endowments for the creation of separate land-grant institutions for African Americans in certain Southern states. These institutions are typically known as the "1890 Land-Grants." Many Western and Plains states have one or more of the "1994 land-grants" which are part of the 29 Native American tribal colleges. Land-grant status was conferred by Congress on the 29 Native American colleges in October 1994, as a provision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Reauthorization Act.

Since their creation in the latter half of the 19th century, land-grant colleges and universities have provided the world with a unique system of higher education which is widely accessible to a broad cross-section of society and, prolific in its discovery and dissemination of relevant information, designed to contribute positively to society as a whole. Consistent with the mission espoused by Senator Morrill in 19th century, today's land-grant colleges and universities "continue to fulfill their democratic mandate for openness,

accessibility, and service to the people" ("The Land-Grant Tradition," 1995, p.4). Further, many land-grant institutions have established themselves as some of the United States' most distinguished research universities. The land-grant tradition and heritage have afforded millions of students the opportunity to study nearly any academic discipline "and explore fields of inquiry far beyond the scope envisioned in the original land-grant mission" ("The Land-Grant Tradition," 1995, p.4). In fact, the land-grant university system in the United States has afforded the largest segment of people in the history of the world the benefits of a college or university education.

### College Student Retention Theory Overview

The persistence/attrition phenomenon in higher education has been the central focus of many institutional reviews, evaluations and studies since the latter half of the 1970's and, given the major economic, technological and demographic changes during the last twenty years, the retention phenomenon continues to be at the forefront of many college and university planning scenarios. During the past two decades, a number of definitive reviews and studies have been presented which provide the theoretical foundations for any investigation or research effort surrounding the issue of college student retention. The following paragraphs highlight the retention/attrition/persistence theories which have made the greatest contributions to the body of research and literature dealing with retention. Following this review, a definition of retention will be presented which provides the basic guide for the data collection and analysis for this research project.

The field of study regarding college student retention/attrition has a long and varied history when one considers the plethora of models which have been advanced to explain the college student dropout phenomenon. While most of these theorists are adept at describing actual leaving behaviors, in a practical sense, the bulk of early retention/attrition scholars were unable to link cause and effect. In terms of providing constructs for actual retention-oriented programming, many models fell short of describing what caused students to leave their post-secondary institutions and they neglected the role the institution played in the individual's decision to drop out. Finally, a great number of studies failed to provide a definition of student departure which was consistent and accurate.

Theories of college student retention generally fall into one of three categories: (1) psychological models of educational persistence; (2) environmental/social theories; and (3) organizational theories. Viewed individually, each of the three disciplines examines the retention phenomenon from a distinct perspective. The psychological studies (Ethington, 1990) view the act of staying or leaving as purely individually motivated. The decision to depart is more a reflection of the individual's personality and ability to cope with college life. Sociological/environmental studies of student retention (Manski & Wise, 1983; Iwai & Churchill, 1982), on the other hand, tend to emphasize the impact of economic, institutional and other outside social forces (race, gender, status attainment, etc.) on an individual's decision to stay or leave college. Finally, organizational theorists (Bean, 1980, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1986), look at the role of the higher education organization or institution in the student's departure decision. In essence, how satisfied was the individual with the institution in terms of the distinct organizational characteristics (campus climate, institutional bureaucracy, policies, etc.) and the benefits offered by the school (status, prestige, grades, training). Organizational theorists tend to view institutions like many other organizations--as a place of work--when they consider the issue of college student retention. In their view, the organizational ethos and culture plays a fundamental role in the retention process. Like other places of "work," institutions of higher education will retain more "workers" (students) by creating an environment where individuals have the opportunity to participate and be rewarded for their work.

As Tinto (1993) notes in his work *Leaving College*, each of the perspectives taken by the psychological, socio-environmental, and organizational theorists are valuable, but in a decidedly limited capacity. As the study of college student retention has been examined across each of the three disciplines, one critical component of college life has been consistently neglected. Tinto's (1993) articulation of this omission is straightforward: "That past theories of student departure should so underestimate, if not wholly ignore, the role the setting of the institution plays in the withdrawal process is surprising" (p.90). Viewed more holistically, within a social context, the phenomenon of college student retention becomes less truncated. Considering the institutional environment as a major component in the college student attrition and/or persistence equation broadens the scope of retention theory from the individual perspective to the cultural, community and physical impact of

the institution. Given this environmental point of view, an individual student's decision to leave or stay can be viewed within the social constructs of the institution as well as the greater community. It is this broad view of college student retention which transcends the consideration of individual departure or persistence patterns to include the environmental and social impacts of the institution that provides the foundation for this study.

### Six Major Retention Theories

During the course of this research effort, the theories of six major retention and student development theorists were used to both provide a framework for and guide the investigation. Most of the theories employed in this paper provide the background for systematically considering the future of college student retention programming and planning within the context of projected socio-economic trends during the next ten to fifteen years. A majority of the theories considered in this section fall into the environmental/sociological construct of college student retention theory as described in the above section. More specifically, the theories listed below describe the "college impact models of student change" category of college student development research (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p.57). These theories assign a "prominent and specific role to the context in which the student acts and thinks" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p.57).

[Institutional] structures, policies, programs, and services (whether academic or nonacademic), as well as the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the people who occupy (and to some extent define) institutional environments, are all seen as potential sources of influence on students' cognitive and affective changes" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p.57).

It should be noted for the purpose of this section that, in most cases, the term "college student" refers to a traditionally-aged student who falls somewhere within the range of 18 to 24 years old. Drawing much of their structure from student development theory, these environmental/sociological models view the college student as an "active participant" in his/her own personal growth process, however, the college impact models take the concept of personal development one step further by including the impact of environment and context as major components of college student development. As Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) discuss in their definitive work *How College Affects Students*, college impact models of college student development and change view the environment "as an active force

that not only affords opportunities for change-inducing encounters but can also, on occasion, require a student to respond [to change] (p.57). As many college impact theorists assert, "change is influenced not only by whether and how the student responds but also by the nature and intensity of the environmental stimulus" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p.57). One of the most common and salient features of the theories used in this study is the basic assumption that the university environment has a profound impact on college student retention. While other factors also may have a role in the individual student's decision to depart or stay, the institution's impact on each student plays a major role in his or her development and ability to achieve his or her educational objectives.

One of the earliest sociological-college impact models which addresses the college student retention phenomenon stems from the work of Alexander Astin (1970a, 1970b, 1971, 1972, 1975). Beginning with his "input-process-output" model which has been refined over the past thirty years to the "input-environment-outcome" (I-E-O) model, Astin (1993) has developed a guide for considering the impact of college on a student's level of individual development. The fundamental elements of the model are defined in the following manner:

*Inputs* refer to the characteristics of the student at the time of initial entry to the institution; *environment* refers to the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which the student is exposed; and *outcomes* refers to the student's characteristics *after* exposure to the environment (p.7, emphasis in original text).

Based on this definition of the college student development process, Astin (1993) suggests "change or growth in the student during college is determined by comparing outcome characteristics with input characteristics" (p.7). In terms of retention program planning, the I-E-O model provides administrators and other college personnel with a process to help them to realize their desired education and retention-related outcomes. While this linear model appears straight-forward in its design, actual implementation involves a great deal of uncertainty and improvisation on the part of the program designers and policy-makers. Even a veteran university administrator would find it difficult to project precisely which input, environment, and outcome variables need to be assessed in order to develop programming which would enhance desired student outcomes.

Astin (1993) also has proposed a second theory which has direct implications for college student retention and development. His "theory of involvement" is very basic in its foundation: student learning is directly related to student involvement. This simple but powerful concept underscores the immense potential student involvement has for improving the quality of the overall college student experience both affectively and cognitively. "Learning, academic performance, and retention are positively associated with academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups" (Astin, 1993, p.394). In terms of retention, the more involved a student is in the overall college experience, the more likely he or she is to stay and realize his or her personal and educational goals.

The second, and perhaps most cited, sociological/college impact model of college student retention stems from the work of Vincent Tinto (1975, 1987, 1989, 1993). Tinto's (1993) longitudinal interactional sociological model seeks to illuminate the college student dropout phenomenon by focusing on the individual within multiple social contexts. Specifically, Tinto asserts student persistence is directly related to the degree in which the student is integrated into the formal and informal academic and social communities at the university. Tinto (1993) argues:

Individual departure from institutions can be viewed as arising out of a longitudinal process of interactions between an individual with given attributes, skills, financial resources, prior educational experience, and dispositions (intentions and commitments) and other members of the academic and social systems of the institution. The individual's experience in those systems as indicated by his/her intellectual (academic) and social (personal) integration continually modifies his or her intentions and commitments (pp. 113-115).

Positive experiences, where the individual student is made to feel more integrated into the academic and social communities of the school, reinforce the student's desire to persist. Negative experiences erode the student's intentions and commitments and increase an individual's tendency to depart.

Moving beyond the individual to the institution, Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of college student attrition also considers the impact of the academic and social communities within a given institution as well as the external communities surrounding the school. Thus, the model also takes into consideration the impact of the interaction between a stu-

dent and his/her external community affiliations, obligations and commitments. By extending his model beyond the individual, Tinto provides a structure which allows researchers, practitioners and policy makers/administrators an avenue to increased understanding of college student development and institutional policy-making.

Pascarella (1980, 1984a, 1984b) developed a conceptual process model of college student attrition which stresses the informal contact between students and faculty as a critical component of college student retention. In this model, the background characteristics of the student interact with several other institutional variables (school image, policies, size, academic standards) to influence the informal contact a student has with faculty and other on-campus social groups (i.e., peers, student organizations). The nature of this informal contact, in turn, impacts educational outcomes (grades, intellectual development, career development and overall satisfaction with the institution) which directly affect the student's decision to leave or stay.

Following his conceptual process model of student attrition, Pascarella began to seek causes for college student attrition. Using Tinto's (1975) work as a springboard, Pascarella (1985a) outlined a causal model of college student outcomes which is particularly relevant to the study of the attrition/retention phenomenon. Unlike Tinto, however, Pascarella's model includes a "more explicit consideration of both an institution's structural characteristics and its general environment" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p.53). The development of each student is "a function of the direct and indirect effects of six major sets of variables" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p.53). The variables include the student's background/precollege traits; structural/organizational characteristics of institutions; interactions with agents of socialization; institutional involvement; quality of student effort; and learning and cognitive development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Again, the defining features of this theory underscore the college student-institutional-environment interaction while also taking into account the external socio-economic agents of change which may impact a student's decision to persist or depart.

Building on the basic theoretical assumptions advanced by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), Bean (1983, 1986) draws upon theoretical sources which go beyond, yet add to, the sociological/environmental foundations of most retention/attrition/persistence theories. Bean (1983) advanced the notion of student intent--intent to stay (or leave)--into the attrition

equation. Rooted in the psychological discipline where the contention is that "there is a strong relationship between attitudes, intentions, and behavior and that behaviors and attitudes do reflect intentions," Bean's model of college student attrition shows a direct association between a student's attitude about school and his or her intent to leave (Eaton & Bean, 1995, pp.617-618). Further, Bean (1983) demonstrated a strong relationship between a student's level of intent and his or her actual actions as they related to staying or leaving an institution. Bean (1990) augmented his original model with the addition of several variables or background attributes which influence both academic and social integration. "Retention can be influenced by environmental pull, a set of factors external to the institution, such as finances or family responsibilities, that draw an individual away from college" (Eaton & Bean, 1995, p.618). In Bean's updated model, the level of a student's academic and social integration into his or her college or university contributes directly to the student's attitude toward staying or leaving. The characteristics of the institution also have an impact on student attitude. In fact, Bean (1990) contends the attitude of the student will color his or her perception of the person-to-institution fit and directly influence his or her level of commitment.

Finally, in his most recent work, Bean (with Eaton, 1995) again delves into the psychological realm to further explain and expand upon the retention/attrition/persistence phenomenon. Using approach/avoidance theory, Eaton and Bean (1995) develop a conceptual model of the college student attrition phenomenon. In this study, "approach behaviors were associated with successful integration and avoidance behaviors were associated with poor integration" (Eaton & Bean, p.636). Students who take a more active/assertive approach to both academic and social situations at their institutions stand a better chance of achieving their academic goals than avoidant/passive students. This model exposes a not-so-subtle irony in student behaviors and attitudes which has serious implications for practitioners as well as administrators. Those students who are most likely to persist have a positive attitude about the person-institution fit and come with the intent to complete a degree program. They also tend to exhibit more approach (assertive/active) behaviors than the passive (avoidant) student. The more assertive students also tend to take advantage of retention-related programming (student organizations, tutoring, activities, orientations). In many schools across the country, retention programming is geared toward the approach-

oriented student. Students must find tutors, seek-out counselors and advisors and actively approach most programs designed to offer academic and/or social adjustment assistance. Eaton and Bean (1995) contend avoidant students--those students at the highest level of risk for attrition--will not take advantage of the bulk of retention-related services. Based on their findings, Eaton and Bean recommend "proactive and sensibly intrusive" retention programs to better target those students most at-risk for leaving (p.636).

Taking a much more applied approach to the study of college student retention, Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates (1985) present a very practical overview of and guide to the issue of retention. Beginning with a very simple viewpoint of retention and extending through an examination of several case studies of institutions with successful retention programs, Noel et al. build on the work of Astin (1970a, 1970b, 1971, 1972, 1975), Tinto (1975), Pascarella (1980), Bean (1983), and other retention experts (Terenzini, 1982; Upcraft, 1984) to create a step-by-step guide to increasing student retention on any given campus. The cornerstone of their study is founded upon one simple principle: retention is not a goal.

[Retention] is the result or by-product of improved programs and services in our classrooms and elsewhere on campus that contribute to student success. If retention alone becomes the goal, institutions will find themselves engaged in trying to hold students at all costs. (Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates, 1985, p.1).

Noel et al. (1985) make an important and unique contribution to the literature on college student retention by providing an exhaustive plan to promote and improve student success, satisfaction and retention campus-wide. Placing an emphasis on quality and a "people-oriented" campus culture, Noel et al. extend the responsibility for retention programming to faculty, staff and administrators at all levels. While acknowledging the economic implications of retention, they emphasize the importance of each individual student and the talent(s) he or she brings to the institution. It is their contention that if the student is viewed as the focal point of the retention effort, purposeful planning and a push toward quality will follow. The specifics of the plan advanced by Noel et al. will be examined later in this chapter.

Many of the studies (Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates, 1985; Upcraft & Gardner, 1989; Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993) conducted during the past two decades, which consider

the college student retention phenomenon, emphasize the importance of the first year experience in terms of keeping students at a given institution of higher education. In fact, as many institutions continue to deal with fiscal crisis, the practice of front-loading retention efforts toward entering first year students has become increasingly more accepted and popular. At the forefront of the effort to improve quality and educational efficacy for entering students stand Upcraft and Gardner (1989) with their seminal work *The Freshman Year Experience*. Upcraft and Gardner present a strong argument to support their contention that a student's experiences during his or her first year of college determines, to a great extent, his or her success in following years. These first-year experiences also contribute substantially to the likelihood of a student's ability to persist in higher education to degree completion. In an effort to outline a plan of action for colleges and universities which specifically addresses freshmen needs, Upcraft and Gardner identify strategies which address the factors vital to new student success. Not unlike the Noel et al. (1985) work described above, Upcraft and Gardner present a practitioner's guide which systematically addresses a range of foundational retention issues from college student development to policy concerns which provide the administrator a blueprint for course and program planning and implementation.

Upcraft and Gardner (1989) assert an institution must operate in a manner which values freshmen success over recruitment. They define success in developmental and pragmatic terms which extend beyond earning enough credits to graduate. Student success, broadly defined, means developing academic and intellectual competence; establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships; developing identity; deciding on a career and life-style; maintaining personal health and wellness; and developing an integrated philosophy of life (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). In order for students to achieve success, the college or university must provide them with every opportunity to realize their goals. Ethically speaking, an institution who admits a student owes that student a fair chance for advancement or progress toward success. Upcraft and Gardner (1989) present ten institutional "beliefs" or obligations they feel are necessary to facilitate freshmen success:

- Institutions have an obligation to support and enhance the freshman year, not only because retention may be increased, but because it is our moral

and educational obligation to create a collegiate environment with the maximum opportunity for student success.

- Institutions can intentionally and successfully help freshmen achieve their academic and personal goals by providing not only supportive and challenging classroom experiences, but enriched out-of-classroom experiences as well.
- The key to freshmen success is involvement.
- Involvement is enhanced by interaction between freshmen and others in the academic community, including faculty, staff, student affairs professionals, and other students.
- Institutions must take into account the racial, cultural, ethnic, age, and gender diversity of freshmen.
- Faculty involvement is vital to freshmen success.
- Freshmen should be treated with dignity and respect.
- Institutions should have very deliberate goals for freshmen.
- There are very specific and proven ways of enhancing freshmen success, if there is an institutional commitment to doing so.
- The freshmen seminar is a proven and effective way of enhancing freshman success (pp.4-6).

Institutions committed to the development of the whole student, and where a culture of support and understanding is fostered, will create an environment of success for freshmen. These are institutions which understand the developmental needs of entering students as well as the impact of their own institutional environment on this population.

### Defining Retention

Retention, attrition, persistence, withdrawal, dropping-out, stopping-out, and leaving are all terms which have been used to describe the college student drop-out phenomenon. One of the most pivotal issues concerning this research project was how to define retention, or the process of dropping-out, within the context of the study. As one reviews the primary literature on college student retention, it is clear that there is no single agreed upon definition for the term. Some theorists and researchers (Astin, 1993) tend to define college student retention with "the most stringent measure: completing a bachelor's degree in four years" (p.192). While others (Tinto, 1982, 1987, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini,

1991; Bean, 1986) describe retention as a phenomenon which can only be defined from the perspective of the individual, institution or other entity describing leaving behaviors and patterns. Finally, there is the notion that retention should not be defined as a goal or an outcome, rather, "retention is the result or by-product of improved programs and services in our classrooms and elsewhere on campus that contribute to student success" (Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates, 1985, p.1). Upcraft and Gardner (1989) further the notion of viewing college student retention in terms of student success by focusing on freshmen or new entering students exclusively. In their view, retention is an outcome of success which allows students to "make progress toward fulfilling their educational and personal goals" (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989, p.2).

For the purpose of this study, two major retention models (Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates, 1985; Tinto, 1993) were examined and synthesized to provide the framework from which a working definition of college student retention could be employed. The foundational component of this working definition of retention stems from Tinto (1993). The first step in defining retention requires an in-depth consideration of college student attrition patterns. Once the definition for attrition or dropping-out is established, the practical matter of retaining students may be discussed. According to Tinto (1993), there are two broad categories of departure to consider: institutional departure and system departure. Institutional departure describes the process a student follows when leaving an individual institution while system departure is the term used to describe the student's departure from the entire university system.

It is important to distinguish between institutional and system departure because of the variable nature of the individual student's departure process. While each student who leaves a given institution looks the same to the individual school, from a broader systemic perspective, departure patterns fall into five general categories. Those students who leave one institution and transfer directly to another school are considered immediate transfers. Viewed from the system perspective, these students are considered "completers" if they finish their degree within four to five years (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) goes on to describe the remaining four general categories of departure by discussing the other avenues a departing student may take:

Of course, not all institutional leavers immediately transfer to other institutions. Many leave higher education altogether (*system departure*), whereas others temporarily withdraw from the system (*stopouts*). Among the latter group of students, some return to their initial institution (*institutional stopouts*) and others enroll in another institution (*delayed transfer*). In the latter case, some students may delay their return for many years. As adults, they sometimes restart their studies anew as freshmen despite having earned some credit previously (p.8, emphasis in original text).

At present, most individual institutions define a dropout as a student who has withdrawn from or left the institution--regardless of the student's reason(s). When pressed for a definition, most institutions opt for this explanation when describing freshman-to-sophomore-year attrition rates as well as graduation rates. At first glance this definition is pragmatic. Simply put, when a student leaves his or her school, a space is left open and the tuition he or she brings to the institution is lost with the student's departure. Tinto (1993) contends that defining retention in such simplistic terms is to "gloss over important differences among forms of leaving" (p.140). Defining attrition as anyone who leaves is also limiting because it may lead institutions to enact only *one* policy which would seek to address *all* retention/attrition problems. This may lead to an inefficient and inequitable distribution of resources which may weaken an institution's "ability to address any one form" of dropping out (Tinto, 1993, p.140). Further, this definition of college student dropouts has a negative connotation which equates the action of withdrawal or leaving with failure on the part of the student. Viewing the act of leaving as an act of individual failure grossly neglects the role of the institution and the institutional environment in the academic and social adjustment process (Tinto, 1993).

It is clear students leave colleges and universities for a wide range of reasons. The key problem for institutions is identifying which reasons are most relevant to their situations and whether these leaving patterns can be addressed by direct institutional action. As Tinto (1993) notes, each institution's unique culture and fiscal and human resource situation calls for specific plans appropriate to that college or university. There are, however, certain guidelines or principles which will assist institutions in their definition of attrition and retention. The two principles, as articulated by Tinto, focus on two distinct issues in all institutions of higher education: "the correspondence between the needs, interests, and

goals of the students and those of the institution, and the educational mission of institutions of higher education" (p.141). Tinto (1993) presents his basic principles of definition in the following manner:

- Institutions should not define dropout in ways which contradict the students' own understanding of their leaving. If the leaver does not define his/her own behavior as representing a form of failure, neither should the institution.
- In the course of establishing a retention policy, institutions must not only ascertain the goals and commitments of entering students, they must also discern their own goals and commitments (pp.141-144).

Tinto (1993) warns it should not be construed from these principles "that it is the duty of higher educational institutions to attempt to educate all those who enter regardless of their goals, commitments and capacities" (p.144). Rather, the institution has a responsibility to provide each student with every opportunity for success in achieving his or her goals.

Beginning with the recruitment phase, the institution needs to paint a clear picture of its goals and expectations. Following this communication, institutions need to be certain that each student admitted has the potential to fulfill these clearly communicated expectations. Finally, the school needs to assist students in voicing their own educational goals; provide advising and support services which will help students achieve these goals; and redirect those students who may need to seek the realization of their goals at another institution. Given this approach to the student-institution interaction process, dropping out then, may be defined as "those forms of departure involving individuals who are unable to reasonably complete what they came to the institution to achieve" (Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates, 1985, p.39).

If one defines dropping-out as the failure of an individual student to realize his or her educational goal (be that a four-year degree or attending college for one year just to "see what college is like"), the definition of retention becomes very clear. Both Tinto (1993) and Noel et al. (1985) define retention as a process rather than a goal. Retention goes beyond simply keeping or holding students, it is a process whereby institutions help students grow, develop and realize their educational goals. Retention is an outcome, it is a result. Retention is the result of a commitment or mission on the part of the school to educate students and facilitate their intellectual and social development. Retention does not

mean keeping students on campus, it means leaving the door open for students to come and go as their goals and capabilities allow them. Retention policies and programs should have as their cornerstone a clear sense of the institution's commitment to education and intellectual and social development. These policies should also reflect an expectation for students to be responsible for their own education and development. Retention, defined as a process, involves making, keeping and realizing commitments both on the part of the institution *and* the individual. Deliberate, effective retention programming is the key to creating an environment where the goals of the student match those of the college or university.

### A Justification for Retention Planning

College student attrition has consistently remained at approximately 45-50 percent nationally since the turn of the century (Tinto, 1993). The attrition/retention/persistence phenomenon has been exhaustively researched since the 1960's and the reasons why students leave, their motivations and developmental processes have been delineated and presented in a variety of media designed to enhance our understanding of college student dropouts. As we look toward the future, the questions which must be asked are: Why continue to invest fiscal and human resources studying retention? Why place the focus on retaining students? The following paragraphs present three reasons for retaining students and continuing retention-related programming, planning and research as we move into the twenty-first century.

Looking at the larger landscape which takes into account society, technology, the economy and culture, there are several important reasons to look forward as well as inward while continuing to examine the retention/attrition phenomenon. Perhaps the most compelling reason to move forward with the retention planning endeavor is the contribution a well planned retention effort can make to society. For example, when a student is lost from higher education because of his or her failure, or a failure on the part of the institution, all of the potential talent and earning power of that individual is lost to society. Given this perspective, the implications of a 45-50 percent attrition rate are vast not only for the higher education system but for the nation. Bean (1986) details three further rea-

sons retention continues to be an issue of great importance for both higher education and society. In his words, "three reasons to retain students are paramount: economic, ethical, and institutional" (p.47).

The economic reason for retaining college students is generally the first and most easily understood reason advanced by institutions of higher education. The concept is rooted in mathematics and the equation is simple: students equal tuition dollars. Speaking in the broadest terms, the system of American higher education is vast consisting of a complex system of public and private institutions which include two-year and four-year colleges as well as multiple degree-granting research universities. As of academic year 1996-97, there were 4,009 colleges and universities in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). Viewed through the lens of a corporate culture, higher education is a \$175 billion dollar-per-year enterprise which serves more than 14 million students annually (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1998). Further, the higher education enterprise employs approximately 2.5 million people (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1998). A critical component of the higher education system, public colleges and universities play a large role in the higher education process. As of academic year 1996-1997, 613 institutions in the United States were public four-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 1998). While public four-year institutions make up only 17 percent of the higher education enterprise, they serve over 50 percent of the total U.S. student population and grant 67 percent of all bachelor's degrees. Putting these substantial numbers into perspective, the United States has a sizable fiscal and human resource investment in public higher education.

Institutional income and enrollment are directly related (Bean, 1986). Arguing for retention programs using this rationale will certainly demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of such programming, but this reason alone is not enough to convince administrators, legislators or the public to consider retention programming a viable investment. Quite often, institutions adopt a "feast or famine" attitude when it comes to retention programming. When times are good and enrollment is high, the economic rationale loses its impact and institutions tend to fund other programs. When times are bad and enrollment dips, schools often cite a lack of good retention programming and a need for improved recruitment as the primary means to help the institution overcome a difficult fiscal period. The need for

retention programming and the retention of college students must be founded on other reasons than simple economic terms.

The second reason for retaining students is less quantifiable but equally important in terms of the mission of the college or university. Ethically, it is the obligation of the institution to support, educate and provide guidance to each student it admits. "Students must be informed of what will be required academically and socially to remain enrolled at an institution, and they need to know that 'some college' does little to increase one's income above that of a high school graduate" (Bean, 1986, p.47). Addressing retention/attrition issues before a student enrolls may be more effective at improving retention than any retention intervention program oriented toward matriculated students. Ensuring a good student-to-institution match--not admitting students for the short-term fiscal benefit of the institution--underscores the need for continued and active retention programming and research. Again, however, this reason alone is not enough to justify retaining students and continued retention programming.

Viewed in combination with the above two justifications, the third reason for retaining students and developing effective retention programming is powerful and convincing. Consider the implications of retention for the institution in terms of community, public perception, reputation and future enrollments. "When faculty teach at an institution where attrition is high, they are likely to feel negative toward themselves and their profession" (Bean, 1986, p.48). This negative morale then extends beyond the faculty to the entire university community. The reputation and status of the college or university declines and the campus culture becomes disaffected. "Attrition is ordinarily viewed as student failure, but institutions with high rates of attrition can also be viewed as failures, and the best students, faculty, staff, and administrators will try to leave" (Bean, 1986, p.48). This one reason, concomitant with the economic and ethical points, supports the fundamental need to retain college students and continue retention related programming and research.

Studying, assessing and planning for college student retention continues to be important as we move into the twenty-first century because the alternatives are costly. Indeed, as the fiscal restrictions and demands of higher education increase, retaining students becomes cost-effective in terms of dollars, faculty/student/staff morale, ethics, and institutional quality. It is for these reasons in combination with the broader social

implications mentioned at the beginning of this section that college student retention will remain a vital issue for the future of higher education.

### A Perspective on the Future and Future Planning

Rural land-grant university administrators and practitioners involved in college student retention face constant change and innovation as the field of college student retention continues to mature. Changes in society, the economy, public opinion, technology, demography and a wide range of other areas necessitate a proactive, forward looking approach to retention program planning and development. Dickson (1977) observes that all individuals engaged in program development and planning must realize they are "creating the future right now with [their] present decisions, discoveries, policies, actions, and inactions" (p.6). Uncovering the range of possible futures for retention-related planning and program development allows professionals to make informed decisions and "select alternatives likely to produce a better society in both the near and the longer time periods" (Enzer, 1972, p.30). To best accomplish this rather daunting task, higher education retention administrators and practitioners need to be responsive to anticipated trends forecasted for the future.

Contemplating and identifying future trends in higher education and college student retention is at once both easy and challenging. For the practitioner, the trends effecting college student retention are obvious. In their day-to-day interactions with students, information regarding levels of student satisfaction, academic readiness, economic and social status are readily available to those professionals engaged in retention-related programs. Spotting future trends in this immediate environment is not difficult. Identifying higher education megatrends--trends which reflect the larger national and global concerns--tends to be more challenging. Professionals, administrators, faculty and staff generally do not consider issues outside their respective disciplines for a variety of reasons ranging from time to attitude. It also is difficult for the university community to identify issues affecting higher education because the community "is very much influenced by institutional and societal issues that [they] may not fully understand and over which [they] may have little control" (Upcraft & Barr, 1990, p.3). National retention experts, on the other hand, tend to

take a much larger and longer-term view of college student retention and the future directions retention programming and planning may take at colleges and universities across the United States. Merging the views of the retention practitioner with the insights of the national retention expert may provide a more comprehensive view of the future for rural land-grant universities. However, a justification for future studies within the rural land-grant framework is warranted at this juncture.

Careful consideration of the future is critical given the nature and function of public higher education. If land-grant universities are to remain true to their tripartite mission of teaching, research and service, they need to be able to plan for the future effectively. While their argument is directed primarily at student affairs professionals, Upcraft and Barr (1990) present four compelling reasons to consider the future carefully and these reasons are equally relevant to all individuals involved in higher education retention programming and planning:

1. An analysis of potential issues and problems can assist in identifying both problems and opportunities that will be a part of [the] professional future.
2. Study of the future can enable [higher education professionals] to plan more effectively so [they] can respond to issues.
3. Contemplation of future issues can assist the profession in developing strategies to prepare both new and continuing professionals to meet changing conditions.
4. As professionals, [they] can determine [their] own needs and skill deficits as [they] contemplate a future with ambiguity and change (p.3).

Clearly, looking at the future and analyzing the potential forces of change on the horizon for professionals and/or practitioners engaged in retention-related programming and planning will better enable those individuals to respond more quickly and directly to these changes as they occur. This forward-looking approach to long-term retention programming and planning will afford retention practitioners at public institutions the opportunity to maximize fiscal and human resources, and will allow for expeditious acclimation and accommodation to the most prominent future trends as they relate to college student retention. In accordance with this assertion, the following section introduces the main socio-

economic trends effecting the future of retention programming and planning at land-grant universities.

A General Overview of the Main Trends Effecting the  
Future of Retention at Land-Grant Universities

As the new millennium approaches, nearly every aspect of the human experience is being examined and reevaluated with an eye toward improvement and change. Higher education is no exception. A plethora of literature is generated daily which probes the very foundations of the ivory tower. Indeed, commissions, committees and task forces either have been or are in the process of being formed to help guide the academic community through the uncharted future. One such commission which has been charged with revising, refocusing and revitalizing the public system of higher education is the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities. Exploring the specific future challenges faced by land-grant universities, the Commission has approached the inevitability of change in public higher education by issuing a "practical call for institutional renewal to present an action agenda for change, one grounded in a convincing demonstration that change is already underway and the conviction that more is necessary" (Gee, et al., 1996). The Commission has attempted to summarize the major areas of change in higher education while keeping the broader social context in perspective.

The current challenges facing land-grant universities appear daunting when viewed en masse. Consider the following:

- chronic shortages of funds, coupled with soaring fees and public resistance to higher taxes;
- new skepticism from members of the 'attentive public' about [public higher education's] productivity, accompanied by questions about research and tenure;
- an academic culture that appears to measure excellence by scholarly citations and the number of doctoral candidates, not minds opened or the needs of undergraduates;
- vigorous new competitors in the academic market, ready and eager to provide services [public higher education has] ignored; and

- sharp conflict among faculty, administrators, and other leaders about which of these problems need immediate attention and how to address them (Gee, et al., 1996, pp. 1-2).

When stated in such direct and unflinching terms, many of the former strengths of public higher education have become liabilities. While land-grant universities have been, and continue to be, defined by the traditions established by Morrill (1862), they have become mired in the academic anachronisms of the late 19th century. The fundamental tripartite mission of the land-grant university has remained the same. However, it is the nature and purpose of public higher education which needs to be re-focused to accommodate a new educational era with new challenges. During the last ten years, the challenges faced by land-grant universities have gone well beyond the "technical issues of how to allocate rising revenues, [to] difficult adaptive problems of how to lead when conditions are constantly changing, resources are tight, expectations are high, and options are limited" (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.v). The changes which land-grant universities must address and plan for in the future are no longer technical, they are transformational. The traditional responses to change, which include more reactive responses rather than proactive measures, served public higher education well in a climate where sweeping economic and social change were the exception rather than the norm. In other words, the more obvious solutions of "adding a section here, capping enrollment there, shaving expenditures elsewhere, finding additional funds somewhere else, and working around the marginally productive" are traditional strategies which no longer appear to be working in a climate where the only constant is change (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.v). Further, the Kellogg Commission contends "unless public colleges and universities become the architects of change, they will become its victims" (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.v). Planning for these new challenges and changes mandates a paradigm shift from the traditional to the transformational. In the higher education context, transformational change--purposefully planning for and accommodating change by actively managing the evolution of the organization and processes of the university--may be applied to multiple levels across the institution from the leadership to the day-to-day operating procedures. Defined further, a transformational university actively engages in the operation of changing one configuration (i.e. organizational structure, method of operation, etc.) or process into another in

accordance with the actual and anticipated movements of change both external and internal to the institution. Restructuring and rebuilding land-grant universities with the tools of transformational leadership will allow the legacy of public higher education to endure. Transformational planning will enable public higher education to address the multiple challenges of "an emerging enrollment boom, new competitors...constrained public funding...growing resistance to price hikes, eroding public trust, and limited institutional flexibility" which loom ever larger on the horizon (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.v). While it is important to understand the nature of change and the methods with which to plan for the future, it is also imperative to understand the general context of change which organizations like land-grant universities will be facing as the future draws near. The following section outlines the major forces of change facing land-grant universities and provides a general overview of how these issues effect college student retention and attrition.

Campuses need to respond more effectively to a constantly, quickly changing environment. Studying, anticipating, analyzing and planning for the potential issues on the horizon for retention practitioners at institutions of public higher education will facilitate the development of heuristic planning techniques which will help retention practitioners better accommodate a future fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty. Viewed in the broadest context, land-grant universities will be facing change on two major fronts in the coming years. The first area of challenge comes from forces external to the university. There are four major subcategories which fall under the realm of external forces of change, these include societal pressures, economic impact, public perceptions, and the far-reaching influence of technology.

The second major area of challenge land-grant universities will face in the near future comes from within academe. Like the external forces of change introduced above, these internal forces of change have found a voice during the last decade and have reached a level of intensity which can no longer be ignored. These issues of concern are divided into three subcategories and revolve around the individuals who make-up the university community. Internally, the forces of change and challenge have centered around college student demography, enrollment, and the faculty.

Viewed separately, both the internal and external forces of change which will impact land-grant colleges and universities are formidable. When one considers the impact both

forces will have on the progress and perceptions of public higher education, it is clear that each university must prepare and plan for major change. As rural land-grant universities plan for the next ten to fifteen years, they need to consider how these changes and challenges will impact their retention plans and activities. A detailed consideration of the major forces of external and internal change facing land-grant universities is presented in the paragraphs below. This outline of the external and internal forces affecting higher education and retention provides one vision of what the rural land-grant university might look like in the twenty-first century. It is an evolving document at best which attempts to highlight the primary areas of change. The major themes have been identified but the details will not be added for another ten to fifteen years when the future becomes the present. The only constant is the sureness of change and the inevitable march of time. Contextually speaking, each of the subcategories listed below has been presented and discussed in a manner which defines the broader socio-economic issue and relates that trend to the primary focus of this study: college student retention at rural land-grant universities.

#### External Forces of Change

The external forces of change impinging on higher education both now and in the near future will greatly impact both the structure and function of public higher education in the United States. Society, prevailing economic conditions, public accountability and technology will all play major roles in reshaping the mission of public higher education. Drawing from the history of public higher education as an example, one discovers it is important to remember that it is these very forces combined with doggedly persuasive personalities (Morrill, 1887) which created the modern-day land-grant university. Neglecting to examine the current and future impact of these forces of change on retention in the public higher education setting would be fatal as one considers the economic, ethical and institutional fate of the land-grant tradition. The following paragraphs discuss the four external socio-economic agents of change which may have the greatest impact on public higher education: society, the economy, public accountability, and technology.

Society. Upcraft and Barr (1990) believe "one basis for understanding the future is to examine the societal trends that we predict will influence higher education... in the years

ahead" (p.4). To do this, however, one must understand the pivotal role public higher education has played as one of the cornerstone institutions of our society. The interaction between society and public higher education is dynamic and central to the development of our nation. The following section outlines the roles of higher education in American social development; general global, national and local issues impacting public higher education; major student issues; and environmental concerns as they relate to the social trends impacting future retention planning and programming in the public higher education context.

Public higher education has played a tremendous role in the education and continued democratization of the citizenry of the United States. As an agent of socialization, education and change, public higher education has been dynamic and responsive to the needs of the nation. Through the land-grant tradition, the United States has managed to bring the benefits of higher education to "the broadest segment of people in the history of the world" (Gee et al., 1996, p.2). As Gee et al. (1996) discuss in their on-line document regarding change in public higher education, the demands of society on public higher education have continued to grow as the needs of society have grown. As any weekly periodical like *Newsweek* or *Time Magazine* will confirm, the United States is in the middle of sweeping global economic and social change. Change is certainly not novel in the history of the United States nor is change a stranger to higher education. However, if one adds to this change the element of technological advancements, it becomes clear that the pace of change has accelerated exponentially. Simply tracing the historical development and implementation of the World Wide Web since its inception in 1989 and its explosive growth and popularity among traditionally non-technical users during the last decade reinforces the notion that social change has become inextricably linked with high-tech innovation. This connection has helped to create a society with an accelerated set of expectations and an insatiable demand for instant access to information.

The social trends which affect public higher education range from global to local issues. Most U.S. companies must now compete on a global scale within a multinational economic arena. During the past decade, many "secure jobs" have fallen under the corporate downsizing axe. The break-up of the former Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, bitter ethnic battles in Yugoslavia, Bosnia, Rwanda and other countries around the

globe all have impacted how our society views and deals with change. Within the United States, other issues have surfaced regarding our traditional social structures.

For the first time in history, more Americans live in suburbs than in cities (or on farms) leaving behind the decay of broken communities and abandoned urban centers. And, for the first time in memory, well-informed and well-meaning people question whether the people's universities--our great institutions--are capable of responding to these challenges (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.3).

Family values and structures have also undergone a great deal of change during the past three decades. The number of single-parent families continues to rise along with the number of children being raised below the poverty level. Family values, or the lack thereof, continue to be at the forefront of many political platforms while also the topic of conversation on a variety of news programs.

Exploring the social attitudes prevalent among the nation's college freshmen, Sax et al. (1997) in their annual report titled "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1997" presented several social trends which stem from a consideration of the socio-political movements across the country. The 1997 survey, published by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies asserts that college freshmen are less engaged and less connected with academics and politics than any other freshmen class since the UCLA-based survey began over 32 years ago (Sax et al., 1997). Over 36 percent of the students surveyed indicated a substantial disinterest in the academic substance or content of their senior-year high school classes. In direct contrast to this increasing academic disengagement, the report also found that nearly 40 percent of the freshmen surveyed aspire to masters degrees (Sax et al., 1997). As Sax and others (1997) postulate, this trend may be an indication that students may be more motivated by academic credentials and the jobs these credentials may enable them to obtain rather than the simple pleasure of learning for the sake of learning. Further, the report seems to indicate a decreased rate of political interest and activism among entering college students. Finally, social trends relating to health and wellness seem to reflect a decline in the health-related norms of traditionally-aged college freshmen. Support for legalizing marijuana has risen consistently throughout the 1990's with 35.2 percent of students agreeing with the statement "marijuana should be legalized" (Sax et al., 1997). More

freshmen (16.1 percent) say they smoke cigarettes frequently than in the last 30 years (14.5 percent indicated frequent smoking in 1996) and 52.7 percent of the surveyed freshmen said they drank beer frequently (Sax et al., 1997). As retention practitioners look to the future of program planning over the long term within a social context, the above college student norms will play a critical role in the direction these programs may take as the new century approaches.

Finally, American society as a whole faces challenges on the environmental front which do not seem to abate. Both the government and environmentalists agree the environment remains at risk. Improving the quality of the air, water and soil are challenges which will only increase in coming years. Society looks to higher education, specifically land-grant institutions, to provide leadership, scholarship and research to help solve these problems.

The issues society must confront in the future will not only influence the direction of public higher education, they will also be impacted by these same institutions. It is the research, technology and graduates of public higher education which will be instrumental in responding to the impending changes society must endure.

The success of the land-grant tradition lies in its combination of high-quality, affordable education, world-class research, and public service; in its practical real-life orientation; and in its deep sense of responsibility for the society that supports it. As we face the future, that tradition can serve as our guide. A key challenge will be to maintain our legacy of responsiveness and relevance in a rapidly changing world (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997 p.2).

In a declaration of action, Gee and others from the Kellogg Commission (1996) proclaim: "Now is no time for the nation to falter in the ongoing adventure of defining itself through higher education" (p.2). Traditionally, the nation has turned to education--kindergarten through graduate school--to solve many of its problems. Sweeping social concerns like teen pregnancy, substance abuse, sexuality, health care, global competitiveness, the environment, and the family have all been addressed through the public educational institutions as the first line of defense (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997).

Responding to these global, national and regional social challenges is critical in terms of college student retention at land-grant colleges and universities. If land-grant

institutions are not responsive to the challenges mentioned above, they will become irrelevant in a fast-paced society which looks for quick responses. "The imperative [is] to re-energize the university in service to society so that our institutions engage their communities, reflect the needs of students and extend to teaching and service the same respect and rewards now reserved for exceptional scholarship and creativity" (Gee et al., 1996, p.3). The retention of students and faculty is directly related to what public higher education can offer as these institutions and the manner in which they teach problem solving, critical thinking and life-long learning skills must reflect the needs of the twenty-first century society. Speaking specifically in terms of retention-related programming and planning for a new century, attending to the predominant trends in society will facilitate a smoother transition process for new students as they attempt to reconcile their previous educational and social experiences with the new culture environment and community of the university in combination with the future demands of society.

Economy. As one considers the various entities influencing higher education, the economy continues to be a driving force behind many of the changes in the public system of post-secondary education. The following section presents an overview of the broad economic trends which may impact the future of retention and retention-related programs at rural land-grant universities. The first two parts of this section address the general global and national economic trends while the remaining paragraphs discuss the economic trends within the national system of higher education. The section on economic trends concludes with a consideration of the economic benefits of higher education; the economics of retention; and the effect of the external economic forces as they relate to college student persistence at rural land-grant universities.

There is little doubt that both the global and national economies play a large role in the structure and function of public higher education. In fact, as the decade of the nineties draws to a close, our world has moved increasingly toward a global economy. It is this global economy which continues to make the world seem somehow smaller. Some of the primary indications of the increasing globalization of the world's economy include: the growth of multinational corporations which have made geographic boundaries all but disappear; the evolution of stock exchanges around the world which have become closely

interconnected; and the trend for large regions of the globe to organize into "economic communities."

On a national level, the nature of our economy is also changing in unprecedented and dramatic ways. The emphasis in the U.S. economy has shifted away from production to a service-oriented structure. High-tech or informational industries have changed the economic landscape both in terms of corporate structure and the rate of change they exact from the rest of the economy. The impact of this economic paradigm shift from production to service, product exchange to information exchange, and rapid technological advances places a great demand on public higher education. Not only do students need the skills and ability to function on a global level, they need to be technologically savvy to remain competitive.

The economic status of the higher education enterprise has been a central focus of concern at the national, state and local levels since the advent of the 1990's. The fiscal condition of higher education, specifically at public institutions, is under constant scrutiny from both the public sector and within the public university system. In fact, the *Campus Trends 1995* (El-Khawas, 1995) report underscores this concern by noting that the level of "external scrutiny" of colleges and universities in terms of fiscal management, outcomes measurements, and general accountability has steadily increased since 1990. Within the public university system nationally, fiscal concerns have been at the forefront of the education agenda. Consider the following economic trends as they relate to public higher education:

- Nearly two-thirds of all public institutions receive less state financial support than they did ten years ago;
- Six in ten institutions now have a more diversified financial base;
- Only forty percent of administrators gave strong ratings to the overall financial condition of their institutions this year, down from 48 percent seven years ago;
- Nearly one-quarter of all public colleges and universities described their financial condition as 'fair' or 'poor' (El-Khawas & Knopp, 1996, p.2).

The last decade before the millennium has profoundly impacted the economic condition of public higher education. Reflective of the corporate down-sizing trends which have also

pervaded the economic landscape of the 1990's, public institutions have been forced to become "leaner and meaner" and more competitive both in terms of dollars and students.

In 1991, according to Adams and Palmer (1993), "higher education established an unfortunate landmark: [for] the first time in more than thirty years, higher education received less money from state budgets than it had in the previous year" (p.23). In the years following this landmark event, both public and private sector higher education responded to the fiscal crisis in a variety of ways:

- institutions increased tuition and fees--a few institutions went so far as to do this mid-year;
- consumables were bonded;
- pension funds were accessed and reserve accounts were tapped, and in some cases, drained;
- a majority of institutions chose not to fill vacant positions;
- personnel (faculty, adjuncts, non-faculty) and course offerings were cut;
- dramatic cuts were seen in non-personnel areas such as equipment, library acquisitions, travel, maintenance and supplies; and
- a trend toward "continuous downsizing" has become prevalent in many regions throughout the country including the Mid-West, South East, and New England (Adams & Palmer, 1993).

These broader economic trends in higher education have caused public institutions to come face to face with the accusation that the cost of public higher education has "soared while the quality and diversity of the product have dropped" (Adams & Palmer, 1993, p.22). The net result of this public perception has been increasingly negative as the decade of the nineties has progressed. A full consideration of public accountability issues as they relate to public higher education will be considered in the next section.

Table 1. Two-Year Changes in State Support for Public Higher Education at Each of the Sixteen Rural Land-Grant University Study Sites, 1996 - 1998.

| University Name              | Percentage Change in State Appropriations |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| University of Alaska         | -3%                                       |
| University of Idaho          | +4%                                       |
| University of Maine          | +4%                                       |
| Mississippi State University | +3%                                       |
| Montana State University     | +3%                                       |

Table 1. Two-Year Changes in State Support for Public Higher Education at Each of the Sixteen Rural Land-Grant University Study Sites, 1996 - 1998.

| University Name               | Percentage Change in State Appropriations |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| University of Nevada          | +26%                                      |
| New Mexico State University   | +3%                                       |
| North Dakota State University | No Change                                 |
| Oregon State University       | +18%                                      |
| University of Rhode Island    | +9%                                       |
| Clemson State University, SC  | +7%                                       |
| South Dakota State University | +4%                                       |
| Utah State University         | +11%                                      |
| University of Vermont         | +4%                                       |
| Washington State University   | +10%                                      |
| University of Wyoming         | +5%                                       |

Source: *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1997.

During the last two years, state appropriations for public higher education have increased at their highest rates since 1990 in terms of real-dollar amounts (Schmidt, 1997). According to Schmidt (1997), "much of the new money [went] to install new technology, upgrade community colleges, and provide additional funds to institutions that had complained of being short-changed in the past" (p.A30). During this same time frame, only two of the fifty states, Alaska and Hawaii, experienced a decrease in state appropriations while "thirty-six states increased spending on higher education by more than the rate of inflation" (Schmidt, 1997, p.A30). Nationally, states averaged an increase of 6 percent in terms of spending on public higher education (Schmidt, 1997). Narrowing the focus of this data to the sixteen rural land-grant universities in this study (Table 1), the state appropriations figures look slightly more positive than the national average. According to a comprehensive data set titled "Fact File: State Appropriations for Higher Education, 1997-1998" presented in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (1997), the sixteen rural land-grant universities in this study averaged a 6.75 percent increase in state appropriations (.75 percent more than the national average). The largest increase occurred at the University of Nevada with 26 percent while the University of Alaska experienced the lowest growth at -3 percent. Despite the rosy economic picture both nationally and within the study group, Schmidt (1997) cautions public institutions to beware and plan for the next economic

cycle. In his opinion, these figures merely reflect that "state spending on colleges continues to be closely tied to economic cycles, and to fluctuate widely as tax revenues rise or fall with changing economic conditions" (p.A30). In fact, Schmidt (1997) warns institutions to prepare for disproportional suffering in terms of state appropriations "when the economy takes a nose-dive" (p.A30).

While state support for public higher education has increased "modestly in the last two years, much of this decade has been financially traumatic for state and land-grant universities" (*Returning to Our Roots*, p.5). Yet, as one considers the plight of public higher education in a fiscally restrictive economy, it is important to note that the situation may have produced a few positive outcomes. The traditional programs and structures of the public universities have been reevaluated forcing many institutions to implement actual change. These public institutions have become "more focused, reexamining their missions and setting priorities based on strategic plans; [they] have become more cost-effective and have strengthened their management practices; [they] have developed more diverse funding sources, such as private fund raising and sponsored research; [and they] have also developed stronger relationships with their communities and with business and industry" (El-Khawas & Knopp, 1996, p.1). Also, in a direct attempt to address the issue of quality, curricular changes have been implemented in many public systems of higher education to "strengthen the meaning and value of the degree" (El-Khawas & Knopp, 1996, p.1). Public institutions are developing programs to meet the needs of nontraditional students, adult and continuing learners and a broad range of workers seeking to update and retrain in areas such as technology, communication and other fields which reflect current needs in business and industry.

The repercussions of the changing economic environment have been felt very directly by students interested in public higher education. These economic trends have had tremendous consequences for most students attempting to gain access to public higher education. Concomitant with the annual rise of tuition at the public colleges and universities, students were expected to "pay a larger share of instructional costs" (El-Khawas & Knopp, 1996, p.1). In terms of impact on students, this trend means "more students require financial aid, more hold a job while attending college, and more are taking longer to complete a degree program" (El-Khawas & Knopp, 1996, p.1). The need for student aid

continues to grow at a fast rate along with the amount of individual student indebtedness. In fact, trends during the last three years reflect the growing financial pressure on both students and parents. The majority (60 percent or more) of first-year undergraduates need financial aid to pursue a college education (El-Khawas & Knopp, 1996). This need for financial aid is unprecedented in the history of higher education.

While the trend toward an increasing need for financial aid may cause one to question issues of access to higher education, enrollment data suggest otherwise: 80 percent of all institutions in the United States increased their enrollments during the last ten years and approximately 40 percent of all postsecondary institutions increased their enrollments in 1996 (El-Khawas & Knopp, 1996, p.2). Clearly, students are weighing the value of a college education and their earning potential after degree attainment against the burden of indebtedness and the lower-wage or limited job prospects available to individuals without a college degree.

Both the broader economic trends as well as individual student choices are having a decided impact on the process of education. Universities are beginning to reexamine academic calendars, class schedules and delivery methods in light of a student population which, based on economic trends, must opt for a part-time or interrupted study program. Other trends which force universities to consider the role of economics in their plans for the future include "more students ending their studies before getting a degree; [and] job responsibilities during the term that interfere with effective learning and educational accomplishment" (El-Khawas & Knopp, 1996, p.32). Many universities have realized that traditional responses to these new trends will not work if they are to continue to retain students.

While many economic trends revolve around perceptions of the actual value of higher education, terms like value, cost and price seem to be used indiscriminately and inconsistently across many mediums of communication. Any discussion of the economics of higher education necessitates clear and specific definitions of *cost*, *price* and *subsidy* as they relate to the higher education enterprise. For the purpose of this study and for the sake of simplicity, the following definitions established by the National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education ("Straight Talk," 1998) will be used to describe these three terms:

**Costs:** What institutions spend to provide education and related services to students; expenditures that institutions incur in order to provide an individual's education.

- **Cost per student:** The average amount spent annually to provide education and related services to each full-time equivalent student.

**Price:** What students and their families are charged and what they actually pay. These are students' and families' actual college expenses.

- **Sticker price:** The tuition and fees that institutions charge.

- **Total price of attendance:** The tuition and fees that institutions charge students as well as other expenses related to obtaining a higher education. These expenses could include housing (room & board in a residence hall or rent for an off-campus apartment), books, transportation, etc. (This term is usually referred to by other higher education analysts as the "cost of attendance.")

