

7-12-2011

# Composition, Retention, Race, Remediation and the First Year: A Descriptive Study of the "At-Risk" Student Experience

Leah M. Chambers  
*Indiana University of Pennsylvania*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd>

---

## Recommended Citation

Chambers, Leah M., "Composition, Retention, Race, Remediation and the First Year: A Descriptive Study of the "At-Risk" Student Experience" (2011). *Theses and Dissertations (All)*. 424.  
<https://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd/424>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Knowledge Repository @ IUP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations (All) by an authorized administrator of Knowledge Repository @ IUP. For more information, please contact [cclouser@iup.edu](mailto:cclouser@iup.edu), [sara.parme@iup.edu](mailto:sara.parme@iup.edu).

COMPOSITION, RETENTION, RACE, REMEDIATION AND THE FIRST YEAR: A DESCRIPTIVE  
STUDY OF THE "AT-RISK" STUDENT EXPERIENCE ON A REGIONAL CAMPUS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Leah M. Chambers

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2011

Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Leah Michelle Chambers

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**(SIGNATURES ON FILE)**

---

---

Bennett A. Rafoth, Ed.D.  
Professor of English, University Professor, Advisor

---

---

Gian S. Pagnucci, Ph.D.  
Professor of English, University Professor

---

---

Sharon K. Deckert, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of English

ACCEPTED

---

Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.  
Dean  
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Composition, Retention, Race, Remediation and the First Year: A Descriptive Study of the "At-Risk" Student Experience on a Regional Campus

Author: Leah Chambers

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Bennett A. Rafoth

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci  
Dr. Sharon K. Deckert

This study describes the experiences of first-year students at IUP-Punxsutawney, a regional campus designed to provide additional support to