- **Net price:** What students pay after financial aid is subtracted from the total price of attendance. Financial aid comes in different forms: *grants* are scholarships or "gifts" to the student that do not have to be repaid; *loans* are borrowed money that must be paid back, typically after the student leaves school; *work study* entails working to receive financial assistance. Because of the very different nature of grants vs. loans and work study, the Commission uses two different concepts of net price:

- The first measure subtracts *only grants* from the total price of attendance. This concept provides a measure of *affordability*, or the amount of money a student actually pays to attend college.

- The second measure subtracts *all financial aid* awarded grants, loans, and work study from the total price of attendance, to measure the amount of money a student needs in order to enter the college or university. This concept provides a measure of *access*, because, even though loans must be repaid, they allow a student to attend college, just like car loans allow many to buy a car who otherwise may not be able to afford one.

**General Subsidy:** The difference between the cost to the institution of providing an education ("cost per student") and the tuition and fees charged to students ("sticker price"). Students who attend institutions of higher education, regardless of whether they attend public or private colleges or universities, or whether they receive financial aid, typically receive a general subsidy. This general subsidy does not include subsidies some students receive from scholarships and other types of financial aid (p.3, emphasis in original text).

According to the NCCHE ("Straight Talk," 1998) report on the cost and price of higher education, public four-year colleges and universities have seen a dramatic rise in the instructional cost per student during the last ten years. According to the data presented in their report, it costs 57 percent more to educate a student today than it did in 1987. The sticker price, on the other hand, increased 132 percent during the same period of time. The general subsidy also experienced an increase from 1987 to 1996, however, the amount was much less dramatic at 36 percent. These data indicate a much faster rate of increase for tuition, or the sticker price, than either the subsidy or the overall instructional cost per student. While state appropriations in sixteen states included in this study declined during the first three years of the 1990's, tuition increased at a much more rapid pace. In fact, while most of the sixteen states experienced an increase in state appropriations from 1994-1997, increases in tuition continued to outpace the actual cost of instruction. "In public four-year colleges and universities, the percentage of total student costs covered by the general subsidy declined from 79 percent to 68 percent" ("Straight Talk," 1998, p.5).

Looking directly at trends in affordability at land-grant universities, one factor which has impacted state support for higher education stems directly from the broader social-economic trends in most states. Historically, the two primary sources of support for public higher education have come from state appropriated funds and tuition and fee charges. During the past ten years, state appropriations have declined substantially for public post-secondary education and the actual costs of higher education goods and services has increased substantially. Currently, public universities are facing stiff competition for state resources from other state-funded entities. Prisons, primary and secondary education systems, Medicaid, transportation and other public services are all demanding a share of the finite fiscal resources in each state. According to the National Association for State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC), "state governments increased spending on prison construction by 30 percent from 1987-1995 but reduced spending for higher education by 18 percent over the same period" ("College Costs," 1997, p.4). Confronted with withering state support, public land-grant universities and other colleges have opted to increase tuition and fees to compensate for the loss of state dollars and maintain enough revenue to support institutional operating budgets. The rise in tuition from 1991 to 1996

(12 percent at its highest, 6 percent at the lowest point in 1996) far outpaced the rate of inflation (3 percent) during the same period ("College Costs," 1997).

Despite the recent fervor surrounding the price of a college education, the reality at public institutions of higher education is that higher education remains accessible and affordable. In their recent report titled "Straight Talk About College Costs and Prices" (1998), the National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education (NCCHE) concluded that the United States' system of public higher education remains "an extraordinary value" (p.iii). According to the NCCHE Report (1998):

- Thirty-eight percent of the undergraduates enrolled in higher education programs attend public four-year colleges and universities;
- The average tuition and fee rates for students at these institutions was \$3,111 during the academic year 1997-1998; and
- Approximately 50 percent of the undergraduates attending public institutions receive financial aid from institutional, state and/or federal sources.

While the rising cost of public higher education should remain a concern for legislators, tax payers, parents, prospective students and college administrators, it should be noted that the perception in this case may be outrunning the reality. The perception that a college education is being put beyond the reach of average income families is somewhat exaggerated. Based on the above figures, the average net cost to attend most land-grant universities is slightly lower (adjusted for inflation) than it was in the mid-1970s ("Straight Talk," 1998).

Given the rising costs of tuition and the public perception that access to public higher education is moving beyond the reach of most middle income families, many organizations affiliated with public higher education (AASCU, 1997; HEES, 1997; NASULGC, 1997; NCCHE, 1998) are highlighting an economic trend which emphasizes the continued economic benefits of obtaining a postsecondary degree. The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (1997) addresses this issue directly at their Website discussing "College Costs, 1996-1997: A Guide to Student Charges at Public, Four-Year Colleges and Universities" (URL: [www.nasulgc.nche.edu/COSTS\\_TOC.htm](http://www.nasulgc.nche.edu/COSTS_TOC.htm)). According to the NASULGC data, "the long-term economic advantages of higher education are well-documented" (1997, p.5).

As adults acquire increasing levels of higher education, their average annual income rises. Among men, the 1994 median income of high school graduates who were employed full-time and 25 years or older was \$28,037. Their peers who had completed at least a college degree were earning average incomes of \$43,663. Further participation at the graduate or professional level also was beneficial because those graduates enjoyed average incomes of \$53,500 - \$75,009. Among women, the figures for those with varying levels of education were: \$20,373 for high school graduates; \$31,741 for college graduates; and a range of \$39,457 - \$51,119 for those who had completed graduate or professional degrees. ("College Costs," 1997, pp. 5-6).

As one reviews these insightful figures, they illuminate an economic trend which will continue to benefit college students who persist to earn at least a baccalaureate degree.

Moving from the broad global and national trends to the economic trends directly related to public higher education, it is important to consider just how these trends might relate to retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities. When one looks to long-term retention planning in this context, it is important to keep several factors in mind. First, rural land-grant universities must respond better to the increasing globalization of the economy as well as the paradigm shift from a production-oriented to a service-oriented economy simply because of their location, size and limited access to resources. Providing training and internship opportunities which address these trends will help rural land-grant universities attract and retain students. Ensuring that individual students connect with those professors with a more global instructional agenda or campus presence may be another retention-related response to these economic trends. Second, rural land-grant universities need to make a purposeful effort to focus their interests in retention and retention-related programming on long-term planning rather than short-term economically-linked efforts. As Schmidt (1997) asserts, state support for higher education is closely tied to broader economic cycles. Likewise, interest in retention is also linked to the fluctuating fortunes of a state's economy. When funding is tight, university administrators tend to look toward retention practitioners to retain more students and, thereby, more tuition dollars. Long-term retention planning which accounts for the cyclical peaks and valleys in the economy may prove to be a better approach to retention activities at rural land-grant universities. Also, consistent and sustained retention planning and program-

ming will address many funding and economic concerns at these universities by retaining more students (along with their tuition dollars) at a consistent rate over time. Third, retention planners and practitioners constantly need to monitor the cost, price and value of an education at a rural land-grant university. Access and affordability will remain at the heart of long-term retention efforts in this economic context. Keeping tuition costs and financial aid at a level which makes a college education possible for middle-income students will prove to be a sound retention-related practice even as the economy spirals through its many cycles. Finally, as rural land-grant universities look toward a new century, it is important to consider how economic trends as a whole may be amplified or diminished at institutions on the geographic and economic fringes of public higher education. Using global, national and local economic trends as a guideline, retention planners need to be able to advise institutions how to be more responsive to issues of quality; to tighten management practices; and to focus on communicating with the public about the economic benefits of an education at their rural land-grant universities.

Public Accountability. One of the three key mission components of the land-grant university is to serve the public. Through education, information dissemination, and other means, the university endeavors to bring new knowledge and insights to the public it serves. It is through these activities that land-grant universities are evaluated, judged and rewarded by the public. Intended as a "wake-up-call" for public higher education, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1996) described a wide range of challenges as they relate to the mission of the land-grant university and identified concerns regarding public perception and accountability. At their Website titled "Taking Charge of Change...And the Tradition of Excellence," the Commission begins their statement with a oracular paraphrase from Shakespeare's Cassius: "We shall change, or worse days endure" (1996, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/TCCpage3.html](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/TCCpage3.html)). Speaking directly about the need to address matters of public concern and not rest on their laurels, the Commission indicates four areas of change they feel land-grant colleges and universities must respond to in order to maintain public confidence and support:

- In the face of complex new problems confronting the nation, our challenge is to meet society's expectation that we will continue providing the first-rate research, service, and access essential to producing the educated populace required in the twenty-first century.
- Given the complexity and scope of our campuses, we must do a better job of putting our house in order and explaining what we are doing and why.
- We have to address perceptions about teaching and costs. The public believes we have lost sight of the needs of students and that costs are spiraling beyond the reach of most families.
- We have to persuade the American people that we are good enough to lead, strong enough to change, and competent enough to be trusted with the nation's future. In brief, we must take charge of change (1996, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/TCCpage3.html](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/TCCpage3.html)).

The general public and their elected representatives simply believe that public higher education must do a better job in all of the above areas in order to prepare students better to join the workforce, communities and world of the future (Davies, 1997).

Beginning with an account of public perceptions and college costs, this section highlights recent measures enacted to bring the costs of higher education under control. The second trend discussed in this section reviews a movement toward federal and/or state-imposed outcomes-based measurements on institutions of public higher education. The third and final public accountability issue to surface in the literature centers around an increase in parental activism at colleges and universities around the country. The following section explores these three dominant trends in public perception and accountability as they relate to public higher education and concludes with a discussion of their projected impact on retention planning and programming at rural land-grant universities.

Perhaps the most written about and discussed issue regarding trends in public perception and accountability is the concern expressed by many parents, legislators and other officials regarding the cost of obtaining a higher education. Public perceptions and college costs have been the focus of many discussions since the advent of the 1990s when state funding for public higher education began to wane and tuition increases began to outpace inflation. In a phrase, the public has become "transfixed by sticker shock and worried about the costs of its children's education" (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.7). The public outcry for accountability became so stark by the mid-1990s that new legislation was

enacted to look into the matter in a systematic, objective fashion. In 1997, Public Law 105-18 (Title IV, Cost of Higher Education Review) created the National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education (NCCHE) to conduct a comprehensive review of college costs and prices in the United States. This legislation established an eleven-member commission which generated a report titled *Straight Talk About College Costs and Prices* (1998). The report addressed several issues as they related to the economics of higher education and outlined a five-part action agenda to deal with the public concern regarding the cost/price of higher education. While the economic trends were discussed at some length above, the matter of public accountability was not fully addressed.

Identifying the primary public concerns regarding the costs of higher education and rejecting the notion of government-imposed cost controls, the 50-page NCCHE report brings to light the gross public misperceptions regarding the accessibility and affordability of a college education (*Straight Talk About College Costs and Prices*, 1998). Describing the results of a number of focus groups conducted on behalf of NCCHE, *Newsline* ("College Costs and Public Perceptions," 1998) presented the preliminary findings of the NCCHE report shortly before the formal publication date. Conveying the common public misperceptions regarding the costs of higher education, *Newsline* (1998) reported:

There is no disputing that the public continues to overestimate the costs of a college education and to underestimate the amount of financial aid available. While the American public believes that the future belongs to the educated, they also remain convinced that the cost of college is going through the roof, threatening their ability to provide an education for their children ("College Costs and Public Perceptions," p.1).

Further highlighting the public willingness to believe the worst about their fears of soaring costs and the lack of financial aid, the article goes on to describe the ineffectual results of public reeducation on the issues of affordability.

[So-called] 'bad' stories about higher education costs are very believable, but offsetting news, such as the amount of financial aid available, is not readily accepted. The public seems to have an imperfect knowledge regarding the availability of student aid, they underestimate the amount of financial aid available, and even when they learn that there is \$50 billion out there, they assume it's not available to them. Significantly, they also have trouble seeing loans as financial aid because

loans have to be paid back ("College Costs and Public Perceptions," 1998, p.1).

The outcomes of the above focus group results, combined with other findings, led the NCCHE to present five convictions regarding the college costs and affordability issues. Listed below, each conviction attends to a wide range of public concerns and separates the myths from the realities regarding the cost of higher education:

1. The concern about rising college prices is real.
2. The public and its leaders are concerned about where higher education places its priorities.
3. Confusion about cost and price abounds and the distinction between the two must be recognized and respected.
4. Rising costs are just as troubling a policy issue as rising prices.
5. The United States has a world-class system of higher education. (*Straight Talk About College Costs and Prices*, 1998, pp. 12-13).

Further determining that proclamations and press releases were not enough to stem the tide of public opinion, the NCCHE strongly recommended that institutions of higher education be less opaque about their finances. Urging higher education to hold itself accountable to the public it serves by making its expenditures, funding sources and costs more accessible to the public, NCCHE warned if higher education did not follow these recommendations they would surely face federal cost regulation as public confidence continues to erode.

In response to the NCCHE report and the recommendations therein, both NCCHE and other higher education organizations mounted aggressive efforts to convert public opinion in favor of higher education and dispel the myth that college is becoming inaccessible to the middle-class. Interestingly, this reeducation effort was launched and supported primarily through the World Wide Web. In late January, 1998, NASULGC posted a website titled "College Costs: Perceptions and Reality" (URL: [www.nasulgc.nche.edu](http://www.nasulgc.nche.edu)) which presented a factual account of affordability and cost issues for state colleges and land-grant universities. In October, 1998, the American Council on Education (ACE) enacted a "College is Possible" campaign on college affordability via the World Wide Web and other media (URL: [www.CollegeIsPossible.org](http://www.CollegeIsPossible.org)). Over 1,200 colleges and universities had par-

ticipated in the campaign by November, 1998. In a one-month time frame, the website had received nearly 533,000 "hits" while the toll-free information hotline received approximately 5,000 calls ("College is Possible," 1998).

The second trend to dominate public perception and accountability concerns on a national level centered on a movement toward imposed outcomes measures for colleges and universities. In a series of articles on the issue presented in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (1997), one article in particular highlighted the newest trend in public accountability:

Legislators in many states believe that what's best for students is to attend public universities that retain and graduate them within a reasonable period of time. Increasingly, states are using graduation and job placement rates, among other measures, to judge the performance of their colleges and universities. Several states, including Arkansas and South Carolina, have begun tying state appropriations to how well public colleges meet prescribed goals, including how fast they graduate their students (Burd, 1997, p.A33).

This movement toward performance-based funding has transcended many of the state legislatures to the Congressional level where lawmakers are advocating on behalf of their constituents for similar accountability measures for federal student aid dollars (Burd, 1997). Increasingly, during the next few years, "officials of the nation's public universities will be fending off proposals that would base a college's eligibility to award federal aid on its success at retaining and graduating students" (Burd, 1997, p.A33). While this movement has gained substantial momentum during the past year, both federal and state education officials are cautioning that such measures would only damage public higher education prospects for students. As Burd points out in his article "Should Eligibility for U.S. Aid be Linked to Colleges' Graduation and Retention Rates?" (1997), "the adoption of such a standard would especially hurt state universities, which tend to have more trouble retaining their students than do private colleges" (p.A33).

The third and final issue to surface regarding public accountability centered on the unique trend toward increased parental activism on college and university campuses across the country. Long considered an impenetrable "black box" by most parents, recent trends demonstrate that "members of the generation that rebelled against authority at campus rallies and sit-ins" are back on campus demanding to have an active role in administra-

tive and academic procedures and decisions ("Baby-Boomer Parents," 1998). According to a recent article in the *Washington Post* (1998), "today's college parents are getting involved in school matters to a degree that university administrators have never seen." Riding the tide of increasing public accountability and interest in higher education, the increase in parental activism on campuses where their students attend seem to stem, at least partially, from the increasing price of higher education. "Many of today's college parents acknowledge that, during their own days in college, their parents pretty much faded into the background, but, they add, tuition was a lot cheaper" ("Baby-Boomer Parents," 1998). With the cost of many colleges and universities extending into "tens of thousands of dollars a year, [parents] say they need to keep a close eye on things to make sure they're getting their money's worth" ("Baby-Boomer Parents," 1998).

Examining the three dominant public accountability trends impacting public colleges and universities across the country, several conclusions may be drawn from the research which have a direct application to rural land-grant universities and their future plans for retention. In keeping with the tripartite mission of teaching, research and service, rural land-grant universities, in particular, need to be sensitive to issues of cost and price; they need to be accountable to the public they serve; and they need to communicate more effectively with a public which quite often views universities as places shrouded in mystery.

In terms of college costs and prices, rural land-grant universities must especially be responsive to the will of the public and the legislators. As the Kellogg Commission pointed out in their statement launching the charge to redefine the twenty-first century state and land-grant university ("Taking Charge," 1996, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/comstate.html](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/comstate.html)), land-grant universities must keep in mind their roles as both community partner and servant. In effect, the public must be able to identify the land-grant university as an "institution that is intimately connected to its community and responsive to the many demands made on it nationally and internationally, while also providing the broadest possible access in ways that respond to student needs" ("Taking Charge," 1996, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/comstate.html](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/comstate.html)). Breaking with past doctrines by becoming less opaque about the financial practices of the institution will go a long way toward bringing state legislators and the general public "into

the loop" regarding university costs, prices, subsidies and expenditures. It may also force institutions to be more self-regulating and help tighten-up financial planning and management practices. If rural land-grant universities do not begin to move in this direction they will continue to have only themselves to blame for the lack of public support.

Colleges are largely to blame for the heightened public suspicion that they are overcharging their students because institutions share so little information about their finances, few people realize that it actually costs colleges more to educate students than the students pay...Public skepticism of higher education will only continue to grow as long as colleges fail to better explain their finances (Burd, 1998, p.A27).

The potential impact on the future of retention planning and programming at rural land-grant universities may be devastating if these universities do not do more to counteract this trend. In general, rural land-grant institutions are located in less populated, rural states or areas where the political climate is conservative and public support is less than generous. Keeping the public informed of their financial practices may help to improve the attitudes toward public higher education in many of the sixteen rural land-grant university states reviewed for this study. Improved attitudes equal more public support both in terms of new initiatives and dollars. When the public is able to see that investing in higher education is more cost effective than investing in prisons, retention programs and services will only benefit. Future retention plans, in this context, should include a mechanism which highlights the affordability of public higher education and spotlights the retention-related services students may gain from this investment.

Building on this suggestion for better financial disclosure, rural land-grant universities need to begin to prove their worth or demonstrate their accountability in a number of ways. Rural land-grant universities would benefit by following four of the recommendations put forth by NCCHE (1998):

- Strengthening institutional cost controls;
- Improving market information and public accountability;
- Rethinking accreditation; and
- Enhancing and simplifying Federal student aid (*Straight Talk About College Costs and Prices*, 1998).

Again, by taking a public-centered, student-centered approach to their basic fiscal operating procedures, rural land-grant universities will go a long way toward retaining public support and students.

The third conclusion which may be drawn from the prevailing trends in public accountability and their relationship to future retention planning at rural land-grant universities is that these institutions need to communicate more effectively with a conservative-minded, skeptical public. As many researchers recently have suggested (Burd, 1998; NCCHE, 1998; NASULGC, 1998; ACE, 1998), communication needs to be forthright and direct:

In developing an effective public information campaign, the nation's colleges and universities need to convey a message that is simple, believable, and delivered by a credible messenger ("College Costs and Public Perceptions," 1998, p.1).

Providing information which directly addresses the prevailing concerns of the public may assist many rural land-grant universities with establishing their own outcomes measures rather than having them imposed upon them by a public frustrated with the often obtuse reports generated by universities. Welcoming public scrutiny and opening the "black box" to increased parental participation as well as developing effective and clear methods of communication and public relations may inspire a level of confidence among legislators and the public which has been sorely lacking during the last ten years. A public which is confident about its rural land-grant university will support the institution with increased funding and by sending their children there for an education. This confidence will engender respect, a good reputation and improved retention and graduation rates.

Technology. In his article describing the recent increases in state appropriations for public higher education, Schmidt (1997) points out that "nearly every state was spending significantly more on technology" adding credence to the popular notion that technology "is an exploding area of higher education" (p.A30). Examining the trends in technology is extremely important when determining how prevailing socio-economic trends might impact the future of retention planning at rural land-grant universities. At no other time in history has technology, or information technology as it is often referred to in higher educa-

tion, been so pivotal in the growth and development of the knowledge and information infrastructure of public higher education and the society beyond. Information technology (IT)--technology which relates to the transference of information typically through computers, networks and data storage--is a broad classification when considered in terms of higher education which encompasses everything from office software applications to telecommunications to high-tech, NASA-funded research labs. Understanding the range of technological applications in the higher education setting falls outside the range of this study, however, considering a brief overview of the current trends in information technology may provide a vision of the future which gives some structure and form to the burgeoning field. The following section highlights the national trends in IT; explores the manner in which technology is employed most commonly at colleges and universities across the country; examines faculty, student and administrative productivity issues as they relate to IT and various computer applications; details recent findings regarding teaching, learning and technology; reviews the educational future of distance education and telecommunications; and presents a consideration of current trends in information technology and how they may impact retention planning and programming at rural land-grant universities as they enter the twenty-first century.

Providing a context for the review of national trend data regarding information technology, Barker (1995) forecasts the future of higher education utilizing scenario theory. In his article titled "Two Futures," Don Barker (1995) describes two widely differing views of the future of higher education based on current trends in technology. In one scenario, he presents a future where "current educational organizations are not effective and will not evolve into an appropriate learning system for the 21st Century" (p.11). Taking a dramatic and extreme view of technology he writes that technology will become a "vast tidal wave that will smash down the existing educational system, completely and utterly obliterating it" (p.11). "In the wake of this mass destruction," speculates Barker, "[society will witness] the rise of a more cost-effective, focused, skill-oriented, electronic-based learning environment, an environment where certification tests replace credentials (i.e. degrees) and an environment where autonomous learning supersedes classroom lectures" (p.11). In an alternate scenario, Barker (1995) describes a much friendlier view of the future of higher education. In this second scenario, "traditional degree programs will not only sur-

vive but will thrive in the age of digital communications and information" (p.11). "Rather than disappearing," he continues, "colleges will band together to form 'global electronic universities,' offering courses and complete degrees to students throughout the world" (p.11). Barker's description of the impact of technology on education, in his second scenario, is "more evolutionary than revolutionary" but, like the first scenario, technology will dramatically alter the delivery of and access to higher education (Barker, 1995, p.11). In either scenario, however, schools that do not plan for and embrace the changes and advantages wrought by technology will become obsolete. University planners need to be nimble in their thinking if they are to meet the technology challenges, in either scenario, with grace, aplomb and no small amount of success.

Adding some validity to Barker's (1995) future vision for higher education, recent trends in information technology seem to support Barker's contention that schools need to plan purposefully for the sustained and extensive use of technology throughout every aspect of the academy. Summarizing the national trends in information technology as they relate to the higher education enterprise, Gilbert (1995), El-Khawas (1995, 1996), and The Kellogg Commission's report *Returning to Our Roots* (1997), present various facts related to higher education information technology applications, developments and highlights as they have appeared across the country during the past four years. A summary list of these facts and events is listed below.

- About one home in four now possess a personal computer (with one in three of *them* reporting they own more than one), many equipped with modems to access the information highway and CD-ROM players to take advantage of the latest educational software (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.6).
- Corporate training expenditures are booming, totaling about \$52 billion in 1995 (a fifteen percent increase from 1990) and involving 41 percent of employees (up from 36 percent a decade ago) (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.6).
- Corporate "universities," thought to number about 400 in 1989, are now estimated to total more than 1,000. They offer training in everything from how to manage a hamburger stand (in more than 20 languages) to theoretical concepts undergirding advances in electronics and computer science (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.6).

- Almost all colleges and universities are expanding the use of electronic classroom technology (El-Khawas, 1995, p.2).
- National faculty unions (AFT, AAUP, NEA) and other professional higher education organizations (ACE, AAHE, AAC&U) routinely include information technology as a major issue in their publications, conferences and committees (Gilbert, 1995, URL:<http://contract.kent.edu/change/articles/sepoct95.html>).
- Within the next five years, many institutions are very likely to offer: more courses using electronic materials; more courses available by distance learning; classroom assignments that are submitted electronically; and course registration that is almost entirely computerized (El-Khawas, 1995, p.2).
- The 1996 announcement of 13 governors that they intend to establish a Western Governor's University, "virtual university" offering college-level coursework by employing the latest telecommunications capabilities (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.6).
- New institutions such as the University of Phoenix in Arizona (a publicly traded, accredited, for-profit institution of higher education) are beginning to appear. Phoenix provides distance-learning opportunities to more than 20,000 students annually (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.6).

While the above list is by no means comprehensive, it emphasizes some of the more influential trends in IT and underscores the technology events underway on and off most campuses across the nation. Integrating these trends with a scenario that demands an evolutionary or transformational approach to information technology adoption and incorporation will remain a primary challenge for all institutions of higher education into the next century.

The manner in which technology is employed most commonly at colleges and universities across the country is the second IT trend to manifest itself in the recent literature regarding the interaction between technology and postsecondary education. Technology usage may be viewed from three vantage points, all of equal concern as one considers the future of higher education in an information technology context: (1) Who actually uses technology on college campuses and how do they use it; (2) What are the prevailing attitudes toward technology on campus; and (3) How has technology been accepted in higher education. The next few paragraphs address these three areas in more detail.

In their most recent survey of higher education trends, the American Council on Education (1995) added a section to their "Higher Education Facts in Brief" website (URL: [www.ace.edu](http://www.ace.edu)) which addressed technology use on campus. According to the report, "a majority of colleges and universities reported regular computer use by both faculty members and students during the 1994-95 academic year" ("Faculty and Students," 1995, URL: [www.ace.edu](http://www.ace.edu)). At least half of the full-time faculty at 82 percent of the institutions in the survey reported using personal computers regularly while 63 percent of the institutions in the survey reported that more than half of their full-time undergraduate students indicated regular computer usage. The report further suggested that "full-time faculty members at research and doctoral universities were more likely than their peers at other institutions to use computers regularly" ("Faculty and Students," 1995, URL: [www.ace.edu](http://www.ace.edu)). During academic year 1994-95, 91 percent of public research and doctoral degree granting institutions reported that at least half of their full-time faculty members regularly used computers. Further research demonstrated that 77 percent of public research and doctoral universities reported more than half of their full-time undergraduate students (61 percent) "routinely used personal computers" ("Faculty and Students," 1995, URL: [www.ace.edu](http://www.ace.edu)). The proportion of part-time and adult students at public research universities regularly using technology was slightly less at 48 percent ("The Student Experience," 1997, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS)). The use of personal computers and other information technology continues to be at an all time high at public research and doctoral degree-granting universities across the country. The implications of this information will be explored in more detail below.

In conjunction with the myriad surveys regarding technology utilization on campus, several researchers have attempted to determine the prevailing attitudes toward technology on campus. In a study which included surveys, observations, interviews, and conversations on more than 20 college campuses and 20 national and international conferences during a one-year period, Steven Gilbert's (1995) report "Technology and the Changing Academy" presents a review of social and technological transformations in higher education which delve into the attitudes of students, faculty and other university professionals regarding the inclusion of information technology into every-day life at the academy. According to Gilbert (1995), attitudes are mixed regarding information technology on campus:

- Many faculty members are reluctant to move beyond word processing because they believe (wrongly) that information technology will not be terribly important for the courses they teach in the next five or ten years.
- A growing minority of faculty members (eight to fifteen percent) can now report significant improvements in the quality and effectiveness of their teaching achieved by using applications of information technology.
- A growing list of college and university students have voted to add annual student fees of \$25 to \$150 per student to subsidize computer-related purchases and services on campus.
- The number of reports of faculty using electronic mail in otherwise conventional courses is growing rapidly.
- Most faculty report that course-related uses of electronic mail significantly increases their workload.
- New combinations of teaching approach, applications of technology, and instructional materials are emerging and gaining advocates (collaborative/cooperative learning provides one such example).
- Almost every academic leader believes that his/her institution is sadly behind in the academic use of information technology.
- In the United States--recognized as having some of the best higher education opportunities in the world--the vast majority of all undergraduate education is still "traditional"; in other words, a single teacher lectures or leads classroom discussion in a room where the dominant instructional technology consists of textbooks, chalkboard, lectern, microphone and, perhaps, an overhead. (1995, URL:<http://contract.kent.edu/change/articles/sep-oct95.html>)

Kiernan (1998) adds further insight into the attitudinal issues surrounding technology use in higher education by noting the general resentment "changing instructional patterns" cause among many faculty members. In Kiernan's estimation, "unwillingness on the part of some professors still holds back the use of information technology at some institutions" (URL: [chronicle.com/free/v45/i09/09a02301.htm](http://chronicle.com/free/v45/i09/09a02301.htm)). Despite the prevalence of information technology, many campuses are still having to contend with large pockets of resistance from faculty.

In her recent article on the rising costs of technology in higher education, McCollum (1999) also explores the attitudes and expectations faculty and students have toward information technology on campus. While she does not address issues of resistance, she does discuss the new level of expectation on the part of both students and faculty to have the

best technology money can buy. Asserting that faculty and students have a much broader acceptance of technology than at any other time during the past ten years, McCollum (1999) says this new attitude toward IT has sparked a tremendous increase in demand: "With more students clamoring for fast Internet access and more professors asking for high-tech classrooms, colleges and universities see an ever-increasing demand for information technology" (p.A27). While students and faculty may lag behind knowing how to utilize information technology to its fullest extent, their prevailing attitude, for the most part, is progressive and open-minded. They prefer to have the latest, fastest and most powerful technologies at their fingertips while they learn how to use the applications.

Finally, it is interesting to note the trends in technology acceptance and adoption in higher education. Reporting the results of a recent survey, the Kellogg Commission (1997) described the current and projected use of technology on public college and land-grant university campuses across the country. As university administrators from public doctoral universities responded to the survey, the following trends in technology usage emerged:

1. Seventy-eight percent indicated registration was conducted almost entirely by telephone and or computer;
2. Seventy-two percent reported courses using electronic materials;
3. Sixty-five percent stated they offered distance learning courses; and
4. Forty-six percent said they had courses where class assignments were submitted electronically. ("The Student Experience," 1997, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS)).

An interesting sidenote to the acceptance and use of technology on campus concerns the abuse of technology. While technology has facilitated and enhanced both the administrative and educational process on college campuses, it also has made fraud, plagiarism and academic misrepresentation a looming challenge that raises new concerns within the academic community (Sauter, 1998). In this new age of information technology, the technology-enabled campus provides countless opportunities for students to falsify grades, account records and even diplomas. While faculty, administrators and staff still embrace the conveniences of modern technology, they are also becoming more proactive in anticipating how campus and home-based desktop technologies encourage fraud and misrepresentation (Sauter, 1998).

The third major technology-related trend to appear in the literature examines faculty, student and administrative productivity issues as they relate to information technology and various computer applications. As the above paragraphs indicate, the demand for technology-based teaching and learning programs as well as student services continues to grow. With this profound change in technology use and acceptance, a more flexible offering of programs and services for traditional and non-traditional college students is becoming more evident. In their report titled "Executive Outlook on the Transformation of Higher Education," the Higher Education Information Resources Alliance (1996) outlined several executive strategies for higher education to respond better to the demands of society in a technological era. Part of their report focused on the need to redefine productivity in a postsecondary context and to integrate academic and administrative systems more efficiently. "Old concepts of productivity," the report claims, "based on throughput and seat-time products such as credit hours and degrees, must give way to learning outcomes and client satisfaction: variety, quality, timeliness, responsiveness" ("Executive Outlook," 1996, URL: <http://cause-www.colorado.edu/collab/heirapapers/hei1070.html>). Information technology will be the catalyst in this transformation which is already well underway. Strategic thinking about the future needs of learners, the meaning of academic productivity and the increased and improved use of networked technology will not only address the issues of student/client satisfaction it will enable leaders in higher education to utilize and apply technology more effectively to suit the needs of all constituents. In a scenario where student services become unbundled and academic and administrative systems become more seamlessly integrated, "faculty and support staff will require new kinds of software tools to facilitate and manage learning, linking financial and demographic records, learning progress, and other records contained in the institution's databases, smart cards and external sources" ("Executive Outlook," 1996, URL: <http://cause-www.colorado.edu/collab/heirapapers/hei1070.html>). These "learningware" applications which facilitate and manage learning "will be the focus of software support systems for the information age" ("Executive Outlook," 1996, URL: <http://cause-www.colorado.edu/collab/heirapapers/hei1070.html>).

The fourth major trend apparent in the research literature regarding higher education and information technology details recent findings concerning the interaction between

teaching, learning and technology. One of the most discussed issues in higher education, information technology and its capacity to help transform higher education from a teaching paradigm to a learning paradigm is the primary focus of many recent books and articles (Blythe, 1997; Erwin, 1997; Hollowell, 1997; Norris & Morrison, 1997a, 1997b; Van Dusen, 1997). Claiming the "information age" is an inadequate metaphor, Norris and Morrison (1997) adduce "we are on the threshold of a Knowledge Age that will be the Age of Learners" where student/learner-centered services and programs will be the norm and where campuses will reshape "their visions of the future and their capacity to reach new learners or reach old learners in new ways" (p.1). Educational and informational technologies are helping to move students and faculty away from the traditional lecture model (passive learning) to a place where technology augments the learning/teaching process with experiential learning (active learning), collaborative teaching, and rich, frequent and timely feedback (Ehrmann, 1995). Promoting seamless learning objectives through well-articulated learning experiences spanning student services, residence life and academic affairs, technology will enable a student to have the most favorable opportunities for success based on his or her specific learning style. Technology is fast becoming the institution-wide tool that can promote individualized, collaborative, interactive, and/or research-oriented learning in ways heretofore never imagined (Van Dusen, 1997). A key leverage point in the process of transformational change, information technology may help to pave the way to a new age of understanding and learning on college and university campuses across the country.

The fifth major concept to surface in the review of significant literature regarding higher education and technology focused on the educational future of distance education and telecommunications.

In the next century, a new kind of university will be in place. Most of us are already in the process of inventing it. A university without walls, it will retain the best of our heritage. But it will also be open, accessible, and flexible in ways that can barely be imagined today. In this new university, the emphasis will be on delivering instruction anywhere, anytime, and to practically anyone who seeks it (*Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience*, 1997, p.vi.).

Casting his vision forward to describe the tumultuous times ahead for public higher education, Davies (1997) maintains the future of higher education rests on the ability of public colleges and universities to link their intellectual resources (faculty, researchers, etc.) with "communications and technical resources, and capital" (p.A68). The goal of such alliances will be to offer "electronic education in the home or workplace at prices below those charged for on-campus programs" (Davies, 1997, p.A68). Called "Drive Thru U," "Technoversity," "Virtual University," and "Cyberschool," these new organizations for postsecondary education have been and will continue to be able to keep their prices down and enrollments high by avoiding many of the standard expenses which burden traditional colleges and universities (athletics, student services, large physical plants, and ranks of tenured faculty and staff) and act in a more responsive fleet-footed way by offering only those courses which have the highest enrollment and satisfaction ratings ("The Western Governor's," 1996; Davies, 1997; "Western Governor's," 1997; Traub, 1997). As Traub (1997) indicates, the market for the type of education which leads directly to a job or career is expanding rapidly in a world where skills are quickly outdated. In separate articles, both Davies (1997) and Traub (1997) speculate the future of higher education may involve programs which train individuals for specific positions and provide follow-up training and education which upgrades worker skills and knowledge as needed. Fusing the traditions of contemporary public higher education with the demands of a techno-savvy clientele may prove to be a great challenge for the future of public higher education unless these institutions are able to transcend the physical bounds of their individual campuses to form organizations or alliances which are able to compete with corporate, for-profit postsecondary education providers (e.g. National Technological University, University of Phoenix, Graduate School of America). While this movement toward regional alliances has already begun in several states (Western Governor's University, an alliance of ten Western states), it is clear that most public universities are not keeping-up with the increased competition from the proprietary postsecondary and graduate education sector.

Balancing the clamor for a technoversity with the need for a civilizing socializing agent for traditionally-aged students, Auger (1995) maintains that, while it may be vital for the survival of many higher education institutions to change with the times and become more technologically responsive, the function of higher education is not simply that of "an

intellectual resource that provides active adult learners with access to the latest knowledge, theories and research" (p.12). Taking into account the communal nature of the higher education experience, Auger (1995) reminds the technology-enamored futurists that a "university is also a social institution that fosters the development of young adults into whole persons ready to assume a responsible role in the world of work, politics, family, and community" (p.12). Virtual universities may provide traditionally-aged students with a broad range of educational opportunities but they do not meet the educational challenges of this age group such as "curbing personal violence; developing more positive ways to resolve conflict; fostering tolerance; encouraging a celebration of diversity; eliminating sexism and racism; inculcating more respectful sexual practices; teaching skills to cope with dysfunctional family histories; and promoting more balanced lifestyles and patterns of wellness to enhance human performance" (p.12). These issues may be peripheral to the academic core of the university--the creation and dissemination of knowledge--, however, it is important to realize academic achievement is directly related to the psychosocial development and maturity of the individual. Technology must be used in a way which not only feeds the intellectual demands of society, it must also be used to augment the ethical/moral mission of higher education. "Society (and our funding agencies) expects universities to produce a new generation of responsible and productive leaders, thinkers, and politicians, and to foster the development of productive workers, enlightened and involved citizens, empathetic social leaders, creative problem solvers, and useful scholars and researchers" (Auger, 1995, p. 13). The expectation that a technoversity will be able to fulfill these expectations flies in the face of the social-community experience.

As one regards the future of retention planning and programming at rural land-grant universities during the next decade, a consideration of the current trends in information technology and how they may impact student attrition and persistence is necessary. As each of the five major movements in technology has made clear, our society and its system of public higher education is undergoing a major transformation. As Gilbert (1995) observes:

This transformation is inevitable, irreversible, and unpredictable, although we can still influence its direction. The emergence of new information technologies is neither the cause, the purpose, nor the con-

sequence of this transformation (URL: <http://contract.kent.edu/change/articles/sepoc95.html>).

However, we can guide the character of this transformation, in part, by our own thoughtfulness about the role of technology in public higher education. To fulfill both the purpose of and expectations for retention planning and programming at rurally situated universities in the land-grant tradition, these retention managers and university administrators alike must employ technology in a manner which promotes a student-centered culture on campus, and facilitates a smooth transition from high school to college. First, the rural land-grant university must transition from being an institution which values and promotes teaching to an establishment that emphasizes learning. Information technology is a key feature in accomplishing the task of increasing opportunities for learners actively to engage in content acquisition in a process with other students, faculty and staff. Further, a new approach to incorporating information technology across the campus from residence hall room to classroom needs to take place. College student retention is, at its most basic level, about connecting the entering student to the institutional environment through at least one meaningful interpersonal interaction. Used in conjunction with other interactive teaching and student services programs, information technology will expand the opportunities for meaningful interpersonal interaction on campus through group work, electronic mail, listservs, and other interactive media. Not only will this allow students to direct their learning experiences to accommodate their own learning styles, it places an emphasis and value on individual thought as well as an individual's contribution to the larger academic community. As Astin (1993) indicated, an involved and engaged student is more likely to persist to graduation than a student who remains disconnected from the university culture. Information technology may help further facilitate student involvement in the academic and social culture of the institution.

Also apparent from the trend data surrounding technology in higher education is the direct relationship between information technology and the provision of student services. Promoting a smooth transition from high school to college is as much a matter of access and convenience as it is a student development issue. Increasing the convenience of application, admissions, registration, fee payment, and dropping/adding courses is a positive step toward removing some of the initial roadblocks to a smooth college transition. For

rural land-grant universities, this is especially important for students who must travel long distances to accomplish these tasks with traditional processes. All of these areas are administrative and bureaucratic processes which are easily facilitated by the incorporation of effective and seamless information technologies. Student services could also be improved through better data tracking and management. Understanding the needs of each cohort of incoming students in advance of their arrival through the effective use of admissions data could promote more student-centered services and better enrollment management processes on the rural land-grant university campus.

Reiterating the fact that information technology is not the silver bullet or the magic panacea for retention and attrition woes at rural land-grant universities, it certainly has the potential to be a very powerful pedagogical, data management and student development mechanism. Used in the most productive and proactive manner, information technology will aid rural land-grant universities in reconceptualizing scholarship and learning, bureaucratic processes, and long-term strategic enrollment management and retention planning. Technology has the potential to improve the future and expand the horizon, specifically in the field of college student retention at rural land-grant universities, by allowing these mid-sized institutions to cater to the individual and plan for individual needs in a way which may bring the word community to the forefront of the institution.

### Internal Forces of Change

Exploring the trends in public higher education is especially relevant when planning for the future as it relates to college student retention and retention-related programming. Public higher education trends, or trends which are internal to the institution, closely parallel the broader external or social trends. When considered in their entirety, it is clear that these internal forces of change will have a swifter, more direct impact on college student retention than social trends external to the university. Three of the internal forces of change, in particular, stand out and will have a real and direct effect on the future of retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities: demography, enrollment, and faculty. The following section outlines these three internal forces of change and considers the interaction between the individual and the institution as each topic is reviewed. Exploring the dominant internal institutional trends and understanding

the relationship between the individual student and the institution remains at the heart of a rural land-grant institution's plan for getting and keeping its students.

Demography. The changing characteristics of America's college students will greatly influence whom public colleges and universities serve as well as the manner in which individual students get served. The changing demographic characteristics of students will have a great impact on who will provide retention related services as well as the exact nature of the services provided. The following paragraphs consider the general demographic trends as they relate to higher education and attempt to forecast how these trends may impact retention at rural land-grant universities in the next decades.

Looking at the demographic trends of the last generation, it is clear our society has been greatly transformed. These changes have, in turn, resulted in some discernible differences in the composition of the college population. Participation patterns in higher education during the past ten years have shown dramatic changes among students of "different gender, race, ability, and social class" (Tinto, 1993, p.11). For the purpose of this study, a consideration of three areas of demographic change will be explored as they relate to higher education: the projected number of high school graduates; patterns of participation by gender; and racial/ethnic participation trends.

The projected number of high school graduates is anticipated to grow substantially during the next ten years. Reisberg (1998) reports, "the size of the nation's high-school graduating class is projected to reach an all-time high of 3.2 million by 2008" (p.A48). In 1996 by contrast, 2.5 million students graduated from the nation's high schools. The 2008 projections represent a 26 percent increase over the 1996 numbers (Reisberg, 1998). Viewed in a historical context, these increases are quite substantial. The largest graduating class on record occurred in 1977 with 3.1 million students graduating from high school (Reisberg, 1998). This represented a peak in the baby boomer population. The number of high school graduates sank to "2.47 million in the 1990s [and] now the children of the baby boomers are causing enrollments to rise again" (Reisberg, 1998, p.A48). Most of the growth is predicted to occur in the so-called sunbelt states, with the exception of Louisiana, where states like Florida, Georgia, Arizona and Nevada anticipate a growth of 51% or more in the number of high school graduates.

Table 2. Projections of High School Graduates for Sixteen States in Study.

| State          | Projected Change in the Number of<br>High School Graduates, 1996-2012 |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Alaska         | + 8%                                                                  |
| Idaho          | +22%                                                                  |
| Maine          | -5%                                                                   |
| Mississippi    | +2%                                                                   |
| Montana        | +4%                                                                   |
| Nevada         | +134%                                                                 |
| New Mexico     | +16%                                                                  |
| North Dakota   | -16%                                                                  |
| Oregon         | +26%                                                                  |
| Rhode Island   | +15%                                                                  |
| South Carolina | +8%                                                                   |
| South Dakota   | +3%                                                                   |
| Utah           | +16%                                                                  |
| Vermont        | +9%                                                                   |
| Washington     | +36%                                                                  |
| Wyoming        | -12%                                                                  |

Source: *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1998.

Speaking in terms of the sixteen states with rural land-grant universities involved in this study, a wide range of change is predicted during the next decade (Table 2). For three of the states in the study (Maine, North Dakota, and Wyoming), the number of high school graduates is expected to decline between five and sixteen percent during the 1996-2012 time frame. Nevada stands out with a projected increase in high school graduates of 134 percent during the same time period. In general, the demand for higher education should grow proportionally with the growth of high school graduates in each state. Rural land-grant universities located in the states with little or no projected growth during the next decade may consider developing long-term retention plans which will enable them to overcome the projected demographic trends by focusing on out-of-state students and students of nontraditional age (24 and above).

Since 1980, the patterns of postsecondary participation by gender have changed to include a greater proportion of female students. In 1998, females made up 56.7 percent of all enrollments in higher education (*The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1998). The projections for the next ten years indicate this trend will only increase with female enrollments predicted to increase to 57.1 percent (*The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1998). Male enrollment in postsecondary education is expected to decline proportionally. In general, the average first time, full time entering freshman in 1997 was a traditionally-aged (18-24) white female from a family with an estimated parental income of \$60-\$75 thousand dollars per year (*The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1998). This profile reflects both the larger number of females in each high school graduating cohort and the fact that, since 1990, "a somewhat larger percentage of female high school graduates go on to college immediately after graduation" (Tinto, 1993).

The final trend to emerge from recent demographic data confirms that colleges and universities are slowly becoming more diverse in their makeup (Table 3). Racial and ethnic participation trends have also increased during the past decade and are expected to increase even more as the nation looks toward a new century. "Demographers anticipate that by the year 2020 nearly 40 percent of Americans will be members of minority groups--African American, Latino, Asian American, Pacific Islanders, or Native Americans" (*Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience*, 1997, p.4). Harkening back to the projected high school graduation rates, Reisberg (1998) reports that by the year 2001, 13 percent of the high school graduates will be African-American (unchanged from 1996 figures). The largest proportion of growth will be among "Latino, American Indian, and Asian-American graduates" with each group expected to grow by more than 30 percent (Reisberg, 1998, p.A48). This report, however, neglects to consider the participation and persistence rates of many minority populations. Despite the tremendous growth of minority groups during the next decade, Rendón and Hope (1996) warn that minority students will likely be participating at lower rates than the majority students in postsecondary education. Noting that minority students increased their numbers on traditionally white campuses across the country during the late seventies and early eighties, by the nineties, minority students "suffered serious setbacks during the Reagan and Bush administrations because of various policy changes and other developments that chipped away at their gains

in higher education" (Rendón and Hope, 1996, p.72). While women (white and minority) appear to be making tremendous strides in higher education, minority enrollment rates (especially among minority males) have become static and, in some groups, declined.

Table 3. Undergraduate College Enrollment by Racial and Ethnic Group, 1996.

| Race/Ethnicity                        | Percent of Total Undergraduate Enrollment |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| American Indian                       | 1.03%                                     |
| Asian-American                        | 5.82%                                     |
| African-American                      | 11.02%                                    |
| Hispanic                              | 8.76%                                     |
| <i>Total undergraduate enrollment</i> | <i>12,326,900</i>                         |

Source: *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 1998.

As rural land-grant universities move into the next decade, it is critical they consider the above demographic trends and how they relate to the unique culture of their institutions. Enrollment and retention management processes, plans and programs are closely intertwined with the prevailing demographic trends. Rural land-grant colleges and universities cannot ignore the shifts in population and the subsequent needs of their new, entering students. In fact, the trends outlined above mandate a call for rethinking and redefining rural land-grant university recruitment and retention efforts. According to the projections, women will continue to lead the way in college and university enrollment, followed by white males. Minority populations will constitute 33.3 percent of the American citizenry by the year 2000, and in five out of the sixteen states in this study, "minority students are expected to comprise from 29 to 49 percent of the high school graduates" (Rendón and Hope, 1996, p.91). The implications of these shifts in student characteristics for individuals involved in retention planning and programming on rural land-grant university campuses are unprecedented in the history of the land-grant tradition. Retention and enrollment managers and other administrators at rural land-grant universities can respond to the challenges brought on by these population shifts in a number of ways. First, retention and enrollment managers and other campus administrators must realize that campus diversity has gone from being a moral imperative to being a practical necessity. Second, it is critical that these administrators understand retention and enrollment management suc-

cess increasingly will be determined by an institution's ability to create an environment which is comfortable for persons of multiple cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

While a number of researchers (Upcraft & Barr, 1990; Tinto, 1993; Rendón & Hope, 1996) have suggested ways in which to plan for, confront and accommodate the looming demographic challenges, Kuh (1990) suggests an approach which takes into account the individual student as well as the individual and unique characteristics of the institution. As Kuh (1990) indicates most rural land-grant institutions with regional reputations will continue to attract "high numbers of part-time, older, and commuting students, and students of color...[however,] the number of ethnic minority students an institution will enroll will be influenced by the region of the country in which the institution is located" (p.85). In effect, the degree to which the current and projected trends in demographic change impact a given institution depends on the convergence of the mission, geographical location, and level of student commitment of each rural land-grant university. Regardless of these institutional variations, however, Kuh (1990) suggests all retention practitioners must have a sense of the students they serve and must understand how the changing characteristics of these students will necessitate a change in their living and learning environments:

How many students are part-time, commuting, traditional age, adult learners, or from various cultural, ethnic, and racial heritages? How do these qualities influence what their attitudes and values are, what they need to learn, where and how they can best attain these goals? (pp.85-86).

Retention practitioners must have an informed vision of the future of their institutions which accounts for the academic, social and cultural needs of their students. Again, it is the attention to the individual which makes for a labor-intensive, yet successful, retention management program both now and in the future.

Enrollment. In seeking to identify the internal challenges to retention management at rural land-grant universities as the new millennium approaches, understanding college student enrollment patterns becomes central to the planning process. While enrollment trends are closely linked to the demographic trends described in the above section, enrollment issues have specific consequences within the administrative, academic and student affairs framework on campus which merit specific attention. As one considers enrollment trends,

an examination must occur which takes into account the particular "policies, practices, and programs that assist new students of whatever category in their transitions to our institutions" (Upcraft & Barr, 1990, p.9). The following section highlights additional enrollment facts and figures not covered in the section on demographics; examines enrollment levels and characteristics of land-grant university students; presents a rationale for change based on current enrollment trends; and concludes with a consideration of the implications of these enrollment trends on rural land-grant universities and recommendations for change as they move toward the twenty-first century.

In highlighting additional enrollment facts and figures not covered in the section on demographics, it is important to contemplate three areas of population and enrollment shifts as they relate to higher education: general trends; minority student trends; and trends in degree attainment. In their most recent survey of higher education trends, the American Council on Education (1995) included a section in their "Higher Education Facts in Brief" website (URL:www.ace.edu) which addressed the projected enrollment increases into the 21st century. Adding to the demographic shifts indicated in the previous section, these general trends represent projected changes through the year 2005:

- Nearly three in five students (57 percent) will attend school full time in 2005, up from 55 percent in 1993.
- Approximately 78 percent of students will attend public colleges and universities in 2005, the same proportion as in 1993.
- A majority of higher education students (87 percent) will be enrolled at the undergraduate level in 2005, up slightly from 86 percent in 1993.

The expected rise in enrollment in American colleges and universities is predicted to be 16.1 million by 2005. Calling this trend the "Baby Boom Echo" and "Tidal Wave II," public college and university officials around the country are concerned about the fiscal and physical demands such an increase in enrollment will cause their institutions. Recent figures for minority enrollment, by contrast, were "troubling because they showed very limited growth, and nothing like the gains [evidenced] at the beginning of the 1990s" (Gose, 1998, p. A32). Further statistics on enrollment based on race and ethnicity "indicate that the enrollment of Hispanic students rose at the fastest rate, 5.3 percent...Black enrollment was up 1.7 percent...[and] that of Asian-Americans rose 3.3 percent...[while] that of

American Indians rose 2.1 percent" (Gose, 1998, p. A32). Consistent with other gender-based enrollment data, women in all but the Asian-American population enrolled in greater numbers than their male counterparts. Projections are that while the number of minority high school graduates will increase dramatically during the next ten years, minority enrollment rates at American colleges and universities will remain flat at approximately one fourth of the total national enrollment (Rendón and Hope, 1996). Finally, statistics examining the degree attainment rates of college students indicate an overall downward trend with variations based on gender and ethnicity. In a survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute, located at UCLA's Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, findings indicate "only about two in five students (39.9 percent) were able to complete a bachelor's degree within four years after entering college, which represents a net decline of nearly seven percent from 20 years ago" ("UCLA Study Finds," 1996, URL: [www.gseis.edu/heri/darcu.html](http://www.gseis.edu/heri/darcu.html)). Students are taking longer to graduate (up to nine years for 33.9 percent of African Americans), and women (48.6 percent), on the whole, are graduating in larger numbers than men (43 percent) regardless of the timeframe used. Finally, when looking at degree attainment by institution-type, the study shows that "degree attainment rates are highest at private universities (72 percent in nine years) and are lowest at public colleges (38.4 percent) and public universities (40.8 percent)" ("UCLA Study Finds," 1996, URL: [www.gseis.edu/heri/darcu.html](http://www.gseis.edu/heri/darcu.html)).

The second point of focus for this section on enrollment trends examines enrollment levels and characteristics of land-grant university students. In 1997, the majority of students attending land-grant institutions were typically:

- undergraduates (80 percent);
- white, non-Hispanic (76 percent);
- attending full-time (70 percent);
- under 25 years of age (63 percent); and
- women (53 percent) (*The Student Experience: Data Related to Change*, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/DataCh.html](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/DataCh.html)).

While the above profile describes today's typical land-grant university student, it is anticipated that during the next ten years this land-grant student archetype will change somewhat to accommodate the projected demographic and enrollment trends. Summarizing the

projected enrollment trends at land-grant universities in their report titled *Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience* (1997), the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities indicated how enrollment trends at land-grant universities mirror the broader national trends: "Beginning next year [1998], the crush of students seeking admission will send enrollment to record levels. Most of this growth will be in the West, where high school graduates are expected to increase by 60 percent over the next decade...Smaller increases will be experienced in the South (22 percent), the Northeast (21 percent) and the Midwest (10 percent)" (p.5). Not only will there be a larger proportion of students in most rural land-grant universities, the enrollment profile will be quite different in many of these institutions:

There will be many more members of minority groups. Many more students will be older. Most will probably be on campus; many will not. A lot of students will be lifelong learners, graduates looking to us to bur-nish their skills for a changing economy (*Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience*, 1997, p. 5).

Additionally, approximately 46 percent of all full-time college students work, an unprecedented statistic in public higher education. This number is expected to grow during the next ten years as the costs of tuition at public institutions continue to rise and students find they need to offset college expenses. Further, the number of students with a reported disability attending public institutions has risen to more than 227,000 (*The Student Experience: Data Related to Change*, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/DataCh.html](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/DataCh.html)). These new enrollment trends will mandate that retention and enrollment managers at land-grant universities commit themselves to new ways of facilitating the student-institution transition which anticipates and accommodates the variety of backgrounds and experiences these new students bring with them to their inaugural institution.

Institutions of higher education are often characterized by rigid rules and regulations, as well as services, programs and policies which are geared toward an incoming population of traditionally-aged majority population students. As the demographics across the country begin to change with substantial increases in minority populations, increasing numbers of older (24+) students, and more students with disabilities, institutions need to revisit their policies and procedures to assist these increasing populations with the critical transition to the college and university environments (Upcraft, Gardner, & Associates,

1989). A rationale for institutional change based on current enrollment trends should be considered as institutions contend with current and future demographic and enrollment trends. Forecasting this need for change ten years prior to this study, Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) illustrate the rationale for accommodating new demographic trends and enrollment patterns by highlighting the specific concerns of the increasing population of older-than-average entering students.

The educational bureaucracy originally served only young adults who were in apprentice like roles dealing with dependency issues. Older adults who begin school or return to school are usually colleagues, mentors or sponsors in their families, jobs and communities. Suddenly these adults are Bill, Joe and Anna, and those in charge, sometimes younger and with less experience are 'Professor' or 'Doctor' ...The needs of adults and the character of colleges diverge: Adults want to feel central, not marginal; competent, not childish; independent, not dependent; colleges and universities rely on rigid rules, regulations and policies. As a consequence, adults and educational institutions are out of sync (p.8).

Adapting current student services, institutional policies, rules and regulations to accommodate the growing nontraditional, non-majority and non-male enrollments will be the imperative of the next century.

Consideration of the implications of the above enrollment trends on rural land-grant universities and recommendations for change as these institutions move toward the twenty-first century are detailed below. Throughout the above paragraphs on demography and enrollment, it has become clear that rural land-grant institutions will have to deal with the challenges of these general trends on a regional basis. While all of the rural land-grant universities in this study may expect an increase in enrollment during the next ten years, those institutions in the South and West will have to contend with exponential increases in enrollment (states like Nevada, Utah, and South Carolina come to mind). Some states like Wyoming, North Dakota and Maine will need to plan for a decline in high school graduates in their states during the next ten years necessitating a recruitment plan which aggressively targets neighboring states with increasing graduation rates. All of the rural land-grant universities will need to plan for either accommodating or actively creating a more diverse community on their campuses which fosters the development and integration of

women, minorities, older students and students with disabilities. Providing student services, and adapting institutional policies to accommodate the cultural and developmental differences of these populations will help to promote a successful college transition as well as persistence among these students. Simply put, "higher education must accommodate these new learners of whatever age, category, ethnicity, or race and must be intentional about those efforts by front-loading resources to assist them with the transition; otherwise, we will face even greater problems with retention of students than is currently the case" (Upcraft & Barr, 1990, p.10). Further, rural land-grant institutions must continue to promote access and success for students from a broad range of socio-economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as academically underprepared students. Given the current degree completion rates at most rural land-grant institutions, questions of limiting access and limiting enrollment abound. However, "support of and confidence in higher education will inevitably decline unless the need to change enrollment patterns by reducing attrition is not met head on" (Upcraft & Barr, 1990, p. 10). As the 21st Century fast approaches, rural land-grant institutions must continue to maintain their mission of access for all qualified students. Further, a renewed emphasis must be placed on the issue of student-institution fit. These institutions must revisit their recruitment, admissions, counseling, financial aid and student services policies to accommodate the multi-racial, multi-ethnic student population of the future.

Faculty. As higher education in general, and rural land-grant universities, in particular move into the twenty-first century, the role of faculty in the retention management and planning process is at once clear and perplexing. While the literature confirms the pivotal role of the student-faculty connection in persistence rates and in the student-institution transition process, very little is said about how to accomplish these interpersonal encounters successfully. Having long ago moved away from the *in loco parentis* model of higher education, faculty have tended to move further and further away from regular, meaningful student interaction beyond the classroom. As the new century approaches, retention experts and practitioners alike are concerned with the role of faculty in the student-college transition and integration process. The following paragraphs consider two dominant trends in faculty culture and faculty-student interaction within the context of the changing land-

scape of higher education: a consideration of changes in learning, teaching and retention; and trends in faculty advising. The section concludes with a consideration of the implications of these trends on the future of retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities during the next decade.

Faculty have been and will remain one of the cornerstones of campus culture. As one considers the current trends, challenges and changes in learning, teaching and retention across college campuses it is important to remember the role of faculty in the education, integration and transition process. As many of the above sections on socio-economic trends have indicated, there is a new movement afoot in the nation's colleges and universities to transform education from being teacher-centered to student-centered. However, it seems that this shift in pedagogy may yet be a long way off. In fact, one of the most prevalent criticisms regarding higher education, aside from the rising costs, centers on the role of the faculty in the teaching and learning process:

With their commitment to education, research, and public service, our institutions have helped create a national system of higher education that everyone acknowledges to be second-to-none in the world. But few of us quibble seriously with the criticism that excellence in research is a far more important consideration within the faculty culture than excellence in teaching or service. We may wish that were not true. Most of us can point to exceptions that disprove the rule. But, for the most part, that critical arrow finds its mark (*Kellogg Presidents' Commission On The 21st Century State and Land-Grant University*, 1996, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/comstate.html](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/comstate.html)).

In his poignant article titled "I Am Here Because They Were There," Hallowell (1997) discusses the importance of the teacher-student connection in both the learning and retention process. In describing the current state of affairs in most colleges and universities where it is rare for an undergraduate at a research university to make a personal connection with a full professor, Hallowell makes a tongue-in-cheek comment on the predominant faculty culture: "Why should it be rare for an undergraduate and a professor to work closely together? It's messy, I guess. Undergraduates are needy, naive, even potentially dangerous. Teaching is not rewarded, either financially or with academic prestige. Why should a professor want to get tangled up in the jejune psyche of an undergraduate" (p.21)? Epitomizing the prevailing culture among many academicians, Hallowell (1997) claims that while

many colleges and universities are moving in the right direction with discussions and pilot projects involving student-centered learning and purposeful faculty-student connections, most universities still rely on luck, "simply letting the chips fall where they may" (p. 21). In other words, those students lucky enough to have made a meaningful connection with at least one faculty member during their first year on campus will likely persist where students who manage to miss the faculty connection decrease their likelihood of academic success. In a recent speech given at the National Conference on Student Retention, Randi Levitz (1998), a leading national expert on college student retention, noted a "major 'disconnect' in the expectations versus the reality for both faculty and students as they consider the college experience." For faculty, "college *education* is the goal" while students view college as a "*means* to achieve their job, career and lifestyle goals" (Levitz, 1998). Reconciling this disparity will be one of the most challenging steps toward bringing student-centeredness into the culture and value systems of the faculty.

The second major faculty-related trend to surface from a review of the significant literature focused squarely on faculty advising. Trends in faculty academic advising have been fairly consistent since the late 1960s: faculty have been rated consistently poorly by students in their willingness and ability to advise college students (Astin, 1975; Astin, Korn & Green, 1987; Noel & Levitz, 1998). When considered in terms of college student retention and any future trends in the faculty-student interaction arena, this continued disparity between students' advising expectations and the faculty reality is of special concern. Since the late 1980s, retention researchers have called special attention to this advising trend and noted that faculty advising is one of the most influential methods for connecting students to the university environment and facilitating a smooth transition from high school to college for new students. This faculty-student connection is one of the key elements in student persistence and success (Noel, Levitz, Saluri & Associates, 1985; Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). However, it is well established that the faculty reward systems at most colleges and universities give little more than lip-service to a faculty member's advising track record (Astin, Korn & Green, 1987; Tinto, 1993; Levitz, 1998). "Indeed, in many of the larger and more research-oriented institutions, faculty no longer have academic advising responsibility for lower-division students...the data suggest that the time has come for institutions to take a critical look at this very important function" (Astin,

Korn & Green, 1987). Unfortunately in 1998, a full decade after this call to action was issued, national survey data on college student satisfaction with academic advising still confirmed the earlier contention that much still needs to be done to improve the quality of academic advising (Noel & Levitz, 1998).

The implications of faculty culture, learning, teaching and advising trends on the future of retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities during the next decade are focal points as one considers the future of student persistence and success. The role of the faculty in the future of retention management remains complex. Contending with an aging faculty entrenched in a culture which values research above all else, change will be hard won in the near future. "Younger faculty are likely leaders for change," according to a September, 1997 *Newsline* article, "disciplinary societies are paying attention to pedagogy, career choices and teaching" ("The Kellogg Connections," URL: [www.nasulgc.nche.edu](http://www.nasulgc.nche.edu)). Rural land-grant universities need to send a very clear message to faculty that they "have the responsibility for student graduation rates" ("The Kellogg Connections," 1997, URL: [www.nasulgc.nche.edu](http://www.nasulgc.nche.edu)).

When considering trends in faculty culture, faculty need to realize "college is not just an institution for learning, it is an academy of friendships" (Hallowell, 1997, p.22). This is not to say that faculty must be friends with all students, the intent here is that faculty make time to connect person to person with students. Paraphrasing Yeats, Hallowell (1997) reminds faculty about the essence of higher education:

At institutions of higher learning we need to go back to where all learning starts: in the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart. We teachers, and we elders of any stripe, must make the time for our younger ones. We must remember how we felt, we must recall how painful it can be to learn, how lonely it can be to stare out at a life we haven't really started to forge yet for ourselves, not knowing where we're headed or whether we'll ever make it (p.22).

Rural land-grant universities need to develop "explicit policies that encourage close and prolonged interaction between faculty and students, especially tenured faculty and undergraduates" (Hallowell, 1997, p.22). Faculty culture needs to change to the extent that it places value on the essence of education: the human connection and the intellectual interaction. Further, when planning for change in retention at rural land-grant institutions

within the context of faculty culture it is important to illustrate to faculty the value that their connections with students bring:

These young people need their teachers. They need their wisdom and experience. They need to be able to sit and talk together, ask questions, hear stories, and feel that they are a part of something larger than themselves (Hallowell, 1997, p.22).

Administrators, retention planners and practitioners need to reaffirm the paramount importance of the human connection in the education, learning and retention process. And, they need to facilitate this connection through programs, policies, opportunities and gradual cultural changes which support the faculty in this endeavor.

When considering trends in faculty advising and the future of student persistence at rural land-grant institutions, it is clear that a stronger hand must be played in the evaluation and reward structure of the institution.

We need to pay particular attention to the traditional reward structures with its emphasis on individual faculty entrepreneurialism, pursued within the walls of departments devoted to the interests of individual disciplines. At the same time, a reformed and revitalized state university and land-grant system must honestly face long-standing internal obstacles to change in the form of faculty and administrative dynamics. While administrators sometimes paint a picture of the faculty with its face turned firmly to the past, faculty leaders often point to administrators with their heads planted firmly in the sand. These issues and dynamics need to be faced squarely, with suggestions about how to reform the culture so that the reward system reflects our commitment to community engagement and student needs, in reality as well as rhetoric (*Kellogg Presidents' Commission On: The 21st Century State and Land-Grant University*, 1996, URL: [www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/comstate.html](http://www.intervisage.com/Kellogg/STATEMENTS/comstate.html)).

Faculty need to provide quality advising and administrators need to provide the professional development opportunities for faculty to become engaged advisors as well as a clear set of expectations and rewards for faculty involved in the advising process.

### A Review of Retention Plans

Based on the review of significant literature related to the trends in higher education and retention management, it is clear that there is a pronounced concern regarding the

future of higher education. Across all socio-economic trends, a call for change in the mission, traditional modus operandi and delivery of services at public postsecondary institutions is evident. Along with this call for change comes a wide range of plans, re-worked missions and jargon which hope to guide this reinvention of higher education for a new century. During this last decade of the 20th Century, retention plans too have undergone some significant changes as higher education administrators and retention practitioners have sought to redefine the institution-student relationship. The following paragraphs present a general discussion of organizational change within the context of higher education and relate this discussion to the two schools of thought regarding retention planning and management: models-based planning and pragmatic action plans. Finally, consideration is given to rural land-grant universities and the manner of change and retention planning which may be most useful as these institutions organize for the future.

#### Organizational Change within the Context of Higher Education

Before embarking upon any strategic long-term planning or transition, it is important to understand organizational change within the context of higher education. Change, or the process by which some thing or some entity is made different, is a hard-won series of actions when considered in a higher education setting. Colleges and universities of any ilk primarily are based on long-standing traditions and historical precedents. Change, if it occurs, moves slowly through the parliamentary ranks of the faculty and the bureaucratic echelons of the administration pausing at each phase for debate, discussion and thoughtful consideration until the issue is passed, forgotten, ignored or abandoned. While this process has often been a boon to higher education by preventing rash decisions and the tendency to pounce on every popular new idea, it has also encumbered these stalwart institutions as they have sought to meet the needs of the rapidly changing society they serve. Indeed, the actual mechanism for change on most college campuses is out-moded. As Heydinger (1994) observes, "the 'toolbox' of higher education change contains mostly tools from the nineteenth century bureaucratic paradigm" (p.1). Contrasting this model with the needs of a new century Heydinger postulates, "twenty-first century higher education must become mission-driven, customer-sensitive, enterprise-organized, and results-oriented" (1994, p.1). In order to plan for and affect change, higher education must develop a new organiza-

tional paradigm: "one that will focus us on those we serve; allocate resources based on demonstrable success; provide flexibility that will permit timely responses to changing student and research needs; [and] eliminate unnecessary layers of oversight by placing more responsibility with those we serve" (Heydinger, 1994, p.1). This new organizational model may supply institutional leaders with the tools necessary to 'remodel' higher education so that it can meet the needs of the twenty-first century (Heydinger, 1994). Retention management and planning is inherently model-driven. For a program to succeed, it also must be retooled and refined with the characteristics of the mission-driven, student-sensitive paradigm. Planning for change either in retention management or on an organizational level necessitates a consideration of models for institutional transformation. As one considers the recent models for change in higher education, one paradigm emerges which lends itself to the institution of the 21st century: change based on reengineering and/or transformation. Further consideration of this model is given below.

Adding to the toolbox analogy introduced by Heydinger (1994), Bennis and Mische (1995) and Spanbauer (1996) discuss the organization of the future as one which is reinvented through reengineering. Referring to change as a process of rebuilding or retooling, these organizational change theorists provide step-by-step instructions for institutions to follow into the next millennium. The reengineering model is based on a five phase plan which attempts to infuse total quality or continuous quality improvement into the organizational processes of an institution which eventually will lead to organizational transformation (Bennis & Mische, 1995; Spanbauer, 1996). Using a methodology which specifically targets process innovation and institutional/organizational transformation, Bennis and Mische (1995), in their book *The 21st Century Organization*, highlight five specific steps to achieving institutional transformation:

- Phase 1: Visioning and setting goals.
- Phase 2: Benchmarking and defining success.
- Phase 3: Innovating processes.
- Phase 4: Transforming the organization.
- Phase 5: Monitoring reengineered processes (pp.39-40).

Each phase in the process has its own individual objectives, goals and assignments which may be created, added or deleted to suit the needs of the individual institution. For Bennis

and Mische (1995), the process of change is linear with a timeframe for transformation of twelve to fifteen months. Dolence and Norris (1995), in their work *Transforming Higher Education: A Vision for Learning in the 21st Century*, express the foundation of transformational change in higher education by indicating that just because an institution is changing or planning for change does not mean that it is transforming or moving forward. Moving beyond the linear reengineering terminology for change, Dolence and Norris assert transformational change is recursive. They present a methodology for change which is similar to the Bennis and Mische model, however, they factor in the impact of information technology as an agent of change. Transformational change involves:

1. Vision and strategy;
2. Campus-wide discussion and dialogue;
3. Development of IT infrastructure to overcome barriers to innovation;
4. Redirection of existing processes
5. Crafting of new learning processes and products; and a
6. Creation of new cultures (Norris & Morrison, 1997, p.102).

Transformational change in higher education involves creating a plan which will lead institutions down a road of five to ten years in length, which ultimately will bring the institution to a new place. Planning for transformation eventually will build "assured migration paths to the future" (Norris & Morrison, 1997b, p.111). Miller (1997), in his discussion of future organizational transformation, believes the successful organization of the future has five critically important characteristics: "great flexibility, commitment to the individual, superior use of teams, strong core competencies, and a taste for diversity" (p.120). It is important to keep these characteristics in mind as the two schools of thought regarding retention planning and management are considered below.

### Models-Based Retention Planning

The first approach to retention planning which is evidenced in the literature utilizes retention models as a foundation for generating guiding principles for retention plan development. This models-based approach establishes guideposts for the retention planner and/or practitioner to follow as (s)he develops and implements his/her institution specific

retention plans. There are as many models-based approaches to retention planning as there are retention models. Many of the retention models presented earlier in this chapter (Pascarella, 1980; Bean, 1986; Upcraft, Gardner & Associates, 1989; Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993; Terenzini, 1994; Rendón & Hope, 1996) are similar in structure but differ in the individual variables assumed to affect a student's decision to depart from his or her college. It is these individual assumptions which distinguish one retention plan from the next within the models-based construct. In each case, however, the theorist has generated a general route to retention planning which allows the practitioner to formulate a dropout prevention strategy. Reflecting on the commonalities of effective retention programs at institutions of higher education across the country and his own research on the departure patterns of college students, Tinto (1993) synthesizes a set of guiding principles for effective retention programs which epitomize the model-based approach to retention planning. According to Tinto (1993), "the 'secret' of successful retention, if there is one, lies in understanding these principles and how they can be applied to the complex problem of the retention of different students in different institutional settings" (p.146). Based on this, Tinto's principles incorporate three fundamental aspects of the student-institution interaction equation:

1. Effective retention programs are committed to the students they serve. They put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals.
2. Effective retention programs are first and foremost committed to the education of all, not just some, of their students.
3. Effective retention programs are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members (pp. 146-147).

Expanding the models-based approach to retention planning, Tinto (1993) also establishes seven "principles of effective implementation" which endeavor to guide the application of the above three program principles for the retention practitioner:

- Institutions should provide resources for program development and incentives for program participation that reach out to faculty and staff alike.
- Institutions should commit themselves to a long-term process of program development.

- Institutions should place ownership for institutional change in the hands of those across the campus who have to implement that change.
- Institutional actions should be coordinated in a collaborative fashion to insure a systematic, campuswide approach to student retention.
- Institutions should act to insure that faculty and staff possess the skills needed to assist and educate their students.
- Institutions should frontload their efforts on behalf of student retention.
- Institutions and programs should continually assess their actions with an eye toward improvement (pp.148-153).

Rendón and Hope (1996) add to the literature regarding models-based plans for retention by addressing the specific needs of students from diverse races and cultures, and advancing a series of principles for these unique populations.

#### Pragmatic Action Plans for Retention

The second approach to retention planning which is evidenced in the literature advances a systematic, step-by-step approach to retention management. These pragmatic action plans (Noel, Levitz, Saluri & Associates, 1985; Noel, 1993; Levitz & Noel, 1996; Dennis, 1998; Low, 1998; Seidman, 1998) are based on research but presented in a utilitarian manner which allows the practitioner to follow a timetable for quick implementation. While there are a number of current pragmatic action plans for retention (Dennis, 1998; Low, 1998) and even some formula-based retention management plans (Seidman, 1998), the most cited and widely tested blueprints for practical retention planning emanate from the seminal work of Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates (1985). Through a series of in-depth case studies, quantitative research and expert consultation, Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates (1985) present a comprehensive practitioners guide to retention planning and management which advances a ten-step action plan for getting long-term retention results:

1. Decide to act; create an awareness of the benefits to both students and faculty of improving the quality of learning on campus.
2. Create need; begin the process of creating an awareness on campus of a need for action.

3. Identify supporters; identify an ad hoc start-up committee among committed supporters.
4. Assemble start-up committee; assemble the newly formed start-up committee and share campus retention data.
5. Formalize effort; officially create a formal campus committee for retention.
6. Convene committee and display data; have the whole committee review all existing data and devise strategies to foster deeper understanding of the forces of persistence and quality of life on campus.
7. Begin implementation; after formulating strategies for creating campuswide awareness of the need for change, begin to implement these strategies.
8. Establish priorities for action; determine priorities and establish action sub-committees.
9. Gain top-level support; seek administrative support and sanction for the proposed changes.
10. Assess impact; evaluate and continuously review to determine if the efforts have had the desired impact and are still on track and to highlight those efforts that need to be intensified (pp.458-466).

In their most recent occasional paper and article, Levitz and Noel (1996) and Low (1998) update the above ten-step process to include a bimodal approach to retention implementation efforts. In order to achieve the maximum impact from campus-based retention efforts, Levitz and Noel (1996) promote a retention plan which has "an immediate individualized approach which can be quickly implemented" and a longer-term effort which "leads to substantive long-lasting changes" in the culture of the institution (p.1). Encapsulating this bimodal approach in six steps, Low (1998) addresses the needs of the practitioner by advancing a systematic plan to focus campus efforts "for the highest payoffs":

- Assess your campus readiness.
- Set goals by identifying issues you can resolve.
- Integrate new retention strategies within existing programs and services.
- Develop an evaluation plan for each new strategy.
- Establish reasonable timelines and assemble the resources needed.
- Recognize, reward, and celebrate your successes (p2).

Speaking directly to the in-the-trenches retention practitioners, these pragmatic action plans provide a step-by-step plan in a vernacular that is easy to understand, easy to use and easy to implement.

### Change and Retention at Rural Land-Grant Universities

After a comprehensive review of literature related to change in higher education, it is clear that most experts advocate the transformational model of change for large, complex organizations like mid-sized, rural land-grant universities (Bennis & Mische, 1995; Dolence & Norris, 1995; Spanbauer, 1996; Miller, 1997; Norris & Morrison, 1997). Viewed at its most basic level, transformational change at the rural land-grant university needs to begin with three fundamental yet ambitious questions related to change: what manner of change is possible; what type of change is most desirable; and what must be done to enact the change(s)? Building on this initial foundation for conversion, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1997) describes the nature of transformational change as a process of reform intertwined with innovative vision:

Reform on our campuses can only succeed if it is broad and comprehensive, attacking many problems at the same time. But it cannot succeed at all unless it is based on a clear vision of where we want to go. Change for the sake of change will gain us little but change aimed at developing learning communities and our capacity to continuously improve our performance will gain us everything--because that kind of change will give us the perpetual ability to review our missions, infuse new energy into the values underlying them, and improve our responsiveness to the many stakeholders we serve (p. 19).

As land-grant universities in general begin a new century, the Kellogg Commission has established a set of principles to guide their transformational reform process. Demonstrating a commitment to the historical and ethical founding mission of the land-grant university and moving ahead with seven principles to direct future action, the "Statement of Principles to Guide Academic Reform" presents a series of values for a new century. In the preamble to the principles statement, the Commission reaffirms a commitment to the land-grant tradition in higher education by viewing the mission as a "public trust" (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997). Outlining a vision for the future, the land-grant university

"supports the state and land-grant ethic of service to students, communities, and states through teaching, research, and public service as a statement of trust" (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p. 21). Supporting and guiding this trust, the seven principles are as follows:

1. **A learning community.** The university defines itself as a learning community, one that supports and inspires academic growth and learning among faculty, staff, students, and learners of all kinds, on-campus and off.
2. **Access and opportunity.** [The] institution is dedicated to maintaining the widest possible access to the benefits of a college education.
3. **An education of value.** [The] university will provide graduates with an education that fits them with the skills, attitudes, and values required for success in life, citizenship, and work or further education.
4. **Containing costs.** [The] institution is dedicated to containing its costs.
5. **Accountability.** [The] institution is a prudent steward of public resources, conscious of the need to maintain and improve quality while containing costs.
6. **Meeting new needs.** [The] university is committed to developing distance learning techniques and extended evening and weekend offerings to meet the widest variety of student needs.
7. **Flexibility and responsiveness.** [The] institution is committed to developing new partnerships and collaborations and improving governance structures so that it can meet its teaching, research, and service obligations more effectively, work with its many stakeholders more efficiently, and respond to change and emerging needs more flexibly (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p. 21, emphasis in original text).

Using the transformational change process as a foundation for future retention planning at rural land-grant universities is consistent with the suggestions and recommendations in the recent literature regarding both organizational and educational change. Using either the Bennis and Mische (1995) or the Norris and Morrison (1997) model as a guide will allow the retention practitioner to think outside the confines of his or her discipline to the broader mission-based context of the higher education process. By doing this, the retention practitioner may understand how his or her plans fit into and supports the overall

mission of the institution. A word of caution, however, is warranted at this juncture. While each of the models for transformational change are helpful in addressing the path to organizational transition and growth, they do little to address the issue of leadership for change. As rural land-grant universities plan for retention management within the transformational paradigm, it will be important for them to consider who has the strength, political savvy and know-how to affect cultural and process change within the institution.

As retention managers at rural land-grant universities move to the next level of transformational planning and consider which retention plans from the literature would be most effective, it is important to consider the advantages of an integrated models-based and pragmatic approach. Using the models-based approach to provide the retention program philosophy and operating principles, the pragmatic action plan can be adapted to accommodate and support the model while allowing the practitioner to move forward with alacrity. While the models-based approach focuses on the "big picture" and the pragmatic action plans center on the details of implementation, both models are recursive or circular processes which encourage active evaluation, program flexibility and future elasticity. Establishing grounding principles while providing a detailed, step-by-step roadmap to achieve the broader goals, this integrated approach to retention planning provides the rural land-grant university retention practitioner a practical means toward transformational change.

Looking ahead to the next century, it is important for rural land-grant university retention planners and managers to consider the external and internal socio-economic forces of change as they apply to the higher education enterprise and the process of college student retention. In their report *Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience*, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1997) puts out a call for these public institutions to "become the transformational institutions they were intended to be" and offers the above seven guiding principles to accomplish this transformation within the context of external and internal socio-economic forces of change (p. i). Retention planners and managers at rural land-grant universities might be well served to use these principles as the guideposts for their transformational retention plans. By using the constructs established and recommended by the Commission, retention managers can create pragmatic plans of action which will not only address individual student needs rela-

tive to their institutions, they will also develop plans which support the primary mission of their land-grant institutions.

### Chapter Summary and Conclusions

Drawing from the significant literature from the higher education, college student development, sociological and organizational traditions, this integrative literature review provided a context for the study of future directions in retention programming, planning and management at rural land-grant universities in sixteen states across the country. The future trends were examined in seven sections which traced the development and traditions of land-grant institutions within the U.S. higher education system; outlined the basic theories regarding retention and presented a working definition of the term for the purpose of this study; discussed the need for and impact of retention programming at rural land-grant institutions; provided a perspective on the future and future planning in a public higher education context; reviewed the external and internal socio-economic changes facing public higher education; and explored the organizational changes rural land-grant schools must consider in order to adapt and plan for the future. The seventh and final section of this chapter reviewed current retention plans as well as other relevant organizational plans which lent themselves to the rural land-grant university context and the process of institutional change.

Six major college student retention theorists were reviewed in order to provide a foundation for the consideration of the future of retention programming, planning and management at rural land-grant universities. Among the major retention/attrition theorists, Astin (1993), Tinto (1993), Pascarella (1985), Bean (1986), Noel, Levitz, Saluri and Associates (1985), and Upcraft and Gardner (1989) were considered the leading contributors to the body of literature regarding the college student dropout phenomenon. Adding to this review, a working definition of retention was established for the purpose of this study which was derived from the college impact theorists noted above.

Questioning the need for retention planning and programming in public higher education, three major points emerged which provided a rationale for the establishment of

goals, policies, and procedures related to student success at rural land-grant universities. Purposeful retention planning and management is a social obligation for public higher education and has economic, ethical and institutional ramifications for colleges and universities. Retention management is critical because the alternatives are costly in terms of lost revenue, faculty, staff and student morale, and institutional quality.

Uncovering the range of possible futures for retention planning and management at rural land-grant universities will allow individuals involved in student attrition and persistence to develop near and long-term strategic plans for their institutions. Responding to the anticipated trends forecasted for the near future and analyzing the potential forces of change on the horizon for professionals and/or practitioners engaged in retention-related programming and planning will better enable those individuals to respond more quickly and directly to these changes as they occur. This forward-looking approach to long-term retention programming and planning will afford retention practitioners at public institutions the opportunity to maximize fiscal and human resources, and will allow for expeditious acclimation and accommodation to the most prominent future trends as they relate to college student retention.

In a review of the main social and economic trends effecting the future of retention programming, planning and management rural land-grant universities will be facing challenges on two fronts: demands external to the university and change internal to the institution. Four major trends embody the external institutional challenges including social pressures, economic trends, issues of public accountability and new directions in technology. The internal forces of change impacting public higher education are exemplified by demographic, enrollment and faculty trends within the academy.

The impact of society on the future of retention planning and management at rural land-grant universities ranges from the role of public higher education in American social development to general global, national and local issues impacting public higher education. Social and cultural characteristics students exhibit as they enter college also emerged as critical trends to follow when contemplating the future in a retention/rural land-grant university context. One of the most direct conclusions which was drawn from these social trends is that the retention of students is directly related to what rural land-grant universities are able to offer the constituents they serve. The manner in which these institutions

teach problem solving, critical thinking and life-long learning skills must reflect the needs of the twenty-first century society. Speaking specifically in terms of retention-related programming and planning for a new century, attending to the predominant trends in society will facilitate a smoother transition process for new students as they attempt to reconcile their previous educational and social experiences with the new culture, environment and community of the rural land-grant university.

As it has been since the advent of the 1990s, the economy remains a driving force behind many of the changes and challenges faced by rural land-grant universities. The dominant economic categories impacting public higher education include general global and economic trends; understanding the economic benefits of higher education; delineating the economics of retention; and the effect of the external economic forces as they relate to college student retention at rural land-grant universities. Concluding this examination of the economic trends impacting public higher education, rural land-grant universities need to consider four areas of potential impact and their requisite planning strategies. First, rural land-grant universities must respond better to the increasing globalization of the economy as well as the paradigm shift from a production-oriented to a service-oriented economy simply because of their location, size and limited access to resources. Providing training, internship and student exchange opportunities which address these trends will help rural land-grant universities attract and retain students. Second, rural land-grant universities need to make a purposeful effort to focus their interests in retention and retention-related programming on long-term strategic planning rather than short-term economically-linked efforts. Third, retention planners and practitioners constantly need to monitor the cost, price and value of an education at a rural land-grant university. Finally, as rural land-grant universities look toward a new millennium, it is important to consider how the economic trends as a whole may be amplified or diminished at institutions on the geographic and economic fringes of public higher education. Using the global, national and local economic trends as a guideline, retention planners need to be able to advise institutions how to be more responsive to issues of quality; to tighten management practices; and to focus on communicating with the public about the economic benefits of an education at their rural land-grant universities.

Public service is one of the three cornerstones to the purpose and mission of a land-grant university. Addressing the needs of the public and communicating effectively with its stakeholders and other constituents continues to be a great challenge for most land-grant universities. Three trends surfaced in the review of significant literature which may impact the future of retention at rural land-grant universities: public perceptions regarding college costs and recent measures enacted to bring the costs of higher education under control; a movement toward federal and/or state-imposed outcomes-based measurements; and an increase in parental activism at colleges and universities around the country. Examining the three dominant public accountability trends impacting public colleges and universities across the country, several conclusions were drawn from the research which have a direct application to rural land-grant universities and their future plans for retention. In keeping with the tripartite mission of teaching, research and service, rural land-grant universities, in particular, need to be sensitive to issues of cost and price; they need to be accountable to the public they serve; and they need to communicate more effectively with a public which quite often views universities as places shrouded in mystery.

The recent growth and development of the knowledge and information infrastructure of public higher education and society is directly attributable to the current information technology explosion. Several trends were explored which may directly influence the retention management and planning efforts at rural land-grant institutions as the twenty-first century dawns. These areas of impact include national trends in information technology; the manner in which technology is employed most commonly in colleges and universities; faculty, student and administrative productivity issues as they relate to information technology and various computer applications; and distance education and telecommunications. As the literature suggests, information technology, when used appropriately, has the potential to be a very powerful pedagogical, data management and student development mechanism. Used in the most productive and proactive manner, information technology will aid rural land-grant universities in reconceptualizing scholarship and learning, bureaucratic processes, and long-term strategic enrollment management and retention planning.

The general demographic trends apparent in the literature reflect a society which has and will continue to undergo wide transformation both in terms of gender, race and ethnic-

ity. Vast population shifts, increases in high school graduates and an increasing minority population demand responsive retention-related programs at rural land-grant universities. Demographic trends specific to each state considered for the study indicate an overall increase in enrollments in the South and the West with some substantial declines in several of the most geographically isolated states. For the majority of the schools in this study, they will be faced with slight increases in enrollment or no change. As a result, these rural land-grant institutions will need to concentrate their recruiting efforts toward out-of-state students. As the states supporting the sixteen rural land-grant universities increase their focus on out-of-state students, they will need to develop retention programs which accommodate the specific needs of those students who are from outside the region traditionally served by the rural land-grant institution. Two other conclusions which were drawn from the trends in the literature concentrate on the specific role of the retention manager or administrator. First, retention and enrollment managers and other campus administrators must realize that campus diversity has gone from being a moral imperative to being a practical necessity. Second, it is critical that these administrators understand retention and enrollment management success increasingly will be determined by an institution's ability to create an environment which is comfortable for persons of multiple cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Retention practitioners must have an informed vision of the future of their institutions which accounts for the academic, social and cultural needs of their students. Again, it is the attention to the individual which makes for a labor-intensive, yet successful, retention management program both now and in the future.

Understanding enrollment trends is central to the retention management process. The section on internal enrollment trends furthered the information presented in the demographics section by presenting additional enrollment facts and figures; examining both the enrollment levels and student characteristics of land-grant universities; and presenting a rationale for change based on current enrollment trends. Synthesizing much of the college student demographic trend data with the enrollment figures for public higher education, several conclusions were developed which address the future retention planning and management needs at rural land-grant universities. Rural land-grant universities must place an emphasis on accommodating new students regardless of age, category, ethnicity, or race and these institutions "must be intentional about those efforts by front-loading resources

to assist them with the transition; otherwise, [higher education] will face even greater problems with retention of students than is currently the case" (Upcraft & Barr, 1990, p.10). Further, rural land-grant institutions must continue to promote access and success for students from a broad range of socio-economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as academically underprepared students. As the 21st century fast approaches, rural land-grant institutions must continue to maintain their mission of access for all qualified students. These institutions must revisit their recruitment, admissions, counseling, financial aid and student services policies to accommodate the multi-racial, multi-ethnic student population of the future.

The role of faculty in the retention management and planning process remains pivotal as rural land-grant universities move into the twenty-first century. The two dominant trends in faculty culture revolve around the faculty-student interaction process and include a consideration of changes in learning, teaching and the faculty role in retention; and trends in faculty advising. Conclusions which were derived from these two trends in faculty culture were simple and straight forward. Administrators, retention planners and practitioners need to reaffirm the paramount importance of the human connection in the education, learning and retention process. And, they need to facilitate this connection through programs, policies, opportunities and gradual cultural changes which support the faculty in this endeavor. Additionally, faculty need to provide quality advising and administrators need to provide the professional development opportunities for faculty to become engaged advisors as well as a clear set of expectations and rewards for faculty involved in the advising process.

Moving on from a consideration of the primary social and economic trends impacting rural land-grant universities, a review of retention plans was conducted which presented a general discussion of organizational change within the context of higher education and related these trends to the two retention planning constructs for higher education: models-based planning and pragmatic action plans. Speaking directly to the issue of organizational change, rural land-grant universities would be best served by enacting a process of transformational change as the next century approaches. Incorporating the institutional characteristics of flexibility, commitment to the individual and an acceptance for diversity provide the foundation for transformational change. Future retention plans may

emulate the models-based approach to retention management which establishes guideposts using principles for the retention planner and/or practitioner to follow as he or she develops and implements his/her institution specific retention plans. Or, future plans may follow the systematic, step-by-step approach to retention management found in the pragmatic action plans models presented in a language that is easy to understand, easy to use and easy to implement. Considering both the external and internal social and economic forces of change at work on most rural land-grant universities, retention planners and managers at these institutions might be well served to employ transformational retention plans which support an integrated models-based and pragmatic action plan approach.

Retention programmers, planners and managers at rural land-grant universities will be facing a variety of challenges external and internal to their institutions as the new millennium dawns. Meeting these challenges with an eye toward transformational change which incorporates principles-based plans of action may be one strategy which allows retention planners effectively to accommodate the whims and wilds of a new era. Despite the rapidly changing trends in society, the economy, public accountability, technology, demography, enrollment and faculty culture, rural land-grant universities need to put students and their interests, needs and emerging capacities at the center of their futures because it is economically sound practice, socially responsible, and ethical. As rural land-grant universities transform their retention programs to meet the demands of the future, so too, will they transform the students they serve. Focusing on quality, embracing diversity, committing to the individual, and reaffirming the human connection, despite the alienating nature of technology, should remain the core values of any future retention program. It is these values which rural land-grant institutions should impart to their students and use to build future-responsive retention programs for the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER 3

### PROCEDURE

#### Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

The qualitative research paradigm is one of two major paradigms commonly employed in educational and social science research. The following section provides an overview of the qualitative research paradigm used in this study and briefly highlights the fundamental assumptions inherent in a qualitative design.

Qualitative or naturalistic inquiry has as its philosophical base the concept of phenomenology. Phenomenological inquiry, according to Patton (1990), is a qualitative, naturalistic approach to inductively and holistically understanding the human experience in a context-specific setting. The primary purpose of the qualitative research procedure is to understand a given phenomenon. The researcher goes into the field, as Guba (1978) describes, open minded not empty headed. (S)he has predetermined the problem to investigate and uses the "parameters of that problem... to determine the inquiry limits" (Guba, 1978, p.42).

Viewed in the broadest terms, there are four major foundational assumptions which encompass the qualitative research paradigm. These assumptions or approaches to research are grounded in the specific ontology, epistemology, axiology, and rhetoric utilized by the qualitative researcher. Ontologically speaking, qualitative research paradigms are based on the assumption that the only reality which exists is that which is perceived. In other words, the assumption is that there are multiple realities--reality is constructed, it is what people in the study perceive it to be. The basic epistemological assumption behind the qualitative research paradigm sees the interaction between researcher and researched as interactive. Thus, the inquiry paradigm for the qualitative researcher is ethnographic in

nature, underscoring the inter-relatedness between researcher and study participant. The fundamental axiological assumption is that the qualitative researcher tries to understand the values of the study participants while acknowledging he/she brings his or her own values to the study. Rhetorically, qualitative research reports are thick and rich with a narrative voice and a wide range of direct quotes from study participants (Patton, 1990).

Qualitative research can be distinguished from quantitative methodology by a number of specific and distinct characteristics inherent in the assumptions and design of the study. In fact, the differences between these two research paradigms are as distinct as the philosophical quest for understanding employed by researchers in each area. Each paradigm is based on a different set of assumptions, has differing methods of inquiry and has fundamentally different views of reality. Merriam (1988) outlines six practical assumptions which distinguish qualitative research from other forms of inquiry:

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with **process**, rather than outcomes or products.
2. Qualitative researchers are interested in **meaning**--how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.
3. The qualitative researcher is the **primary instrument** for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines.
4. Qualitative research involves **fieldwork**. The researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe or record behavior in its natural setting.
5. Qualitative research is **descriptive** in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures.
6. The process of qualitative research is **inductive** in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details (pp.19-20, emphasis in original text).

Methodologically, the primary purpose of a qualitative study is not to test a hypothesis. Rather, it has at the center of its purpose a mission of discovery. Theory or hypotheses are not established a priori, qualitative researchers have ideas or "working hypotheses."

Qualitative researchers seek to discover or uncover information which may help to shed light on a particular question. The stance of the qualitative researcher is expansionist in scope, seeking to broaden the knowledge-base through understanding and illumination. The design of the research is highly individualized depending a great deal on the individual researcher and the questions (s)he asks as well as the research situation. The qualitative researcher takes an inductive approach--looking for patterns, themes and trends. (S)he employs direct, subjective data gathering techniques including interviews, observations, focus groups and document analysis. Data are gathered and analyzed simultaneously which allows for the discovery-oriented nature of qualitative research.

Through the use of qualitative research methodologies, this study seeks to provide retention specialists and other individuals involved or interested in retention enhanced insight into the issues and challenges rural land-grant universities will be facing as they move into the twenty-first century. To this end, the study explored national trends in attrition and persistence as well as the latest data on college student satisfaction. Concomitant with the analysis of national statistics, national retention experts were interviewed to determine what they believed to be the major retention challenges facing rural land-grant institutions as they looked toward the future. Specifically, this study endeavored to answer the following question: "What are the retention challenges facing rural land-grant universities into the twenty-first century and which plan for retention will best anticipate and accommodate the changes these institutions may face as they move into the next millennium?"

By its very nature, qualitative research is exploratory and was the best method to use in answering the above question. The characteristics of this research problem supported the use of a qualitative research design for several reasons:

1. There was a distinct and conspicuous lack of theory regarding future trends in retention-related research;
2. Available retention-related theory did not specifically address the needs of rural land-grant institutions;
3. A need existed to explore the future retention challenges facing rural land-grant universities as well as the plans which may help to assist them through the millennial transition; and

4. The essence of the phenomenon under study was not suited to quantitative measures because of the futuristic, predictive nature of the problem.

### Study Design

The basis for the design of this study was grounded in the phenomenological tradition of qualitative inquiry. Phenomenology is a "complex, multifaceted philosophy [which] defies simple characterization because it is not a single unified philosophical standpoint" (Schwandt, 1997, pp.114-115).

It includes the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the existential forms of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), and the hermeneutic phenomenology of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) (Schwandt, 1997, p.114).

In general terms, however, the term phenomenology most often refers to "the structure and essence of experience" for a given group of people for a particular phenomenon (Patton, 1990, p.69). Patton advances the notion that phenomenologically based research can be viewed as either a philosophical standpoint for the research or it can be a methodological approach, or both. This study was conducted with a "phenomenological focus (i.e., getting at the essence of the experience of some phenomenon)" as opposed to being a strict phenomenological study adhering to prescribed phenomenological methodology (Patton, 1990, p.71). Drawing from Patton's (1990) interpretation of phenomenology, this study employs "a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience (p.71).

The data collection processes commonly used in phenomenological research include interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and other forms of data collection. Each of these data collection techniques were employed in this study. Specific technologies also were utilized to augment the data collection process. These technologies included E-mail, Internet and World Wide Web interfaces.

Adding to the phenomenological approach of this study, the researcher also employed a future-responsive approach to her inquiry methods (Kauffman, 1967; Ayres,

1969; Enzer, 1971; Welch & Watson, 1979). Due to the futures forecasting nature of the phenomenon under consideration, incorporating specific elements of futures research seemed appropriate for the study design. Welch and Watson (1979) assert that there are four basic assumptions at the foundation of futures research:

1. The future is determined by a combination of history, environment, chance, and human choice;
2. A wide range of alternative futures exist;
3. Responsible choices about the future cannot be made without a knowledge of the available options and their consequences; and
4. The purpose of futures research is not to predict, but to understand, the range of options and how they may be affected by the interaction of choice and chance (pp.1-2).

The primary characteristics of futures research may be utilized effectively with qualitative phenomenological methodology. Enzer (1972) suggests a four-step procedure be followed when combining futures research with another research methodology or technique. Characteristically, futures research emphasizing the forecast of any projected situation is:

- interdisciplinary, recognizing the complex interactions of social components;
- systematic, attempting to avoid overlooking interacting developments and trends;
- judgemental, as hard, predictive data may not be available to forecast a future event;
- alternative, stressing a range of decision and planning choices (Welch & Watson, 1979)

Ayres (1969), long considered the founding expert in modern futures research, asserts there are two types of futures forecasting which indicate the researcher's study approach: normative and exploratory. Briefly, the exploratory approach considers "the hypothetical future consequences of existing trends from the perspective of a neutral observer" (Welch & Watson, 1979, p.3). Normative forecasting, by contrast, "emphasizes a thorough assessment of future goals and missions and works backwards from the goals to determine the best methods of attaining them" (Welch & Watson, 1979, p.3). For the purpose of this study, the researcher has employed the exploratory method of futures fore-

casting on three key points: (1) current knowledge, based on a review of relevant research literature and interviews with national retention experts; (2) current performance, based on interviews conducted with individual retention practitioners at rural land-grant universities; and (3) past progress, based on an historical/theoretical overview of land-grant universities and retention related theories and practice (Ayres, 1969). Lanford (1972) further advocates the use of trend exploration, Delphi techniques, polls, panels, and precursive indicators, either singularly or in combination with one another, as part of the exploratory methodology. In the case of this study, the researcher has chosen to employ both trend exploration and a Delphi technique as exploratory research methodologies with the understanding that the phenomenological approach provides the research overlay for the futures methodologies.

### Role of the Researcher

One of the cornerstones of qualitative inquiry is the notion of the researcher as the primary data collection instrument (Patton, 1990; Creswell, 1994; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). As such, this individual brings his or her own personal values, judgements, biases and assumptions as (s)he embarks upon the study. Given this view, the identification of the aforementioned issues can lend a positive strength to the study and data collection process (Patton, 1990). My views of higher education and issues relating to college student retention stem from both personal experience and observation. I have been a part of the higher education community both as a student and employee for the past fifteen years. From 1984-1988, I attended Columbia University in the City of New York as an undergraduate student. After graduating, I attended Teachers College-Columbia University for one year and earned a Masters degree while working in the Provost's office. Both my undergraduate and graduate experiences at Columbia were pivotal in shaping my current view of college student attrition/retention. After a particularly difficult adjustment to both the school and the urban metropolis of New York, I constantly wondered how I managed to persist through graduate school at Columbia. After leaving New York, I moved to Dickinson, North Dakota where I worked (1989-1992) at a small rural public university as the Coordinator of the Learning Resource Center. As part of my job, I was directly responsi-

ble for facilitating the Freshmen Experience class and assisting both traditionally and non-traditionally-aged new students with their adjustment and transition to higher education. It was at this point that I began to look seriously at the theory and issues surrounding college student retention. I currently work as the Director of Retention for a mid-sized, rural land-grant university and believe this role, combined with my cumulative experience in higher education increases my understanding of the problem under consideration in this study. I bring a keen insight and knowledge of both the structure of higher education and the distinct mission/function of rural public higher education. Specifically, I have worked in the field of retention and retention-related activities for ten years and have a unique comprehension of the challenges, decisions, trends and outcomes of retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities.

The same characteristics and experiences mentioned above as strengths also contribute to the list of biases I bring to this study. While every effort will be made to ensure objectivity, the biases I bring due to my experience in higher education may be reflected in the way I view and interpret data as well as in the way I move through the data collection process. First, I am predisposed to believe, based on my experience, that retention programming and planning is necessary for rural land-grant universities. Second, my experiences as a female undergraduate and graduate student at a highly selective urban university provide my basic frame of reference for postsecondary education and this, at times, may make it difficult for me to understand why a given rural public college or university may act in ways which differ widely from my own undergraduate experience. Third, I have been and am currently employed in a Student Affairs division of a university. This may introduce a bias in the way in which I view and interpret the role of the faculty, in particular, and Academic Affairs, in general, in the college student retention process. Finally, I question the ability of many institutions of higher education to change dramatically as the millennium approaches and may view indications of change at rural land-grant universities with measured cynicism. Despite this fundamental question, I remain optimistic that rural land-grant universities are planning for the future and that college student retention is an integral part of that plan.

### Study Parameters and Data Collection Procedures

In identifying the parameters of a qualitative study, Creswell (1994) advances the notion of purposeful action on the part of the researcher: "the idea of qualitative research is to purposefully select informants (or documents or visual material) that will best answer the research question...no attempt is made to randomly select informants" (p.148). Setting boundaries or describing the means by which the researcher has imposed limits to the study is also done in a purposeful manner which is guided by the fundamental research question. The following section outlines the boundaries or parameters for the study which have been established for the data collection process based on the investigation of retention challenges facing rural land-grant institutions during the next ten to fifteen years.

#### Setting

This study was conducted primarily in a "virtual setting." A total of fifteen universities from each major region of the country were purposefully chosen for the study based on visits to their World Wide Web sites and three actual campus visits. The universities in this study were all rural land-grant institutions as defined by the characteristics listed below. The universities in this study all met the following criteria:

1. The university was a federal land-grant institution and has as its primary mission the threefold goal of teaching, research and service;
2. The university was situated in a rural area. Specifically, the university was located in a region with no more than one hundred thousand inhabitants, exclusive of university's student population, within a sixty-mile radius surrounding the school;
3. The local community surrounding the institution had, as one of its primary economic forces, agriculture or agriculture-related businesses; and
4. The enrollment figures for the university fell between a minimum of 8,000 students (FTE) and a maximum of 22,000.

The purpose of the above criteria was to identify comparable, peer institutions from which data could be gathered to study the unique retention needs of rural land-grant institutions.

### Actors

The informants in this study included a minimum of sixteen retention experts from the land-grant universities meeting the above criteria. These individuals had special skills or knowledge derived from training or experience in the area of college student retention, attrition, drop-out prevention or persistence. Their expertise was evidenced by a current or former leadership position in a retention-related area at their particular rural land-grant institution. Other informants in this study included four national experts or "key knowledgeable" in the field of college student retention (Patton, 1990, p.136). These informants were pivotal in terms of the recommendations, comments and input they had regarding megatrends in college student retention. Their expertise was evidenced by publications, years of experience in the field, or by a current or former position in a retention-related area.

### Events

Using qualitative research methods with a phenomenological focus overlaying futures forecasting techniques, the purpose of this study was to examine and elucidate the perceived retention challenges national experts and experts at rural land-grant universities believed they would be facing in view of current and projected socio-economic trends as the Nation moves into the twenty-first century. Further, the plans for retention, suggested or employed by each expert were examined in light of their ability to anticipate and accommodate the changes these institutions may face during the next ten to fifteen years.

### Process

Throughout the data collection process, specific attention was paid to the trends, indicators of change, and plans of action identified by each of the study participants as they related to college student retention. As the study evolved, both terminology and process were closely observed as the examination moved from expert to expert, campus to campus. This observation technique facilitated both the data collection and analysis process.

### Data Recording and Analysis Procedures

Five specific qualitative research methodologies were employed to study fifteen rural land-grant institutions across the United States. These methodologies included: a review of relevant literature; a prospective study; on-line site selection and visitation; individual interviews (in-person, over-the-phone, and on-line); and document analysis. Two limited quantitative research methods were also used to provide descriptive statistics for the study. These methods included a demographic profile of each institution including current enrollment figures, and current retention and graduation statistics; and a review of national retention and student satisfaction statistics. The following section details the seven data collecting and recording techniques employed in this study.

#### Literature Review

The review of literature involved a comprehensive examination of relevant journal articles, books and other related studies regarding retention in general and, more specifically, retention, attrition and persistence as it relates to public colleges and universities. Further, a review of relevant literature regarding current and projected socio-economic trends was employed as part of the exploratory method of future trend forecasting. This manner of trend exploration, based on current research had, as its underlying supposition, the view that "the 'environment'--or the balance of forces--does not change, so that it is reasonable to assume that the behavior of the recent past is a good model for the behavior of the near-term future" (Ayres, 1969, p.35).

#### Prospective Study

Using a qualitative Delphi technique to help ascertain the anticipated changes and implications on the horizon for retention at rural land-grant universities, "key knowledgeable" in the field of retention were solicited for their input regarding approximately eight major areas of change which may impact retention efforts (Patton, 1990, p.136). The Delphi technique, in this case, was based on a series of "iterations, or rounds, which sample and report expert opinion" until a general pattern emerges clustering around clearly identifiable themes. Four nationally recognized experts were asked for their reactions to and rec-

ommendations for retention planning based on social trends, financial/economic issues, public accountability concerns, technology, changing student demographics, enrollment, faculty culture, and the changing mission and function of rural land-grant universities. The interviews were qualitative in nature using the general interview guide approach (Patton, 1990, pp.280-284). Specifically, a list of open-ended questions focusing on the eight major topic areas listed above were explored. An interview guide was prepared in advance "in order to make sure that basically the same information [was] obtained from a number of people by covering the same material" (Patton, p.283). According to Patton (1990), "the interview guide helps make interviewing across a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored" (p.283). The interviews were conducted over-the-phone, in-person and on-line. Copies of the over-the-phone, in-person and on-line interview guides have been included in Appendix A. Each of the experts interviewed for this particular phase of the study was apprised of the research objectives both verbally and in writing. A clear indication of how the data would be used was articulated to each informant. The experts in this study were all informed of the data collection devices and activities (audio-tape, E-mail print-outs, etc.) and were given the option to read and approve their particular interview transcript(s). In terms of reporting the data, the wishes of the interviewee were considered paramount. The decisions regarding the anonymity of the expert were left up to the desire of the informant.

#### Online Study Site Selection Procedures

Using the World Wide Web as the springboard for the study site selection, the researcher visited the websites of each of the 50 U.S.-based land-grant universities to establish criteria for selection. Those institutions that did not meet the criteria established in the study proposal (see the *Setting* section of this chapter) were eliminated from the pool and the researcher focused on the remaining sixteen schools meeting the rural land-grant university definition. As the virtual site selection was narrowed down to sixteen institutions, several critical pieces of information were sought during each virtual site visit: (1) the size (enrollment) and location of the school; (2) the size of the greater community; (3) any mention of retention programs, services, or personnel; (4) pertinent demographic/school profile information; and (5) a contact name and telephone number to set-up

the on-line, in-person or telephone interview. This site selection procedure provided a very expeditious and systematic way of "visiting" the universities in the study to gather demographic and anecdotal data for analysis. Further, the researcher had the opportunity to visit three of the study sites in-person to further ascertain their relevance to the study and to get a sense of the rural land-grant university culture outside of her own university setting.

### Individual Interviews

Using the research base established by the above method, individual interviews were conducted to gather more in-depth information and reactions regarding the major trends in retention at rural land-grant universities. The interviews were conducted with a broad cross-section of retention experts from around the country. Sixteen interviewees were drawn from a pool of prospective individuals who were directly involved in college student retention, attrition, or persistence programming or research. At least one retention specialist (an individual directly responsible for retention-related activities) from each of the universities in the study was interviewed. As part of a preliminary or prospective study described above, four nationally recognized retention theorists also were interviewed. Both sets of interviews were conducted by phone, in-person and/or through other interactive media. The in-person or over-the-phone interview sessions were audio-taped with the consent of the volunteers. All on-line interviewees were informed that their individual electronic mail messages/discussions would be printed-out and used as transcripts for analysis with their permission.

### Document Analysis

The document analysis data collection technique encompassed a review of pertinent retention-related documents from the rural land-grant institutions under study and included an overview of successful retention models/plans from land-grant institutions across the country. Much of the preliminary data was gathered on-line due to the up-to-date nature of each university's website. Other documents were obtained from interviewees and other sources at each study site.

### Demographic Survey

Demographic data from the rural land-grant institutions under study was gathered to provide a base-line profile of enrollment, and retention and graduation rates at each of the sixteen universities. Once again, much of this information was obtained on-line at each university's website. In cases where the information was not available on the Web, the primary institutional research specialist was contacted for the data. In all cases, the demographic information was a matter of public record..

### National Retention and Student Satisfaction Statistics

These data were collected from Noel/Levitz, Iowa City, Iowa, and the American College Testing Service (ACT, 1999) data files, two of the primary clearinghouses for national retention data. In order to provide descriptive statistics for general comparison for the sixteen rural land-grant universities in the study, national retention and student satisfaction statistics were incorporated into the data.

### Other Processes

All of the interviews conducted as part of this study either were tape-recorded or transcribed with the permission of the interviewees. Follow-up E-mail questions and conversations were included as transcripts for the analysis process. The tapes and E-mail transcripts for the expert and other individual interviews were summarized and common themes which occurred were identified and discussed. After data collection and analysis were completed, the researcher synthesized her findings by focusing on the themes which were common across each data collection method. Thick and rich description related to each theme was provided in a narrative reporting format.

### Analysis

The process of data collection, interpretation and analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the course of this study. As Creswell (1994) notes, "in qualitative analysis several simultaneous activities engage the attention of the researcher: collecting information from the field, sorting the information into categories, formatting the information into a

story or picture, and actually writing the qualitative text" (p.154). During data collection and analysis, the data were organized both categorically and, in some cases, chronologically and reviewed on a regular basis. Data were taken out of context or "de-contextualized" and then synthesized into a broader view of the phenomenon under study (Tesch, 1990). Data were then distilled into a format which could be represented in a table format (demographic info, national statistics, overview of broad categories/themes) in order to provide a simple visual representation of the "re-contextualized" information. Further, the tables were developed to provide an overview of the relationships among each category. As stated above, thick and rich descriptions of each category/theme were presented in narrative form to build a detailed and clear account of the retention trends phenomenon. In many cases, direct quotes or text-based data were used to support and illustrate the various categories outlined in the study.

The specific coding procedures used in this study to reduce the volumes of data to general themes were based on a process advanced by Tesch (1990). Tesch's eight-step process for data analysis provides the researcher with a means to systematically analyze text-based data. The following eight-step process was employed actively during the data analysis stage of this study. Tesch advises researchers to:

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read through all of the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind.
2. Pick one document (one interview)--the most interesting, the shortest, the one on top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, What is this about? Do not think about the "substance" of the information, but rather its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
3. When you have completed this task for several informants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns that might be arrayed as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.
4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try out this preliminary organizing scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that

relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show inter-relationships.

6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7. Assemble that data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode your existing data (pp.142-145).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher also color-coded data (using low-tech markers and highlighters) which fit together under a particular category or topic area.

While phenomenological research is less structured than other qualitative research designs, the above guidelines proved to be very useful in guiding the data analysis process. One key component of phenomenological research, however, is the process of verification by a different researcher (Patton, 1990; Schwandt, 1997). In keeping with this analysis process, the categories and data were presented to an outside researcher for review, feedback, commentary and independent confirmation. This outside researcher has recently published several qualitative studies in refereed journals and consults internationally regarding qualitative data collection methodologies and reporting methods.

### Methods for Verification

This study addressed the concepts of validity and reliability through several procedures designed and recommended by qualitative research experts (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Merriam, 1988; Creswell, 1994, 1997). Specifically, this study addressed the issue of internal validity by employing the following procedures throughout the study:

1. Triangulation--data were collected through multiple sources including interviews, document analysis, a Delphi technique, and descriptive statistics;
2. Member checks--in order to ensure accurate data interpretation, informants were consulted in an on-going manner to review and comment on the researcher's analysis and conclusions;

3. Peer examination--a doctoral student in the Department of Education at Montana State University-Bozeman has reviewed the data; and
4. Bias clarification--the researcher's biases were clearly stated at the outset of the study design (see the Role of the Researcher section).

While it is not the goal of qualitative research to generalize findings, it is important to consider the unique interpretation of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1988). The external validity of the study has been addressed with the provision of a detailed narrative accounting for main trends and themes uncovered by this research. This study provides a solid foundation for others who may wish to examine the same or a similar phenomenon. Based on this in-depth examination, a limited generalizability could be drawn from several aspects of the study. Both the categories and themes generated by this study and the trends identified by the various experts around the country may be applied to other, similarly-sized colleges and universities around the country. The broader social and economic trends uncovered by this study will have a great impact on all universities as they develop retention plans and programs for the next decade. Also, the data collection procedures/protocol may be generalized for use in other studies which are being conducted over great distances. Finally, the on-line interview protocol as well as the over-the-phone guidelines may be of interest to other researchers conducting their studies in a virtual setting.

The unique nature of this research project limits the replication of the study, however, issues of reliability have been addressed using several strategies. Statements regarding the central assumptions, selection of the study sites and interviewees, and the biases and values of the researcher have been included in this study to provide an example for others wishing to conduct similar research. These general statements along with a detailed research protocol may lend themselves to the replication of this study in a variety of settings. While settings may change, the procedures used for data collection and analysis could be transferred to other studies.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROSPECTIVE STUDY FINDINGS

Due to the rapidly changing nature of society, and particularly higher education, conducting a study which examined future trends and directions as they related to the retention of college students at rural land-grant universities necessitated the use of "qualitative inquiry futuring research strategies" (Patton, 1990, p.136). The following chapter describes two phases of a preliminary or prospective study which were conducted prior to the sixteen central interviews discussed in the following chapter. The purpose of this prospective study was twofold:

1. To collect and assemble the insights, projections and predictions of current national retention experts in "real time" who were knowledgeable about the literature on retention and could comment on future retention trends and retention planning within the narrow scope of rural land-grant universities; and
2. To establish a bridge which connected existent retention theory as related in relevant research literature to the examination of current practices at rural land-grant universities.

Essentially, this aspect of the research could be viewed as an extension of the literature review utilizing live commentary rather than the written word. Each of the interviewees were cited extensively in the literature review and represent the major ideological contributors to the body of knowledge on college student retention at the present moment. These expert interviews serve as an amplification of the literature as it applies to the future retention trends at rural land-grant universities.

Two distinct methods were employed for this prospective study which facilitated the development of general topics and questions for the in-depth interviews conducted at the sixteen rural land-grant universities. The first prospective study method consisted of "a

synthesis of existing knowledge to pull together a research base" that assisted the researcher in narrowing-down topic areas for examination (Patton, 1990, p.136). During the first phase of this study, two broad categories emerged as one considered the future retention trends in higher education: (1) trends which were external to the higher education system, and (2) trends which were internal to academe. Based on this bifurcated framework, the researcher was able to develop seven socio-economic subcategories to provide a context for consideration as she explored the issue of future retention trends at rural land-grant universities.

The second futuring strategy utilized in this study was the development and implementation of a prospective study based on the preliminary findings of the research base evidenced in the review of literature. Using a qualitative Delphi technique during this second phase of the study, four "key knowledgeable" in the field of college student retention were interviewed for the express purpose of soliciting "the latest and best thinking" about the future of retention planning and programming (Patton, 1990, p.136). An interview guide (Appendix A), derived from the research base established during the review of relevant research literature, was used to interview each of the national retention experts. Each expert was asked for his reaction to and recommendations for future retention planning at rural land-grant universities based on social trends; economic trends; issues of public perception and accountability; technology; faculty issues; changing student demographics; and the changing mission and function of rural land-grant universities.

### Participant Profiles

During a period of four months, a variety of nationally recognized retention experts were solicited directly via electronic mail to participate in an on-line, asynchronous interview regarding the future trends of retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities. The experts were chosen based on their meaningful contributions to the literature base on retention and on the number of citations for each individual. A total of eight experts meeting the above criteria were contacted. Four of the eight experts consented to be interviewed in both on-line and over-the-phone formats. The following section provides a brief biographical sketch of each participant. No names have been used

in this section due to the fact that not all of the participants agreed to be identified. Therefore, for the sake of continuity, only limited professional biographies were used to establish each participant's credentials. It is important to note all of the interview participants are male. Several female experts were solicited for their input, however, none consented to be interviewed in-depth. Three of the interviews were conducted over-the-phone and one interview was conducted in a virtual setting using electronic mail.

Initially the researcher constructed a biographical sketch of each of the four prospective study participants for presentation in this section. Upon review and reflection, it became quite clear that, while not specifically named, individuals could be identified by these abbreviated biographies based on their accomplishments and area of retention expertise. Therefore, the researcher has condensed or merged the four individual prospective study participant profiles into one descriptive biography which establishes the credentials of each national retention expert in a generic fashion. In general, each of the four prospective study participants has

- made college student retention the primary focus of his research during the past 25 years;
- been recognized by either the *Chronicle of Higher Education* or other higher education journal or periodical as a "pioneer" in the field of college student retention;
- taught, researched, written about and published extensively in refereed journals or books on the topic of college student retention;
- been widely cited for his research on retention;
- served in an upper-level leadership capacity in a national higher education association; and
- been invited regularly to be a keynote speaker regarding college student retention at many national conferences and meetings.

Again, while individual accomplishments and specific areas of research within the field of college student retention may vary, each of the national retention experts interviewed for this prospective study met the qualifications summarized above.

Although it is important to note the general accomplishments of each of the prospective study participants, it is also important to consider the interrelatedness of these retention experts. During each of the four interviews, each participant commented at least once that he had worked, researched or co-authored with one or more of the other prospective

study participants. Interestingly, the researcher did not specifically solicit this information. Each participant volunteered information which indicated his involvement with the research of another interviewee. At first, this raised several areas of concern for the researcher:

1. Would the interview results have a "rarified" quality born of close associations between prospective study participants; and
2. Would the interviewees offer projections, suggestions and comments which were too similar to differentiate?

After a lengthy consideration of the interview data, two critical observations emerged which have put to rest the concerns mentioned above. The first preliminary observation was that each prospective study participant had unique, individualized insights and commentary on each of the major topics under consideration. While each participant acknowledged the contributions of his fellow experts encouraging the researcher to "check out the latest article from Dr. X," the interviewee took ownership of his own theories and assertions even to the point of saying "and this is where my ideas diverge from those of my esteemed colleagues." As reflected in the section below, the findings from these data suggest a very diverse view of the future of college student retention at rural land-grant universities as expressed by these four national retention experts.

### Summary of Findings

Through the analysis of voice and electronic mail transcripts as well as short follow-up interviews, data from the national retention experts indicated a complex view of the future of college student retention at rural land-grant universities. Sharing their own unique perspectives on the future of higher education and the role of college student retention at rural land-grant universities, each expert added his voice to the future trends scenarios described in this section.

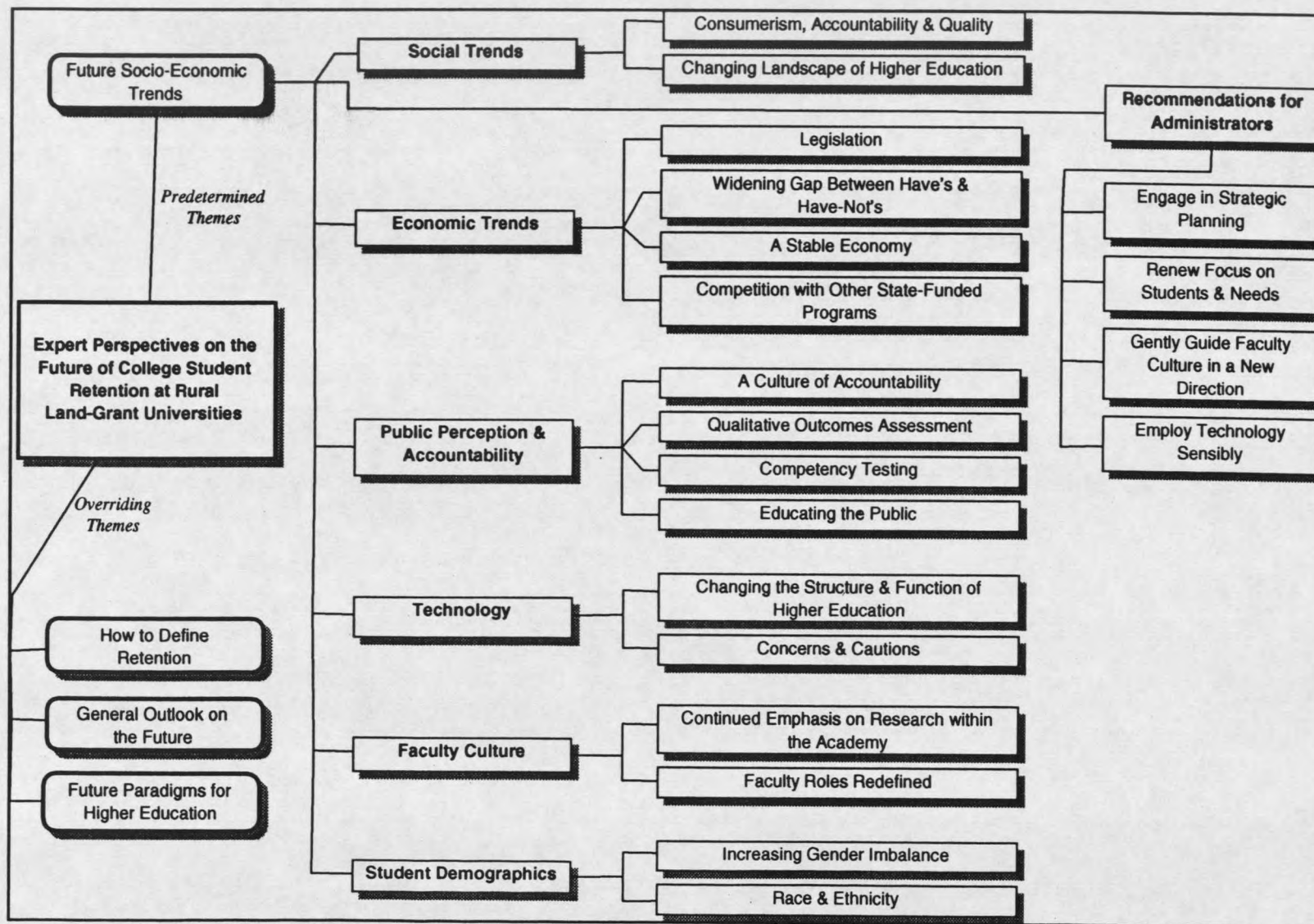


Figure 1. Expert Perspectives on the Future

In spite of the seeming complexity and individuality each participant expressed as he considered a version of the future, several common themes emerged from the data which remained consistent across all prospective study participants. Upon answering the key research question "How do you envision the future of retention and retention-related issues at rural land-grant universities during the next ten to fifteen years?," multiple themes with several categorical strata became evident (Figure 1). Expert perspectives on the future of college student retention at rural land-grant universities fell into two broad categories: overriding themes--themes which emerged above and beyond those introduced by the researcher; and predetermined themes--themes systematically introduced by the researcher through the standardized interview format. Reflecting on the overriding themes, three categories emerged which captured the national experts' broadest visions of the future of college student retention outside the socio-economic constructs imposed by the researcher. These three areas include an analysis of expert definitions of retention; experts' general outlooks on the future as it related to retention and higher education; and future paradigms for higher education. Each of these areas is discussed in greater detail below.

With the exception of the three overriding themes introduced above, the other major category for discussion and examination was predetermined by the researcher as part of the interview process. Each expert was asked for his reaction to and recommendation for future retention planning at rural land-grant universities based on seven major areas of socio-economic change: social trends; economic trends; issues of public perception and accountability; technology; faculty issues; changing student demographics; and recommendations for administrators within the context of the changing mission and function of rural land-grant universities. The following section highlights the commentary, reactions and insights four national college student retention experts had as they envisioned the future of retention at rural land-grant universities.

### Defining Retention

During the course of the expert interviews, the researcher noted that each of the four interviewees opted to self-define the term "retention" to provide a context for his comments and projections. While this was not a question presented by the interviewer, all of the participants felt compelled to break-out of a current train of thought or commentary to

define what they meant by retention. In most cases, the definition was mentioned as an aside to the answer-in-progress. Given the differing approaches each interviewee had toward the future and the role of retention, it was interesting to note the similarities between each man's definition of the term. In fact, all of the prospective study participants defined retention as a matter of goal attainment and success rather than degree completion and/or graduation from a particular institution.

And, oh, I would like to make retention sort of synonymous with success and satisfaction with the learning experiences of the students as opposed to a numeric kind of calculation. Did they [the students] get what they came for; how satisfied were they with it; how valuable did they perceive it to be; [and] how interested was the institution...or the instructor in the student?

The comments from the above interviewee in particular seem to sum-up a general trend across the data to view retention in terms of individual student satisfaction with the higher education experience rather than the general return or retention rate of cohorts of students to one institution. This shift from the concerns of the institution to the interest in the individual is a topic which will be explored further in the following sections.

### General Outlook on the Future

The second broad category to emerge from the data which went beyond the predetermined socio-economic categories established during the interview was that of the participants general outlook on the future--specifically, the future of higher education within the context of a rapidly changing society. For three of the prospective study participants, their future projections were optimistic and full of potential. They discussed the anticipated changes and trends with a fast-talking energy that at times made them stumble over their words and talk in paragraph-long sentences.

Well, let me ramble a bit here. This should be fun. I'm happy to talk about this. How to begin?

My vision, the future I've been thinking about, is exciting and very different.

Oh, the future, the future, retention, it's ah, um a tremendous and exciting thing to contemplate and I'll be dead before I can see many of these exciting things happen! But that's okay, water under the bridge.

One participant, however, had a very different view of the future both as it related to retention and to the five major socio-economic trends under consideration.

The future? I'm not as optimistic about it as others. Let me paint a bigger picture here. What we're currently doing is exporting our materialism and our status consciousness to the rest of the world so they can be like us. So it can consume more resources and pollute more things and drain more rivers and cause serious problems to the ecostructure. Right now, what the entire society needs to think about is sustainability. If we have an ecological disaster, we...would think of education somewhat differently.

Enlarging the field of consideration from socio-economic trends to socio-ecological trends broadened the scope of this interview and also gave the researcher a context and a point of understanding for the interviewee's less than optimistic view of the future. As each of the other major subtopics is explored below, this particular national retention expert will provide a counter-point in many cases which will add depth and an alternative scenario to those expressed by the others.

#### Future Paradigm for Higher Education

The third and final broad category to emerge dealt with the participants' views of the current model for higher education and how they believed this model might be altered. In each interview, the participant depicted a future in which the current higher education paradigm would change dramatically. Not one expert expected the landscape for public higher education and, therefore, retention to remain the same. Interestingly, most of the discussion regarding this paradigm shift centered on the role of technology in higher education. Again, however, the paths between the four interviewees diverged with three participants speaking positively about technology and advocating an increase in its application across all campuses. Each of these three interviewees spoke at length about how technology would make higher education more accessible and how it would "bring down the walls of the 'ivory tower' to create a university without any boundaries or any limitations."

While one interviewee agreed with the growing impact of technology, he did not view its inclusion or application across higher education as positive. He discounted the impact of technology on higher education claiming it would soon "blow-up in our faces

and alienate everyone." This prospective study participant claimed the future of higher education was "going to be much different." The pace of learning, the pace of instruction would slow down and people would want to go to institutions which advocated a lo-tech approach. In his higher education paradigm of the future, the interviewee claimed there would be a technology backlash and the revival of a more "human-oriented" institution.

### Future Socio-Economic Trends

The following section provides an in-depth consideration of each of the seven categories of socio-economic change as predetermined by the researcher through an exploratory method of futures forecasting based on a review of relevant research literature. Each section examines a segment of the socio-economic structure of contemporary U.S. culture and applies the projected trends and changes in that sector to the future of college student retention at rural land-grant universities. Based on the data from four national expert interviews, several sub-categories emerged under each section which represent the major forces of change these experts believe will impact retention and retention programming during the next ten to fifteen years.

Social Trends. When asked to forecast the impact of broad social trends on the future of retention and retention-related issues at rural land-grant universities, expert commentary centered around two major themes: increasing trends toward consumerism, accountability and quality; and the changing landscape of higher education.

Considering social trends in a purposely broad sense, each of the four prospective study participants zeroed-in on what they considered to be three dominant social trends which would have a great impact on the future of retention. Consumerism, accountability and quality were consistently mentioned as areas of change which would eventually alter the way rural land-grant institutions look at retention and retention-related programs and activities. To illustrate this trend, two of the interviewees went so far as to refer to students as consumers as they discussed their views of the future. All four participants indicated the increasing trends for higher education, and society in general, to adopt a consumer-oriented mentality which divides society into those who supply and those who demand. Using this analogy with higher education, three of the four interviewees indicated that in

the very near future institutions needed to be very "in-tune" with their levels of consumer (student) satisfaction. In order to have any impact on retention, institutions need to assess what it is that their consumers value and provide these things for them at a reasonable cost. If society, and students in particular, value higher education but are not satisfied with what they are getting for the money they have to spend, there will be dissonance. As one study participant stated, "I think we'll increasingly have to meet the consumer demand." According to another expert, this will have to be done by keeping track of consumer/student satisfaction levels.

The level of student satisfaction with their learning experiences in the classroom and elsewhere on the campus is far more potent in determining what an institution ought to do to enhance retention than any other variable....If we know that instruction, for example, and advising are those substantive areas really most valued by students and we find they [the students] are not as satisfied as we would like for them to be in those areas, the best thing we could do for enhancing retention in the future would be to address those issues. That is to say, figure out what the needs of the students are. If institutions want to be in-tune, they are going to have to pay more attention to the consumers.

Wrapping-up his discussion on the increasing trends toward consumerism and what that means for college student retention, one interviewee expressed a positive view of the student-as-consumer scenario:

If you look at society as a whole, it's materialistic and status conscious. If you want more material, you go into business or you go into a profession. Generally, those [positions] require--although business is the exception--more education. So, if you want to become a professional, you need to go through higher education which is pretty much the gate keeper of the professions. So, with that [desire for status] in the background, the pressures would be great to go to school [college or university] and stay in school. I only see this trend getting more and more pronounced in the future. We've [universities] got what the consumer wants.

Issues of accountability for institutions of higher education also arose as an area which the participants predicted would have a great impact on college student retention at rural land-grant institutions in the future. As one interviewee stated, "Society is going to become much more demanding of results from higher education, if they don't get what they want, they'll walk or they'll, the state, will take even more money away from its pub-

lic institutions...We have to respond to this by changing and showing them what we do, and how we do it, has value and positive outcomes." Discussing accountability from another vantage point, one interviewee proclaimed public higher education needs to look beyond the number counting and measurable objectives of accountability to the less tangible issues of quality.

The thing is, we're caught-up in the sort of advertising, high pace, high change political world where politicians are looking at a two-year turnaround and corporations are looking at quarterly reports and accountability. If you want to put into society the Accountability Movement, I think that's one of the things that's going to push us [public higher education] in a bad direction because it's short-sighted and only looks at things you can count. And, the things that higher education does...well, accounting isn't important. Universities, students, legislators are really interested in quality which can't easily be defined. [And], if something isn't of high quality, it doesn't make any difference how many of them you've got.

Another interviewee had a related comment about quality and retention:

I can graduate 10,000 people and not *educate* any of them. So, it looks like I'm doing a lot of stuff...when, in fact, if there's no quality it doesn't make any difference. Society, trustees, legislators, they think we [public higher education] should operate like a business and count up stuff. This, to me, will work against retention in the long run. In the short run, we'll try to do things to get the numbers up, keep the percentages up, because administrators like percentages. Ah, and they don't see what's going on because they're facing a legislature which doesn't see what's going on. They're [the legislature] concerned about numbers and things, not satisfaction, not quality. That's dismal.

For each of the participants, the future of retention at rural land-grant institutions was as much an issue of counting numbers as it was an issue of quality. However, for these experts, the issue of quality--in instruction, advising, student services, etc.--was one which they each claimed at some point during the interview would remain the defining feature of any future successful retention effort. Without addressing issues of quality in public higher education, the future outlook for retention would be bleak.

The second theme to emerge from a discussion of the role of social trends in the future of college student retention centered on the changing structure and landscape of higher education. Each participant addressed the issue of social change and the impact that

would have on higher education and retention by describing very similar future scenarios. For two interviewees in particular, this future vision included the development of a two-tiered system of education which served a broader segment of the population. Expanding on the Community and Technical College models, participants saw the following changes in higher education.

Another likely trend will be that there will probably be a greater emphasis on two-year and technical education programs rather than the four-year or graduate degree. By that I mean, as we down-size corporations and other entities, we probably are reducing the number of college degrees we need. And therefore, [this trend] could have a downsizing impact on these institutions [four-year and graduate colleges and universities] as well.

Expanding on this vision a bit further, the interviewee suggested rural land-grant institutions be very aware of this trend especially as it relates to their enrollment and retention rates.

Based on a large social trend I'm seeing, more and more of the population will or should have some level of postsecondary training or education...If a state doesn't have a strong two-year system--and some of your rural states don't--, it would behoove the land-grant institutions to provide that access for all--at least for a year or two of postsecondary study.

Expanding on the notion of an increased need for two-year and technical training, one participant portrayed a vision of the future which followed the recent social trends toward decentralization, less government, and more individual control. In his words, "the impact of our society will be the decentralization of institutions." He continued to describe this decentralization process by depicting a world where people would be more interested in "just-in-time" education rather than the four-year degree process. The students of the future will "just want to get enough skills to go get a job." Students will "craft something that will meet their own needs and will meet the needs of their potential employer." When asked to elaborate on how students would attain such an individualized program of education, the interviewee responded with a description of higher education and a new definition of retention within that new paradigm which challenges our current notions of traditional public higher education.

I think that within twenty years we'll have a very different landscape in higher education. With the advent of all the technology and distance education, people are going to be able to broker or put-together courses, on-line or over the Net, that may not require them to even show up on campus, or to take any of their courses on the same campus in order to get a degree...People are not going to care about how they get [their education]. If they can broker together courses from five or six institutions over the Net then figure out some way to have an institution certify that in a degree, then that's what will happen. In this way, we'll increasingly have to meet consumer demand. In this world, retention will be defined as completion of a course or completion of a series of courses rather than "did they persist to full graduation. We're going to worry about whether they were satisfied with that course and whether that course met their educational goals. I'm not sure that getting a degree will be all that important anymore.

This notion of a more skills-oriented movement in post secondary education was introduced by each of the four interviewees. Three out of the four described a scenario where degrees would become less important as skills became more valued. Only one participant differed on the issue of degree importance. While he too mentioned the increasing demand for a skills-oriented course of study, he was adamant about the importance and value of both baccalaureate and graduate degrees in the future when questioned by the researcher on this point. In his expert opinion, "higher education will still be valued, in fact the more training you have the more likely you will be to find a secure professional position." He continued by indicating it is the capacity to continue learning and the ability to "learn how to learn in a social context which will continue to be the strength of public higher education." It is this social learning experience, not the "simple acquisition of quickly outdated skills" which will continue to attract and retain students "at all institutions of higher education." "Although," the participant added as an aside, "you have to pay attention to all of that skills stuff too because of the hype it's getting."

As national retention experts articulated their visions of the future of retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities during the next ten to fifteen years, they seemed to emphasize two major areas of change which would impact this form of public higher education. On the one hand, experts forecasted an increasing social trend toward consumerism, accountability and demands for quality within the public higher education context. In the future students would increasingly take on the attributes of "con-

sumers" and institutions would respond to this consumer-oriented mentality by providing consumer-valued services. Paying special attention to public demand and issues of quality, most agreed, would go a long way toward improving student (and public) satisfaction, success and retention at rural land-grant universities. On the other hand, the changing landscape of higher education was the second category to emerge when experts considered the future interaction between social trends and retention programming and planning. For most of the experts, they saw a future where social values and trends would demand a shift from traditional public four-year institutions to a two-tiered system of education in most states which offered a wide range of choice among two-year community and technical colleges, and a more limited focus at the four-year level. Building on the notion of an expanding two-tiered system of education, national retention experts claimed that the whole system of postsecondary education as we know it today may shift to a "just-in-time" educational system where students take multiple courses from multiple campuses in a variety of formats (i.e., distance education, traditional classes, on-line or Web-based classes, etc.) to "broker together degrees" which suit the skills and occupational needs of the individual student. Only one study participant expressed a dissenting view of the future by indicating that he felt social trends would not dictate such dramatic changes in higher education. In fact, this interviewee took the opposite approach by claiming society would place more value on learning in a social context, with other students, than independent on-line learning. In his future, it would be the social experience of higher education which would attract and retain students rather than the simple acquisition of skills for a particular occupation.

**Economic Trends.** Four subcategories emerged when national retention experts were asked to consider the impact economic trends would have on the future of retention and retention related programs at rural land-grant institutions. Legislation, a widening gap between the have's and have-not's, a solid economy, and competition with other state-funded programs were the major areas of impact which the prospective study participants discussed as being most influential with regard to the future of retention.

Each of the four participants noted the recent tax credit legislation in terms of the potential impact it may have on retention. The Tax Payers Relief Act (1997) contains sev-

eral incentives for American taxpayers to invest in higher education for their children.

Some of the tax incentives are described below:

- deduction for interest on education loans;
- penalty-free withdrawal from investment retirement plans for higher education expenses;
- deductions related to higher education tuition and related expenses; and
- lifetime learning credits.

Study participants claimed the relatively new legislation would have a slight impact on retention by increasing access to higher education. None of the experts, however, were able to predict what the long-term effects of the legislation would be in light of overall retention rates. At the very least, indicated one study participant, public universities should realize a very slight benefit because these institutions serve a larger proportion of the population. Another interviewee expressed his mixed feelings about the new legislation by stating that the policy was good but not nearly enough to have a major impact. "The new legislation tries to take a step in the right direction with the tax credit," he stated, "but it's a small step. It's a very small step."

The second major category to emerge from the discussion of economic trends and their collective impact on retention in public higher education centered around a broader socio-economic phenomenon--the widening gap between the have's and have-not's in our society. Each of the four experts indicated concern for this economic trend and said that if it continues in a similar manner during the next few years, "it could change the face of higher education." One expert expressed his unease about the future of retention and higher education in the following manner:

You know, if this gap between the rich and the poor widens much further, as I think it will, this country is going to be in a lot of trouble. Only the rich will be able to go to college, and they'll all be trying to go to elite or selective colleges. I think this will hurt retention efforts down the road because the pool of students will shrink unless the government can do something to help the poor--you know, increase access. And plus, this increasing gap will only hurt our country because of all of the talent which will be wasted. Middle-class and poorer people will either go into great debt to get a college degree--like they're already doing--or they'll just go into low-paying service industry jobs.

Each expert also remarked on the trend in higher education toward rising tuition costs. This trend, compounded by the ever-increasing socio-economic division, further limits access to higher education and the likelihood of degree completion. "The people that the land-grants were originally created to serve are going to be marginalized. They [the land grant colleges and universities] are going to have *more* retention problems if they can't get a handle on the rising cost of tuition. It's simple, higher tuition equals fewer students, especially poor students." When pressed for a possible solution for the widening economic gap and rising tuition, most of the experts looked toward the government (federal, state and local) to help defray the costs of higher education for economically disadvantaged students.

As the discussion about the widening socio-economic gap came to its natural conclusion, each of the four prospective study participants turned the discussion to a broader consideration of the economy and how that would impact retention. A major trend to emerge from this discussion was the relative stability of the economy during the past few years. As one expert said, "Right now the economy is very solid." This trend, according to the same expert has been "very positive for the higher education industry because there's been an influx of soft money to make up for the decline in state funding." The stability of the economy combined with increased consumer confidence has, according to another interviewee, caused "more parents to feel okay about sending their kids to college." "As long as they [parents] feel like the economy is under control and that they [the parents] will continue to have jobs, they'll keep 'em coming to school--this is good for retention." If the economy remains stable, most of the experts concluded that retention rates at rural land-grant institutions would increase somewhat along with increased accessibility to higher education.

Another trend to emerge from the stable economy discussion centered on the increased scrutiny of higher education by both the general public and the federal government. As one expert illustrated, "if inflation continues to be under control, we're [land-grant colleges and universities] no longer going to be able to get away with raising tuition as we have in the past." In another interview, one expert described how his state was beginning to "reign-in rising tuition":

It's [the rapidly rising tuition costs] just ridiculous. It's part of that widening gap thing we were talking about before. You know, a number of states are saying 'hell no we're not going to allow you to do that [raise tuition] anymore'. A lot of state institutions, including [my own], had a legislative mandate that they can only raise tuition to a certain 'X' amount or their funding would be reduced.

Concluding his discussion of the increased scrutiny of higher education costs, one expert indicated he thought this might be a good trend not only for public higher education but for retention in particular.

As John Q. Public begins to take a closer look at us [public higher education] and how we spend or waste their money, this is going to make us [public higher education] start doing a better job--it's like the 'Hawthorn Effect'. If we know they're watching us we'll be more productive and do a better job. This can only help with our retention efforts.

A more comprehensive discussion of public opinion and accountability follows in the next section.

In keeping with the above discussion regarding state funding for higher education, nearly all of the prospective study participants directed the discussion to the recent trends in state funding for public higher education and its relationship to retention rates and retention efforts at public colleges and universities. In all four cases, interviewees indicated a dramatic decline during the last six to eight years in state appropriations for public higher education. This trend is well documented and discussed at length in the Review of Literature for this study. According to two of the interviewees, state colleges and universities have had to face increasing competition from other state-funded programs for fewer and fewer dollars. Elementary and secondary school systems, social services and a host of other state-funded programs all demand a portion of the funding pie. There is, however, one state-funded entity which recently has claimed a larger portion of the pie than any of the other agencies combined. In many states, according to one interviewee, "the incarceration industry budget is larger than the education budget--and I mean elementary, secondary and college." "In fact," he continued, "the incarceration industry is drawing funds away from all of the education budget at an alarming rate--just look at California's recent budget--and, anyway, while we continue to set up systems that punish people we're consuming the sources which we could use for education."

Nearly all of the participants indicated the increased competition for both state and federal funds across many state agencies has had, and will continue to have a negative impact on retention rates and retention-related programs at rural land-grant universities. As one interviewee proclaimed "rural states are conservative, especially when it comes to funding public higher education--in fact, they are conservative when it comes to funding period." If rural land-grant universities are going to survive this trend during the next five to ten years, according to two of the interviewees, they will need to consider how decreased funding will impact many of the programs and services which help attract and retain students. Financial aid, students services, recruiting efforts and quality faculty are all areas which will need to be buttressed by alternative funding sources as the trend toward shrinking state funds continues.

Exploring the projected interaction between economic trends and retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities, national retention experts focused their responses around four distinct themes. The first subcategory to emerge from the interview data centered on recent tax credit legislation in the form of the Tax Payers Relief Act (1997). While study participants acknowledged this new legislation might positively impact retention in the near future, they were all clear to point out that future retention programs and plans would be impacted only slightly. A widening gap between the have's and the have not's surfaced as the second intersection between future economic trends and retention-related programming and planning at rural land-grant universities. For all of the national experts, this ever-widening socio-economic division would marginalize many of the students who typically attend rural land-grant universities. Citing the rising cost of tuition and the proliferation of lower paying service industry jobs, participants reflected on the stable economy in this section. Many national experts claimed the stable economy would have a positive effect on retention in the future. The stable economy has caused parents to feel more confident about spending the money to send their children to college. In contrast however, the stable economy has focused much public scrutiny on public higher education. The public keeps questioning why tuition continues to soar when the level of inflation has leveled out, if not declined. In an economic climate where stability has been the norm, continuously rising tuition costs would have a negative impact on accessibility and, therefore, college student retention. The fourth and final subcategory to emerge from

the discussion regarding the impact of economic trends on retention programming and planning highlighted the competition public higher education would continue to have with other state-funded programs. In each case, national retention experts expressed their continued dismay at the disparity between state funding for education as opposed to state funding for the incarceration industry. The dramatic decline in funding for education and subsequent increase in funding for prisons emphasizes the level of increasing competition for state funds. For rural, more conservative states, the land-grant universities would need to rely more heavily on alternative sources and focus more than ever on retaining those students already enrolled.

Trends in Public Perception and Public Accountability. Expanding on the notion of accountability presented in the above section on economic trends, this section explores in greater depth the interrelatedness of retention and public perception and accountability. Based on the comments and insights of the four prospective study participants four themes emerged which spotlight the increasing demand for accountability from higher education by both the general public and government agencies. The following section describes how a culture of accountability, a demand for qualitative outcomes assessment, competency testing at the college level, and a movement in public higher education to educate the public have and will continue to contribute to the future of retention at rural land-grant universities.

The advent of the nineties brought with it a corporate mentality for down-sizing and "getting meaner and leaner" which, as we look at the tail-end of the nineties, has spread quite extensively into the public higher education arena. There is a drive for more accountability, according to each of the prospective study participants, which is forcing public institutions to be more open about their education and research practices and more consumer-oriented than at any other time in the history of public higher education. Both students and tax payers want to be certain that public higher education is providing full value for the investment that students and the public are making in a given public postsecondary institution. This culture of accountability, or the "accountability movement" as one interviewee is quoted as saying above, finds a mixed reception among each of the experts interviewed for this study. Nearly all of the experts were concerned that a consumer-driven

public university would "soften standards" and "guide higher education into a place for vocationally driven training programs rather than places to learn for learning's sake." These same individuals, however, also thought aspects of the new culture of accountability were positive and would further the cause of student success and retention. As one expert noted, "we have permitted educational institutions to operate in a very, very sloppy manner...we need to clean house and reevaluate what we're doing, where we want to go and how we need to treat our students." This same expert indicated that being student-centered rather than consumer-oriented would become the cornerstone of any future successful student retention program at a rural land-grant institution. "Increased accountability" another interviewee elaborated, "will go a long way toward securing public confidence and generating happy well-educated students...in a sense, it will make us [public higher education] feel like we're losing our freedoms but in reality it's a change which will help us hold onto our independence." Confirming this mixed emotion, each of the experts described future scenarios which indicated the accountability movement would only intensify in the future. Yet, each participant seemed to indicate the increased demand for accountability would benefit students greatly in the long run. This, in turn, will help to improve both student retention and success.

Tuition has increased at a pace which has far outstripped inflation during the last ten years (1989-1999). As a direct result of these increases, the call for higher education to demonstrate its effectiveness has become louder and louder. Many of the experts described an outcomes assessment trend which has moved away from numbers of graduates and simple retention rates to more qualitative measures which focus on a wide range of skills and affective measures for college graduates. Summarizing these qualitative measures as stated independently by each of the experts, participants believed graduates should have the ability to

- contribute meaningfully to society;
- lead;
- be a team-player;
- think creatively and critically;
- communicate effectively; and
- solve problems.

"The public wants to see college graduates getting jobs...they want to see graduates making a contribution to their communities and on-the-job," indicated another expert. The focus, according to two of the interviewees, is shifting toward quality of contribution rather than a mastery of skills. While skills are still important, "in the end, there is going to be more attention to the affective side of the product that comes out of colleges and universities." Employers want graduates who can relate to other people, who have people skills as well as technical skills. This trend, "will only intensify as we look toward the future," according to one interviewee. As the new century approaches, students will stay at and support institutions which demonstrate results in these areas.

In a discussion centering around the public accountability and the new demands both legislators and tax payers are exacting from public higher education, one interviewee opened up his discussion with a blunt description of the new situation: succinctly put, "legislators want results." As the general public continues to demand hard documentation of productivity and outcomes, legislators are setting up systems which meet their demands. Each of the four experts interviewed indicated a trend toward competency testing of college students which, each felt, would continue well into the twenty-first century. The public and the legislators are "tired of institutions that graduate people who can't read and write or do anything and, consequently, in many states, the state is imposing standards and tests." "Anymore," one participant continued, "you've got a test after your sophomore year in order to continue with college." Describing the competency testing movement from another angle, one expert noted the relative lack of scrutiny public higher education has enjoyed until recently:

One new trend which has to do with retention and public accountability is this new competency testing business. In Missouri they're getting into testing. In Tennessee, they've already done it. There's increasing pressure to have an external verification of grades and degrees and I think in some ways we've [public higher education] deserved it because we haven't produced results in some instances and we're resistant to the notion of an external review of what we do. So, in some states we're paying for it.

Each of the interviewees commented on the direct relationship between public support, college student retention and institutions that "demonstrate results." One expert summed up his thoughts on the issue this way: "If you don't demonstrate what you can do or what

you do [as a public postsecondary institution] in a way which is meaningful to legislators and the general public, you won't have the public support, no one will be compelled to come to your school and that will do a heck of a number on any retention numbers--you've got to be accountable if you want to improve retention."

When asked what this trend might mean in terms of college student retention at rural land-grant universities, comments tended to be vague. One expert noted competency testing may reduce accessibility and retention by acting as a "gate" to keep students out of upperclass courses. Another interviewee indicated it might improve retention rates similar to the manner in which increased admissions standards reduce attrition rates. Yet another study participant stated "competency testing may be a good thing for some institutions, it will make them accountable and it will aid the retention effort by demonstrating that 'people really learn here'." At the very least, competency testing is a trend which needs to be followed closely by both educators and administrators in public higher education during the next ten to fifteen years.

None of the experts in the prospective study were able to discuss future trends in retention and retention related programs in light of new public accountability trends without mentioning the responsibility that individuals involved in higher education have to educate and inform the public regarding what public higher education is doing. As one expert stated, "we should educate the public to understand what we're doing and not just things that can be counted like retention and graduation rates because, as I see it, everybody wants a highway but not everybody recognizes the advantages of having an educated citizenry." Another interviewee described public education as a "great paradox" claiming the general public enjoys the benefits of research, training and knowledge which public higher education produces but is distrustful of these "evil liberal places where people experiment with sex and drugs and have no family values." Many of the interviewees discussed a pervasive "anti-intellectual culture" in the United States, especially in rural states, which they each mentioned might have a continued negative impact on public perception of, fiscal support for and retention efforts in public higher education. When asked to cast his mind forward ten to fifteen years in the future, one expert used an analogy to describe what he saw as the direction for rural, public higher education to move in order to improve its image with the public and to improve its college student retention efforts:

Respect for intellect has never been great in this country--we like hard workers not eggheads--it's a culture that also doesn't trust. Most Americans have a love-hate relationship with universities, they love that you come up with a better, more resilient corn plant but they don't love it that intellectuals don't do any 'real work' and get a lot of money for just sitting around (laughs). So, you've got to educate. What you have to do is think of the minister. He's only in the pulpit for one hour a week and yet we pay him because he's doing other things the rest of the week, you know, visiting hospitals, seeing the sick, organizing events and other things. The general public has no idea what we do inside the ivory tower. We need to help people see what the social benefits of higher education are.

The consensus from the interviewees seemed to center around the notion that if you could convince the general public that public higher education produced valuable results, you could convince students of that same fact. If you could sell students on the idea that college is a worthwhile investment both in terms of time and money, and that colleges are really about educating students, not just esoteric research, students would be less inclined to drop out. To paraphrase one expert interviewee, the impact of public perceptions on the future of retention and retention-related activities at rural land-grant universities is going to be largely determined by the universities themselves. If the school is successful in educating its students and the general community about the inherent value of public higher education, then the future of retention may look a bit brighter.

Technological Trends. Of the five major trends discussed during the prospective study, no other question generated as much discussion as the topic of technology and its impact on the future of retention at rural land-grant universities. The interest in and speculation about issues related to technology arose in nearly every subtopic discussion from economic trends to faculty culture. During the interviews, it was interesting to note that general discussions about technology found no middle ground; interviewees either embraced the new trends toward increasing the use of technology in higher education or they shunned its pervasiveness and advocated a return to a lo-tech culture. When prospective study participants were asked to comment directly on the impact of technology and the future of college student retention at rural land-grant universities, two major categories

emerged which described the changing structure and function of higher education and the concerns and cautions regarding the impact of technology.

One of the most predominant themes to emerge from the discussion regarding technology, higher education and retention was a dramatic change in the traditional structure and function of higher education. For one interviewee, the impact of technology was so vast he introduced the implications of technology into each interview question. For all four of the experts, technology presented a dynamic force of change which would redefine higher education as we now understand it.

I think that within twenty years we'll have a very different landscape in higher education, and...with the advent of all the technology and distance education, people are going to be able to broker or put together courses, on line or over the Net, that may not require them to even show up on campus, or to take the same courses on the same campus in order to get a degree. Ah, so much of my thinking lately about the future is [pauses] ties in with what I think the impact of technology will be. Even the whole concept of retention, that is, staying at an institution until you graduate or going to one institution and graduating from another may be impacted by what I see as a technological revolution.

In this new vision of higher education, there will be multiple institutions offering multiple courses and students attending virtual classes from all over the globe. Along these same lines, another interviewee described a future where "just-in-time" education would take the place of traditional semester calendars and other artificially imposed time structures.

Twenty years from now we might not recognize the university of today. Distance learning--I really believe that is what really makes sense. Our current approach of a four-year or five-year period of time to receive an education is almost antiseptic or artificial. What I think we are going to find is 'just-in-time education'--more integration of learning when it's needed, delivered in places that represent even better learning laboratories than a classroom. If I think about it, it is going to cause institutions to be more accountable and more focused...on the needs of the students, the affective side of students. The great institution of the future is going to have to figure out creative ways of delivering that kind of learning opportunity in all sorts of nontraditional ways and nontraditional settings.

In the most optimistic sense, three of the experts viewed the future impact of technology on retention and higher education as a means to become more student specific--a key component of any well-grounded retention effort.

Another trend which emerged from the data on technology which related to the changing structure and function of public higher education centered around redefining retention in a virtual or technological/distance education environment. It became clear from three of the experts that the future concept of retention, according to their vision, would be redefined in terms of course completion rather than persistence to graduation. "Retention will be defined as completion of a course or a series of courses," said one study participant. Two experts described a future where retention concerns would center around whether a student was satisfied with a course and whether that course met his or her educational goals. In this same scenario, degrees would become less important as students entered the workforce and kept "revolving" in and out of higher education to get updated, retrained or "re-tooled" as needed. Thus, the importance of excellent teaching would increase along with more student-responsive teaching styles.

Technology would also increase access to higher education for a broader range of the population in the near future. This, in turn, would help retention efforts at many of the more geographically isolated universities. "Technology will become increasingly more affordable," said one expert, "if you have a T.V. you can have access to higher education." "Your rural land-grant universities have an advantage here," he continued "because many of them are already set-up for distance education delivery and it's just a matter of time before everyone in the state of Montana can sit in their living rooms and take a class at Montana State University over their televisions." "Geographically challenged universities," stated another study participant, "will now be on a level playing field with the rest of the public universities because they can reach right into people's living rooms." From the standpoint of college student retention this new access to higher education was viewed as a good future trend because it allowed for more flexibility, variety and convenience for a broader segment of the population seeking postsecondary education. As one expert concluded, "distance education is more consumer-oriented and meets the needs of students in a way which they have more control over--this is always a good thing when you're thinking about retention."

While each of the four retention experts touched upon the negative aspects of technology and the future of retention, one interviewee in particular seemed to express several concerns and cautions as he related his vision of the future impact of technology on the future of college student retention at rural land-grant universities. According to this expert, "people should not be so quick to jump on that technology bandwagon--I think technology will hurt retention." When asked to elaborate, he described the interpersonal dynamics of college student retention and stressed that most types of technology or technological applications were not effective in this situation.

Retention is labor intensive. [College student] integration is hands-on time with specific attention making someone feel connected to someone else. With the exception of E-mail, technology doesn't really facilitate that. People get 'connected' with technology but to what --a server, a machine, a virtual entity? That's not going to work for most people. The more we rely on technology the harder trouble we'll have with retention. Without the human element, it's going to be very hard to keep people engaged let alone retained. I don't think you'll have higher retention in a virtual setting or a virtual university or a university that uses too much technology where they should be using real people. I'm just not as optimistic about it as others.

Nearly all of the experts interviewed recounted current studies where retention rates were low in distance education programs and other virtual settings. The challenge, all four indicated, would be to introduce the human element into this new format.

A second interviewee who spoke out strongly against technology, specifically as it related to retention, stressed the need for continued "real" community building within higher education. Debunking the very notion of virtual communities and virtual universities this expert used an analogy to describe his view of the future of retention in a technological age.

I think a virtual community is sort of like taking a shower with your raincoat on. It looks like you're taking a shower and it feels like you're taking a shower but you're not getting wet. And, I think the same can be said of virtual communities. You know, you'll be talking with people electronically but it just ain't the same. To me, the essence of undergraduate education is personal, face-to-face communication among people. If you take that away, I don't know what you'll have left other than some verification and concept mastery, and maybe some critical thinking. But the sort of student involvement goals that we think are

important [pause] I don't know how we'll accomplish those things if the out-of-classroom [i.e., the social components of college life] either ceases to exist in traditional ways or becomes virtual out-of-class [social involvement via on-line chatrooms, etc.].

Underscoring the above sentiment, one interviewee said he felt "the entire concept of virtual universities and virtual higher education communities" to be fantastically over-hyped. In his vision of the future, "distance education will go the way of T.V.'s in the classroom in the late 1970's." Some people will employ the technology and some people will ignore it.

Each of the four interviewees claimed higher education would need to change its concept of community to adapt to the new trends in technology. All but one of the interviewees mentioned, however, that this sort of change would eventually have a positive outcome for retention at rural land-grant universities. For three of the experts, this expansion of the university community to include the geographically isolated would only help retention in the long run. Further, the advent of this new technology would allow for a more comprehensive educational experience for students both on and off campus.

While the issue of technology was peppered throughout each of the seven socio-economic areas under consideration for the prospective study, national retention experts seemed to focus their attention on two areas as they considered the specific impact of technology on the future of retention planning and programming at rural land-grant universities. The first subcategory to appear in the data concentrated on the anticipated change in the structure and function of higher education in light of new technologies and new systems of instructional delivery. Retention and higher education would be redefined as the dynamic force of change fronted by technological innovation swept through colleges and universities. Distance education will allow students to attend multiple institutions, take an eclectic assortment of courses, and acquire "just-in-time" skills to suit their occupational needs. The shift from university-wide retention initiatives to individual course retention initiatives will become prevalent, and a student-specific focus will be the net result of this changed definition of college student retention. Student satisfaction would be a major retention-related concern. Further, technology would increase access to public higher education for a broader range of the population allowing for more flexibility, variety and convenience. The second subcategory narrowed the scope of the discussion to the concerns

and cautions national experts has as they considered the future interaction between technology and college student retention at rural land-grant universities. Experts expressed the concern that technology may actually detract from future retention plans and programs because of its tendency to remove the human element from the institution-student interaction and integration process. Experts advised an increased stress on real community building and real, person-to-person interface rather than the virtual kind. As each expert concluded, retention is about people connecting with people and meeting student-specific needs. Perhaps the prudent use of technology will allow for the realization of both goals.

Trends in Faculty Culture. After the question regarding future trends in faculty culture and college student retention was posed, each expert either uttered a chuckle or a protracted sigh before answering the question. Each of the interviewees also began with a statement which, paraphrased, acknowledged the slow-to-change nature of most faculty and the difficulty many faculty have feeling rewarded for those activities which lead to student success and retention (i.e., teaching and advising). Two subjects dominated the discussion of future trends in faculty culture and their impact on retention at rural land-grant universities. The first theme revolved around the continued emphasis on research within the academy. Redefining the role of the faculty was the second topic of discourse to appear as the retention experts attempted to forecast the future of retention at rural land-grant universities within the context of the faculty culture.

"Research," said one expert, "continues to be a greater and greater emphasis at more and more institutions." As a result of this shift, the faculty have moved further away from direct student interaction to a very research-oriented culture which does not place students at the center of the institution. One interviewee noted that most rural land-grant institutions still maintained their "practical, university-of-the-people missions" but within the tripartite mission of teaching, research and service, research has become "more and more of a fundamental priority." In the words of another expert, "all of this focus on research, research, research has changed the very nature of higher education...too many faculty don't have passion in their stomachs for growing and teaching students."

The second major trend to emerge from this discussion centered around what rural land-grant institutions should do in the future to redefine the faculty role and enhance stu-

dent retention efforts. Acknowledging the need for profound changes in faculty and administrative culture, each expert discussed how addressing teaching and learning at rural land-grant institutions would do more for future retention efforts than any other programmatic effort. All four of the expert interviewees commented on the need for faculty culture to shift from research-centered to student-centered/learner-centered.

In order for the rural land-grant university to be true to its mission and to improve its retention rates in the future, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on student learning, student satisfaction, student service [pause] yes, it takes good teaching and it takes a satisfying experience for students [in order for an institution] to continue to build the foundation for recruiting and retaining students.

Continuing along this vein, two study participants underscored Tinto's (1993) recommendation to front-load faculty talent toward the freshman year. To paraphrase one expert, students--especially freshmen--need to be drawn-in by a quality learning experience. It is essential to connect them with excellent teachers during their first semester both in and out of the classroom.

Nearly all of the interviewees noted that faculty were slow to change. When pressed to provide their vision for how to motivate faculty to change, one expert articulated a plan which summed-up the suggestions made by each of the other three interviewees:

I just think that if you set priorities and you identify a strong rationale for why it's the right thing to do and then you provide the reward and recognition system, they'll [faculty] change. For example, developing a two-tiered faculty system would be a step in the right direction. That is, a system which rewards one set of talents--the ones that it takes to be an outstanding teacher or the talents that it takes to be an outstanding researcher--equally with the other set of requirements and talents.

Drawing from his experiences during the last seventeen years conducting research on over 500 campuses, another expert illustrated his vision for a parallel faculty tracking system which supported both quality teaching and quality research. To provide a contrast to this point the expert related several examples he had seen over the years of outstanding teachers who motivated students to learn, connected with students, and had students "flocking to their classes" only to be denied tenure because their focus was on students and learning rather than research.

In each of the four interviews, participants indicated a budding trend toward increasing faculty accountability in the future which each felt would impact retention at rural land-grant institutions in a positive way. Summing up his discussion of the future of faculty and retention, one study participant indicated that, in the near future, faculty would be held more accountable for how they teach and interact with students. More importantly, administrators at colleges and universities across the country were beginning to understand the direct relationship faculty have on student retention. In his closing statement on the subject, another interviewee expressed the growing trend toward "requiring faculty to participate more purposefully in the enrollment and retention challenge."

Considering the future impact of faculty culture on retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities, national retention experts noted two trends which they felt would be directly related to college student retention in this setting. The first subcategory discussed by the national retention experts considered the continued emphasis on research within the academy. Emphasizing and rewarding faculty research over teaching and service seemed to be the dominant trend at most rural land-grant universities. Experts noted this trend would continue to be damaging to retention efforts. The second subcategory centered on the need to redefine faculty roles in response to the above trend. Advocating a two-tiered faculty tracking system which supports and rewards both quality research and quality teaching, the experts concluded, would be a positive step for future retention planning. Further, shifting the focus of the classroom from teacher-centered to learner-centered experiences would again promote the aspects of the college living and learning experience which foster student success and retention.

Trends in Student Demographics. When asked to consider how demographic trends would impact retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities, each of the four experts centered their answers around two major trends: gender and race/ethnicity. The only general discussion of demographic trends came from one expert who noted an upcoming increase in the number of high school students who would be graduating during the next five to ten years. This "baby boomlet," as he called them, would impact both enrollment and retention rates at universities across the country. Public universities in particular would benefit from this trend simply because more high school graduates attend

public colleges and universities than private schools. The downside to this trend, however, would be for "any funding or new developments for people like you and me who actually work in the field." "For us," he continued "there will be only frustration because what I've found in all of my research is that institutions become much less attentive when there is sufficient enrollment." High enrollment figures allow the institution to focus on its own needs rather than those of the students. "losing sight of student needs--not putting them first--is the critical mistake most public institutions make when times are good," he concluded.

The most notable trend to emerge from the data on changing student demographics centered around an increasing gender imbalance in the participation and continuation rates of males and females in higher education. According to a recent study conducted by one of the interview experts and described during the interview, "male enrollments in institutions of higher education are substantially down in two ways: 1. the overall number of male students who pursue postsecondary education; and 2. the number of male students who complete a degree program." The interviewee continued to describe the gender imbalance by remarking that "when you look at the figures by racial or ethnic groups--specifically African American and Hispanic groups--the [gender] gap is even further exaggerated."

The implications of these trends were described with mixed feelings by two of the study participants. On the one hand, the increase in female participation and graduation rates in higher education was great news because that would have a positive impact on retention rates and "it means that women have finally managed to get in there and hold their own at least in the undergraduate ranks." On the other hand, one expert noted, "it [the gender imbalance] causes us to question why males are succeeding at a differential rate than females, why have they suddenly become more 'at-risk'."

The downside to this equation, and the second trend to surface in this section, focused on issues of race and ethnicity. Specifically, the conversation centered on diversity, access and support for male minority students. As one interviewee observed, "I think this trend toward decreasing participation and increasing dropout rates for under represented students is only going to be amplified at your rural land-grants--it's unfortunate but that just seems to be the trend and the only way we can do something about this is to get

them [male minority students] when they're in middle school and stay with them 'till they graduate from college." Most of the interviewees indicated a need to extend retention efforts for male minority students beyond the realm of postsecondary education to the eighth grade.

In contrast to the other socio-economic trend discussions elsewhere in the prospective study, national retention experts had comparatively fewer insights and comments regarding the interaction between future demographic trends and retention planning and programming at rural land-grant universities. Despite this notable lack of commentary, two subcategories emerged from the interview data which clearly represented the patterns of concern and reflection exhibited by each expert. The first theme highlighted the increasing gender imbalance in the participation and continuation rates among students in higher education. Male enrollments have decreased both in the overall number of male students pursuing post secondary education and in the number of male college students who attain a degree. The second category to surface when national retention experts considered demographic trends and the future of retention at rural land-grant universities centered on issues of race and ethnicity. Experts were clear to express their concerns that rural land-grant universities would face especially difficult challenges developing and implementing retention programs and services aimed at an ever-decreasing pool of male minority students. Overcoming this trend would necessitate an extension of programs and services from the university to upper elementary and middle schools.

### Recommendations for Administrators

The final prospective study interview question solicited advice from each of the study participants. Each retention expert was asked to think about the future of retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities and make recommendations for administrators at these institutions regarding how they should proceed as the Nation turns the corner into a new millennium. Each expert was asked to reflect upon the changing mission and function of rural land-grant universities as a context for their suggestions and observations. While each individual participant provided a wealth of recommendations and suggestions for how administrators should respond to the predominant trends and anticipated changes in higher education during the next fifteen years, four

major themes emerged from the data which provide a springboard for future action. According to the experts, for rural land-grant institutions to successfully meet the retention challenges of the future, administrators need to engage in strategic planning; place a renewed focus on students and student needs; gently guide faculty culture in a new direction; and employ technology sensibly.

Each of the four study participants made strong recommendations to rural land-grant administrators to take a step back and "take a hard look at who you are as an institution." "Institutions need to define themselves," said one interviewee, "before they can attempt to recruit or retain students; they need to develop a mission which defines what they want to be." Further, administrators need to realistically evaluate what they have to offer students and play on those strengths. "You have to remember, you can't be all things to all people even if you are a land-grant--define what your specialty is," advised another expert. Along these same lines, institutions also need to look at their state's demographics and needs. Administrators should assess what it is that people want from their institutions of higher education and what taxpayers want for their college-bound children. Once these assessments have been made, administrators should develop a plan which will help them attain their newly defined missions and goals. At this point, advised one study participant, "you need to package your [institution] in an exciting way which emphasizes your strengths--then tell everyone the good news!" Most rural land-grant institutions should have an advantage in this arena specifically as it relates to recruitment and retention.

I really believe land-grant institutions (if they've been practicing their mission) have a chance to have a leg-up on the rest of higher education in the years to come because their whole goal is to provide access and meet the educational needs of the state. I think that should give them the advantage in being more accountable, more responsive, and more consumer-centered and this makes a dramatic impact on retention.

Finding, defining and planning for a specific niche in the higher education market and delivering on these goals is the first step administrators should consider as they plan for the future at their institutions.

The second retention-related recommendation experts advanced for administrators at rural land-grant institutions centered on placing a renewed focus on students. For each of the four interviewees, planning for retention meant connecting with both the cognitive and

affective needs of students. Now and in the near future, more emphasis needs to be placed on student needs, student learning, student satisfaction and student success. Concomitant with a renewed attention and commitment to students, a dramatic emphasis on motivating students to learn needs to be incorporated into the daily activities of the institution. As one expert noted, "learning and retention are inextricably linked."

Slowly changing faculty culture was the third recommendation to emerge from the data. Two experts advised prompting faculty to think about how they deliver instruction; faculty should begin to reflect on whether they motivate students to want to learn what they have to teach.

For many faculty teaching is a 'take it or leave it' proposition. Too often, I think, teaching is synonymous with information dissemination. I have news--if the student hasn't learned, the teacher hasn't taught.

Administrators need to plan on changing faculty behavior in a way which supports putting the affective and cognitive needs of the students first. While research is important, all four of the experts noted that emphasizing research does not help to retain students. More of an emphasis needs to be placed on good teaching, and good teaching needs to be rewarded. As an aside, one expert mentioned that deemphasizing research would not only have retention benefits but fiscal benefits as well. "Research is costly," he noted, "both in terms of human and fiscal resources unless you're MIT or Stanford or another *major* research university and not everyone can be those places." Placing an emphasis on quality teaching and education will speak more directly to the population rural land-grant institutions are charged to serve and will go farther toward achieving their long-term retention goals.

The fourth recommendation advanced by the prospective study participants addressed the issue of higher education and technology. During this discussion, even the most technologically reticent experts advised a prudent implementation of technology for current and future retention efforts. For each of the four experts, technology, distance learning and vast information databases would not be the great retention panacea. Rather, technology could be a very powerful aid to help connect students to other individuals at the institution. E-mail, chat rooms, web pages and databases should all be utilized by faculty, administrators and other campus staff in facilitating student integration. As one of the experts proclaimed in his closing statement, "the technology sell will only go so far...you

have to remember students want to date other students not computer screens and they want to meet faculty face-to-face not in a video conference room." "We're social animals," he continued, "and we like to interact with one another in a setting where we can smell each other and bump into each other and sense whether someone is antsy or bored or excited, this is the human experience and *this* connection is what will keep students on campuses rather than in their living rooms or behind their computer screens." Technology should be used to facilitate the human connections, not replace them.

### Prospective Study Conclusions and Recommendations

The prospective study served as an extension of the literature review utilizing live, and sometimes lively, commentary rather than the written word. These expert interviews provided an amplification of the literature in a manner which was specific to future retention trends at rural land-grant universities. The net result of the interviews provided a perspective on one aspect of public higher education which took into account the national trends as determined by four retention experts. Lending their specific insight to social trends; economic trends; issues of public perception and accountability; technology; faculty culture; changing student demographics; and recommendations based on the changing mission and function of rural land-grant universities, each expert provided his unique observations, recommendations and advice for future retention-related planning and planning. The prospective study also served as a mechanism to test the basic procedures of the study design. The prospective study allowed the researcher to test the asynchronous, over-the-phone, and in-person interview protocols as well as the wording of individual questions. The following section presents several conclusions regarding the perspectives national retention experts had on the future of retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities based on the above socio-economic contexts. Recommendations for further research and suggestions for conducting the second phase of the study with the sixteen rural land-grant university retention practitioners are also presented in the paragraphs below.

### Conclusions

Based on the commentary and insights from the four national retention experts, several conclusions were drawn from the data regarding the intersection and impact of future socio-economic trends on the future of retention-related programs and plans at rural land-grant universities. As the researcher analyzed and reflected upon the prospective study data, she was able to make several conclusions as they related to each of the seven socio-economic areas covered during the interview. These conclusions are delineated below by topic area.

Social Trends. According to the expert opinions of the study participants, it is clear that there will be a paradigm shift in public postsecondary education from centers of higher learning to places of learning *and* skills acquisition, certification and credentialing. As the review of the literature confirms, this is a trend which is well underway and will likely continue into the next century. However, this shift may not be as dramatic as some of the national retention experts envisioned. The acquisition of skills, whether via distance education, at a technical or community college, or a rural land-grant university, will continue to be balanced by the social-residential nature of the college experience. College student development and interaction, perhaps a primary social expectation of the college student experience beyond academic concerns, will most likely not be replaced by students learning in a "virtual" vacuum, isolated from other peers. However, nontraditional students and workers seeking to update their skills may find the virtual classroom the only option they have for higher education. In keeping with some of the dominant social trends, public higher education will need to change how it responds to a more consumer-oriented society and consumer-savvy student. This will allow rural land-grant universities to serve a broader segment of society more meaningfully and effectively. Traditionally-aged students, however, will continue to seek out colleges and universities not only for the academic advantages they confer but for the social and cultural growth opportunities they provide.

Economic Trends. Perhaps one of the most profound realizations derived from the prospective study and supported by the research literature is the tremendous decline in

state funding for public higher education. Based on this fact, it is essential for rural land-grant universities to plan for an increasingly smaller amount of state funds as time goes on if they are to survive in an increasingly competitive economic environment where prisons take priority over education. Understanding how this decrease in state funds will impact programs and services which help to attract and retain students would be the first step toward a brighter financial future. Financial aid, student services, recruiting efforts and quality faculty are all areas which will need to be buttressed by alternative funding sources as the trend toward shrinking state funds continues. Rural land-grant universities will need to diversify and seek funding from other sources, similar to the private school model, as well as investing time and effort into being more student responsive and quality conscious. Satisfied students equal retained students which results in a good reputation and increased tuition dollars.

Trends in Public Perception and Accountability. Through their comments and insights, national retention experts seemed to express a profound concern regarding the recent tide in public perception and public expectations that learning for the sake of learning be replaced at public higher education institutions with vocationally-oriented programs geared toward skills acquisition rather than erudition and scholarship. In order to stem the tide of public/consumer demand and strike a compromise between the traditional pedagogical goals of public higher education and the recent public outcry for accountability, rural land-grant universities need to refocus their public response and rebuild their public images. Rural land-grant universities and their future retention plans and programs need to switch from being consumer-centered to student-centered. Acknowledging the increasing public trends toward consumerism and the subsequent demands students place on their chosen institutions of higher education only underscore the need for retention-related programs to place *student*-centered programs and services at the forefront of their retention efforts. Rural land-grant universities need to secure public confidence through outcomes measures and indications of quality which have been established by the institution not the prevailing public tides of accountability. Rural land-grant universities should take advantage of the gradual shift in the public mandate from retention and graduation rates and skills mastery to a demand for more quality-oriented measures especially as they

relate to a student's ability to contribute meaningfully to his/her chosen occupation and community. Augmenting the quantitative outcomes measures (retention and graduation rates) with affective measures will go a long way toward securing public support. Consistent with most of the prevailing models of retention (Noel, 1985; Bean, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993), students will attend and remain at an institution which is able to demonstrate results in both the cognitive and affective domains of a college student's education.

Technology. While the topic of technology in college student retention is expansive in its scope, the conclusions which can be drawn from the projected technological trends and their influence at rural land-grant universities simple. Technology certainly will change the structure and function of retention planning and programming in the future. Retaining virtual students will necessitate a change in retention planning from being institution-focused to being course-specific and student-centered. Providing opportunities for traditional and non-traditional students to make the critical one-on-one connections with faculty, staff and peers will be challenging for the retention planner, but not impossible. Working together with faculty to develop and provide the programs and services necessary to facilitate these individual connections will be the key to any future successful retention effort. Further, allowing technology to assist individuals involved in retention planning to make programs and services more student-specific will further aid a campus' virtual and actual retention efforts. Finally, as with any new tool or device, one must keep in mind the fact that balance is paramount. Learning to use and incorporate the tool effectively is essential when planning to supplement and/or improve the long-standing, time-tested retention practices already in place. Technology is not about replacement, it is about assistance.

Faculty Trends. Considering the continued vital role of the faculty in retention-related plans and activities, the trend toward increasing research demands must be balanced with an equal emphasis on student satisfaction and student-centered learning/teaching. In accordance with data presented in the literature review and ideas advanced by the national retention experts, faculty roles need to be redefined as one looks toward any

future improvement of retention. A two-tiered system whereby research-oriented faculty could channel their efforts into research and teaching-oriented faculty could concentrate on teaching may be ideal in a climate where national student satisfaction surveys indicate an intense dissatisfaction with academic advising as conducted by faculty. However, for the two-tiered system to be successful, years of faculty culture and entrenchment will need to be overcome. Further, rewards for research and teaching activities will need to be equalized on individual campuses. While the two-tiered system would be one trend that may come to fruition at a majority of rural land-grant universities in the new millennium, the path toward equitable implementation will not be easy. Beyond the two-tiered faculty system, one may conclude from the data that faculty will continue to be the cornerstone of any future retention effort. As the new century approaches, rural land-grant universities should continue to frontload faculty talent toward the freshman year and promote quality learning experiences where classroom experiences are learner-centered.

Student Demographics. Perhaps the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the consideration of future student demographic trends and retention at rural land-grant universities is the notion that many institutions are addressing their retention efforts toward specific racial and ethnic populations at a point in the student's educational career when it is almost too late to have a meaningful intervention. Both prevailing research and the national retention experts indicate it is the under represented racial/ethnic male who is most at risk for dropping out of both secondary and postsecondary institutions of education. As the future approaches, it may behoove retention planners and service providers at rural land-grant universities to work in conjunction with local upper-elementary and middle schools to create programs which target these high-risk populations before they are at risk. Moving beyond traditional bridge programs and infusing retention-related support services into the lower grades may be one approach to this all-too-obvious future demographic trend.

#### Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

One of the primary goals of the prospective study was to ascertain whether the questions or topic areas, which were selected based on the literature review, were relevant to

retention planning at rural land-grant universities and whether the interview format would work given the great distances between the researcher and the study participants. As the data analysis concluded for the prospective study, several issues surfaced which helped to guide the researcher during the second phase of the study. The following paragraphs highlight these findings and outline several recommendations for conducting the next phase of the interviews with retention practitioners at sixteen pre-identified rural land-grant universities across the country.

Based on the outcomes of the prospective study, it became clear that the interview format needed to remain flexible. One of the key factors in successfully gathering the interview data was making the interview process flexible enough to accommodate busy people with limited amounts of time. As a result, those individuals who were comfortable with an asynchronous on-line interview format could answer questions at their convenience and other participants could opt for more traditional in-person or over-the-phone interview formats. In either case, the multiple contact format was an effective approach to the data collection process. Each of the study participants encouraged the researcher to continue to offer a flexible interview format.

The second issue which arose as a result of the prospective study was one surrounding the process for contacting possible study participants. Each of the prospective study participants commented that the process which the researcher used for the initial contact and the eventual interview was, as one expert claimed "appropriately persistent." Thus the researcher continued to follow the same steps during the next sixteen interviews. Initial contact was made on-line with a brief introductory E-mail describing the research topic and soliciting input. If a positive response was received, the researcher would confirm the contact by phone and follow-up with an interview either on-line, in-person, or over-the-phone at the convenience of the interviewee. All of the study participants asked for an outline of the questions in advance of the interview and each of the four noted that this was helpful in facilitating more meaningful discussion. Follow-up questions were conducted primarily via electronic mail.

The third and final issue to surface from the prospective study dealt with the actual questions. It became clear after the second expert interview that a better introduction needed to be used in the interview guide for the on-line interview questions. More descrip-

tion regarding the purpose and the process of the study was required. Several of the questions needed to be reformatted to include better, clearer prompts, and the question regarding society needed further clarification. Most of the experts found the society question to be too broad or too vague. It also became evident from the prospective study that a question which asked for a definition of retention needed to be included with the socioeconomic trends question in order to establish a common ground for discussion for the interviewer and the study participant. Finally, as many of the experts noted, the researcher needed to be prepared for a different view of retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant institutions from folks who are "in the trenches" daily. As the four national retention experts advised during their concluding statements and follow-up E-mail exchanges, "people who are in the field, doing the real work of retention may really view the future differently." It was with this caution in mind that the researcher proceeded to the next phase of the data collection and analysis process.

## CHAPTER 5

### PRACTITIONERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE

Lending a voice to the literature and other research data regarding the future of college student retention at rural land-grant universities, sixteen retention practitioners or on-site retention experts were asked to express their thoughts and opinions regarding the retention trends they felt would have the most impact on retention and retention-related programs at their institutions ten to fifteen years into the new millennium. Mixing current retention and student development theory with a healthy dose of real-world pragmatism, the sixteen campus-based retention experts provided descriptive data about the future of retention which was rich with information and thick with personal insight and years of hands-on retention experience. This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected from the sixteen retention practitioners during a period of nine months. As part of this interview and analysis process, salient issues were extracted from the data which helped to illuminate the future of retention programming and planning within the rural land-grant university framework. The first section of this chapter presents a profile of the study sites including the selection criteria, and a general description of the retention-related programs at each site. Six unique retention-related programs and initiatives are also described briefly in the first section. The second major section of this chapter introduces the study participants in a general manner by providing a brief description of the sixteen on-site retention experts, their titles and ranges of experience. The third and final section of this chapter includes a summary of findings which encompasses a discussion of institution-specific definitions of retention as well as the seven predetermined categories related to future trends in the economy, public accountability, changing student demographics, society, technology, faculty, and long-term retention planning at rural land-grant universities.

Table 4. Rural Land-Grant University Profiles

| Institution Name                 | 1997-98 Enrollment | 1996-97 Fall to Fall Retention Rate | Five-Year Average Retention Rate | Average Graduation Rate | Average Time to Graduation |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| University of Alaska - Fairbanks | 8,362              | 66%                                 | 65%                              | 27%                     | 6 years                    |
| Clemson University-SC            | 16,526             | 82.5%                               | 84.4%                            | 69.6%                   | 5 years                    |
| University of Idaho              | 11,133             | 76.3%                               | 73.1%                            | 46%                     | 5 years                    |
| University of Maine              | 9,400              | 76.6%                               | 77.6%                            | 52.9%                   | 5 years                    |
| Mississippi State University     | 14,831             | 77.9%                               | 77%                              | 50%                     | 5.5 years                  |
| Montana State University         | 11,662             | 67.4%                               | 69.3%                            | 42.9%                   | 5 years                    |
| North Dakota State University    | 9,598              | 76.2%                               | 77.7%                            | 44%                     | 5 years                    |
| University of Nevada             | 11,652             | 77%                                 | 77%                              | 42.7%                   | 5 years                    |
| New Mexico State University      | 15,067             | 75%                                 | 75%                              | 40%                     | 5.4 years                  |
| Oregon State University          | 13,784             | 77.3%                               | 76.9%                            | 62.4%                   | 5 years                    |
| University of Rhode Island       | 13,261             | 76%                                 | 76%                              | 58%                     | 5 years                    |
| South Dakota State University    | 8,350              | 73.5%                               | 74%                              | 56%                     | 5 years                    |
| Utah State University            | 21,808             | 67%                                 | 67%                              | 36%                     | 6 years                    |
| University of Vermont            | 8,929              | 84%                                 | 83%                              | 73%                     | 4.4 years                  |
| Washington State University      | 17,323             | 86%                                 | 83.5%                            | 63%                     | 4.9 years                  |
| University of Wyoming            | 11,094             | 75.1%                               | 72.7%                            | 44%                     | 6 years                    |
| <i>Mean</i>                      | <i>12,674</i>      | <i>75.9%</i>                        | <i>75.6%</i>                     | <i>50.5%</i>            | <i>5.2 years</i>           |
| National Retention Rates         |                    | 76%                                 | 76%                              | 35.6%                   | 5 years                    |

### Institutional Profiles

This study was conducted primarily in a "virtual setting." A total of sixteen universities from each major region of the country were purposefully chosen for the study based on visits to their World Wide Web sites and three actual campus visits. The universities in this study were all rural land-grant institutions as defined by the characteristics listed below. The universities in this study all met the following criteria:

1. The university was a federal land-grant institution and has as its primary mission the threefold goal of teaching, research and service;
2. The university was situated in a rural area. Specifically, the university was located in a region with no more than one hundred thousand inhabitants, exclusive of university's student population, within a sixty-mile radius surrounding the school;
3. The local community surrounding the institution had, as one of its primary economic forces, agriculture or agriculture-related businesses; and
4. The enrollment figures for the university fell between a minimum of 8,000 students (FTE) and a maximum of 22,000.

The purpose of the above criteria was to identify comparable, peer institutions from which data could be gathered to study the unique retention needs of rural land-grant institutions.

The sixteen study sites or rural land-grant institutions are listed in Table 4, along with an institutional profile of each school which includes relevant retention-related statistics. Enrollment and retention data were gathered directly from each institution either from the Office of Institutional Research and/or the Office of Admissions. The Student Right-to-Know Act of 1990 requires an institution participating in any student financial aid assistance program under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 to disclose graduation rates to current and prospective students. Both the graduation and retention rates listed in Table 4 are based on entering cohorts or classes of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen, in accordance with the definitions established by the 1990 Student Right-to-Know Act. Total enrollment figures for the 1997-1998 academic year are listed for each institution with an average enrollment of 12,674 students. For the purpose of this study, and to provide baseline data for comparison among the sixteen peer institutions, the fall-

to-fall (1996-1997) retention rates and the average retention rate during the last five years (1991-1996) for first-time, full-time, degree-seeking entering students are listed in Table 4. As a point of comparison, national fall-to-fall retention rates for first-time, full-time, degree seeking students at public doctoral degree granting institutions also are listed in Table 4, as well as graduation rates and average time to graduation (compiled from ACT Institutional Data File, 1999). While the average 1996-1997, retention rate for the rural land-grant universities in this study was 75.9 percent, the range begins with a low of 66 percent and ends with a high of 86 percent. The national 1996-1997, retention rate was 76 percent. The mean five year average retention rate for entering freshmen at the universities in this study is 75.6 percent with a retention rate of 65 percent at the lowest end of the scale and 84.4 percent at the highest end. The national five year average retention rate was 76 percent. The mean average graduation rate for the sixteen rural land-grant universities is 50.5 percent with all but two institutions reporting an average time to degree completion and graduation of five or more years. On a national level, the average graduation rate for public doctoral degree granting institutions was 35.6 percent with an average time to degree completion and graduation of five years.

At the outset of each individual interview, the participating institutions' informants were asked to describe or list the current retention programs at their respective universities. A comprehensive list of these programs is presented in Appendix B. A total of sixty-nine retention-related programs were described by the study participants. Most of these programs were housed in Student Affairs divisions, yet nearly each study participant stated faculty, classroom interaction and positive academically-related experiences were the most critical elements of any retention-related program or effort. Another general trend to highlight is that the vast majority of the sixty-nine retention-related programs focused on new or entering students. After analyzing the goals and objectives of each of these programs, the researcher developed sixteen broad categories to describe the retention-related programs at rural land-grant universities across the country. These categories span both academic and student affairs divisions at each of the sixteen study sites and are listed below:

- Learning and Academic Support Services

- Advising and Advising-Related Activities
- Early Warning Systems
- Career Services
- New Student Orientation and Extended Orientation
- Counseling and Psychological Services
- Financial Aid
- Institutional Evaluation and Assessment
- Specialized Recruiting
- Faculty and Staff Development Programs
- Targeted Programs and Services
- Intrusive Intervention Activities
- Freshmen Year Programs
- Social Integration Activities
- Miscellaneous Programs
- No Formal Programs

While several of the sixteen major category titles reflect established student and/or academic affairs programs on most campuses, it is important to note that participants highlighted these areas as activities which were specifically designed and developed to enhance college student retention as defined by their respective institutions. In many cases, participants used this occasion to describe their institution's level of student commitment by commenting on the quality and quantity of support each of the programs was accorded at the administrative level. For example, one interviewee listed what he deemed were the most relevant retention-related programs on his campus but added that he felt most of the programs only "paid lip-service to the ideals behind a true, comprehensive retention effort." In his estimation, "most of our programs are too poorly funded and too poorly staffed to have much of an effect on our retention rates." At the other end of the spectrum, one participant concluded a rather extensive list of retention-related programs by saying, "actually our whole college is about retention, everything we do every day is designed toward that end and it has really paid off!"

As study participants began to discuss individual programs or initiatives, several unique efforts emerged which went beyond traditional academic and student support services. Six programs in particular were of special interest to the researcher and are

described briefly below and outlined in greater detail in Appendix C. While the details of the six unique programs are not germane to the primary purpose of this study, they provide some examples of retention programs which transcend the bounds of "traditional" retention programs and services. In the researcher's opinion, these programs represented a fundamental change in the culture of the institution which placed an institutional-cultural focus on retention by providing an integrated approach to the student-institution transition process. In each case, the following programs address the issues of student success and persistence in a holistic manner which brings academic, residential and student development matters together under one umbrella.

The first unique program to surface during this segment of the individual interviews regarding retention programs centered around effective and accessible advising for new, in-coming students through advising/orientation outreach programs which travel around the state during the summer and bring faculty and student affairs staff to student "where they live." The second unique retention-related program was actually designed at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and is employed widely across the country. The rationale for its inclusion in a section describing unique retention-related programs stems from the fact that none of the other sixteen sites in the study were employing a similar program. In the researcher's opinion, this fact alone merited mention along with a brief description of the program. According to the interviewee, the "Supplemental Instruction Program" (SI) at his institution "targets high-risk courses--like freshmen chemistry--where large numbers of students are at-risk for dropping out or failing." The program provides support for students in these high-risk classes through peer-assisted study groups or sessions which are held out-of-class at regularly scheduled times. A program titled the "First Year Initiative" (FYI) was the third unique retention-related program to warrant a more detailed description. According to the study participant, "the First Year Initiative was developed for a number of reasons, but perhaps the most important reason was to help tie together all of the disparate retention-related efforts on the campus and begin to launch a coordinated effort which would help us use our limited fiscal and human resources more effectively on the students' behalf." While a number of institutions in the study had Freshman Year Experience (FYE) programs, one institution in particular exhibited a unique approach to the FYE genre of programming which went beyond the typical extended orientation or

classroom experience. The primary goal of the fourth unique retention-related program was to "infuse the Freshman Year Experience philosophy into every aspect of a new student's life." This included programming which originated during orientation and became infused throughout a student's coursework, specific FYE classes, FYE-trained faculty as well as a specially designated FYE residence hall. The fifth unique retention-related program was the oldest and most established program in the study and, in the opinion of the researcher, the least traditional retention-related program. Described by the interviewee as "a complete transition program college," the University College program is "the college of admission...for all new students at the university." She went on to explain that the University College is "the administrative unit and the advising unit--the unit that provides the academic orientation programs, that provides the Freshmen seminar class, that does a whole variety of things for various populations of students to ease their transition into college." The final unique retention-related program to surface during the preliminary phase of the individual interviews centered around what the interviewee labelled a "campus ecology conceptualization." This comprehensive campus ecology approach to retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities stood-out to the researcher as a multi-dimensional program which not only focused on the individual and the needs of the individual student but also on the university environment and how it affects or interacts with the student. As a group, the six unique retention programs spanned a wide range of offerings from well-established, long-term programs to relatively new pilot projects. In each case, the program went beyond targeting a particular area or student sub-group for intervention but took a more comprehensive, big-picture approach to promoting student success. Unlike the other retention programs listed in Appendix B, these six unique programs targeted both the students and the institution on a variety of levels from where students live, to how they obtain information and advice to how both the university and the student approach the learning process.

### Participant Profiles

The informants in this study included sixteen retention practitioners or on-site experts from the land-grant universities described above. These individuals had special

skills or knowledge derived from training or experience in the area of college student retention, attrition, drop-out prevention or persistence. Their expertise was evidenced by a current or former position of leadership in a retention-related area at their particular rural land-grant institution and their continued involvement and leadership in retention-related activities and initiatives on their campuses.

Using the research base established by the literature review and the prospective study, individual interviews were conducted to gather more in-depth information and reactions regarding the major future trends in retention at rural land-grant universities. The interviews were conducted with a broad cross-section of retention experts from around the country. Sixteen interviewees were drawn from a pool of individuals who were directly involved in college student retention, attrition, or persistence programming or research. At least one retention specialist (an individual directly responsible for retention-related activities) from each of the universities in the study was interviewed. Interviews were conducted by phone, in-person and via electronic mail. The telephone and in-person interview sessions were audio-taped with the consent of the volunteers. All on-line interviewees were informed that their individual E-mail messages/discussions would be printed-out and used as transcripts for analysis with their permission.

A total of sixteen individual interviews were conducted during a period of nine months. Six of the interviews were conducted asynchronously via E-mail, seven of the interviews were conducted over-the-phone and three of the interviews were conducted in-person. In each case, follow-up questions and member checks were conducted on-line. The following paragraphs provide a general biographical overview of the study participant group. Similar to the prospective study, individual identities have not been presented in this analysis.

Upon making initial inquiries at each institution/study site for a key contact person responsible for retention or retention-related programming, in all but three instances, the researcher was referred to a Learning Resource Center Coordinator and/or a Minority or Multicultural Student Services Coordinator. After briefly outlining the purpose of the research to the individuals at these offices, the researcher was, in each case, referred to the "designated" or "official" retention expert on campus. It was interesting to note that in all but one case, the campus expert was not housed in a learning resource center or minority/

multicultural program despite the fact that many of the sixty-nine retention-related programs identified in the above section were housed in these areas.

All of the sixteen study participants either self-identified or were identified by others as being "the primary driving force" behind retention-related programs and activities at their respective institutions. Of the sixteen study participants, five were female and eleven were male. Only one of the female informants held an executive-level administrative position while nine of the men in the study held positions at this level. The other six informants held mid-level management positions at their respective universities. Four of the interviewees identified themselves as former faculty members from disciplines in the hard sciences, agriculture and the humanities. Five of the sixteen study participants were chairs of their campus retention committees and six interviewees were either co-chairs or prominent members of a retention or enrollment management committee on their campuses. Of the sixteen study participants, five stated that no university-wide retention or enrollment management committee existed on their campuses. A comprehensive list of professional titles as well as committee titles is presented in Appendix D.

### Summary of Findings

Through the analysis of voice and E-mail transcripts as well as a series of short follow-up interviews, the data from the sixteen retention practitioners indicated a complex view of the future of college student retention at rural and-land-grant universities. Sharing their own unique perspectives on the future of higher education and the role of college student retention at their universities, each campus retention expert added his or her voice to the future trends scenarios described in this section. In spite of the seeming complexity and individuality each participant expressed as he or she considered a version of the future, several common themes emerged from the data which remained consistent across all rural land-grant study participants. Upon answering the key research question, "How do you envision the future of retention and retention-related issues at rural land-grant universities during the next ten to fifteen years?," two overriding themes became evident. A graphical summary of both the major categories to emerge from the data as well as a visual outline for the summary of findings section is presented below (Figure 2).

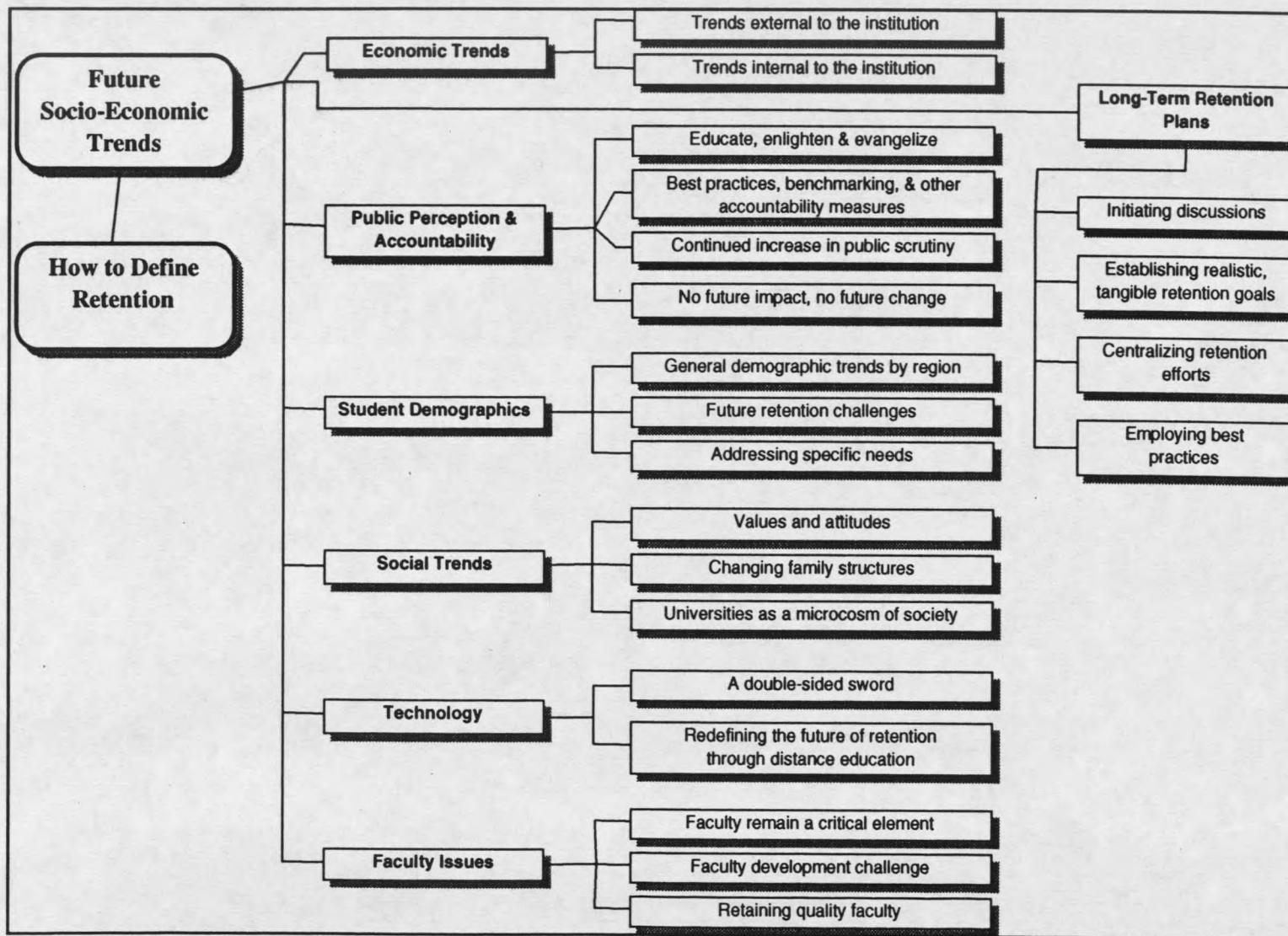


Figure 2. Practitioners' Perspectives on the Future

As the Figure 2 indicates, retention practitioners' perspectives on the future of college student retention at rural land-grant universities have been divided into two major groups: defining retention and future socio-economic trends. The following section describes each of the two major categories as they evidenced themselves in the data and provides a collective vision of the future of retention and retention-related programs at rural land-grant universities from the perspective of on-site, practicing campus retention experts.

### Defining Retention

As described/noted in the Prospective Study chapter, establishing a definition for the term retention was a critical first step during the initial phase of the individual interview process. Due to the standardized interview question format, each participant was asked directly to define the term retention relative to his/her campus. Having the interviewee articulate his or her definition of the term retention at the outset of the interview provided both the researcher and the interviewee with a common basis for understanding throughout the rest of the discussion. The researcher also observed that, in fifteen out of the sixteen interviews, the interviewees often responded in a perplexed or confused manner when first considering the request to define the term retention. Many of the interviewees attempted a number of definitions before settling on one answer. In fact, several of the on-line, in-person and over-the-phone interviewees provided a definition for the term retention which concluded with the question "is that what you wanted?" The following section summarizes the three types of definitions to emerge from the data and highlights two unique perspectives on college student retention.

The first and most dominant definition of retention to emerge from the data was the Federal or National definition of retention as advanced by the 1990 Student Right to Know Act where graduation and retention rates are based on entering cohorts of first-time, full-time, degree-seeking freshmen. As one interviewee stated, "when we think of retention here, we look at retention through graduation...we look at what percentage of our students graduate and we track a cohort of every entering year following the life of the student." He continued by saying, "we look at each student, in each cohort, each year and see who returns to [our institution] from year-to-year; those that don't return to [our university]

have not been retained and, obviously, haven't graduated from here." Another interviewee summed-up her institutional definition of retention, in accordance with the Federal requirements, very succinctly in a follow-up E-mail exchange: "retention means the persistence of students from application to admission to matriculation to graduation--you can't get more direct than that!" While ten out of the sixteen interviewees used the above Federal definition for retention for the purpose of this interview, it should be noted that this definition is required by law for any institution participating in any student financial aid assistance program under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965. Thus, all of the institutions in this study employ this definition when calculating their retention and graduation rates for public reporting as required by Federal law.

The second type of response to the question of defining retention centered on what appeared to the researcher to be an internal-cultural-environmental definition of retention. When asked to provide a definition of retention as it related to their campuses for the purpose of the interview, eight out of the sixteen interviewees began with statements similar to the one given by this study participant:

Well, actually, I'm going to throw you a bit of a curve because I don't like to use the word retention. The approach that I'm taking here is that there is a continuum and the continuum is admission, progress, graduation and beyond. I prefer the word progress and that's what I'm trying to sell here. Retention sounds to me like someone who is chained to a desk and that isn't what it's about after all. In answer to your question, it's a student making *progress* towards his or her educational objectives and goals. That may or may not be a degree but they should have a focus or a goal and there should be *progress* and that should be measured.

For each of the participants who provided definitions which fell into this category, retention was not a numerical concept captured by retention and graduation rates. Rather, the concept of retention was expanded or broadened to incorporate the notion of "student success" within the given campus culture. As another participant stated:

I really resist people using the term retention or retention programs on this campus. Retention is an activity not a number and it has to be interwoven throughout the culture of the campus. It is way beyond how many students are showing up on this campus one fall after the previous fall. What it should mean, and what I'm aiming to have it mean on

this campus, is how do we relate to our students and what is the culture of learning and what promotes student success.

Another interviewee who stated that retention was "more about student success than numbers," again broadened the notion of student persistence to include what he claimed were the ethical obligations of the university. "If you admit a student into your university," he noted, "you have an ethical obligation to provide them with every opportunity for success and that is really what retention is about--in fact, that word [retention] really isn't the best word to use in this context." Finally, as the first respondent observed, the concept of retention is very broad and should be the "thread which links all of the pieces which contribute to student success together." Factors which contribute to student success range from the ecology of the campus to the availability of classes and quality of advisement and other student services. "And," he concluded, "if you really want to know what student success is, you need to go back to that concept of the continuum--student success is measured by two things: (1) did the student achieve his educational goal, and (2) five years after they leave or graduate from your university are they successful according to their own definition." How a university adds to or detracts from the student's own measure of success is, as this interviewee indicated, the key retention indicator for a campus.

At this point, it is important to note that three of the individuals responding to the question choose to define retention as a two-tiered concept addressing the required Federal definition and the broader notions of student-institution interaction and student success. In each of the three cases, the study participants said something very similar to the following interviewee's response. "Well," she paused and then stated, "I suppose you're looking for that definition we use to calculate graduation rates for the public and the government--you know, the first-time, full-time, degree-seeking one--we use that but we also like to think of retention as a by-product of us doing a good job for our students and our students achieving success." Each of the three individuals who provided a dual definition for retention were quick to point out that the Federal definition was a required or, as one interviewee stated, "an imposed, mandated definition," while the second definition was "the real working philosophy." Two of the three individuals who provided this dual definition indicated that both of these definitions were necessary for their campuses in order to satisfy the let-

ter of the Federal law as well as the "intent of the law which is to help students choose a school which will best fit with their educational goals."

The final category to emerge from the discussion regarding the definition of retention evolved from one interviewee who claimed his institution had "no clear articulated definition for retention." When asked to elaborate further on his contention, the interviewee expressed his feelings this way: "You see, that's our biggest problem here--we just don't have or use a definition here." "I know our Office of Institutional Research is tracking the data for Federal purposes but the information is not widely publicized and very few people are talking about retention seriously on this campus," he continued. The study participant concluded his remarks concerning the definition of retention by speculating that "because we have no definition and no real discussions about retention and what it takes to retain students on this campus we have really low graduation rates." "We've tried to start committees and task forces to look into our retention problem but we can't even agree as a campus as to what the term means so we can't even begin to dialog," he continued, "we have a long way to go before I can answer that question for you."

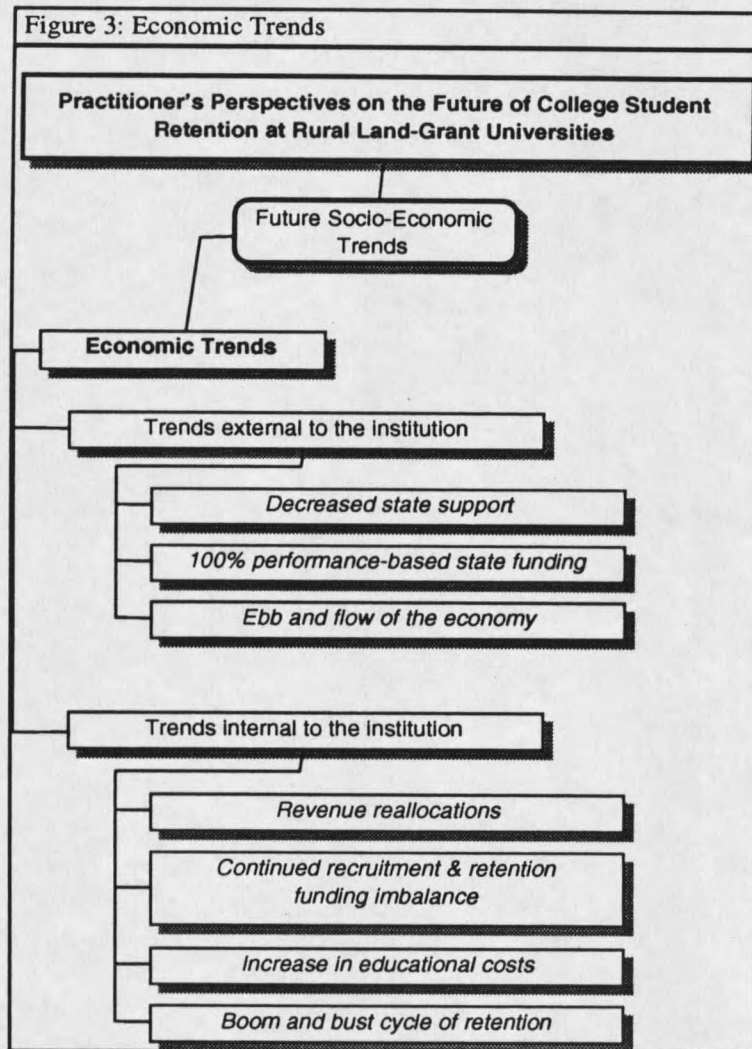
Two perspectives on college student retention emerged from the above three categories which seem to indicate a bifurcated approach to college student retention among the sixteen study sites. With the exception of one institution, individual participants reflected either a very narrow, quantitative definition of retention or a broad, holistic definition which encompassed many qualitative aspects of the student-institution interaction or experience. It brought into question for the researcher how each of the participants might direct programming or other future retention efforts at their respective institutions. It was with this thought in mind that the researcher conducted the remainder of the interview and much of the on-going analysis during and after the interview process.

#### Future Socio-Economic Trends

When asked to express their views on the future of retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities, participants at the sixteen study sites were asked to consider their responses as they related to seven specific socio-economic trends. Respondents were, on the whole, very forthcoming and thoughtful as they addressed each socio-economic area and attempted to forecast the future of retention within the stated

context. The following section presents the seven socio-economic trends including the economy; public perceptions and accountability; student demographics; social trends; technological trends; faculty issues; and long-term retention plans, and details the various points of impact these trends may have on the future of retention. The data are summarized in Figure 2 with each of the seven socio-economic trends as well as the various subcategories affiliated with each major subject area.

Economic Trends. When asked to consider how the future of retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities might be impacted by projected economic and financial trends, study participants generally divided their comments into two categories of change: change which would originate external to the university and forces of change internal to the university. In each case, the retention practitioners described scenarios which compared and contrasted the external and internal impact of change brought on by the economic and financial trends they found to be most relevant to their institutions. Figure 3 presents a summary of these findings. More specifically, when retention practitioners described the future financial and economic trends external to the institution which they felt would have the greatest impact on retention, they clustered their projections around three areas: decreased state support; state funding becoming 100 percent performance-based; and the impact of the natural ebb and flow of the economy. As study participants described future scenarios addressing the economic and financial trends internal to their universities, their answers tended to center around four categories: a concern about internal revenue reallocations; continued recruitment and retention funding imbalances; continued increases in educational costs; and the perpetual boom and bust cycle of retention in public higher education. The following section presents the two major themes which emerged from the data and outlines the primary subcategories for the external and internal forces of change most associated with the future of retention and retention-related programs at their rural land-grant universities.



Speaking within the context of future economic and financial trends in public higher education and the direction retention programming may take, each study participant began his or her discussion with a statement about the external forces of change and how they would interact with their respective institutions. The three most commonly mentioned areas revolved around a general and continued concern about state funding issues; a relatively new trend toward performance-based funding; and the general ebb and flow of the economy and how that impacts retention. The following paragraphs describe in more detail the three dominant external economic and financial trends retention practitioners

saw as having the most impact on retention and retention programming at their rural land-grant institutions.

The most common response interviewees gave when asked to describe how future retention rates and retention programs would be effected by economic and financial trends was, as one interviewee stated, that "state support continues to wane." In fact, each participant opened his or her comment with a phrase that addressed the issue of decreasing state funding for public higher education. In many cases, practitioners described a negative attitude or perception by governors and legislators regarding higher education funding. As one interviewee noted, "I think that here, and other places, legislative funding will continue to decline and we folks at the state schools will be faced with continued budget cut-backs and constraints." Commenting on the dramatic reduction in funding for public higher education in her state, another study participant wrote, "we are going to have to keep trying to do more with less :-( [sad-faced emoticon]." Many of the interviewees made comments about increased austerity both now and in the future and when pressed to describe how they felt that would impact retention and retention programming respondents were less than positive about the future outlook:

This serious negative trend in state funding has made it, and will *continue* to make it, impossible for us to continue many of our retention programs. You know, that that [sic] will have a serious negative effect on our retention rates. In fact, I think it already has.

Another campus retention expert observed:

These budget cuts. Well, we're not trying new things in retention programming because we can't afford it. All we have been able to do is add on to what people are already doing. This does not necessarily, let's just say, allow for the retention programs to be given the full amount of time and talents that people could bring to them otherwise. In the near future, in my crystal ball, I don't see any changes in that trend. That's not going to be a good thing for retention here.

In general, none of the sixteen study participants expressed any hope for an increase in state funding levels for public higher education during the next ten to fifteen years, and most of the interviewees foresaw this trend negatively impacting retention efforts on their campuses.

The second most common issue to surface during the discussion of external economic and financial trends as they relate to the future of retention focused on a new concept in state funding for public higher education based on performance. Ten of the sixteen practitioners described scenarios where future state funding and support for public higher education would be linked to the overall performance of the institution. When asked to describe what this meant, one interviewee provided the following example:

Our Commission on Higher Education has gone this year to one hundred percent performance-based funding. They have set certain performance criteria and the first step is to benchmark your institution in terms of retention rates and the number of faculty with terminal degrees. (I mean the list goes on and on to thirty some things that serve as benchmarks.) Then you're funded against how you progress with respect to your benchmark and the benchmarks of peer institutions. So, for example, now student retention has become a funding issue and if student retention goes up we get more money [from the state] and if retention goes down we get less money. I think that any time you can tie student retention to a funding benchmark for your institution, or a funding indicator for your institution, that that [sic] will have a major impact on your retention programs. I just think the future will look brighter and brighter for retention.

Study participants were often divided on their impressions of this performance-based funding. One individual was very positive about the trend and claimed "performance-based funding is the thing which is going to jump-start retention programming," while another interviewee took a very negative view of the trend by saying, "this performance-based stuff is going to be the absolute death of retention programming and other student support services at [our school]." Not all of the respondents were as extreme in their views but many seemed to express skepticism about the trend specifically as it related to the future of retention.

A general discussion of the ebb and flow of the economy was the third theme to emerge as study participants described the external economic and financial forces which would impact retention at their institutions. Introducing the topic with her opening remarks on the issue, one campus retention expert provided the following framework to view the up and down, back and forth impact of external economic forces on retention and retention-related programs:

Economic and financial trends, both now and in the future, are often the driving forces behind our retention efforts. It will become increasingly important to keep the students that we have. *But*, and this is a big “but,” this good economy is definitely effecting our retention rates and will keep it up as long as this trend continues. [Our state] has less than a two percent unemployment rate. That is great for the state but not so good for retention. Students want to leave us to get good paying jobs. As an institution, we have to learn how to deal with that [issue] better in the future.

Lending further detail to the consideration of the ebb and flow of the economy and the future impact on retention, a senior-level retention practitioner further described the interplay between a strong economy and retention rates at rural land-grant universities:

Currently, and as long as the trend continues, the booming economy Figure 3 presents a temptation for students to ‘stop-out’ and work to make more money to support themselves and eventually their education. If the economy slows, it will encourage students to remain in school since the job prospects are not too attractive. I think the economy in our state is going to look good at least beyond the year two-thousand. So, we’ve got to do some major work on our retention programming.

Expressing her chagrin at the booming economy, one executive-level campus retention expert gave a tongue-in-cheek response to the question regarding the impact of future economic trends on retention. Her response provided some levity to the issue regarding the impact of the economic ebb and flow and it highlighted the fact that the issue of a cyclical economic impact is not new to higher education:

You know what I really think about the economy and the future of retention? Well, the economy should take a nose dive. Things in the economy have been too good for too long (even with the Asian crisis) and we need to see some sort of down turn. (laughs) Actually, I’m kidding. It’s just that I am keenly aware of the historical trends in this area. You see, if the economy is good, as it is now, it’s very tough to retain students who’d rather earn good money than spend it on their education. But, if the economy takes a nose dive, as I said before, the historical trend should bear out and enrollments should go up. A bad economy just makes our jobs easier in the immediate sense. Really, if we would just keep up with our retention efforts through the good and the bad, in the future, you wouldn’t have people like me tempted to wish for an economic downturn or mild disaster.

During the interview process, it became clear that many campus retention experts felt a strong link between the external ebb and flow of the economy and future retention trends. Even with purposeful retention programming, many practitioners cautioned that the condition of the economy, whether robust or weak, would continue to play a direct role in the stopout and dropout rates of college students at rural land-grant universities during the next ten to fifteen years.

The second major force of economic change as it related to retention and retention programs at rural land-grant universities centered around the impact of the internal university economy on the retention process. Specifically, the internal areas of economic change within rural land-grant universities and how they would impact retention. As the data were analyzed regarding the internal economic forces of change, four distinct subcategories emerged which addressed the relationship between the internal economic forces of change and retention. The first subcategory covered the issue of revenue reallocations while the second subcategory treated the issue of a continued recruitment/retention funding imbalance on most rural land-grant campuses. A concern about the increase in higher education costs was the third subcategory. Finally, nearly every study participant introduced the idea of a boom and bust cycle as the fourth subcategory under the internal economic forces of change. The following paragraphs present data in support of these four subcategories and discuss their relationship to the issue of the future impact of the economy on retention and retention-related issues at rural land-grant universities.

For many study participants, the issue of revenue reallocations surfaced as the most pressing internal economic issue on rural land-grant university campuses across the country. Typifying the responses of many of her peers in the study, one mid-level campus retention expert stated her institution, and, more specifically, many of the retention programs she oversees, are "under severe pressure to contain and reduce costs." "We've had to reallocate our resources," she continued, "and cut funding to some of our retention programs so that the others could survive." While a number of campus retention experts expressed similar sentiments regarding revenue reallocations and program cut-backs, one executive-level retention practitioner viewed the reallocation process in a much more positive light:

There's this new trend here which was instituted by the administration to have revenue or money brought through increased enrollments fol-

low enrollments--this was not done previously in the history of the institution. So, departments and faculty are beginning to understand that success and retention equals money. This new economic or financial trend means that there is more and will be more attention to retention on campus now and in the future. The economic reality of allowing the student population to grow and retaining more of these students has a positive result economically on the campus. It's more cost-effective to keep a student than it is to get a new student.

For many campus retention experts, resource reallocations exemplified an internal economic force which would have both positive and negative impacts on retention and retention-related programs during the next ten to fifteen years. Clearly, the anticipated outcomes of the resource reallocations were viewed differently on an institution-by-institution, program-by-program basis. The only factor common across each of the study sites was that revenue reallocations or redistributions would play a large role in the future of retention at rural land-grant universities.

The second subcategory to be brought to light when internal economic forces were considered was the continued recruitment/retention funding imbalance at each of the sixteen study sites. As one campus expert noted, "on our campus, there is much financial support for recruitment activities and very little, in proportion, for retention." This description of imbalance was noted consistently by each study participant either directly or in similar terms. When asked how this internal economic force would impact the future of retention, all but one interviewee responded in a manner similar to the retention practitioner cited below:

Retention could be improved if we had more money behind it but we can't do as much as we need to because of the economic and financial situation here--even in the future. If anything, funds will continue to go toward recruitment which, as you know, is a backwards approach.

The one study participant who took a more positive attitude toward the future of recruitment and retention at his university discussed the interrelatedness of recruitment and retention and how that was viewed at his institution:

Economics and finances in higher education go hand-in-hand like recruitment and retention. The fiscal picture looks brighter for retention on this campus and will continue to brighten if the same kinds of efforts (and investments) that go toward recruitment go to retention efforts or all of the recruitment is a waste of money. I'm a convert to this idea, a

true believer. You need to put money and effort into retention. This is the goal we have here.

The imbalance between recruitment and retention programming funding was an issue with campus retention experts across the research group. Unlike resource reallocation issues, however, the funding imbalance seemed to be on the side of recruitment initiatives rather than retention programs on all campuses.

The rising cost of tuition was the third theme to emerge as retention practitioners described the internal economic and financial forces which would impact retention at rural land-grant institutions. Expressing his dismay at this trend and his approach to the issue in the near future, one executive-level retention practitioner declared, "We've had a one-hundred percent increase in tuition over the past several years (pauses and shakes head) that's a trend which will *not* continue!" Placing this internal economic trend within a retention-related context at rural land-grant universities, the interviewee expresses his concerns about the future impact of the trend:

The single most important factor in why a student chooses an institution in the land-grant framework is cost. Our economics do not match. In fact, the cost of tuition has far exceeded the consumer price index and the education price index. We're pricing ourselves out of range of the very public we were created to serve.

For another senior-level campus retention expert, concerns over rising tuition costs and internal economic impacts translated into a change in the manner of service provision:

Our tuition costs are getting so high we're moving in the direction of most private universities by being a tuition-driven institution. Because the economy is the way it is now, more and more students have become wise consumers. This means there has got to be a perceived value for the dollar. It is in our continued economic interest to provide good service to our customers. That means we need to look at what are the resources necessary for our students to be successful? We all in higher education have to prove we are worth the money in order to retain our customers.

Several other campus retention experts referred to students as customers in this context and saw the rising cost of tuition as a reason to discuss marketing strategies designed to attract and retain students. Half of the interviewees stated that they were compensating for the trend in rising tuition by, as one retention practitioner stated, "getting scholarships and

grants, need-based and merit scholarships." Expanding on this statement, another campus retention expert posited that being able to offer scholarships and grants "becomes very important to our financial and marketing game." "Really," he continued, "quality customer service and financial incentives is where I see the future of economics and retention going."

At many points during the question and subsequent discussion regarding the direction of retention and retention planning in light of future economic trends, many study participants mentioned the phrase "boom and bust cycle" as part of their response. As the fourth and final subcategory of the internal economic forces of change, the boom and bust cycle reflects the influences of the external ebb and flow of the economy on the internal economic functions of rural land-grant universities. Describing the historical as well as projected future economic trends, a senior-level campus retention expert summarized the sentiments of many study participants:

The economic and financial future of retention will follow the same path it always has: it's 'boom or bust' with retention. When enrollments are fat, no one cares about [retention], everyone ignores it and counts their blessings. When enrollments are lean, [retention] is everyone's business and this makes life hell for those of us who were trying to get their attention during the good times. This attitude threatens the economic stability of a campus.

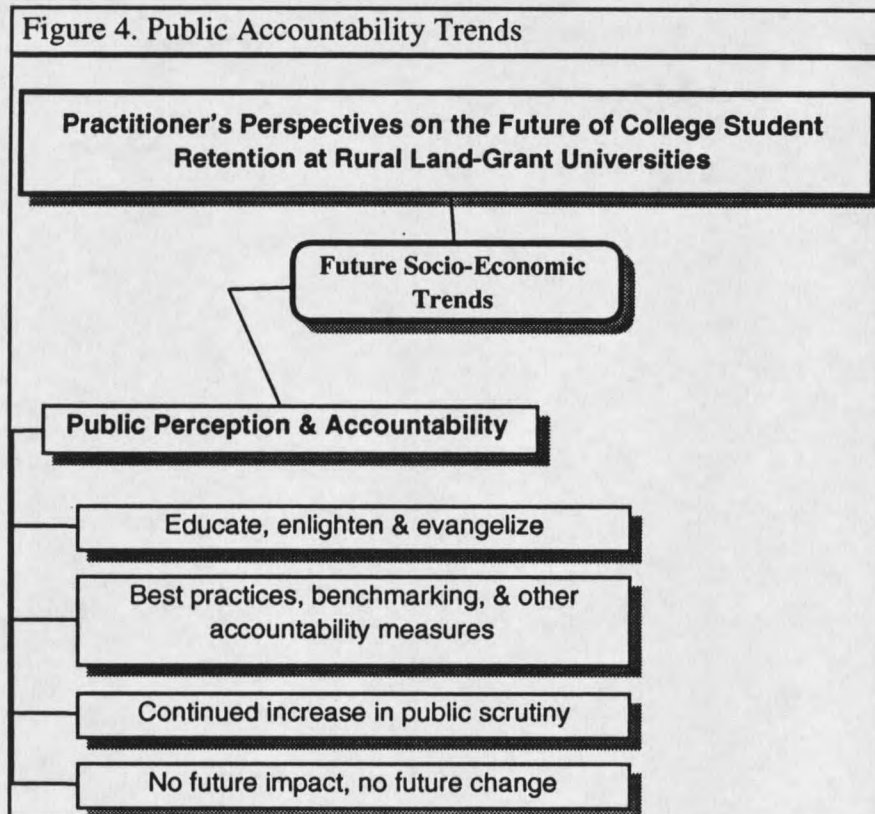
Continuing to describe how the boom and bust mentality surrounding enrollment effects the internal campus economy and retention, the above administrator said, "when enrollment is good, our campus economy is good and when our enrollment is poor, the campus economy is bad." As this interviewee and others went on to describe, one of the greatest future challenges will be to level-out the boom or bust mentality and apply consistent support and funding to retention-related programming. One campus expert concluded, "I'd like to imagine a future (doesn't that sound poetic) where people actually talk about retention in a broad sense when times are good and enrollment is high." According to this interviewee, retention programs which have consistent administrative, cultural and fiscal support from across campus during high and low enrollment cycles will eventually create a stabilizing economic force as more new students are retained and fewer students drop

out. "However," he noted, "promoting this kind of new trend or change will be difficult and the future seems far away."

When asked how they thought the future of retention and retention-related programming would be impacted by future economic trends, rural land-grant retention practitioners tended to view the future through a bifurcated lens. On the one hand, campus retention experts discussed projected economic trends external to the university and the three major areas which would impact retention including a decrease in state support; state support moving to one-hundred percent performance-based funding; and the influence of the ebb and flow of the National or global economy. On the other hand, campus retention experts focused their sights on the internal economic trends at rural land-grant universities. Remarking on such issues as internal revenue reallocations; a continued imbalance between recruitment and retention funding; increases in the overall cost of education; and the boom and bust cycle of enrollment and retention, retention experts expressed their concerns regarding the inflexibility and short-sightedness of several of their campus planning entities. In general, many campus retention experts envisioned a future where economic trends both external and internal to the institution would cause great challenges to future retention plans and programs at rural land-grant universities.

Public Accountability. When asked to describe how future retention programs might be impacted by current trends in public accountability, the sixteen retention practitioners tended to focus their responses around four major themes (Figure 4). The most common response participants expressed indicated an increasing trend at rural land-grant universities to be more assertive with the public through an active program of education, enlightenment and evangelizing. Through these activities, retention practitioners at the sixteen rural land-grant universities sought to establish their own public accountability measures rather than respond to measures dictated by the public. The second theme to emerge from the data was a trend to establish and publicize best practices, benchmarking and other accountability measures in response to increasing public demand. A growing concern about the steady increase in public accountability on all levels and its impact on retention programming represented the third most commonly stated response. Finally, five respondents believed there would be no future impact on retention programs based on public

accountability trends in their states. The following paragraphs describe in greater detail the four categories related to the future of retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant institutions within the context of public accountability trends.



In advance of this detailed description, however, it is important to note a general observation the researcher had as study participants responded to the aforementioned question regarding public accountability. In general, the campus practitioners were polarized as they considered and articulated their notions and opinions about the interplay between public accountability, public higher education and retention. Individual responses tended either to be positive and welcoming or defensive and/or indignant when it came to describing their view of public accountability, or "public scrutiny" as several interviewees stated, toward their rural land-grant institutions. This polarized attitudinal overlay provides a greater understanding of and insight into the individual responses to this scenario.

The most common response individual practitioners gave when asked to consider the future impact of public accountability on retention and retention-related programs

revolved around a central theme to educate, enlighten and evangelize to the public regarding the benefits and positive attributes and outcomes of public higher education. In fact, many of the interviewees used public relations-style terminology like "marketing" and "advertising" to describe what they anticipated they would do to address the concerns of the citizens of their states.

Your best advertisement to the public is a satisfied graduate. We have a university committee addressing the public accountability issue by looking at who we are now, the future of [our university] and the unique [university] experience. We are trying to identify what makes us special to the student and the public. By defining the [university] experience, we will model our future in a way to preserve what is good and unique while incorporating new trends and practices.

Espousing the virtues of "bringing the message to the people," another interviewee was very direct in his approach to the public accountability issues:

In the future, we need to do a better job with education. We need to give the public what it wants. We need to do a better job and a more systematic job of documenting what students are getting as a result of their educations and how well we're meeting what we list as our objectives and goals. We have to *enlighten* people and shed some light on what goes on here. Certainly, this is the heart of retention as it relates to the future and public accountability problems.

Taking a more evangelistic approach to the future, one campus practitioner talked about "converting" the "non-believers and the skeptics" in the general public as well as in the legislature through aggressive information campaigns and rigorous assessment:

In the future, we will assess our retention programs more and sell them better to the public to show our work actually helps. People need to see this, they need to *understand* this, and we must do a better, more purposeful job of communicating with the public. You realize, *we* have to make them understand *us*.

Finally, one interviewee asserted that to have a positive future outlook on retention "you've got to maintain a positive relationship with the state legislators (some of whom will be your own graduates)." According to this senior-level administrator/practitioner, it is imperative that higher education officials educate the legislature. "They need to truly understand," he continued, "where [the university's] costs come from and what the retention and graduation issues are on the campus." Taking a proactive stance toward the public

accountability issue, the interviewee wrapped-up his comments by remarking on the need to improve the university assessment process and demonstrate that the university's programs "really do contribute to improved education, retention and graduation rates." "After all," he noted, "good data makes for good decisions and that makes for good public relations."

Establishing best practices, benchmarks and other improved accountability measures was the second theme to emerge as study participants discussed the interplay between the future of retention programming and issues of public accountability. Most of the interviewees who introduced this topic began with a general description of what they felt the public valued in higher education and how their rural land-grant university intended to respond. Speaking very generally about a new benchmarking program at his institution, one study participant said, "you know, we've really had to do a lot here to respond to public accountability demands." "We're right now in the process of establishing quantitative measures for our performance specifications in areas like retention and graduation," he continued, "so we can show Mr. John Q. Public just how we're doing." When asked how he felt the public responded to quantitative measures, the interviewee laughed and said the following with a broad smile:

Well, we have Ross Perot to thank for that now don't we? You know, ever since he introduced charts and graphs and performance indicators to the public, I think he, well, he made it easier for the rest of us to do the same thing. And that's not to say you shouldn't have the other anecdotal stuff because that's important too.

While ten out of the sixteen retention practitioners talked about responding to issues of public accountability now and in the future with increased accountability measures, best practices and benchmarking, only one campus retention expert spoke of being proactive in the future.

We need to be proactive about our efforts in responding to legislators and the public--we need to stand out in front of it. When we talk about retention and other accountability measures, we [in higher education] should be the ones to define what accountability is and how we measure it so we get beyond this misunderstanding or misperception the public has about us [in public higher education]. As the future approaches, we need to look at what the best practices are in the area of

retention and establish benchmarks for evaluation. We *should* be held accountable but *we* should define what accountability means.

Adding emphasis to the notion of public higher education defining which accountability measures to use and which outcomes to measure, one campus retention expert summed-up his discussion on the future of retention in light of public accountability trends by noting the importance for rural land-grant universities to ensure the public "truly understands the mission" of the institution.

I don't mind being held accountable and I don't mind the public holding higher education accountable for doing the millions of things it does, but I do care when public accountability equates getting a college degree with getting a job. We [public land-grant universities] are not, nor should we be proprietary schools which prepare future people just to get a job. This future trend could be very damaging to the concepts of student development, retention and the overall mission of higher education.

When asked to describe how he might avoid this scenario, the interviewee laughed and indicated that the best advice he could think of was to "campaign and act like a politician." In his view, the most effective way to communicate what you want the public to know is to "tell them directly, over and over and over again."

As study participants discussed the impact of public accountability trends on the future of retention at rural land-grant universities, a growing concern emerged about the ever-increasing scrutiny of public higher education by the public. Not one of the sixteen informants foresaw a decrease in the public accountability trend and many listed retention areas as being greatly impacted because of the increase. Again, responses were mixed when the interviewer introduced a question soliciting details about how this perceived trend would impact retention. Replies tended to be either completely positive or completely negative. Among the sixteen campus retention experts, there seemed to be no middle ground.

Our state requires graduation rates as part of their accountability measures. I don't think this trend will go away in the future. You know, I think this trend in increased public accountability should be good for the future of retention on this campus. It will maybe allow, maybe spur the institution on to put more money into retention programs. This is a good thing and I say turn that spotlight on us full force!

Taking the opposite view of the interaction between public accountability and retention, another campus retention expert forecasted a future which was not very bright for retention programming:

Oh, I think there will be increased public scrutiny in the future and this will simply lead to less funding, *again*, for higher education. This, in turn, will cause cuts in various academic programs which will just further reduce retention programs and retention rates.

The final theme to emerge from the data regarding public accountability trends and the future of retention centered around the notion that there would be no future impact on retention programs or activities. The following statement from one retention practitioner exemplifies the general attitude and perceptions from individuals who gave responses in this category:

We're not under any great public scrutiny or pressure because our retention and graduation rates are higher than any other institution in the state. Why should we do anything to change that? We're 'sitting pretty', as they say, and I don't foresee this trend will change in the future.

Five out of the sixteen retention practitioners responded with similar confidence that issues of public accountability would continue to have little or no impact on the future of retention or retention-related programming on their campuses.

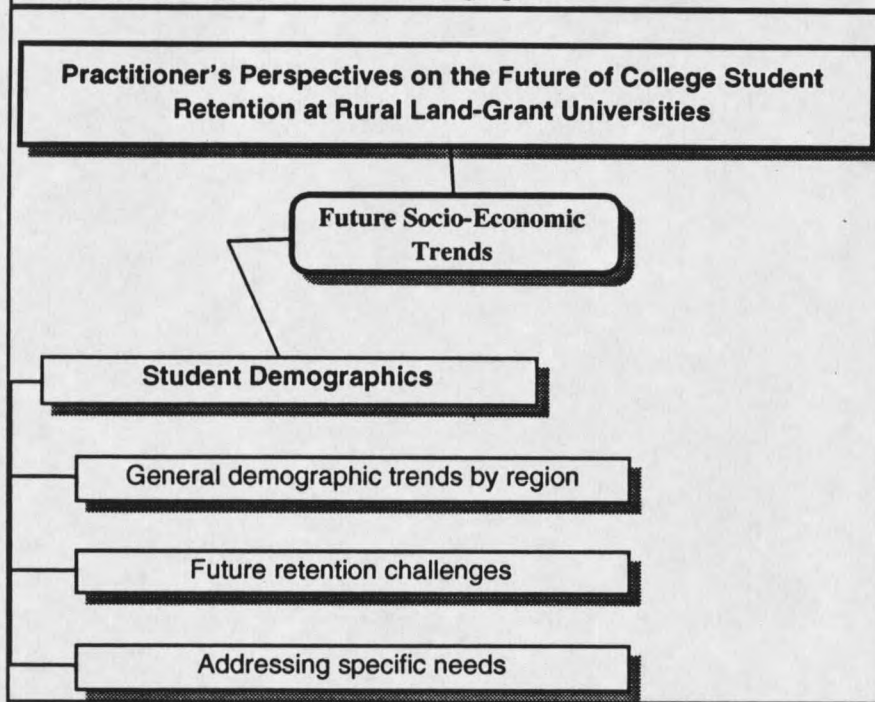
Contemplating the interplay between future public accountability trends and retention at rural land-grant universities, campus retention experts were often polarized in their responses. Speaking emphatically either for or against public accountability trends, study respondents tended to focus their descriptions of the future of retention around four areas. In most cases, interviewees advocated a public relations or marketing approach in the future which fostered a plan to educate, enlighten and evangelize. Promoting activities which informed the public regarding the successes and positive attributes of public higher education in multiple formats aimed at multiple audiences was seen as one means to address public accountability concerns. Furthering the basic intentions of this first category, the second theme to emerge underscored the feelings most retention practitioners had toward establishing best practices, benchmarks and other accountability measures for public consumption and fair public evaluation. The third theme to surface centered around

a contention many study participants had that public scrutiny of public higher education would continue to increase. While many campus retention experts remarked on the future increase in public scrutiny, interviewees were divided in their reactions as the increase related to retention. Several retention practitioners welcomed the increase in public scrutiny and speculated the trend would be good for retention while others were very negative and felt this trend would be detrimental to any of their future retention efforts. Finally, the fourth public perception and accountability theme to come to light presented a contention held by five of the study participants. They felt that the public would have no impact on the future of retention and retention-related planning at their respective rural land-grant universities. Ironically, as each study participant discussed his or her view of the future of retention within the public accountability context, it became clear that their views on the topic were greatly influenced by how they felt the public valued and supported public higher education within each of their states. Where they perceived there was a great deal of support, campus retention experts were very positive in their outlook on the future; where they perceived little or no support, retention practitioners forecasted a negative scenario for retention and retention-related programs on their campuses.

Changing Student Demographics. When asked to project how actual and anticipated changes in student demographics would impact retention at rural land-grant universities turned the corner to the next century, retention practitioners at the sixteen study sites clustered their answers around three distinct areas (Figure 5). The first theme to emerge from the interview data was a general discussion of demographic trends relative to the region of the particular study site. As participants contemplated the demographic trends which would impact their retention rates and programs, most tended to give a provincial outlook of the future which did not really expand to incorporate more national level trends. Future retention challenges comprised the second most dominant subject evident in the data. In many cases, when discussing the demographic implications of the future, study participants tended to describe the future retention challenges their institutions would face as a result of the anticipated changes. Finally, the third theme to surface centered around addressing the specific needs of selected student populations. The following paragraphs

describe these three thematic trends in more detail and highlight the general regional demographic trends as forecasted by each campus retention expert.

Figure 5. Changing Student Demographics



As the retention practitioners considered the relationship between demographic trends and the future of retention at their land-grant universities, it became clear to the researcher that there were no dominant national demographic trends which would have an impact on all of the sixteen institutions. In fact, as the researcher collected and analyzed the data, a very distinct pattern began to appear which centered on geographic location more than any other factor. This was in direct contrast to much of the data presented in the review of the literature. In fact, most of the current college student demographic data tends to focus on broad national trends rather than those specific to most rural land-grant universities. Looking at the future demographic projections region by region provides much more insight into the specific retention concerns at rural land-grant universities than the more generalized national trend data. Listening to the insights of local campus retention experts, a clearer picture developed which was more reflective of the concerns of this specific study population. As study participants described the anticipated demographic trends,

a demarkation emerged separating institutions into a North-South, East-West grouping. For example, when discussing the issue of increasing racial and ethnic diversity at their institutions, retention practitioners at schools located in both the Southeast and Southwest described a scenario which included a "great increase in the number of minority students." Interviewees from the Northern-tier states did not anticipate an increase in minority student populations. Rather, the practitioners from Northern universities very pointedly discussed plans to purposefully recruit more diverse students.

In the future, we are going to purposefully increase our minority and international student recruitment efforts because we want a campus that is more reflective of what the real world looks like. We want to enhance diversity and, naturally, we will need to develop retention or support programs to address the needs of these imported (pardon the expression) populations better than what we currently have in place.

While the Northern-tier land-grant university study participants did not anticipate a dramatic increase in the number of minority students, many of the interviewees mentioned a trend toward an increasing population of nontraditional students, part-time students, economically disadvantaged students and students with disabilities. Discussing the future impact of these major trends, one senior administrator/practitioner described the challenges these changing demographics would pose for future retention efforts:

There will be more nontraditional students and that will keep impacting our retention programs. We will need to pay attention to the support services we have--our student services--in a different way than we have with the traditional eighteen to twenty-one-year-old group.

Outlining the specific challenges an increase in the nontraditional student population would pose, another executive-level administrator added his insight to future retention issues:

The increase in nontraditional students, which, I believe, will be the demographic trend which impacts us the most, will present special challenges for our future retention programs. Let's think about the characteristics of this population. They are on campus infrequently; they have other demands which make it difficult for them to connect with the university; they have job conflicts, families, etcetera. All of these things will continue to contribute to a high dropout or stop-out rate. Drawing these students into our university community and providing

the support they need will continue to be our biggest retention challenge in this area.

Many of the interviewees at the Northern land-grant universities expressed their concerns about the increasing nontraditional student population and, while they identified the characteristic needs of this particular population, none of the individuals could articulate a plan for the future which would address the specific attrition/persistence needs of this group.

Changing direction from North-South to East-West, another pattern emerged which bespoke the regional differentiation in anticipated demographic trends. Generally, study participants at rural land-grant universities in the Western portion of the United States portrayed a scenario similar to the one described below:

Demographically? Well, I know one thing, we expect an increase in the numbers of high school graduates in the next few years. This increase in numbers is good--especially because we're so rural--and we will increase our retention efforts especially once those student get here. Overall, we're looking at a general population increase out West. That's always good for business.

Also anticipating an increase in the number of high school graduates, another Western campus retention expert was less positive about the future impact on retention programming.

There will be a boom in the next few years in terms of high school grads. We're not prepared to serve them effectively (not enough funding, staff, stuff like that). I anticipate that, unless there is a budgeting miracle here, this will have a negative impact on retention with understaffing and over crowding.

Study participants from the East, on the other hand, did not mention a general increase in the population of high school graduates. "We may see more minority students in higher education," said one campus practitioner, "but I don't anticipate any more major demographic changes." When asked to expand on his statement, this practitioner noted, "we've had our big changes and it [demographic trends] should remain stable so our retention programs or support programs shouldn't be impacted."

The second category to emerge from the data regarding the interaction between future retention programming and demographic trends was one in which future retention challenges were addressed. One of the most dominant future retention challenges

expressed by the study group revolved around new curricular and student development changes. Based on the responses of eleven out of the sixteen interviewees, a great deal of consideration regarding the nature of learning and the acquisition of knowledge by a generation of students "unaccustomed to lectures with shorter and shorter attention spans" needed to be given to this population of students. In her opening remarks about demographic trends and the future of retention, one administrator/practitioner expressed this concern rather clearly:

Well now, let me get to the real big picture here. Sure, we'll see more minority students and more high school students overall, but we need to look at the demographics of these students as potential learners. We need to be more learner-centered. That is, we need to be more student-centered rather than teacher or curriculum-centered. We need to change our culture [in higher education] to meet the changes and challenges and needs of this new crop of students. We need to help them become engaged and committed learners through our retention efforts.

The other future retention challenge which seemed to appear quite often in the data, focused on the increased challenges in retaining minority students. This was an issue which was not unique to any particular geographic region. Rather, all of the sixteen study participants cited minority student retention as a particularly challenging issue for rural land-grant universities both now and in the future. "You know," said one campus retention expert, "the first thing that comes to mind when you talk about demographics and retention is the challenges we have with minority student retention." Elaborating on his comment, he continued by saying: "I think these challenges will continue and, perhaps, increase and I'm not sure how we're going to deal with this issue in the future." Another study participant who expressed her concerns about minority student retention took a different tack in her approach to the issue:

When you look at demographic trends and consider retention, you really are looking at some very specific challenges both now and in the future. While the high schools are experiencing a boom, I don't think higher education will. Graduation numbers have gone down in high schools while minority populations have continued to grow and I don't think most people are really thinking about that. I mean really *thinking* about the implications. Less minority students are graduating when compared to white students and Asian students. I think our future retention efforts, as they relate to changing demographics, need to extend

down into the middle schools and follow kids through high school *and* college graduation. If we don't do something like that we're [public higher education] in danger of losing a whole segment of the population in the future.

Adding to the concern expressed in the above quote, the third theme to emerge from the data regarding the impact of demographic trends on the future of retention at rural land-grant universities was primarily centered around addressing the specific needs of targeted student populations. Speaking very generally about the issue, one retention practitioner wrote the following:

We have to keep changing our retention programs to meet our students' needs--it's that simple. And, the label a student is given by some demographic profile or trend shouldn't change that simple fact now or in the future. Retention is about success. Success is about meeting the needs of each and all of our students.

A second campus retention expert focused her discussion of meeting student needs in the following way:

We need to be better prepared to deal with everyone's needs both as individuals and as groups. We *especially* need to be able to address the academic cultural and transition needs of those students with more diverse cultural backgrounds.

Finally, one executive-level administrator spoke about the interaction between demographic trends and retention and the needs of specific student populations by stating: "the quality of an education must interact with a composition of students that has to look much like society." When asked to clarify, the interviewee described a general demographic trend "across the country which includes more racial and ethnic minorities." In his opinion, in order for the university to provide all students with a quality education, the school's demographic profile should be kept in sync with the greater demographic trends in society. "If students learn in an environment which is rarified or does not reflect the realities of society," he elaborated, "they won't really be learning for the real world, will they?" In addressing this specific need for educational quality, the interviewee pointed-out that to attain the level of quality in higher education appropriate for future generations, "an emphasis on recruiting and *retaining* more minority students" had become paramount at

the interviewee's institution. Based on this new recruitment and retention effort, the specific needs of these students had gained a level of importance.

There will need to be some attention--unique attention--given to those groups that have traditionally lower retention rates and graduation rates. This fact alone, will have a major impact on retention and retention programs in the very near future.

While the specific needs of targeted student populations seemed to be a concern for most of the sixteen study participants, when pressed to identify which student populations warranted intervention, fifteen out of the sixteen retention practitioners stated that they had plans to target their minority student populations. Only one institutional respondent quoted above, refrained from identifying a particular student group emphasizing individuals rather than groups as the target of intervention.

While not as impassioned about demographic trends as they were about issues of public accountability, study participants spoke very directly about the demographic trends they would be facing well into the next decade and how these trends would impact retention and retention-related programs at their institutions. Most importantly, this segment of the research shed light on the fact that the national demographic research data was not as relevant to retention practitioners as their own regional data. While the national retention experts in the prospective study focused solely on the national demographic data, regional practitioners tended to base most of their actions and future projections on homegrown demographic trend data. Subsequent themes regarding future retention challenges and addressing the specific needs of certain populations were entirely dependent on the regional trend data outlined by each campus retention expert.

Social Trends. As study participants considered the issue of the potential impact broad-scale social trends would have on retention at rural land-grant universities, the researcher noted an interesting trend in respondent's initial reactions to the question. Across all of the interview mediums ranging from E-mail responses, to telephone conversations, to face-to-face interviews, study participants tended to approach the question in one of two ways. Nine out of the sixteen interviewees responded to the question by taking a very comprehensive or big picture approach to the issue of social trends. Respondents in

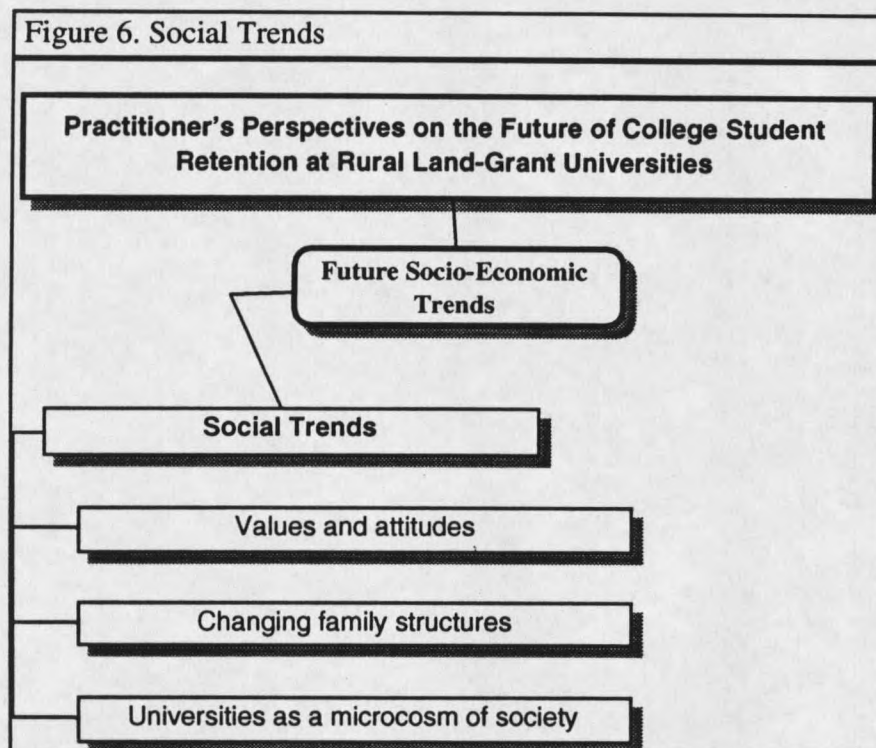
this vein often made comments about the broader national social trends and related these to the world of public higher education. They covered a wide range of issues and many of these individuals stated the question was so broad that they "could write a book just on this one topic alone." The other seven study participants claimed to see no connection between the broader social trends and their impacts on public higher education or retention-related issues. Concerned about the broad nature of the question, the researcher introduced several follow-up probes (Appendix A) for clarification. Again, the responses to the probes were vague at best. The comments from one of the seven interviewees in this category sums-up the basic approach this group had toward the question.

You know, I think I know what you're getting at with these questions about the impact of society on future retention programs but I just don't think a connection exists. It's not that you're being too broad or anything, I just don't see that there is a direct relationship between the two.

Another campus retention expert from this group expressed the common observation that society or social trends would not have much of an influence on retention or retention-related programs in the future because "we're too rural, too remote to be impacted that much by the real world."

Examining the data from the nine study participants who described a relationship between social trends and the future of retention, three broad categories emerged which formed a scenario for retention planning in a broad social context (Figure 6). The most dominant issue that respondents expressed as they described the future interaction of society and retention was that of the relationship between emerging social attitudes and values and public higher education. The second theme to surface as campus retention experts considered the interaction between society and the future of retention narrowed from a consideration of social values and focused solely on the topic of family values. Finally, viewing the rural land-grant university as a microcosm of the greater society was the third category to appear in the data. The following paragraphs provide a more detailed explanation of these three categories.

Figure 6. Social Trends



The first and most commonly expressed view retention practitioners had as they described the future interaction between society and retention at rural land-grant universities centered around the role of emerging social attitudes and values. Several of the interviewees made special mention of the values, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs that new and current students were bringing with them from their parents, peers and communities to the public higher education scene. In general, as one interviewee observed, "values and attitudes are changing in our society especially as you look at higher education." "People are not interested in knowledge for knowledge sake," she continued, "as much as they simply want the end product or the degree." When considering the question about society and retention, one retention practitioner was initially dismissive with his response saying, "society doesn't value higher education as much anymore and we can see this devaluation each year with each new group of students." Another interviewee audibly moaned when he began to describe what he saw as an increasing lack of personal accountability and responsibility which seemed to be permeating the higher education community.

Oh, (moan) I think the biggest trend that will impact the future of retention is that people or society tends to take less and less responsibility for what they do. Students increasingly tend to be doing the same things and not take responsibility for what happens to them. They, and their parents, tend to see their failures or bad grades or improper behavior or whatever as the fault of everyone but themselves. 'She's not going to class because the teacher is *boring*.' If there's one trend that really disturbs me, it's the lack of accountability that students have now. They want more liberal withdrawal policies, they want later times to dropout of courses they're having trouble with, and they want back-dated withdrawals and all sorts of bizarre things. They want to say that, 'it wasn't really my fault I has a horrible semester, can we just wipe that off my record?' To some, it might sound okay to go this direction in the future but, I think, it will only end up destroying our standards and hurting retention efforts.

Expressing yet another negative view of the impact of social trends on the future of higher education, one executive-level retention practitioner expressed his concerns regarding a behavioral or attitudinal trend which he felt had been transferred from society to public higher education.

I think there is and will continue to be a profound interaction between the two [society and retention in higher education]...There seems to have been an erosion of commitments to integrity. We see cheating going on typically higher than it's ever been before. A lack of integrity in terms of basic dishonesty that is sometimes winked at by university officials and parents. Some students aren't even aware that what they're doing is wrong. As long as the academic environment insists on academic integrity and as long as the students coming into the system [of public higher education] have a different standard of integrity, there's a chance that there's going to be more and more students who will be leaving the system because they can't exist within a system that demands integrity.

Narrowing the scope of social trends down to one particular issue, several retention practitioners mentioned their concerns about risk-drinking and drugs. As one interviewee noted, "risk-drinking and drugs are a social trend--and it's not new mind you--that really impacts our students, it's a trend which begins in junior high school and escalates once students are in college." Summing up his discussion of this trend, one practitioner observed, "drinking and doing drugs...that's going to be a social trend which will continue to impact retention

at this institution; people don't think a lot about it but social trends as they relate to health and wellness will always have an impact on retention."

On a more positive note, many of the study participants described values-based social trends they believed would be good for the future of retention at rural land-grant universities. Outlining an emerging social trend which places the individual and individual needs at the center, one campus retention expert explained her optimistic view of the future of retention:

Some social trends will be good for retention because they force public universities to respond better to the varying needs of students whether it's learning styles or individual intellectual capabilities. Society is taking a closer look at the individual and how they learn and so are we. This individual approach is what good retention programs are all about and it will only help with the future of retention to go in that direction.

Another positive aspect coming from society, according to an executive-level retention practitioner comes from a "social movement toward volunteerism, environmental issues and community involvement." He continued to describe this scenario highlighting the positive implications for the future of retention:

Our students are bringing these trends with them and there are studies which show that community involvement and volunteerism actually contribute to increased retention rates. (I think this is a UCLA Sandy Astin study.) We'll continue this trend in the future because it is and should remain a part of our retention programming.

Both positive and negative social trends ranging from social values to individual attitudes and commitment to community seem to be issues which retention practitioners believe will impact retention in the future. The manner of their interaction with the rural land-grant enterprise will determine whether retention rates will improve as these public universities enter the next century.

The second social trend to emerge from the data as campus retention experts hypothesized about the interaction between society and the future of retention focused exclusively on the topic of family values and family structure. When prompted to explain what she meant by family values and family structure, one campus retention expert attributed a host of current and future "retention problems" to the "evolving nature of the family in our society." In her estimation, traditional family structures and, therefore, traditional family

and community values were changing so dramatically that public higher education has had little time to respond effectively to these changes. "There are more single and teen parents which means more poor students and less familial stability," she said. "If we are to respond accurately to these social trends," she continued, "we need to define the services these students need and provide them--this is where I see the future of retention programming going in response to social change." When asked how she thought social trends would impact retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities, one executive-level retention practitioner bluntly stated, "I think they [social trends] already have--I don't think this interaction between society and retention is something that just happened." Describing current and future social changes, this interviewee voiced her primary concerns in terms of family structure:

You know, I wrote about these issues at some length in a book published in [the early 1990's]. I think the social changes I wrote about then have only been amplified today. Not only have we [public higher education] brought more students into higher education, which is a good thing for retention, but they are coming from backgrounds where a kind of committed learning is less of a habit, and I think that the decline in reading skills, for example, is one of those things that is very noticeable. More and more students have not had parents read to them for many years...they haven't gotten into the habit of reading and, therefore, they're not committed readers or learners--this is one minor little thing but it impacts retention. I also think the structure of our families is changing. I think people are working longer and longer hours--especially in single parent households--and there's perhaps less time for the nurturing kinds of relationships that people need in order to be the confident learners colleges demand that they be in order to succeed. That has and will continue to take its toll on retention and that's the reason why our counseling centers are so busy.

When asked how university retention practitioners might respond to these social trends in family structure, the interviewee indicated there were many ways to address these issues. The programs which she felt would have the greatest impact both on retention and the issues surrounding family structure revolved around having students establish or reestablish connections with other individuals on campus which would assist students in becoming confident committed learners.

You need to have students engage in various active learning strategies which help them connect to one another in a way which they might not

have connected with their parents or primary caregivers. Humans are, for the most part, social learners and traditionally we've found that within the family structure. Now, we have to encourage students to form learning communities, study groups and have them connect with a caring faculty or staff member. This will continue to be the future of retention--don't you think?

Adding to the notion of changing family structure, many respondents discussed the issue that more and more students seemed to be working their way through college. Some interviewees attributed this phenomenon to an increasing number of economically at-risk students coming from poorer single-parent families while others claimed the trend was due, in part, to an increasing number of nontraditional students who needed to work to support their families. In any case, as one campus retention expert posited, "this social trend has had a major impact on the extent to which they are totally students." Lamenting the passage of the traditional family and the impact of the stability it represented had on college students, one interviewee noted whimsically, "that kind of magical period for students just to be students and explore the world of knowledge, I think, has pretty much disappeared for many of our students today." She continued, "most students don't have the economic or emotional support from their families that they need to have just to be college students and nothing else." Relating this issue back to changing family structure and retention, this interviewee concluded that for retention programs to be successful, in the future, they needed to fill the social, intellectual and emotional gap left by many changing family situations. In her view, retention programs needed to "be flexible enough to bring stability to a wide range of students with a wide range of needs."

Taking a proactive stance to the changing nature of the family, one administrator-practitioner described a program on his campus which was slated for implementation in the not-too-distant future:

When I first got here, I'd meet parents, or the parent, and understand or get a feel for the kid and why there were attitudinal or other problems. This is a social issue we face on this campus. But we've just developed (we haven't implemented it yet) a two track retention program to deal with some of this. During our orientations and in early Fall, we try to do some developmental things with the students...we try to do some things with the students and their parents and we try to work with parents only. We will have an extensive parent program that starts with ori-

entation and will be carried through the first year, and to give you a notion of what we're trying to do with parents, we want to convey or suggest to them that they are part of the first year for success. We try to teach them how to assist in the retention process and support them with classes, events newsletters and mailings throughout the first year. As I tell parents, we want their students to be successful alumni for two reasons. One is so they can support the university and two so they can support their parents in their old age (laughs). This goes a long way with parents whatever their status.

It is clear that the issue of changing family structures has prompted both concern and action as retention practitioners have considered the impact of social trends on the future of retention at their rural land-grant universities. Program development in response to this issue is varied ranging from proactive to reactive. Regardless of the assorted institutional responses to this social trend, it is clear that as many rural land-grant universities plan for the future, a consideration of the changing nature of the family will play a vital role in their future retention efforts.

The third and final trend to emerge from the data regarding social trends and their interaction with the future of retention at rural land-grant universities dealt with the particular view each retention practitioner had of his or her institution. As the researcher analyzed the data related to the social trends question, it became evident that many campus retention experts viewed their institutions as microcosms of the greater society. The words of one executive-level administrator-practitioner sum-up this notion of the social-institutional interaction:

Society will continue to define the motivating issues and universities will respond in kind. That's how it has been in the past and will continue into the future. In a sense, we are a reflection of society. If universities don't respond, students will not stay and retention will decrease accordingly.

Adding to the idea of public higher education as a microcosm of society, another interviewee provided a broader perspective on the issue. In his opinion, "higher education is society's way of creating a measure of accountability." Describing the social transition during the last forty years from a production economy to an information-based economy, this interviewee stated that "public higher education has had to respond by keeping up with this prevailing trend." "Fortunately," he continued, "the people of the United States

have faith in public higher education as our answer to the good life." Rural land-grant universities need to speak to this ideal and ensure access to the broadest most representative segments of society "from the poor to the middle class, to all of the culturally and personally diverse segments of our population." If our land-grant universities are elitist or limit access, and if we don't reflect the society we were designed to serve, we do our students and society a disservice," the interviewee declared, "and that's gonna really hurt your retention efforts!"

One final commentary on the university as a microcosm of society came from another executive-level administrator-practitioner who took the view that society-at-large has become more and more service-driven. This, in turn, has forced universities to take a much more service-oriented approach to students, parents and the public. Contending that universities, while not businesses, must still provide excellent service to their constituents, this administrator-practitioner used the following example to illustrate his point:

Like government trends, public higher education will be called upon more and more to provide various services--you know, social services--to its citizens--the students--like you see around the country particularly in cities. We're called upon on our campus to have full-service health centers and mental health services and this trend will continue to grow like it has in society. If we don't follow the trend, it will really decrease our retention rates because we won't have the services students want. Retention is not simply about academics, there needs to be a full web of support for students. They expect it. Society expects it. And we better do it.

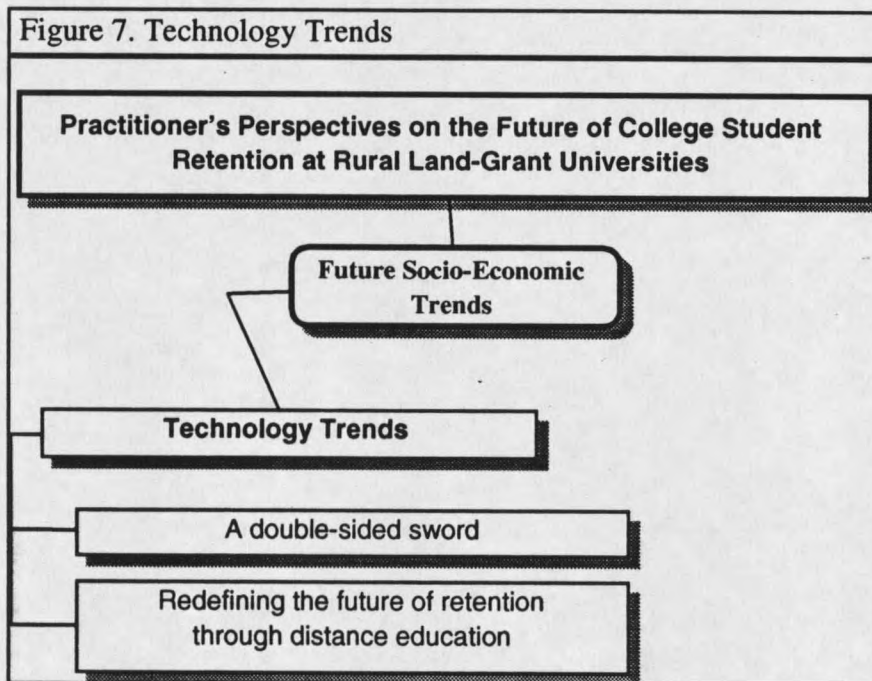
Advancing the notion that rural land-grant universities are and should be reflective of the defining social trends, it is evident that many campus retention experts view the future of retention and retention-related programming as being inextricably linked to the motivating issues in society. As many study participants stated, keeping abreast of the dominant social movements and tides of change, and responding to them will only enhance future retention efforts.

While only nine of the sixteen study participants saw a connection between broad social trends and the future of retention at rural land-grant universities, their comments, insights and projections regarding the future yielded data which highlighted three fundamental areas of interconnectedness between social trends and retention. In particular, the

nine respondents saw a strong link between social values and attitudes, and the future of retention. Many interviewees felt that the values and attitudes students brought with them to their colleges and universities would impact future retention efforts. If rural land-grant universities did not respond to these changing values accordingly, most retention practitioners felt future retention efforts would be negatively impacted. The second trend brought to light by the nine campus retention experts expressed the strong feelings they had toward changing family structures and how this social trend would impact retention in the future. Many retention practitioners suggested developing programs and services in the future which would address areas of developmental and personal deficit brought on by the overwhelming changes in traditional family structures. Future retention efforts which did not take these changes into account would, according to several retention experts, be setting themselves up for disappointment. Adding to the above two trends, the third theme to emerge from the data regarding the interaction between social trends and the future of retention at rural land-grant universities confronted the issue of universities appearing as a microcosm of society. For many campus experts, this view seemed to tie together their views about the interaction between public higher education and society. For many individuals, retention and future retention trends were viewed as a by-product of this interaction. Based on the data, it is clear that at least nine of the sixteen study participants felt that social trends would have an impact on future retention plans and programs at rural land-grant universities. Finally, as many of these individuals articulated their future projections for retention, the social trends which they perceived to be the most relevant to public higher education were the issues which most impacted students on a personal and developmental level.

The Impact of Technology. With the advent of the World Wide Web in the early part of the decade and the subsequent dramatic increase in interest, use and implementation of computing and telecommunications technologies in academe, study participants were very responsive to the question of how technology would interact with future retention efforts at rural land-grant universities. In general, campus retention experts approached the issue of technology and how it related to the future of retention with a cautious optimism. Many interviewees responded in an excited manner and conveyed their exuberance through vari-

ous media with punctuation, emoticons, gestures and voice inflection. In most cases, retention practitioners spoke in terms of the "potential" for technology implementation and use attempting to forecast how computing technology would "make life different for those of us in higher education." Based on the input from the sixteen study participants, two dominant categories arose which encompassed the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the campus retention experts (Figure 7). The first theme to emerge was one which was pervasive across all of the study participants: technology is, and will continue to be, a double-sided sword. The notion that the future of retention and public higher education would be redefined through distance education was the second theme to surface as data were analyzed. The following paragraphs lend insight into these two categories and provide a detailed picture of how retention practitioners at rural land-grant universities view the interplay between technology and retention in the twenty-first century.



Giving an image or catch-phrase to an issue expressed by the sixteen study participants, one retention practitioner summed-up the first category of data to emerge on the subject of technology by saying: "Technology, as it relates to future retention efforts, is a double-sided sword." While most campus retention experts reacted positively to the cur-

rent changes wrought by technology, they were quick to indicate that "with technology, one has to take the good with the bad." In describing how technology and retention programming might interact in the future, most interviewees began with a list of pros and cons (Table 5). Putting the technology movement into a retention specific context, however, one executive-level retention expert described how technology had permeated the system of higher education:

Retention will now begin with your [institution's] Webpage. Students are looking at us from a technological point of view. They come here and they are, in some cases, more comfortable with technology than many of our faculty and staff, and, consequently, I think we [the institution] need to be ahead of that curve. Students don't just want the basics anymore, they want cutting-edge stuff. Our residence halls are completely wired so that every bed has access to a mainframe computer so that students can interact with their faculty and each other with the E-mail, and do, you know, research on computers in their rooms. I think this says to [our state] that we're pretty active and that's important. It says to students and legislators that we go beyond, that we offer services which show we care and which make it easier for them [the students]. As I said, this technology stuff should be good for retention.

Table 5. A Summary of Technology Pros and Cons.

| Pro's                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Con's                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Retention practitioners will have more new technology (computers, software, information resources) to use in the future.                                                                                                                                                                                          | There will be a large learning curve as staff learn how to effectively use the new technology.                               |
| Technology will increase student conveniences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ easier telephone and website registration;</li> <li>◦ easier bill payment options;</li> <li>◦ easier access to grades and transcripts; and</li> <li>◦ easier, more direct access to professors through E-mail.</li> </ul> | Most of the things which make things easier and more streamlined for students take away the human element of the experience. |

Table 5. A Summary of Technology Pros and Cons.

| Pro's                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Con's                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| It will be easier for those of us who oversee retention programs and who work directly with students who are at risk to contact students via E-mail                                                               | Students may become more disconnected from the institution because of the technological conveniences and not persist because of the lack of connection.      |
| It will be easier to track both students and retention programs electronically.                                                                                                                                   | Technology may lead to a high-tech, low-touch environment that may contribute to a lack of identity and integration between the student and the institution. |
| There will be better, more accurate data collection.                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                              |
| Technology will improve early warning systems.                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                              |
| In the future, there will be better tracking of stop-out students.                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                              |
| Technology will allow for improved, more accurate advising.                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                              |
| Technology will enable the establishment of a new data warehouse which will allow for better identification of variable that can contribute to improved retention and will allow for better longitudinal studies. |                                                                                                                                                              |
| Technology will enable rural land-grant institutions to become more learner-centered.                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                              |

As many of the interviewees discussed the positive attributes of technology, streamlining processes from application to registration to advising became clear indicators of an intentional technology-retention planning interaction. Describing the stream-lining process, one interviewee stated: "it's all about making it easier for them and for us in the future; they [students] can get at what they need easier and we [retention practitioners] can respond to them better because we'll have greater access to the data." In fact, improved data collection and tracking seemed to be the most consistent contribution to improved future retention efforts articulated by the study group.

While the vast majority of study participants extolled the virtues of technology as a device to increase retention through improved learning experiences, one campus retention expert in particular spoke at some length on the topic. He related how he believed technology would improve learning and student satisfaction and, thereby, retention rates in the future.

When I think about technology and the potential it has for retention, my mind immediately jumps to learning and what we're doing on that front. Let's start with faculty. In the very near future, we'll be sitting down with faculty to get them to explore how technology can be used in their classes. They'll sit down and tell us what they want to teach and we'll tell them 'that's all well and good but what do you want students to learn'? And we'll begin talking about the development of a curriculum not from the perspective on [sic] what the teacher wants to teach but more from what would you like the student to learn. Technology can help you do that. It will aid in collaborative learning with communal learning spaces in the residence halls and in the computer labs. In this mode, students start taking responsibility for their learning and they start seeing that the role of the learner isn't to go into a classroom and sit passively taking notes and, you know, do the traditional binge and purge every time there's a midterm. And, back to retention and technology, my contention about students is that they're excited about learning when they come here and they have high expectations--they are intellectually hungry. If we can rethink the way we do our classrooms and shift the focus to the learner, we're going to be able to affect a change in retention because we'll be better able to meet student expectations and they'll continue to be excited about what they're doing. Some students come here and then leave because they are disappointed in the academic rudder [direction] of the courses that they need. I think technology can help them grow to this level of expectation. Technology is going to enable faculty to do more and change how we do business, I think, over time and probably keep students a little more excited and stimulated about learning and, you know, this will greatly impact retention.

Facilitating higher education processes from learning to registration and advising, technology, according a majority of the study participants, will be a boon to the higher education retention enterprise at rural land-grant universities. Concomitant with this contention, however, came a stern warning from some interviewees and expression of concern from others. One of the most dominant views expressed on the negative side of the technology issues dealt with removing the "human element" from the student-institution inter-

action equation. As one campus retention expert warned, "technology may lead to a high-tech, low-touch environment that may contribute to a lack of identity and integration between the students and the institution." Expressing his concern along a similar vein, another retention practitioner commented on the downside of technology and the conveniences it brings:

You [the student] can register but your advisor is not there to sign the final copy. You have to meet with your advisor before you register, but once you get your advisor's signature and your registration access number, then you can go out and register for whatever you want to. You can drop and add your own classes which is of convenience and a real time saver in terms of paperwork for the university, but it takes the advisor--the real person--out of the approval loop. Students drop classes they need to graduate and get behind and get off-track so that works against them and against us in terms of retention and graduation. I think we've got to be realistic enough to realize that the students who are coming to us now are very savvy with the Internet and the use of computers, and they would not be very anxious to stand in long lines to get a professor's signature to add a course. They want to sit down on the Web and do it there and then. That's what they're used to doing and I think we've just gotta find a way to make that work for us. And so, we're depending more and more on the advisor and the classroom teacher to do the humanizing part of the university experience.

Based on the data from the sixteen interviewees, it is clear that technology and its interaction with retention-related issues has been an issue on each of the campuses. For most retention practitioners, the positive attributes of convenience and accessibility outweighed the negative attributes of technology. However, the advent of new computer technologies was viewed with a cautious optimism with many interviewees expressing concern about the double-sided sword technology presented to the future of retention.

The second theme to emerge from the data gathered from the forecasted interaction between technology and future retention efforts at rural land-grant institutions focused on the notion that the future of retention in public higher education would be redefined through distance education. During both the interview and analysis processes, it became evident to the researcher that the issues of technology and distance education, and their relationship to the future of retention were timely concerns at the sixteen study sites across the country. In fact, when asked to consider the impact of technology on the future of

retention, most study participants immediately launched into a discussion of the impact of distance education on retention and how distance education would cause most institutions to redefine retention in the future. As one executive-level retention practitioner projected, "technology will force us to redefine retention." "We will need to look at it more as involvement in a sustained pursuit of a degree or completion of a degree," he maintained. When asked to provide an example to elucidate his contention, the study participant summarized his vision of a new future for retention:

So, a student that, for example, leaves [your university] or [my university] and returns to their hometown and begins to take some classes through the Western Governor's University or through some other system, conceptually, has not really dropped out of college. We've got to learn to account for that. Right now we don't. I mean, technically, they've not dropped out because they are still pursuing [a degree]. We've got to get more and more broad and flexible in how we define retention, to include people who stop-out as a result of technology or distance education in permitting them to be able to stop-out. There is no question, I think, retention characteristics and figures will change, will be viewed differently as a result of distance education and other technologies.

Providing more detail to the above example, another executive-level administrator described his impressions of the future impact of distance education technology on retention by asserting, "there is no doubt that retention through distance education will be the wave of the future." Adding further insight to his assertion, he noted:

More students will take a variety of courses from lots of different universities via distance education (we're seeing that more and more now). They will ultimately need to get a certification or degree from *someone*. This will be the next critical challenge and opportunity for those in retention. How can we keep those students *here* or attract them long enough to get a degree *from us*? The future will be very interesting--glad I'm retiring soon.

Taking a more positive approach to the retention-distance education scenario, one retention practitioner noted that distance education would "help in increasing access to higher education for rural schools." In her on-line dialog, this interviewee wrote emphatically using uppercase letters to convey her strong feelings about the topic:

In one sense, distance education technology IS THE ANSWER to access, in fact. Increased access, I think, will help with retention in the

long term if we do it right, target the right people and bend what we traditionally think of as "retention." Technology will certainly be a boon for retaining adult learners, people pursuing a second or advanced degree and people who want to update or acquire new skill sets to keep current in the workforce. Technology will force us to think outside of our traditional retention box by moving beyond traditionally-aged students to a broader untapped audience. LOVE THE THOUGHT OF TECHNOLOGY-- can you tell? :->

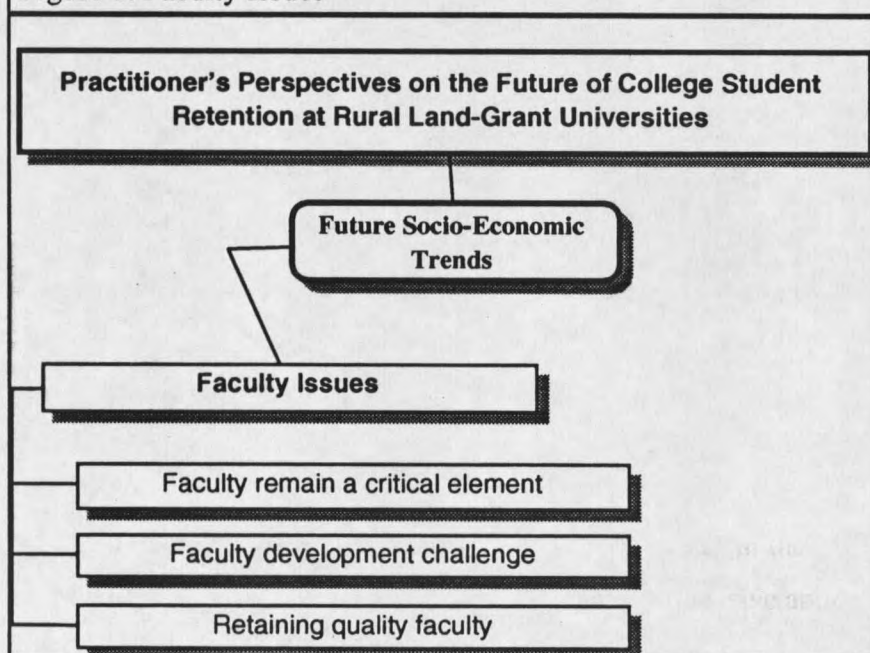
The issues of distance education technology and retention certainly sparked a great deal of discussion with all of the study participants especially as they attempted to forecast what the future of rural land-grant education would look like. In sum, campus retention experts anticipated a reconsideration of the definition for retention and increased access to public higher education. In the estimation of several study participants, students would have more choices in how they pursue and complete their degrees and the student audience will increase to include a broader mix of nontraditional students.

As campus retention experts considered the issue of technology and its interaction with the future of retention at rural land-grant universities, they expressed cautious optimism about the prospective changes and, in some cases, challenges they would face. In general, retention practitioners described a future which would make a wide range of administrative tasks, ranging from application to registration, faster, easier and more accessible. However, many study participants also expressed their concerns that this same technology would remove too much of the "human element" from the students' college transition and integration process. Finally, the issue of distance education technology seemed to dominate much of the discussion about the future of retention at rural land-grant universities. Many of the retention practitioners expressed the view that distance education technology would dramatically alter the landscape of public higher education forcing institutions to rethink the traditional definitions for retention and attrition. Despite many of the concerns about distance education technology, most campus retention experts expressed optimism at the potential for increased access that the technology would afford to a broader spectrum of traditional and nontraditional students.

Faculty Issues. While study participants often expressed strong opinions during other segments of the interview and discussion process, no one question elicited such a

strong, emphatic and unified reaction from campus retention experts as the following question: "How do you think faculty will impact the future of retention and retention-related programs at rural land-grant universities?" Across the board, study participants expressed strong convictions about the pivotal role of faculty in any future retention effort (Figure 8). As one campus retention expert declared, "quality faculty-student interaction will remain the defining element in quality retention programming." The first major theme presented in this section details a strong opinion expressed by each of the sixteen study participants: faculty are critical to retention efforts "in all aspects and all levels of the university environment." In fact, each of the participants in the study used the word "critical" to discuss the interaction between faculty and the process of retention. The second theme to emerge from the data revolved around the central idea that there would continue to be a faculty development challenge as public universities moved into the next millennium. Finally, a concern specific to many rural land-grant universities appeared as the third category: retaining quality faculty. This extended the consideration of retention issues from college students to a community which includes students, faculty and staff. Each of the three faculty-related categories is outlined in greater detail below as well as representative data captured from individual campus retention experts.

Figure 8. Faculty Issues



One of the most consistent themes to appear as study participants contemplated the interaction between faculty and the future of retention at rural land-grant universities was the critical role faculty play in a university's overall retention efforts. One campus retention expert introduced the concept in an excited manner which bespoke the importance of this issue for many of the retention practitioners:

Oh, I've been waiting for you to get to this question about faculty and retention because, let me just say, it's one that I think about more than any of the others. Faculty will continue to be *the most critical* link to retention in all aspects. Good faculty,--poor faculty can be equally damaging--those that keep up with the changes in technology and learning theory, will be the ones that are the critical element in retention. It will be these faculty who captivate and excite students and keep them interested in shelling out the cash to keep coming back.

For many interviewees, faculty needed to recognize their importance in the student-institution-faculty interaction equation if future retention efforts are to improve. Lending specific insight to this issue, one executive-level retention practitioner underscored the importance of faculty in retention:

One problem with retention and retention programming is that it tends to leave the key players--faculty--out of the equation. Retention programming is really peripheral, faculty are really at the center. In the final analysis, it's what happens or doesn't happen in the classroom that really counts. Faculty have always been and will always be the key whether people or administrators like myself acknowledge it or not. That's where your retention efforts should start, continue and end.

Many of the interviewees reiterated the idea that without faculty cooperation, retention efforts would be very limited. Campus retention experts expressed the notion of cooperating much more actively with faculty in the future. As one executive administrator/practitioner stated, "we [faculty and retention practitioners] need to make opportunities to get together, now and in the future, inside the classroom and out, to interact and, you know, share information, issues and concerns." For many interviewees, resolving historically difficult communication issues between faculty and retention program administrators seemed to be the main success strategy for future retention programming.

While the sixteen study participants all mention the critical role of faculty in the future of retention planning and program development, they were equally expressive about

the difficulties they would face in gaining faculty support and understanding for campus-wide retention efforts. Testimony about faculty development challenges, the second faculty-related category in this section, provided an account of the struggles many campus retention experts at all levels felt they faced as the new century approached. Faculty development or training was mentioned in fifteen out of the sixteen interviews as playing an important role in getting faculty to contribute more effectively to future retention initiatives. For several retention practitioners, faculty development programs would aid in converting faculty to be better agents of retention. "I think," said one study participant, "that schools who are serious about retention need to put an effort into faculty development to help faculty understand how to serve as retention agents." Another retention practitioner added, "you need to have some type of faculty development program to teach faculty that they are the most important retention agents." He continued by noting, "they [the faculty] need to be shown how they can most effectively contribute to future retention efforts." Discussing the specific challenges retention practitioners would face in developing and successfully implementing faculty development programs, one executive-level administrator characterized faculty as either "retention agents" or "academic Darwinists":

I think faculty will remain bimodal. Yes, they are essential to the retention effort but you have those, on the one hand, who are naturally student-friendly. They are good advisors, naturally attentive and caring faculty. Others--and there will always be others--are simply academic Darwinists. You know, people who think college is about survival of the fittest--reward and punishment. It is important we [who are] involved in strategic planning for retention continue to hammer away at that academic Darwinist notion and keep trying to change the academic culture so it works *for* students not against them.

Contributing further to the contention that faculty would pose specific challenges as retention programs moved toward the future, one campus retention expert acknowledged that faculty are the key to any retention effort but also asserted that faculty "come from a very rarified perspective." In his opinion, many faculty do not know or want to know the fundamental theory, practice and data supporting college student dropout and persistence trends.

Most faculty think students leave because of academic difficulty--because they just can't hack it. In reality, that only accounts for one third of our student departures. But faculty don't care about numbers, they only want quality--quality students. Perceptions, no, a long-stand-

ing cultural change needs to occur with faculty to really impact retention. We need to work with faculty to help students meet their [the faculty's] standards rather than having faculty lower them.

Expanding the notion of faculty development to include a wider audience and an environmental perspective, one campus retention expert concluded his discussion of the faculty development challenge by exploring the positive attributes of both faculty and staff and how these characteristics contributed to the student-institution-environment gestalt.

I believe that the most important single variable [in retention] is a warm and caring faculty attitude (well, and staff too). People stay in an environment where they think someone cares. Just as clearly, people like to leave an environment where they think they don't matter or they think no one cares. The role of the people in the environment (faculty and staff) is the most important one. Very soon, we will have a training, rather, development program for front-line staff and faculty designed to help them understand how to deal with students in a civil, respectful, caring way. Now, you might have said, 'That sounds like you're pushing another training program and what does that have to do with faculty and retention?' My answer is that it has *everything* to do with retention.

Establishing an environment where faculty and staff understand how vital their roles are to college student retention contributes to the successful transition and integration process of new students. Including staff and faculty training as a specific professional development component or job requirement lends clout to an otherwise challenging undertaking.

While most of the study participants acknowledged the difficulties of initiating successful retention-related faculty development programs, they appeared to remain determined about moving forward with the faculty and staff education process. Paraphrasing the sentiments of several retention practitioners, the future of retention is inextricably linked with quality student-faculty interactions. Ensuring that the faculty and staff development process continues to improve and move forward will probably remain one of the greatest challenges any retention practitioner must face in the future.

One future retention concern which was voiced by at least ten of the study participants dealt with the issue of retaining quality faculty. This third category pertaining to the faculty-retention interaction question exemplifies the direct relationship between quality faculty and college student retention. It was interesting for the researcher to note that this particular issue was of unique concern to study group participants. At no other point in the

study was this issue discussed. Targeting the specific retention concerns of rural land-grant universities shed light on an issue which did not appear to any great degree in the research literature or in the national experts' prospective study. However, based on the data, it is clear that faculty retention is a grave concern for many of the rural land-grant universities. As one retention administrator observed: "I think the real question is how to retain quality faculty so we are able to retain quality students." Continuing her line of discussion, the interviewee illuminated her conception that without quality faculty, an institution is unlikely to attract, let alone retain, the caliber of students who make up the backbone of most rural land-grant institutions. Contending that "rural isolation is a big problem for faculty," even in an age when telecommunications, distance education and E-mail help to "keep people in touch with what's going on in the real world," this retention administrator keenly voiced a concern shared by many other study participants. "Unless they're after a real life change, we just seem to have a real problem attracting and keeping the good, young faculty," she posited. "We don't pay 'em enough, we don't have the variety or cultural attractions of a big city," she continued, "and, while the scenery is great, in the long run it doesn't help us to retain faculty or students." Other than increasing salaries and providing more professional development opportunities (i.e. opportunities to go to conferences or program development seed money), study participants were at a loss for how to improve this situation in the future. "We're just a stepping stone for the really good one's (faculty), they come here and use us to get to where they really want to go," said one campus retention expert. "They don't really get integrated into the university culture; many are not here long enough," he continued, "and the students sense that so they don't make connections with them." Emphasizing the notion that making meaningful connections with faculty is the key to successful student integration and retention, the future interaction of faculty and retention planning at rural land-grant institutions will certainly need to address this issue of retaining quality faculty.

As campus retention practitioners considered the influence of faculty on the future of retention at rural land-grant universities, they expressed three areas of impact this group might have well into the next century. One trend which appeared consistently across each of the sixteen study participants was their strong contention that faculty would remain a critical element in any future retention endeavors. As many practitioners voiced their

views on this topic, it became clear that any and all future retention programs and services must keep faculty at the center of their efforts in order to achieve success. Adding to the notion that faculty are critical to any future retention efforts, the second category highlighting the continued faculty development challenge presented a bumpy road riddled with pitfalls and obstacles as one considered how to incorporate faculty more successfully into future retention plans. Converting so-called academic Darwinists and changing faculty culture to encourage more consistent and positive faculty-student interactions seemed to be the most challenging, yet important, trend on the horizon for retention planners and practitioners. The final theme to emerge regarding the future of retention and rural land-grant university faculty went beyond the traditional consideration of retaining college students to actively retaining quality faculty. Exemplifying the direct linear relationship between quality faculty and college student retention, many of the study participants described an issue unique to rural land-grant universities. Overcoming the problem of retaining quality faculty had become a major priority for many campus retention experts. Without quality faculty, campus experts contended institutions would be unlikely to attract, let alone retain, the population of students who made up the backbone of most rural land-grant institutions. Placing an emphasis on both faculty and student retention efforts seemed to be an important future trend to watch for at rural land-grant universities.

Long-Term Retention Plans. In a purposeful attempt to have campus retention experts articulate their general vision of the future for retention at rural land-grant universities, study participants were asked to describe/discuss any long-term retention plans their universities might have as they turned the corner to a new century. While it was clear that the underlying assumption of this question was that the given university study site had a plan, the researcher quickly discovered a wide range of responses. In some cases, campus retention experts communicated a very detailed strategic retention plan for the future with specific goals and target rates while other interviewees described very general or vague goals with no measurable objectives or outcomes. In fact, three campus retention experts very honestly indicated that their universities had no real retention plans for the future. One senior-level administrator, noting the lack of a plan at his institution, was unapologetic about his situation: "We want to make a much stronger effort to improve our reten-

tion rates in the future compared to what they currently are--that's a given--but we've been hit with some serious budget cuts recently and that has just had to take priority." He concluded his statement by saying, "we'd love to do some long-term retention planning but we've got to get our financial ducks in a row and keep this place running by doing some long-term financial planning first."

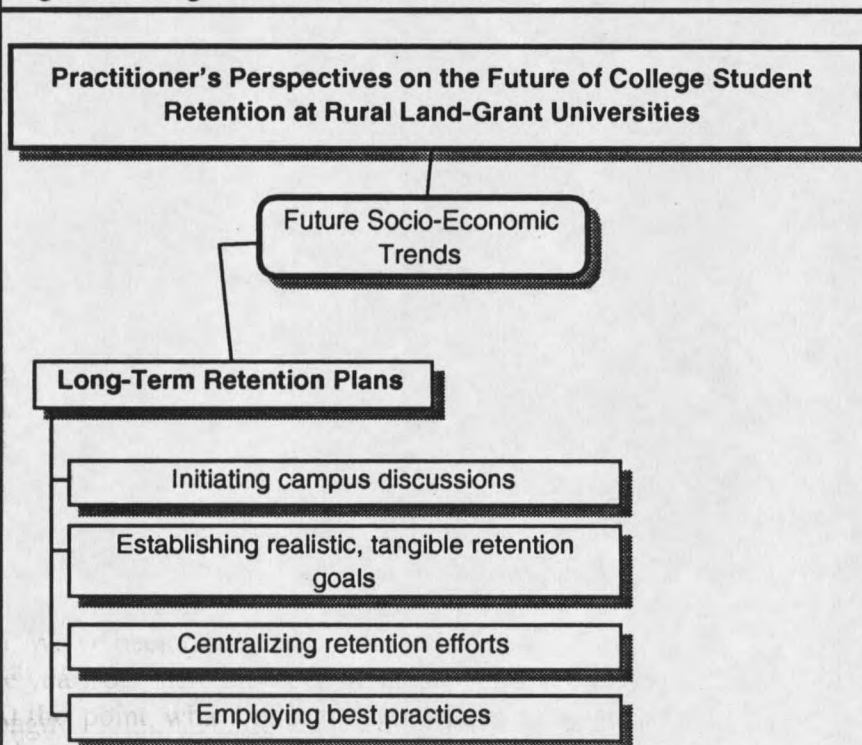
Another retention practitioner described traditional obstacles in the structure and function of higher education administrative processes as getting in the way of her university's long-term retention planning efforts:

We're really trying to complete a long-term strategic enrollment management and retention plan but no recent progress has been made in this area because of the lack of cooperation between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs. This is not the first time in the planning process that this has happened and I'm sure it won't be the last. We just didn't begin our planning in the right way. It came from the top--like 'You *have* to do this retention plan now'. So, in answer to your question, we really have no official plan in place at this time thanks to our own inability to work through this internal strife.

The traditional gap and perceived antagonism between Student and Academic Affairs had thwarted many of the planning efforts for the above retention and enrollment management committee. Expressing her frustration at the lack of a long-term plan after three years of planning, this retention practitioner recommended her university "scrap the whole thing and begin again without the egos and with some fresh new faces and ideas." Attempting to answer the question regarding long-term retention plans, another executive-level retention practitioner responded vaguely by indicating his university had definite plans to improve their current retention rates in the future. When asked if he could provide any specific details or plans to support this effort, the interviewee audibly cleared his throat and stammered his response: "Ah, ah, well, um, I can't really answer that question at this time, well, we just don't have any long-term retention plans." Pausing for a moment, the interviewee then answered the researcher's question with one of his own: "Why? Do the other schools in your study have long-term plans, is this common?" While it became clear that at least three of the study sites had no long-term plans for retention, the researcher was able to make the observation that each of the three schools were at least thinking about retention planning in a general sense.

In contrast to the above examples, thirteen of the sixteen study sites exhibited a very purposeful and directed movement toward long-term retention planning. As the data were analyzed, four distinct categories emerged which exemplified the four distinct phases of retention planning and implementation at rural land-grant universities (Figure 9). The first category centered around the process of initiating discussions around the campus regarding retention planning. Establishing realistic and tangible retention goals was the second common element in retention planning. The third step to emerge from the collective experiences of the retention practitioners focused on centralizing campus retention efforts. Finally, researching and employing best practices became the fourth step in retention planning for rural land-grant universities. While the following paragraphs detail the above four categories of commonality found in the data, they may also be viewed as a process or series of steps utilized by rural land-grant universities to formulate long-term retention plans. It should also be noted that while each of the thirteen universities were at different phases or stages of plan implementation, each of the study participants voiced a similar method for planning encompassing the four stages highlighted below.

Figure 9. Long-Term Retention Plans



One point underscored by each of the university practitioners involved in long-term retention planning was the importance of initiating discussions about the issue across campus. The on-campus retention experts all seemed to believe this was the first and most necessary step in effective long-term planning. Making his point in an emphatic manner, one executive-level retention expert epitomized the consensus toward initiating campus discussions:

To do long-term planning right, you have to foster a university-wide discussion of retention, you have to initiate a grassroots effort, rather, a discussion. You absolutely can't under any circumstances, lead a retention effort from an office or by making announcements or pronouncements. It has to be something that is grassroots.

Detailing strategies for initiating campus-wide discussions regarding retention, several retention practitioners cautioned that when you begin long-term planning and cultural change one should not expect it to happen quickly or easily. In fact, many interviewees were swift to point out that the entity advancing the notion of long-term retention planning should concurrently gain support from selected faculty, staff and administrators, and gradually build consensus and support as the discussion and planning phase move forward. Most importantly, each study participant involved in any phase of long-term retention planning strongly urged the direct participation of a representative group of faculty in any discussion or planning sessions. Many practitioners used the phrase "faculty must feel ownership in the process" to describe the importance of faculty participation in the discussion phase of the long-term planning process.

While initiating discussions, actively involving faculty and gaining grassroots support are critical to the first phase of long-term retention planning at rural land-grant universities, simply talking about retention according to one campus expert is not enough to get a plan off the ground:

You know we started this whole long-term planning scenario years ago by getting people together all over campus and hashing out ideas and ways to improve our retention rates over the long run. I mean we had everyone involved from faculty to residence hall staff. That was good. Here's the bad. We've been talking about our long-term retention plans for the last five years but there has been no actual support behind our discussions. At this point, what I once thought was exciting grassroots stuff has turned out to be something I feel we are only paying lipservice

to...there is no real commitment yet. We just don't have the financial support or a lot of faculty buy-in. Our administration likes to talk about how we are talking about retention but no one is doing anything beyond talking.

In addition to gaining upper-level administrative commitment both in terms of capital and formally articulated support, many campus retention experts expressed the need to formalize discussions into documentable, measurable goals. Moving beyond the talking stage was clearly the next critical hurdle most retention practitioners felt they needed to make in order to successfully begin the second phase of long-term retention planning on their campuses. And, to accomplish this task, each of the thirteen study participants actively engaged in long-term planning recommended establishing realistic and tangible retention goals. This second category encompassed data which were thick with specific examples of long-term goals and lists of tangible, realistic program improvements across each of the study sites. The following quotes represent four distinct approaches to the establishment and articulation of long-term planning goals. Each of the following examples approaches the process of long-term retention planning from a different perspective and places an emphasis on divergent programs and applications. However, each of the examples share several similarities. They all place great value on front-loading retention efforts to the entering student population. They also speak to improving graduation rates and infusing the retention effort across the campus to include faculty, residence halls, student support services and other cultural/environmental components. Finally, each of the four examples represent similar plans, goals and target rates expressed by the other nine study sites engaged in long-term retention planning.

Lending specific target rates and quantifiable measures to her discussion of a long-term retention plan later during her response, one executive-level retention expert began her description of her university's long-term retention plan from a very general vantage point. When asked to relay some of the key components of her plan, this interviewee began by saying, "well, I think it's important to begin with the big picture and then talk specifics like actual numbers and retention and graduation rates." True to her conviction, she went on to address the major areas targeted in her school's long-term retention plan:

We want to play to our strengths, continue to do what works and keep trying out new things. Our long-term plans include some very serious

experimentation with learning communities. We want to continue to evolve our Freshmen Seminar to make it more effective in terms of students' needs and faculty desires. We want to build a stronger faculty development program from our Center. All of these goals are written out and presented in our formal Retention plan developed by the Retention and Enrollment Management Committee. We've got a timeline and benchmarks and everything.

Another executive-level campus retention expert presented a bimodal approach to long-term retention planning which not only addressed the broader cultural and environmental concerns related to retention programming but also incorporated specific quantifiable measures for success:

Our retention program is two years old and it's multifaceted. Our long-term plans have been (and really it's still ongoing), ah, established on two levels. On the one hand, we want targets. During the next five years we want our graduation rate to be a reasonable seventy-nine percent. On another level, we look at more personal goals like what we want the quality of the student experience to be like around here. So, we've started to talk about how to build community and conducting satisfaction surveys to see what students want and need. I guess, what I'm trying to say is that our long-term plan is in progress. We are trying to establish university baselines regarding the quality of the experience here and once we have this info to begin to target the areas of need one-by-one.

When his Committee on Retention presented their first draft of the long-term retention plan to the upper-level administrators on his campus, one retention practitioner described the process as "a total flop." According to this study participant, the committee presented a plan which had a big picture, student development approach "with lots of words like 'community' and 'transition' and 'integration' and 'support' and good student development words like that." He continued to say that "it went over like, excuse the expression, a fart in church with the Dean's Council." As a result, the Committee changed its approach to a very quantified presentation of the plan which resulted in great success with the upper-level administrators.

Now, the Dean's Council has identified retention and academic success as our number one academic priority. We have set a goal of increasing freshmen to sophomore retention by two percent per year for the next few years until we reach an eighty percent retention rate. We have established a long-term goal of sixty percent for our six-year gradua-

tion rate and have a number of other specific plans which span the campus.

Confirming the fact that much of the original intent of the plan and some of the original language of the document were left intact, the study participant pointed out that given the particular culture of his institution it was the numbers, the specific quantifiable outcomes and measures which promoted the plan's adoption not, as he put it, "the touchy-feely language of student development theory." The fourth long-term retention plan example placed the burden of retention planning with the various academic departments across campus. While this executive-level retention practitioner included general target retention rates for the university and specific enrollment goals, the primary responsibility and reward for retention programming was focused on the faculty.

All of our emerging retention programs we view as long-term. We have set a long-term goal for ourselves. We are planning to attract and retain at least two-to-three thousand more students during the next seven years. We will also establish an incentive program for the [academic] departments that will give them budget increases for the success they have retaining additional students. Increased retention rates will mean increased budgets for successful departments. I guess we're manipulating the reward structure here but it makes it very clear that we have some long-term retention goals that everyone will need to contribute to.

The interviewee also went on to describe general program objectives which included the enhancement of their freshmen year programs and establishing living-learning communities. As he concluded his discussion, however, he came back to the issue of faculty involvement by reiterating that "it's really up to the faculty to bear the burden of responsibility on this retention issue." As this study participant indicated, faculty make the most difference in a student's decision to leave or stay at a university, "they should either be rewarded for their efforts or view this plan as an incentive to stop trying to 'pass the buck'."

Adding specific goals and objectives, each of the thirteen study participants listed particular areas at their universities which would be targeted in their long-range plans. These specific long-term goals are listed in Table 6 below. The goal categories included nine areas common across the thirteen campuses with long-term retention plans. Each of the nine general goal areas is listed in order of occurrence followed by the specific state-

ments or general indications made by interviewees on that topic. For example, study participants with long-term retention plans were most concerned about academic advising as a retention goal more than any other category. Similarly, faculty and staff development issues were the next most mentioned goals as participants described their long-term retention plans. While each of the campus retention experts mentioned baseline data collection, assessment, evaluation and feedback as essential elements in their plans, most interviewees only gave this category a passing mention as though it were an afterthought or a forgone conclusion. As one retention practitioner stated at the end of her lengthy response to the long-term retention plan question, "oh, and we'll also be doing some data gathering and evaluation and stuff like that, but that's the boring administrative stuff and you don't need to hear about that."

Table 6. Long-Term Retention Goals

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**Advising**

- placing stronger emphasis on academic advising
- training faculty and other advisors to incorporate student assessment data (data for dropout proneness) into the formal advising process
- making advising more central to the retention effort; focusing on academic advising as the cornerstone of future retention efforts
- developing a freshman advising center
- Conducting regular advising reviews for both professional and faculty advisors

**Faculty and Staff Development**

- developing, increasing and expanding faculty and staff development programs
- increasing faculty awareness of student development processes and other retention-related issues
- creating faculty incentives/rewards for undergraduate education, innovative teaching and quality advising
- implementing front-line staff training programs for customer-centered, total quality service

**Setting Target Rates**

- making single digit, first-year dropout rates a reality
- establishing targets for student success
- establishing goals for student development
- establishing target graduation percentages
- creating retention incentive programs for academic departments across campus increasing funding proportionally to programs that increase their retention rates
- setting targets to reduce the number of credit hours to graduation back down to one hundred and twenty credits
- reducing the average years to graduation from six to five

Table 6. Long-Term Retention Goals

**Front-Loading Efforts**

- placing stronger emphasis on new student orientation
- working individually with freshmen who have academic difficulty during their first semester
- evaluating all incoming freshmen for dropout proneness
- improving and expanding the freshman year experience from orientation through the end of the freshmen year

**Diversity**

- placing a new emphasis on diversity
- recruiting more diverse students, staff and faculty

**Improving Technological Infrastructure**

- establishing new media centers in the library
- bringing all aspect of the university up-to-date including residence halls, administrative offices and faculty offices

**Establishing Learner-Centered Environments or Communities**

- developing alternative evaluation/assessment measures for students (other than midterms, finals and other tests)
- creating group study rooms across campus, not just in the residence halls
- changing the faculty emphasis from teaching to learning
- encouraging learner-centered teaching
- developing learning communities
- implementing a learner-centered curriculum

**Service Learning**

- expanding service learning programs and opportunities to both students and faculty
- making service learning a more viable component of the curriculum

**Baseline Data Collection, Assessment, Evaluation and Feedback**

- conducting student satisfaction surveys
- establishing retention baseline data to assess what the university community is like and move up progressively from that point
- reviewing and reevaluating all university processes and environments to determine impact on student s and retention rates
- continuing all retention-related program assessment, evaluation and feedback

It is clear that at each of the thirteen study sites engaged in long-term retention planning, establishing realistic and tangible retention goals has resulted in a comprehensive consideration of both the campus environment and culture and how they interact with new student transition. The nine goal categories outlined above demonstrate both the practical tasks of long-term retention planning which encompass setting target rates; improving the

technological infrastructure; and conducting baseline data collection, assessment, evaluation and feedback as well as the more quality related tasks of improving advising; faculty and staff development; new student and freshman year experiences (front-loading); diversity; learner-centered environments or communities; and service learning. As many of the campus retention experts indicated, it is the combination of the practical and the qualitative which contribute to the whole of a successful long-term retention plan.

The third theme to emerge from the data regarding long-term retention planning centered around centralizing campus retention efforts. For many of the campus retention experts, this meant conducting campus wide assessments which identified and evaluated all of the entities involved with the retention effort and bringing the successful programs together under one committee or task force, or, as in three cases, one office. Outlining the general process of centralization her school was engaged in, one retention practitioner described this third step in the long-term planning process:

Our various retention efforts are so distributed, so disjointed, that we have decided to move in a direction where we assess what it is that everyone is doing regarding retention and consolidate, combine and coordinate from one area like a retention committee or task force. That way everyone moves beyond just doing pieces of retention to actually contributing to the whole pie. After we do this self-assessment of our strengths and weaknesses, we'll continue with our long-term strategic planning.

Also describing the centralizing phase of long-term retention planning, a senior-level campus retention expert added words of caution to consider during the self-assessment and consolidation process:

When you talk about changing the environment, it doesn't happen overnight and it's not just one thing. You need to be methodical, establish benchmarks and build support and consensus as you go. It's also good to bring it all together, at some point sooner rather than later, so everyone involved in retention knows what everyone else is doing. You get less duplication and less confusion that way.

He went on to say that, in his opinion, it is critical that any campus engaged in long-term retention planning create a committee or task force to oversee the effort and to guide the process as the plan is implemented. Recounting the particulars of the centralizing phase of his university's long-term retention planning, one campus retention expert stressed the

importance of self-assessment in the process. Further, this interviewee also brought to light the value of including a wide-range of campus constituents in the planning process ranging from students to administrators.

We're conducting self-assessments. In fact, you might have heard of this, we're doing a Noel/Levitz retention assessment or audit. We simply want to find out what's working and what's not on this campus. After this, we're going to present our retention plan--a plan developed with faculty, staff and students, oh, and administrators of course (laughs)--to the President, student government and the Enrollment Management Committee. Then we'll implement the plan and have those folks [the faculty and staff directly involved in the program implementation process] answer to the new Retention and Enrollment Management Committee instead of going it alone or independently as they have in the past.

The fourth and final category to come to light from the data regarding long-term retention planning at rural land-grant universities, converged around the theme of employing best practices. This was the fourth step in a long-range planning process which began with internal discussions and institution-specific goal setting to centralizing retention programs through introspective self assessments. Summing up the sentiments of most of the campus retention experts, one retention practitioner concisely related the fourth step in long-term retention planning:

We have a good idea of what we want to accomplish during the next ten or so years. We've got the plans and the goals. We are looking at what the best of the best practices are around the country now and seeing which ones we can adapt for use at [our university].

It appeared as though looking beyond the confines of their own institutions was the last step most campus retention experts engaged in long-term retention planning took to complete their planning process. For many, this process involved a great deal of research and communication with colleagues across the country. When asked to describe why he felt he needed to engage in researching and employing best practices on his campus, one senior-level retention administrator responded with a chuckle and stated, "well, now, we don't want to go around reinventing the wheel do we?" "There are a lot of good and creative and innovative things going on out there with retention and there are some real flops too," he

continued, "and we just want to make sure we're not missing out and we use those practices which are best suited to our needs."

Campus retention experts at rural land-grant universities across the country provided a wide range of long-term retention plans for their institutions. In three cases, retention practitioners admitted to having no long-term plans but they each gave an indication of being interested in initiating the process. Thirteen out of the sixteen study sites had long-term retention plans which fell into one of four categories or planning stages:

1. **Initiating campus-wide discussions** regarding retention and long-term planning;
2. **Establishing realistic and tangible retention goals** based on the climate, environment, location and resources of the institution which measure quantitative and qualitative outcomes;
3. **Centralizing retention efforts** on campuses through institutional assessment, retention and/or enrollment management committee establishment, and program consolidation; and
4. **Employing best practices** from institutions across the country as they fit into the culture, environment and fiscal constraints of the individual institution.

As one considers the four categories of the long-term retention plans at rural land-grant universities, it is interesting to note that the above four themes may also be viewed as stages or steps in a planning process. Of the thirteen land-grant universities with long-term retention plans in the study, each site described a similar four-phase planning process to the steps noted above and their institution's place within that four-step process. While the various long-term retention plans reflect a broad range of diversity across the sixteen study sites, many individual plans share similar characteristics in terms of goals and implementation procedures. One other characteristic came to light as many of the campus retention experts concluded their discussions of the long-term retention plans. Nearly all of the thirteen study participants engaged in long-term planning advised, and in some cases strongly recommended, that any campus interested in improving "retention rates, campus climate, faculty interface, programs and services--you name it--engage themselves in some sort of long-term retention planning process." As one executive-level retention practitioner observed, "planning like this forces you to look at every stone in every corner of your

institution and forces you to see the good with the bad and helps you move the detritus out of there." Echoing the sentiments of many other campus retention experts, this individual advised, "it's something everyone should do, not just your rural land-grant schools."

### Chapter Summary

Providing their insights, anecdotes and "in the trenches" perspectives on the future of college student retention at rural land-grant universities, sixteen campus-based retention experts added a wealth of information to the area of retention-related programming and long-term planning. Expressing their thoughts and opinions, and looking forward to the next ten to fifteen years, retention practitioners discussed future directions in college student retention within the context of economic trends; public perception and accountability issues; changing college student demographics; social trends; technology; faculty issues; and long-term retention plans. Anticipating how each of these trends would interact with retention programs and plans at rural land-grant universities in the new millennium was the primary focus of the study.

Practitioners' perspectives on the future of college student retention were divided into two major categories: defining retention and discussing future retention planning and programming in light of the seven socio-economic trends. The first major category, defining retention, provided a unique insight into the campus culture at many rural land-grant universities. Unlike the national retention experts interviewed for the prospective study, campus-based retention practitioners were much more pragmatic and less idealistic on the whole when it came to defining retention on their campuses. As campus retention experts attempted to define the term retention within the context of their individual institutions, definitions centered around three areas: the Federal definition of retention; an internal-cultural-environmental definition; and no clearly perceived institutional definition. While all of the study sites exhibited definitions in one of the above three areas several of the retention practitioners seemed to take a bifurcated approach to defining retention on their campuses utilizing the Federal definition as it applied to the quantitative measurement outcomes required by law, and the internal-cultural-environmental definition as it applied to program planning and development.

Expressing their views on the future of retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities within the context of seven socio-economic trends listed above, campus-based retention experts illuminated a wide range of concerns and future directions for retention which were unique to the rural land-grant university experience. Considering the interaction between future economic and financial trends and retention, campus practitioners saw the future on two levels: the impact of the external economic and financial trends on retention and the impact of internal economic and financial trends on retention. In terms of the external economic forces, retention practitioners were primarily concerned about decreasing state support; state funding for public higher education moving to 100 percent performance-based criteria; and the impact of the natural ebb and flow of economic forces. When casting an eye inward to their own institutions, campus retention experts saw four areas of future impact and interaction between internal economic forces and retention programming and planning. Internal revenue reallocations were the most pressing concern for retention practitioners at all levels followed by a continued unease about the continued funding imbalance between recruitment and retention efforts on campus. The third internal economic trend which retention practitioners forecasted would impact retention was the continued increase in educational costs. Most participants voiced the concern that these cost increases would jeopardize rural land-grant universities by outpricing themselves beyond the point of accessibility to the very populations they were created to serve. The final internal economic trend campus retention experts felt would impact future retention plans and programs centered around the traditional boom and bust cycle of retention rates. For many campus retention practitioners, future retention plans needed to move beyond simply reacting to high dropout rates and ignoring high retention rates to establishing a more long-term approach to retention programming which accounted for both the peaks and the valleys in the retention numbers game. The ultimate outcome of such a plan would be to regulate the boom and bust cycle by retaining more students during both good and bad times with long-term programming and eventually improving the institution's graduation rates.

The second major socio-economic trend reflected the projected impact of public perceptions and accountability trends on the future of retention programs and plans at rural land-grant universities. For many retention practitioners, the most important means of

contending with the momentum-gaining public accountability movement was to stay ahead of the trend by educating, enlightening and evangelizing to the public regarding the specific retention plans, program and practices on a given campus. Ensuring that the public understands what your institution is doing and demonstrating how well you're doing are the keys to continued support of your institution's retention efforts, according to several forward looking campus retention experts. Building on this contention, the second trend to emerge when retention practitioners discussed the impact of public accountability and perception trends on retention focused on utilizing best practices, and establishing benchmarks and other accountability measures. As many of the seasoned campus retention experts indicated, it is essential for institutions to establish these outcomes-based retention measures so that the public and/or legislators do not impose ill-informed or ill-considered measures on an institution. The third resounding concern to arise from the discussion of public accountability was the conviction most retention practitioners had that public scrutiny of public higher education would continue to increase in the future. Again, this forecasted trend prompted many campus-based experts to stress the need for establishing good public relations through education and solid outcomes-based measurement practices. Finally, a small group of rural land-grant university retention practitioners differentiated themselves from the above three forecasted trends by stating they felt their institutions' retention programs would experience no future change or impact based on public accountability trends. In fact, they were very clear to indicate that in their respective states public scrutiny was a "non-issue" as far as their campus retention plans and programs were concerned.

When retention practitioners at rural land-grant institutions considered future retention plans and programs in light of the anticipated changes in college student demographics, they tended to be very provincial with their responses. Unlike the national experts in the prospective study, campus-based retention experts tended to ignore national demographic trend data favoring a focus on regional demographic trends. This trend was also the favored approach in most of the significant literature related to college student demographic trends. As each study site was considered, the tendency was for schools to fall in either a North-South, or East-West grouping depending on the particular trend under discussion. For instance, the concerns of many Northern-tier schools did not reflect the antic-

ipated increase in student diversity schools in the South seemed to be planning for in the future. Similarly, Western schools forecasted a boom in the number of high school graduates within the next five to ten years while schools in the East expected little or no increases in this particular area. The second trend to surface as retention experts discussed the future of retention within a demographic context was the future retention challenges many rural land-grant universities would face. Given the specific or regional demographic changes on the horizon for each of the study sites, campus retention experts foresaw a great need to develop and strengthen retention programs which addressed the intellectual, cognitive and developmental needs of their changing college student population. While the programming and service needs of each institution varied by region, the fact that each school anticipated these changes based on demographic data emphasized the future retention challenges common to all sixteen study sites. The third and final trend to come out of the discussion concerning demographic changes narrowed the focus of the subject down to a consideration of developing specific retention-related programs for targeted student population. For most schools this meant creating new programs which would anticipate the academic, cultural and other transition needs of students with more diverse racial, ethnic and age-related backgrounds.

Considering the future of retention programs and plans within the context of broad social trends, campus-based retention practitioners were very quick to identify three areas of interaction as they forecasted a direction for the new century. The most discussed issue to surface centered squarely on the role of evolving social values and attitudes. The behaviors and attitudes which seem to be emerging from society and manifesting themselves in tomorrow's college students will need to be taken into consideration if future retention programs are to be successful. Retention programs must be elastic enough to anticipate a new order of values and attitudes and accommodate services to best meet these needs. The second anticipated trend on the horizon for retention practitioners at rural land-grant universities was the changing nature of the family and traditional family structures. Attributing a host of current and future retention-related challenges to the evolving nature of the family, several campus retention experts contended colleges and universities needed to provide services and programs which helped individuals establish interpersonal connections with peers, staff, mentors or faculty enabling these students to become confident and

committed learners. The view that the university was really a microcosm of the greater society was the third and final trend to emerge from the data. As retention experts hypothesized about the future interaction between society and retention and rural land-grant universities, many commented that their institutions reflected the greater society. As a result, rural land-grant universities would need to reflect the service-oriented nature of society and meet the needs of a parent and student population used to full-service, one stop shopping. Moving the concept of student retention beyond the academic realm, campus-based experts foresaw a future where a full web of support would be needed for students ranging from health services to convenience stores in order to meet new social demands, and attract and retain quality students.

The issue of technology seemed to prompt more speculation and excitement among the sixteen study participants than any other socio-economic trend. However, dreams of virtual universities and seamless degrees were tempered with cautious optimism as retention practitioners contemplated the future of retention programming and planning in a technological world. The first trend to surface in this category was that technology is, and will continue to be, a double-sided sword. Cutting both ways, technology would bring many new and innovative advancements for improving the quality and convenience of student but, by the same token, the blade would cut the other way to excise the human touch from a field which relies on fostering interpersonal interactions for success. The second technology trend most campus retention experts felt would impact retention stemmed from their belief that the future of retention and public higher education would be redefined through distance education. Taking a very positive approach to the advent of distance learning technology, several retention practitioners advanced the notion that distance education would help to increase access and retention in geographically isolated land-grant universities for a growing population of traditional and nontraditional students. Further, many campus retention experts confidently asserted that distance education would radically change the landscape of public higher education compelling universities to reconsider the traditional definitions for attrition and retention.

Speaking directly about the socio-economic construct of faculty culture which reflects issues of change internal to the university, retention practitioners expressed strong convictions regarding the pivotal role of faculty in any future retention effort. The concept

that faculty would remain a critical element in any future retention endeavors well into the next century was the first trend to be introduced by virtually all of the study participants. Contending that quality student-faculty interactions would remain the backbone of retention, campus retention experts were assertive in their insistence that future retention programs and plans be inclusive of faculty. The second future trend to surface regarding the future interaction between retention and faculty concentrated on the concept of the continued challenges brought on by faculty development initiatives. Traditionally stalwart in their resistance to training and development in fields outside their own disciplines, faculty will continue to be reluctant agents of retention on most rural land-grant university campuses according to study participants. Converting academic Darwinists to promoters of student success and retention would continue to be one of the greatest retention related challenges in the new millennium. Finally, the third issue to arise as campus-based retention practitioners considered the future interaction of retention and faculty centered around the theme of faculty retention. While the question was targeted at college student retention issues, many study participants advanced the notion that faculty retention would continue to be a concern for most rural land-grant universities. Linking efforts to retain quality faculty with student retention efforts would, as many retention practitioners asserted, compel overall future retention initiatives to experience more acceptance and success in the future.

Giving form and voice to their vision of the future through the lens of retention, retention practitioners described their long-term retention plans within the rural land-grant university framework. As practitioners described their future retention plans, four themes emerged which could be viewed both as trends in long-term retention planning, and as four steps in a retention planning process. The first trend advocated initiating discussions about long-term retention planning on campus. For all of the campus retention experts engaged in long-term planning, this was a critical first step to gaining grassroots support for any new retention-related initiative. The second trend focused on establishing realistic and tangible retention goals based on the climate, environment, location and resources of the institution which measure specific quantitative and qualitative outcomes. The third trend or step in the long-term retention planning process promoted centralizing retention efforts on campus through institutional assessment, retention and/or enrollment management

committee establishment, and program consolidation. Identifying one committee or task force as being the group charged with coordinating campus-wide retention efforts seemed to be the preferred leadership model for most campuses in the future. The fourth and final long-term retention planning trend, and the last step in the planning process, described the employment of best practices from institutions across the country as they fit into the culture, environment and fiscal constraints of the individual institution. For many practitioners this was an important last step in the long-term retention planning process. As several practitioners indicated, an institution would only be ready to employ best practices once the groundwork for retention program development and planning had been laid through internal institution-wide discussions, self assessment and goal setting, and the centralization of current campus retention efforts.

Differentiating retention practitioners' perspectives on the future of retention at rural land-grant universities from those of national retention experts has yielded a wealth of retention-related programming and planning information to consider as the new millennium dawns. Identifying the major areas of interaction between dominant socio-economic trends and retention on rural land-grant university campuses emphasizes the unique mission and function of these institutions within the broader public higher education framework. Finally, the data presented in this chapter provide a road map to the future which fuses national socio-economic trends and expectations with regional insights and practitioners' sensibilities affording one a glimpse of the future of retention through the eyes of a select group of individuals.

## CHAPTER 6

## SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach to combine significant research, expert testimony and insights from campus-based practitioners, this study applied qualitative futures research to the area of college student retention at rural land-grant universities. Exploring the range of social and economic influences on retention and public higher education as well as the variety of long-term planning options available to retention administrators, managers and practitioners, this study attempted to anticipate how choice, chance and socio-economic trends would combine to create a scenario for retention management at rural land-grant universities. The two-fold purpose of this study was to employ a futures-oriented qualitative approach to the identification of the retention challenges facing the rural land-grant university in the twenty-first century; and to develop an institutional plan for college student persistence which would optimally anticipate and accommodate the changes rural land-grant universities may face in this arena as they move into the next millennium.

Employing three distinct phases of analysis, this study synthesized a broad view of future retention challenges in order to provide a progressive, full-spectrum examination of upcoming or potential retention challenges for individuals involved in retention management, programming and planning. The research analysis process occurred on three graduated levels which allowed the study to be comprehensive as well as multifaceted. The review of significant literature represented the most formalized documented ideas and opinions regarding the prevailing socio-economic trends impacting retention at rural land-grant universities. Following the literature review, the national retention expert interviews

added a less formalized, more idealized and spontaneous approach to the topic in a manner which was still primarily based on research, yet tailored to the rural land-grant university tradition. Finally, the campus-based practitioner interviews added an informal pragmatic layer to the analysis which provided an insight into the day-to-day realities of retention planning at rural land-grant universities. Contributing their opinions, which were based on a reality embedded in the historical, political and socio-economic movements unique to their institutions, campus-based retention practitioners presented a multitude of suggestions and examples for implementing retention theory in an informal and practical fashion ranging from triage efforts to strategic long-term planning.

In considering the issues of future trends, retention and new directions for rural land-grant universities, this research report attempted to outline both the retention challenges administrators, managers and practitioners may face in the near future and the methods of planning which may assist them with their long-term retention planning endeavors at a point where the future socio-economic trends and persistence issues at rural land-grant universities intersect. Beginning with a brief consideration of the theoretical underpinnings of the college student dropout and persistence phenomenon and an overview of the historical basis for the land-grant university tradition, the report proceeds to focus on the most evident social and economic trends and/or challenges impacting college student retention in a rural land-grant university setting. A qualitative futures-based methodology which relies extensively on the use of information and telecommunications technologies provided the framework for the data collection and analysis process.

In both the prospective study with four national retention experts and the larger data set from the sixteen retention practitioners at rural land-grant universities, the exploration of future retention trends at rural land-grant universities was conducted within the context of eight major categories: social trends; economic concerns; issues of public perception and accountability; technological innovations, integration and utilization concerns; changing demographics; trends in college student enrollment; faculty culture; and the evolving mission of the rural land-grant university. Both groups provided similar indications regarding the nature and impact of each socio-economic trend mentioned above and their collective impacts on the future of retention at rural land-grant universities. Concluding the summary of findings section, an overview of the current retention plans and models

employed at the rural land-grant universities is presented along with a suggested retention program implementation plan based on a review of the data.

Anticipating the future as it relates to the central theme of college student retention and retention programming at rural land-grant universities requires a solid foundation in retention theory as well as a broadly defined view of social and economic trends as they relate to public higher education. Predicting the intersection between college student retention theory and practice and future socio-economic movements is the key to understanding and developing a scenario for long-term retention planning at rural land-grant universities. In this report, retention theorists, experts, managers and practitioners have reacted to the growing complexity of their environments. In their collective view of the future, rural land-grant universities must expect to experience greater pressure from the public, legislators, parents, students and other constituents than at any other time in their history. As both national retention experts and campus-based practitioners suggest, individuals involved in retention programming and planning need to retool, innovate and plan for transformation while endeavoring to create a campus community which dedicates its primary energy to supporting students in their efforts to become successful learners, employees and citizens in the world of the twenty-first century. Finally, the data presented in this research report provide a roadmap to the future which merges national social and economic trends and expectations with expert advice, regional insights and practitioners' sensibilities and affords a glimpse of the future of retention through the eyes of a select group of individuals.

### Recommendations and Conclusions

Planning for the future of retention at rural land-grant universities necessitates a broad and eclectic understanding of both the external and internal forces of change which may impact future persistence-related efforts on campus in addition to a specific understanding of the cultural and social mores of the institution. In fact, most of the data presented in this report support the notion that there is no one prefabricated approach to retention planning, programming and management suitable for all campuses. However, there are certain salient points to consider when engaging in retention planning and pro-

gram development which will apply to most rural land-grant universities. The recommendations described in this section are presented in a way which highlights the major trends to consider in each social and economic category as well as a suggestion for developing a plan to accommodate future changes and challenges. In addition to these recommendations, some "pearls of wisdom" from experts and practitioners are listed which may help the retention planner avoid some of the problems and pitfalls inherent in the development of a retention management program or plan.

### Social Trends

Data from the research literature, national experts and retention practitioners highlight various social trends which will profoundly impact the nature of retention programs and services in the near future. Shifting social values and attitudes; convenience-oriented, consumer-savvy parents and students; and a society which has shifted from production to service industries are all trends which demand consideration when developing retention plans. Based on these trends, individuals involved in retention planning, programming and management should consider the following recommendations.

First, strong consideration must be given to the evolving social values and attitudes prevalent in our society. The behaviors and attitudes which seem to be emerging from society and manifesting themselves in tomorrow's college students will need to be taken into consideration if future retention programs are to be successful. Retention programs must be elastic enough to anticipate a new order of values and attitudes and develop and accommodate services to best meet these needs. The second anticipated trend on the horizon for retention practitioners at rural land-grant universities was the changing nature of the family and traditional family structures. Attributing a host of current and future retention-related challenges to the evolving nature of the family, several campus retention experts contended colleges and universities needed to provide services and programs which helped individuals establish interpersonal connections with peers, staff, mentors or faculty enabling these students to become confident and committed learners.

The second set of recommendations pertaining to social trends comes in response to increasingly convenience-oriented, consumer-savvy parents and students. All three of the data sets, from the literature, national experts and practitioners, point to a society which

places a premium on convenience and values customer-oriented, full-service learning establishments. Public higher education will need to reevaluate how it responds to a more consumer-oriented society. Retention programs and services must take into account the needs of the student and place them at the center of any future initiatives. Learner-centered environments which respond to the individual student must become the new standard for retention programs and for the campus culture. To best meet this demand and develop future responsive retention plans, rural land-grant universities will need to reflect the service-oriented nature of society and meet the needs of a parent and student population used to full-service, one-stop shopping. A full web of support must be created for students ranging from health services to convenience stores in order to meet new social demands, and attract and retain quality students. Responding to this trend in a manner which focuses on the student will allow rural land-grant universities to serve a broader segment of society more meaningfully and more effectively.

Finally, the major social paradigm shift from production to service industries mandates that rural land-grant institutions adjust the methods they employ to interface with students and rethink the traditional pedagogical outcomes of an undergraduate education. The manner in which rural land-grant universities teach problem solving, critical thinking and life-long learning skills must reflect the needs of twenty-first century society. Speaking specifically in terms of retention-related programming and planning for the next century, attending to the predominant trends in society will facilitate a smoother transition process for new students as they attempt to reconcile their previous educational and social experiences with the new culture environment and community of the rural land-grant university. Further, the social transition from production to service industries will require large changes in public higher education. Reflective of the social transformation of society as a whole, there will be a paradigm shift in public postsecondary education from centers of higher learning to centers of learning *and* skill acquisition, certification and credentialing. A wider segment of the population will need to take advantage of the education afforded at rural land-grant universities as they attempt to update, refine and retool their work-related skills in order to maintain individual marketability. Again, retention programs will need to focus their plans and services toward an increasingly discerning student consumer who may be more interested in course completion than degree completion.

### Economic Trends

The literature and discussion related to the economic trends predicted to impact retention programming and planning at rural land-grant universities was voluminous. Concerns, suggestions and projections centered on trends external as well as internal to the university. The following four recommendations represent a distillation of the data from the literature, national experts and campus-based retention experts.

First, rural land-grant universities must respond better to the increasing globalization of the economy as well as the shift from a production-oriented to a service-oriented economy simply because of their location, size and limited access to resources. Providing training, internship and student exchange opportunities which address these trends will help rural land-grant universities attract and retain students. As a corollary to the discussion regarding the status of the economy, national experts and campus-based practitioners alike mentioned the relative strength and stability of the American economy. While both groups agreed on the relative benefits the stable economy had on public higher education, they did not agree on how this economic trend would impact retention rates. In fact, there was a direct contrast between experts and practitioners as they discussed this facet of the economy. Experts said as long as the economy remains stable, parents will feel confident about sending their children to college and that the stable economy would help to increase retention rates. Retention practitioners asserted a good economy was bad for retention because it lured students away from school and into the work place. Based on their experiences, practitioners felt students would be more likely to make a choice for a job involving money rather than a choice involving debt.

The second recommendation to surface from the combined data is that rural land-grant universities need to make a purposeful effort to focus their interests in retention and retention-related programming on long-term strategic planning rather than short-term economically-linked efforts. Future retention plans needed to move beyond simply overreacting to high dropout rates and ignoring high retention rates to establishing a more long-term sustainable approach to retention programming which accounts for both the peaks and the valleys in the retention numbers game. The ultimate outcome of such a plan would be to regulate the boom and bust cycle of student persistence by retaining more students during both good and bad times with long-term programming and retention management

processes. Eventually, this management-oriented approach would improve the institution's retention and graduation rates. Further consideration must also be given to the tremendous decline in state funding for public higher education programs and services. Based on this fact, it is essential for rural land-grant universities to plan for an increasingly limited amount of state funds if they are to survive in an increasingly competitive economic environment where prisons take priority over education. Understanding how this decrease in state funds will impact programs and services which help to attract and retain students would be the first step toward a brighter financial future. Financial aid, student services, recruiting efforts and quality faculty are all areas which will need to be buttressed by alternative funding sources as the trend toward shrinking state funds continues. Rural land-grant universities will need to diversify and seek funding from other sources, similar to the private school model, as well as investing time and effort in order to increase student responsiveness and quality consciousness. Satisfied students are frequently retained students which directly results in a good reputation for the university and increased tuition dollars.

The research literature, national experts and practitioners all expressed profound concern about the widening gap between the higher education "have's" and "have not's" specifically when considering issues of college accessibility and affordability. Concerned about fulfilling the mission and intent of the land-grant university tradition to keep higher education accessible to the general public, experts and practitioners alike advocated stringent cost controls and improved financial aid of all kinds. In sum, the third recommendation evident in the data regarding economic trends urges retention planners and practitioners to monitor the cost, price and value of an education at a rural land-grant university and ensure the continued accessibility and affordability of public higher education.

Finally, as rural land-grant universities plan for the future, it is important to consider how the economic trends as a whole may be amplified or diminished at institutions on the geographic and economic fringes of public higher education. For many of the practitioners at rural land-grant universities, issues related to economically depressed states, or states with a fiscally conservative populace seemed to play a direct role in the support and success of retention-related programs, plans and initiatives. For example, as state funds wither, the importance of grant-funded projects and research grows. As faculty and admin-

istrators tend to encourage more investment, both in terms of time and effort, toward obtaining research grants in lieu of state funds, institutions often find it difficult to invest in or sustain many retention efforts. This reaction tends to further remove faculty from their critical involvement with students and places a tremendous burden on those involved in retention-related activities and programs to substantiate their efforts and value to the university. Learning how to advocate deliberate retention management practices and demonstrate the cultural and fiscal advantages of retention, in conjunction with recruiting and research, would be a first step toward retention planning in a rural land-grant university context. While the ethical and educational advantages of sound retention management practices are important to the overall, long-term health of an institution's culture and reputation, many faculty and administrators only focus, as one practitioner stated, "on the dollar signs." Learning how to communicate in the native economic and financial language of higher education will be a tremendous asset to any retention program manager.

#### Public Perception and Accountability

Responding effectively to the current and anticipated trends in public perception and accountability needs to be one of the cornerstones of any future retention plan at rural land-grant universities as they set their sights on a new decade. Balancing the mission of the university with the pressing demands of legislators, taxpayers, parents and students will prove to be one of the greatest challenges retention managers may face in the near future. Data from the literature, national retention experts and retention practitioners suggest three approaches to future retention plans at rural land-grant universities. In keeping with the tripartite mission of teaching, research and service, rural land-grant universities need to be sensitive to issues of cost and price; they need to be accountable to the public they serve; and they need to communicate more effectively with a public which quite often views universities as ivory towers shrouded in mystery.

The issues of cost and price were discussed at some length in the above section regarding economic trends. The only further recommendation to make on this topic as it falls within a public accountability context is that rural land-grant universities need to be very clear in their communications with the public, parents, students and other constituents about what it is that students gain from an educational experience at their university.

In a very real sense, when you "sell" a student on your university, you have sold that student something intangible. You have sold him or her the promise of a degree and all that the degree may gain for him or her in the world of work. This is much different than selling someone a tangible product or service. Part of the job of the retention manager is to ensure that students and parents feel like they are, in effect, "getting what they paid for" and that the opportunity costs of a college degree will be offset by long-term marketability and salary benefits. This means conducting research to find out what students need and what they want as well as delivering on the promises made by new student recruiters.

The second set of recommendations center on the need to be accountable to the public rural land-grant universities serve. Discussed in the research literature and by the campus-based retention practitioners, these data sources suggest utilizing best practices, and establishing benchmarks and other outcomes measures to address accountability and perception concerns. Simply put, these rural land-grant universities need to switch from being consumer-centered to student-centered institutions. These schools also need to secure public confidence through outcomes measures and indications of quality which have been established by the institution--not the prevailing public tides of accountability. Augmenting the quantitative outcomes measures (retention and graduation rates) with affective measures will do a great deal toward securing public support. Consistent with most of the prevailing models of retention (Noel, 1985; Bean, 1986; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993), students will attend and remain at an institution which is able to demonstrate results in both the cognitive and affective domains of a college student's education.

Finally, rural land-grant universities need to develop an improved means of communication with the public--one which facilitates a better understanding between the two entities. In order to stem the tide of public and consumer demand and strike a compromise between the traditional pedagogical goals of public higher education and the recent outcry for accountability, rural land-grant universities need to refocus their public responses and rebuild their public images. They must speak in a vernacular which is clear and uncomplicated and reaches a wide audience. Establishing good public relations through education and solid outcomes-based measurement practices are two ways in which retention managers can anticipate future public concerns. Finally, the most important means of contending

with the momentum-gaining public accountability movement is to stay ahead of the trend by educating, enlightening and evangelizing to the public regarding the specific retention plans, program and practices on a given campus. Ensuring that the public understands what an institution is doing and demonstrating how well the institution is performing are critical to the continued support of an institution's retention efforts.

### Technology

No clearer message emerged from the data than the importance of technology in the future of education and retention at rural land-grant universities. Data from all three sources including relevant literature, national experts and campus-based practitioners, support the belief that information technology will continue to change the face of higher education and that the pace of this change can only accelerate. Despite the enthusiasm for information technology, most experts and practitioners warned that technology is, and will continue to be, a double-sided sword. Technology might bring positive new developments and innovative enhancements for improving the quality of student life and the convenience of many student-related processes (i.e., web-based registration, over-the-phone fee payment, online degree audits, etc.). However, the blade might also tend to cut the other way - excising the human touch from a field which relies on fostering interpersonal interactions for student success. Given the "binary" nature of information technology in the higher education setting, the following recommendations may be made for those considering future retention planning in a rural land-grant university setting. First, information technology, when used appropriately, has the potential to be a very powerful pedagogical, data management and student development mechanism. Used in the most productive and proactive manner, information technology will aid rural land-grant universities in reconceptualizing scholarship and learning, bureaucratic processes, and long-term strategic enrollment management and retention planning. Many of the advantages created by information technology are used by retention managers at rural land-grant universities to incorporate better student data tracking methods, from developing a profile of each incoming class to analyzing the characteristics of persisters and non-persisters, to creating programs and services which are much more student-specific. At its best, technology should be used by retention managers to individualize their programs and services as much as possible.

The second recommendation to stem from the data concerns the implications of distance education on the retention planning and programming process. Many experts and practitioners believe retention in specific and public higher education in general will be redefined through distance education. For a certain segment of the student population, this may well be an accurate future prediction. Geographically isolated and nontraditional students as well as workers seeking to upgrade their employability profiles will certainly broaden the scope of retention services and programs at rural land-grant universities accustomed to a primarily residential student population. Retaining these "virtual students" will necessitate a change in retention planning from an institution-focused enterprise to a course-specific and student-centered endeavor. Retention managers need to plan for a future where programs and services are able to accommodate a wide range of students who may or may not be seeking a degree, who may or may not ever set foot on campus, and who certainly will still need to make the critical one-on-one contacts with faculty or other individuals on campus to form the requisite retention connections.

Finally, as with any new tool or device, one must keep in mind that balance is paramount. Learning to use and incorporate a new tool effectively is essential when planning to supplement and/or improve the long-standing, time-tested retention practices already in place. Technology is not about replacement, it is about assistance. The increasing incorporation of technology into the daily lives and activities of faculty, students and staff across campus has tremendous advantages and seems to promise a future full of potential. However, while technology may provide an unsurpassed advantage, it should be viewed with a very critical eye. As has been evidenced in nearly every field employing computing and telecommunications technologies, these devices remain mere tools which magnify, enhance and assist but do not create, develop or implement. Technology in and of itself is unable to proffer solutions for the retention-related problems facing rural land-grant universities. Now, and in the future, retention is about connecting people with people. This concept should be at the heart of any retention plan.

#### Student Demographics and Enrollment

While discussed as separate trends throughout the rest of this research report, trends in student demographics and enrollment overlapped a great deal and, when the researcher

reviewed the data from the literature, national experts and campus-based retention practitioners, it became clear that any recommendations needed to take both categories into account to avoid redundancy. Two broad recommendations may be made for retention managers at rural land-grant universities which account for the projected trends in demography and enrollment: (1) managers must plan for a future which includes a diverse population of students; and (2) future retention programs must be broad enough to accommodate a wide range of students and specific enough to accommodate individual needs.

All of the demographic and enrollment data point to a future which includes more student diversity. Retention and enrollment managers and other campus administrators must realize that campus diversity has gone from being a moral imperative to being a practical necessity. It is critical that these administrators understand that retention and enrollment management success increasingly will be determined by an institution's ability to create an environment which is comfortable for persons of multiple cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Rural land-grant universities on the whole, will undergo a wide transformation in terms of gender, race and ethnic make-up of their students. Vast population shifts, increases in high school graduates and an increasing minority population will demand responsive retention-related programs at these institutions. Rural land-grant universities must emphasize accommodating new students regardless of age, category, ethnicity, or race and these institutions "must be intentional about those efforts by front-loading resources to assist them with the transition; otherwise, we will face even greater problems with retention of students than is currently the case" (Upcraft & Barr, 1990, p.10). Further, rural land-grant institutions must continue to promote access and success for students from a broad range of socio-economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds as well as academically underprepared students. As the 21st century fast approaches, rural land-grant institutions must continue to adhere to their commitment of access for all qualified students. These institutions must revisit their recruitment, admissions, counseling, financial aid and student services policies to accommodate the multi-racial, multi-ethnic student population of the future. However, it is critical that at each rural land-grant university local research must guide local retention efforts. While there will be major demographic and enrollment changes on a national level, many of the rural land-grant universities in this study may

face only slight enrollment increases or no change at all due, in part, to their locations. As a result, these rural land-grant institutions will need to concentrate their recruiting efforts on out-of-state students. As the states supporting the sixteen rural land-grant universities increase their focus on out-of-state students, they will need to develop retention programs which accommodate the specific needs of students from outside the region traditionally served by the rural land-grant institution.

Reflecting the individualized nature of successful retention programming, retention services must be broad enough to accommodate a wide range of students and specific enough to handle individual needs. Rural land-grant university retention managers should be prepared to expand services and extend programs as they develop their long-term plans. In general, there will be a great need to develop and strengthen retention programs which address the intellectual, cognitive and developmental needs of the changing college student population at each university. Expanding on the necessity for dualistic types of retention programming--retention programs designed for all students *and* student-specific programs--specific retention programs need to be developed which accommodate the needs of targeted student populations. For most schools, this will mean creating new programs which will anticipate the academic, cultural and other transition needs of students with more diverse racial, ethnic and age-related backgrounds. Finally, in a further effort to expand and specify retention-related programs, it may benefit retention planners and service providers at rural land-grant universities to work in conjunction with local upper-elementary and middle schools to create programs which target high-risk populations before they are at risk. Moving beyond traditional bridge programs and infusing retention-related support services into the lower grades may be a novel and effective approach to address this all-too-obvious future demographic trend.

### Faculty Culture

In each discussion and review of research pertaining to faculty trends and the future of retention at rural land-grant universities, one recommendation surfaced above all others: faculty must remain at the center of any retention effort. In order to continue to place faculty at the center of the retention management process, however, faculty roles need to be redefined if retention managers at rural land-grant universities hope to achieve any

future improvement in their programs and services. The challenge will be in converting a faculty and administrative culture which values research to a culture which values students. Clearly, this feat will not and should not be attempted by retention managers alone. Indeed, it is an issue of cultural change which must be valued and acted upon by both the executive-level administration as well as the faculty. While there is no one, easy way to accomplish this major cultural change, it is important for retention managers to understand the ideal and work through the process with a full awareness of the continued challenges brought on by faculty development initiatives. Traditionally stalwart in their resistance to training and development in fields outside their own disciplines, faculty will continue to be reluctant agents of retention on most rural land-grant university campuses. Converting academic Darwinists to promoters of student success and retention will remain one of the greatest retention related challenges on the horizon for retention practitioners and planners. The best option any retention manager could plan for is to continuously demonstrate, illustrate and reinforce the paramount importance of the faculty-student connection in the education, learning and retention process. Further, retention managers must facilitate these meaningful connections through programs, policies, opportunities, reward structures, and gradual cultural changes which support the faculty in this endeavor.

### Planning for the Future

Retention programmers, planners and managers at rural land-grant universities will be facing a variety of challenges external and internal to their institutions in the next century. Directly addressing the issue of organizational change, rural land-grant universities would be best served by enacting a process of transformational change in the coming years. Incorporating the institutional characteristics of flexibility, commitment to the individual and acceptance for diversity will provide the foundation for transformational change. Considering both the external and internal social and economic forces of change at work on most rural land-grant universities, retention planners and managers at these institutions might be well served to employ transformational retention plans which support an integrated models-based and pragmatic action plan approach. Despite the rapidly changing trends in society, the economy, public accountability, technology, demography, enrollment and faculty culture, rural land-grant universities need to put students and their

interests, needs and emerging capacities at the center of their future because it is economically sound practice, socially responsible, and ethical. As rural land-grant universities transform their retention programs to meet the demands of the future, so too, will they transform the students they serve. Focusing on quality, embracing diversity, committing to the individual, and reaffirming the human connection despite the alienating nature of technology should remain core values of any future retention program. It is these values which rural land-grant institutions should impart to its students and use to build future responsive retention programs for the twenty-first century. Integrating the data from the significant research literature, national retention experts, and campus-based retention practitioners, an outline of a retention management plan which accommodates and anticipates the impact of future social and economic trends on rural land-grant universities is presented below. Prior to that, however, is a section which offers several "pearls of wisdom" or pieces of advice from national retention experts and retention practitioners at rural land-grant universities which fall outside the constructs of a retention management plan yet merit serious consideration by anyone about to engage in long-term retention planning.

Pearls of Wisdom. Throughout the data collection process, both national retention experts and retention practitioners volunteered sage words of advice related to retention program planning and implementation which stemmed from years of research and experience in the field of college student retention. In collecting these heuristics, the researcher felt they were too valuable to ignore as rural land-grant university retention managers contemplated future plans and retention efforts. While they do not fit into any one aspect of the plan outlined below, they offer guidance, encouragement and insights into the long-term planning process which are significant.

In a speech given at the 1998 National Conference on Student Retention in New Orleans, Terenzini began his talk by presenting some ideas about retention planning which he had accumulated during several decades of personal research on the topic. While these comments were not directed specifically at retention managers at rural land-grant universities, they were general enough to be relevant for anyone contemplating the future of reten-

tion. Offering four observations on the nature of persistence and retention, Terenzini stated:

- persistence and retention is not a one issue phenomenon;
- persistence and retention is holistic and pervasive;
- persistence and retention comes from active involvement in any of multiple activities; and
- persistence and retention is promoted by a supportive environment.

Other advice from national retention experts and retention practitioners spans a general approach to retention management as well as attending to the nuts and bolts of being an effective leader in the retention management process.

- Retention is not rocket science, it is hard work. It's about changing culture, increasing access, and focussing on integration and opportunity. It's about connecting new students with peers, faculty, administrators, etc.
- When you talk about changing the environment it doesn't happen overnight and it's not just one thing. You need to be methodical, establish benchmarks and build support and consensus as you go.
- Foster a university-wide discussion of retention, initiate a grassroots effort/discussion. You can't lead a retention effort from an office or by making announcements or pronouncements it has to be something that is grassroots. So, the long-term retention plan needs to come from the faculty and then the student affairs staff. *A good leader in retention, in this sense, is someone who is invisible.*
- This is just a word of advice. I've learned to try not to take the responsibility or much of the credit for what's going on in retention. I want it out there with the faculty and the advisors and the front-line people. I want them, you know, to take ownership of the effort not just look to me for leadership and then do what I say."

Hopefully these words of advice and encouragement will inspire the retention manager about to embark on a new plan for student persistence at his or her rural land-grant university to proceed with confidence and agility as the next century begins.

Planning Recommendations. In seeking to identify a retention plan which would best anticipate and accommodate the various social and economic trends on the horizon for rural land-grant universities, the researcher endeavored to merge the findings and data from the literature with the insights from national retention experts and the real-world sen-

sibilities of campus-based retention practitioners to form a retention management plan which would be easy to implement for individuals at rural land-grant universities. The following paragraphs present a four-step, long-term planning process recommended by retention practitioners at sixteen rural land-grant universities as well as a series of planning recommendations developed by the researcher as she synthesized and evaluated the information from each of the three data sources in this research report.

The first step in long-term retention planning at rural land-grant universities involves initiating discussions about long-term retention planning on campus. This is a critical first step to gaining grassroots support for any new retention-related initiatives. The second step in the planning process focuses on establishing realistic and tangible retention goals based on the climate, environment, location and resources of the institution which measure specific quantitative and qualitative outcomes. The third step in the long-term retention planning process promotes centralizing retention efforts on campus through institutional assessment, retention and/or enrollment management committee establishment, and program consolidation. Identifying one committee or task force as being *the group* charged with coordinating campus-wide retention efforts seems to be the preferred leadership model for most campuses in the future. The fourth and final long-term retention planning step in the planning process, recommends the employment of "best practices" related to student persistence and dropout prevention from institutions across the country as they fit into the culture, environment and fiscal constraints of the individual institution. Following these four steps, as indicated by retention practitioners at rural land-grant universities at sixteen sites across the country will help to ensure a smoother transition to a receptive retention management-based community ready to accommodate the social and economic trends of the next decade.

To compliment the four long-term retention planning steps presented above, a series of fourteen sequential recommendations is outlined below which provide further step-by-step detail to the retention management planning process. As before, these recommendations are drawn from the research literature, national retention experts and campus-based retention practitioners.

1. Lay the groundwork for success.

- The retention program must match the school's culture, values and mission.
  - Begin the long-term retention program development process by creating a mission, program philosophy, goals (founded on theory), and measurable program objectives which specify practical steps to achieving program goals.
  - Any successful program must be endorsed and supported by the university president.
  - The most successful campuses employing retention management programs are those that have assigned a new position or one existing staff to coordinate retention duties. *Only* the institutions that have no retention coordinator report that their campuses have not been involved in special programs to increase retention (Coward, 1986).
2. Begin soon.
    - Retention programs and services should target students before they set foot on campus.
    - Retention efforts need to begin with a student's first contact with the university.
  3. Front-load your efforts.
    - Programs which front load retention efforts and target new, entering students are the most numerous and most successful at retaining students and promoting student success.
  4. Plan for aggressive and intrusive intervention.
    - Retention plans must be response-oriented. Focus more on intervention strategies rather than trying to identify the characteristics of persisters and non-persisters (Brawer, 1996). In the long-run this is more adaptive and flexible and may have a greater impact on overall retention and graduation rates.
    - Identify students at-risk for dropping out and go after them; don't wait for them to come to you.
  5. Constantly question how your plans/actions/decisions will effect student success and retention within the culture and environment of your institution.
    - Institutional retention initiatives should be assessed, evaluated, and changed as needed: every semester or every year (Dennis, 1998, p.80).
    - Annual retention objectives should be set and agreed upon by faculty and administrators (Dennis, 1998, p.80).
  6. Monitor student enrollment patterns and success regularly and recursively.

- Understand students better. Faculty, staff, administrators, retention managers and parents tend to overrate a student's ability to adapt and consequently make the transition to college.
  - Local research must guide local retention efforts
7. Make a total institution-wide commitment to student success.
    - The nature/manner of the fiscal and human resource support for retention programs and services will have to be further defined and a systematic strategic plan for retention will have to be formulated and enacted in the same manner as recruitment.
    - Grassroots activism and faculty support, as well as executive-level backing, are critical to changing cultural norms on any college campus.
  8. Create plans, programs and services which promote student-centered decision-making.
    - Planning for retention is not about lowering standards or retaining students who should not be enrolled for one reason or another. "It may not even be about graduation. Not all of the students you enroll may want to graduate....Retention management is about assisting each student with reaching his or her educational goal. Each student must decide what that goal is and it may not be a degree" (Dennis, 1998, p.81).
    - Students should have every opportunity for success and the option to determine the level of success they are capable of achieving.
  9. Develop plans which target *all* students.
    - One important aspect of future retention planning would be breaking out of the mold that retention plans and retention-related programming be targeted only at certain segments of the campus student population. Retention plans and programs need to go beyond targeted intervention programs for students at-risk to include broader student populations. Retention theory and wide-reaching retention initiatives and practices need to become a part of the campus ethos.
    - Traditional study skills programs need to move from remediation to programs with a more developmental approach suitable for a wider range of students. These programs should include academic skills and other developmental topics which include and exploration of learning styles, motivation, support networks, emotion management, and creativity enhancement.
    - Employ multiple retention strategies aimed at a wide range of students *and their parents*.
    - Retention management plans should address intellectual and academic student development. "*Every student* should have access to the courses

required to graduate on schedule, in the term and sequence required; a meaningful set of experiences encouraging analysis and reflection, including seminar-style courses and courses requiring written evidence of independent thought; appropriate academic advising and career counseling; and, perhaps most significant, direct experience with the process of discovery, i.e., with undergraduate research" (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.20, emphasis in original text).

- Retention management plans should address personal and social development. "Every student should: have the opportunity to know personally several regular faculty members, each capable of providing personal and professional references for them; be expected to participate in the civic life of the university community, through student government or other campus organizations and activities; and be expected to contribute in a meaningful way in the life of the larger community, through community service, service learning, or in work experiences related to their career aspirations" (*Returning to Our Roots*, 1997, p.20, emphasis in original text).
- Specific retention strategies should be developed and employed for each category of matriculated students ranging from nontraditional students to academically at-risk students to academically talented students and everyone in between. Retention is about individualizing.

#### 10. Be systematic, integrated and collaborative.

- Retention programs must span both academic and student affairs. The value of both the intellectual and social life of the campus cannot be ignored. Both sides need to be actively involved and engaged in retaining students.
- Successful retention programs cannot function, let alone succeed, without faculty input and commitment to advising. "A school's greatest attrition weapon is its faculty" (Dennis, 1998, p.80).
- Retention rates are directly impacted by the purposeful connection of students with faculty--not haphazard "get togethers." Contact should be formal and informal but generally purposeful.
- The early development of peer relationships must be planned for and encouraged.
- A comprehensive list of all retention activities should be disseminated to faculty and staff (Dennis, 1998, p.80).

#### 11. Promote a caring climate.

- Create and maintain a campus culture which values the individual through personalized, responsive, caring and respectful services, staff and programs.

12. Create a campus which is inviting and energizing.

- Attend to the climate of the orientation experience and the events and activities of the first six weeks of each semester.
- Provide multiple opportunities for students to connect with faculty and other staff.
- Train all front-line staff to be student-centered.

13. Promote continuous faculty development.

14. Above all, pick your people well.

- Successful retention programs are only as good as the people who manage them.
- Successful retention programs are time consuming and energy-intensive. Retention staff need to be committed to student success and as diverse as the student population they serve.

While it may be tempting to follow the four long-term retention planning steps presented at the beginning of this section and add to that process the more detailed list of recommendations outlined above, retention managers at rural land-grant universities should view these recommended plans and suggestions with a critical eye. Anticipating the future involves risk, research, patience, and a steadfast sense of purpose. A recipe does not exist for moving traditional retention programs to transformational programs at rural land-grant universities. At best, one can only develop a guideline which may be adapted to accommodate the unique characteristics, culture and attributes of a given institution. Further, as most of the data in this research report suggest, planning for campus transformation is not a quick process. Retention planning, management and programming will take some time to develop and implement. According to the literature, national retention experts and campus-based practitioners, it may take a minimum of three years to get a successful program off the ground. Experts and practitioners alike remind anyone engaged in the retention management process that the retention plan, as well as the program, should never be finished because as long as new students continue to enroll, new challenges will surface with each entering cohort. In sum, a forward-looking retention management plan should be based on current research and it must “be *practical, accountable, and flexible*” (Dennis, 1998, p.79).

### End Note

Rural land-grant universities are facing challenges on multiple fronts both external and internal to their institutions as they enter the 21st century. Social, economic, public accountability, and technological challenges combined with changing student demographics and enrollment, faculty culture, and a redefinition of the mission of the land-grant university tradition all contribute to the assorted pressures retention managers at rural land-grant universities must account for as they plan for the future. The implications of these challenges for rural land-grant universities are legion and systemic. Nothing less than an institutional transformation is needed in order to best accommodate the social, economic, technological, cultural and demographic demands of the future.

On an institutional level, universities must continue to be places where students feel they can explore various cultural and interpersonal values, establish an identity, find direction and meaning, and clarify career and life goals. Rural land-grant universities need to develop retention programs which account for the social and economic demands of a new era and these programs must focus on adaptive living and learning skills. These programs also must place an emphasis on academic and life skills which accommodate the demands of a transformational society. Integrating traditional academic skills (critical thinking, problem solving, organization, content mastery) with a focus on data assimilation, "intuition, information retrieval methods, complex problem solving, and cooperation and communication with a diverse, multicultural population" will ensure success as students and institutions move into the "Age of Knowledge" (Newton, 1998, p.9).

Finally, on a more personal level, retention managers at rural land-grant universities must embark upon the task of long-term retention planning with a full understanding of the skills, abilities and characteristics of a transformational leader. The current and prospective retention manager must be eclectic, a generalist able to be a diplomat when necessary and a champion for the cause of student success and persistence. The retention manager must be up-to-date in many areas ranging from student development to planning for organizational change. (S)he must be able to provide vision as well as practical plans for guidance. (S)he must also have the tenacity and energy to work well with faculty,

students and administrators in a way which balances the demands of each group. In effect, the retention manager should enjoy challenge and have an ethical commitment to the educational and personal success of each student enrolled at his or her rural land-grant university.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW GUIDES

**FAX LETTER FOR NATIONAL RETENTION EXPERT INTERVIEWS**  
*(Telephone Interview Version)*

National Retention Expert:

Thank you for agreeing to do the interview! For your convenience, I have included a copy of the interview questions in this FAX. These questions are intended to be conversational in nature and the bulleted items are simply an example of follow-up probes I may ask to elucidate a particular response.

The interview should be approximately thirty minutes long and, with your permission, I would like to record our conversation to ensure accuracy on my part. Be assured you will have the opportunity to read and approve my analysis before any dissemination takes place. My primary goal in interviewing you is to understand your point of view as it relates to future retention trends.

I will telephone you this afternoon at 3:00pm (Central Time). Thanks again for your time and I look forward to talking with you.

Sincerely,

Courtney Stryker

## GUIDE FOR NATIONAL RETENTION EXPERT INTERVIEWS

(Telephone/In-Person Interview Version)

### Purpose of the Interview:

To collect preliminary data on the perceptions, opinions and projections national retention experts have regarding the retention challenges rural land-grant institutions may be facing into the twenty-first century within the context of seven major socio-economic trends: societal changes; financial/economic; issues of public accountability; technology; enrollment trends; faculty concerns and culture; changing student demographics; and the evolving mission of the rural land-grant university. This general list of topics is not designed to be a check-list, rather, it is an index of subject areas to be covered during the course of the interview conversation.

### Interview Questions:

*Given the following socio-economic trends as a backdrop, how do you envision the future of retention and retention-related issues at rural land-grant universities during the next ten to fifteen years?*

- A. What impact will SOCIETY have on future trends in college student retention?
  - the impact of down-sizing
  - economic security
  - family values & family structure
- B. What impact will the ECONOMY have on future trends in college student retention?
  - tuition costs
  - general resources for retention-related programs
  - financial aid
  - who gets access to higher education (will the poor be excluded)?
- C. What impact will PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS/ACCOUNTABILITY have on future trends in college student retention?
  - will student success be measured in the same way?
  - what will the public expectations be in terms of higher education outcomes?
  - will public support increase/decrease/remains the same?
- D. What impact will TECHNOLOGY have on future trends in college student retention?
  - how will technology impact retention?

- what is the future going to be like with the advent of virtual universities?
  - how will retention be defined in a virtual setting?
  - how might technology be an aid to retention efforts?
- E. What impact will ENROLLMENT have on future trends in college student retention?
- how will the national increase in college attendance effect retention?
- F. What impact will FACULTY have on future trends in college student retention?
- G. What impact will changing student DEMOGRAPHICS have on future trends in college student retention?
- how will increased diversity/multiculturalism affect retention?
  - nontraditional students
  - students of color
  - population trends
  - academically underprepared students
- H. The Changing Mission of the Rural Land-Grant University
- how will retention problems be addressed?
  - how might retention programs support the mission?
- I. What can higher education administrators at rural land-grant universities do to prepare for the new trends in retention for the coming century?

## GUIDE FOR NATIONAL RETENTION EXPERT INTERVIEWS (Online Interview Version)

Dear Retention Expert:

Thank you for your prompt and positive response to my on-line interview inquiry regarding future National trends in college student retention. Please do not be daunted by the length of this email. It includes the interview guidelines as well as the interview questions. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time either by email (email address) or phone (current telephone number) if you have any question or concerns regarding the interview.

Thank you for your time.

### **Purpose of the Interview:**

To collect preliminary data on the perceptions, opinions and projections national retention experts have regarding the retention challenges rural land-grant institutions may be facing into the twenty-first century within the context of five major socio-economic trends: financial/economic; issues of public accountability; technology; changing student demographics; and the evolving mission of the rural land-grant university. This general list of topics is not designed to be a check-list, rather, it is an index of subject areas to be covered during the course of the on-line interview conversation.

### **Process**

The following procedure should be considered for each of the general questions listed below.

1. Each question is designed to introduce and spark discussion about a general topic area. Questions are intended to be conversational in nature.
2. Follow-up probes may be asked to elucidate or shed more light on a particular response.
3. At the natural conclusion of one topic area, please move on to the next topic.

### **General Interview Question Topics**

*Given the following socio-economic trends as a backdrop, how do you envision the future of retention and retention-related issues at rural land-grant universities during the next ten to fifteen years?*

#### **A. Financial/Economic Trends**

- tuition costs
- general resources for retention-related programs

- financial aid
- who gets access to higher education (will the poor be excluded)?

B. Public Accountability

- will student success be measured in the same way?
- what will the public expectations be in terms of higher education outcomes?
- will public support increase/decrease/remains the same?

C. Technology

- how will technology impact retention?
- what is the future going to be like with the advent of virtual universities?
- how will retention be defined in a virtual setting?
- how might technology be an aid to retention efforts?

D. Changing Student Demographics

- how will increased diversity/multiculturalism affect retention?
- nontraditional students
- students of color
- population trends
- academically underprepared students

E. Enrollment Patterns

F. Faculty Culture

G. The Changing Mission of the Rural Land-Grant University

- how will retention problems be addressed?
- how might retention programs support the mission?

**INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR  
CAMPUS-BASED RETENTION PRACTITIONERS  
(Online, In-Person and Telephone Version)**

**Purpose of the Interview:**

To collect data on the perceptions, opinions and projections of rural land-grant university administrators and staff involved in college student retention and drop-out prevention regarding the retention challenges their institutions may be facing as the new millennium approaches

**I. Preliminaries (Telephone and In-Person)**

- A. Introduction: Interviewer introduces self. Interviewer provides background information as follows:

*I am interested in hearing your thoughts and opinions regarding the retention challenges rural land-grant institutions may be facing into the twenty-first century. What I would like to do is spend the next 20-30 minutes asking you questions designed to get a full picture of your perceptions regarding these challenges.*

- B. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**II. Process**

The following procedure will be utilized for each of the general questions listed below.

1. The question will be asked introducing a general topic area. Questions are intended to be conversational in nature.
2. Follow-up probes will be asked to elucidate or shed more light on a particular response.
3. At the natural conclusion of one topic area, the interviewer will move to the next topic.

**III. General Interview Question**

1. What is your name and official (snail mail) mailing address?
2. What is your current professional role/job/title?
3. What does the term retention mean on your campus?

4. Briefly describe (or list) current retention programs at your university.

5. Given the following socio-economic trends as a backdrop, how do you envision the future of retention and retention-related issues on your campus during the next ten to fifteen years?

- A. Financial/Economic Trends
- B. Public Accountability
- C. Technology
- D. Changing Student Demographics
- E. Society
- F. Faculty

6. Briefly describe/discuss any long-term retention plans your university may have.

**APPENDIX B**

**CURRENT RETENTION PROGRAMS**

## Sixty-Nine Current Retention Programs

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### Learning & Academic Support Services

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- peer tutoring
  - remedial/developmental classes
  - study skills classes & workshops
  - formal tutoring programs
  - learning clusters or freshmen interest groups (FIGS)
  - formal and informal study groups
  - *supplementary instruction program*
  - living-learning programs
- 

### Advising & Related Activities

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- freshmen advising centers/programs
  - *advising fairs*
  - university advising center
  - faculty/staff mentoring & partnership programs
  - specialized advising for athletes
- 

### Early Warning Systems

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- mid-term "D&F lists" for new students
  - faculty feed-back mechanisms
  - academic monitoring for all students
  - academic monitoring for freshmen
  - academic monitoring for athletes
- 

### Career Services

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- community service programs
  - internship programs
  - leadership development programs
- 

### New Student Orientation & Extended Orientations

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- academic orientation and retention program
  - student-run orientation summer camp
  - welcome week
  - family weekend
  - new parent orientation
  - special opening ceremonies similar to commencement
- 

### Counseling & Psychological Services

---

- student referred for various assessments
  - students referred for various college transition issues
- 

### Financial Aid

---

- providing more loans, scholarships and grants
- better access to financial aid
- WEB-based services
- more expeditious and stream-lined processing

## Sixty-Nine Current Retention Programs

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### **Institutional Evaluation & Assessment**

- exit interviews
- drop-out follow-up studies
- tracking transfers to other schools via transcript request information
- continuous institutional self-assessment
- student satisfaction surveys

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### **Specialized Recruiting**

- "we're trying a new thing where we recruit specific students for success"
- targeting and retaining more in-state students
- targeting out-of-state and international students

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### **Faculty & Staff Development Programs**

- advisor training by professional advising staff
- quality and customer service training for front-line staff
- faculty training for college student development issues

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### **Targeted Programs & Services**

- academic support services for minority and ethnic groups
- honors programs
- residence hall programs
- science and technology interest programs for women and minority students
- summer bridge programs for academically high-risk students
- undeclared student advising and services

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### **Intrusive Intervention Activities**

- freshmen called by department heads during first six weeks
- calling all freshmen during sixth week of semester to check-in and refer
- follow-up with all new students eligible to register for next term but who have not
- raising admissions standards by department or university-wide
- reducing GTA's & increasing faculty-new student contact
- *purposely creating a campus ecology to foster retention*

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### **Freshmen Year Programs**

- *specific, comprehensive first-year retention programs extending from academics to student services to residence life*
- freshmen year experience (FYE) classes
- FYE-designated residence halls
- freshmen-specific newsletters
- *University College created specifically for new student retention*
- freshmen year interest groups (FIGs)
- *First Year Initiative*

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### **Social Integration Activities**

- student clubs and organizations
  - rock concerts
  - intramurals
  - football and other athletic events
-

**Sixty-Nine Current Retention Programs**

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**No Formal Programs**

- “everyone works on it, it’s everyone’s job”
  - “we haven’t formalized our retention efforts”
  - “we don’t have enough money to work on retention”
- 

**Miscellaneous**

- department-level socials/pizza parties
  - campus-wide retention workgroups
- 

*Italicized text represents unique retention-related programs described in more detail in Appendix C.*

APPENDIX C

SIX UNIQUE RETENTION PROGRAMS

### Advising and Orientation: Summer 'Advising Fairs'

The first unique retention program to surface centered around effective and accessible advising for new, in-coming students. After discussing the retention-related pros and cons of automated web-based or telephone-based registration systems on his campus, one interviewee noted the success his school was experiencing with a lower-tech approach to advising during the summer orientation sessions. When asked to provide more detail about these programs, the study participant explained that "since automation has hit the campus, some of the advising for freshmen means they get nothing but a class list and have never even been on the campus or seen a person [advisor]." "That was not acceptable to me," he continued, "so we've modified what we've traditionally done." Emphasizing the fact that this new initiative was geared primarily toward freshmen, the interviewee described an advising/orientation process which "comes to students where they live rather than forcing them to come to us [the university]." Calling this unique form of orientation outreach "advising fairs" the study participant explained that these fairs "go on in the same way we do information receptions [for recruiting new students] around the state and region." Professional advisors and faculty, as well as representatives from residence life, financial aid and other student services, go to various locations around the state and region during the summer to advise and assist new students with registration for the up-coming fall semester. Students are able to speak directly with faculty and other university staff in a small group setting and "get immediate answers to some of their most pressing questions." Concluding his description of the program, the interviewee stated that preliminary data indicated an increase in the number of "new, registered freshmen actually showing-up in the fall."

### Supplemental Instruction Program

The second unique retention-related program was actually designed at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and is employed widely across the country. The rationale for its inclusion in a section describing unique retention-related programs stems from the fact that none of the other sixteen sites in the study were employing a similar program. In the

researcher's opinion, this fact alone merited mention along with a brief description of the program. According to the interviewee, the "Supplemental Instruction Program" (SI) at his institution "targets high-risk courses--like freshmen chemistry--where large numbers of students are at-risk for dropping out or failing." The program provides support for students in these high-risk classes through peer-assisted study groups or sessions which are held out-of-class at regularly scheduled times. "These review sessions or structured study groups become like a regular class for most students and they [the students] like them because they are purposely designed to be small and accommodating," stated the interviewee. The peer leaders are students who have previously taken the class and performed well. "But," according to the study participant, "they like to work with students, sit through the class again with the students and have some training in group facilitation." One critical component of the SI is that "it is not group tutoring." The program takes advantage of group learning and processing rather than the traditional lecture model. The interviewee further indicated that he felt the SI was an excellent retention program at his institution because it targeted the high-risk course rather than the high-risk student. In the opinion of the interviewee, "looking at the institution and what the institution can do to change, rather than focusing all of the attention on how to change individual students, has had some very positive results."

### The First Year Initiative

A program titled the "First Year Initiative" (FYI) was the third unique retention-related program to warrant a more detailed description outside of the research report. According to the study participant, "the First Year Initiative was developed for a number of reasons, but perhaps the most important reason was to help tie together all of the disparate retention-related efforts on the campus and begin to launch a coordinated effort which would help us use our limited fiscal and human resources more effectively on the students' behalf." "The FYI," he continued, "is clearly a program designed to front-load fiscal and human resources in an attempt to target new students at a time when they are most at-risk for dropping out." The FYI program had four major program components. Beginning with

the College Student Inventory (a survey developed by USAGroup, Noel-Levitz) and a special student orientation leader check-in program, students were "engaged in pro-active rather than reactive retention-related programming." Both of these programs focused on connecting with students during the first six weeks of the fall semester. Following-up with the "Mid-Year Retention Intervention" program in January of each year, "academically at-risk, first-year students have another opportunity to connect with retention staff during their critical first year." The study participant explained that the FYI concluded with a satisfaction inventory (the Student Satisfaction Inventory developed by USAGroup, Noel-Levitz). "The satisfaction inventory," he said, "is used to assess students' satisfaction levels at the conclusion of their first year on campus." Wrapping-up his discussion of the FYI, the study participant explained that "through the FYI program, first-year students have the opportunity to make connections with retention staff members, faculty and other university community members in a social, intellectual and developmental manner at four critical junctures during their first year."

#### Beyond the Freshman Year Experience

While a number of institutions in the study had Freshman Year Experience (FYE) programs, one institution in particular exhibited a unique approach to the FYE genre of programming which went beyond the typical extended orientation or classroom experience. The primary goal of the fourth unique retention-related program was to "infuse the Freshman Year Experience philosophy into every aspect of a new student's life." According to the interviewee, "the FYE program begins with orientation and a one credit course for the new students in the fall." "This course is taught by faculty (and student peers) from a variety of disciplines from across the campus," she continued "and the faculty who teach the class have been trained by our FYE staff in student development theory and in how to create an active learning environment." An FYE residence hall had also been created on this campus to bring the primary concepts and goals of the program into the out-of-class lives of students. Advancing the FYE notion of residence halls becoming living and learning centers, the interviewee described a number of programs at the FYE residence hall

"specifically designed to enhance student transition, integration and retention." These included specialized

- mentoring programs;
- tutoring programs and study groups;
- professional FYE staff support for Resident Assistants and other residence hall staff;
- FYE newsletters; and
- direct telephone contact/support programs for FYE students.

Additionally, these programs and services are available to those students who choose to enroll in the FYE program and live in the FYE-designated residence hall.

#### The University College

The fifth unique retention-related program was the oldest and most established program in the study and, in the opinion of the researcher, the least traditional retention-related program. Described by the interviewee as "a complete transition program college," the University College program is "the college of admission...for all new students at the university." She went on to explain that the University College is "the administrative unit and the advising unit--the unit that provides the academic orientation programs, that provides the Freshmen seminar class, that does a whole variety of things for various populations of students to ease their transition into college." "[Students] must move on to a degree-granting college," she continued, "by the time they've reached 75 credits, but the vast majority move on sometime in their sophomore year." The purpose of this unique college structure is to assist students with the transition from high school to college and to help students understand the broad range of opportunities available to them at the university. "We want our new students to understand the differences between their previous roles as high school students or members of the work force and being a college student," the study participant continued to explain. The University College program is designed to provide students the support they need to be successful. For example, "advising programs are designed to enable students to connect with a *caring* faculty member throughout their

freshman and sophomore years." In her closing remarks on the subject, the interviewee pointed out that the structure of the college was designed with the basic tenants of retention in mind twenty-six years ago. The interviewee was quick to assure the interviewer that programs had been added and changed as research and experience have necessitated but the founding principals of focusing on the individual student and providing the student with programs and services designed to promote his or her success have been the keys to the continued success of the University College program.

### Toward a Campus Ecology

The final unique retention-related program to surface during the preliminary phase of the individual interviews centered around what the interviewee labelled a "campus ecology conceptualization." When asked to describe the retention programs at his university, this administrator paused and reflected for a moment. He then smiled quite broadly and stated: "Well, when you ask me what kinds of retention programs we have, I have a tendency to automatically divide them up into a campus ecology conceptualization which includes the student and the environment." When asked to further define the campus ecology model as it related to retention programming, the interviewee provided the following explanation:

We consider the process of retention to be a series of interventions into the life of the student, or interventions into the life of the university. To clarify, we define our targets or programs in two major arenas: the student and the environment. In our campus ecology, when the student is the target of intervention, this means we look at the skills, abilities, attitudes and other things that the student must have in order to succeed. We're not so naive, though, as to believe that the environment within which the student operates is unimportant. Therefore, our second major retention target is the university environment. We look at how the policies, procedures, and practices that the institution has either frustrate or enhance our mission of retention and, more importantly, student success. The environment is a very comprehensive thing and it ranges from the curriculum to the staff to the condition of the grounds and buildings. On our campus, retention is the student interacting with the environment to create a campus ecology.

This comprehensive campus ecology approach to retention and retention-related programming at rural land-grant universities stood-out to the researcher as a multi-dimensional program which not only focused on the individual and the needs of the individual student but also on the university environment and how it affects or interacts with the student.

APPENDIX D

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMITTEE TITLES

### Professional Titles

The following list outlines the thirteen assorted titles of the study participants. Titles are listed in no particular order. While sixteen individuals were interviewed for the study, only thirteen titles are listed below. Three of the individuals interviewed held the title Vice President of Student Affairs and one individual also held the title Associate Provost for Recruiting along with his Vice President title.

- Director of Academic Advising
- Director of Undergraduate Academic Services
- Vice President of Student Affairs
  - \*Vice President of Student Affairs and Associate Provost for Recruiting
- Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education
- Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Director of Institutional Research
- Retention Program Director
- Student Development Coordinator and Educational Opportunity & Access Program Coordinator
- Coordinator of First Year Experience Programs
- Dean of University College and Special Academic Programs
- Dean of Student Affairs
- Director of Transitional Programs and Orientation
- Director of Student Advising, Learning and Career Services

### Committee Titles

The following list outlines the eight assorted committee titles from the sixteen study sites. Several titles were the same at various campuses. Titles are listed in no particular order.

- Retention Committee Chair
- Advising and Retention Committee Chair
- Undergraduate Commission Co-Chair
- Enrollment Management Committee Chair
- Undergraduate Enrollment Taskforce Co-Chair
- Retention Work Group Member
- Quality Customer Service Task Force Manager
- Enrollment Management Council Designated Retention Representative

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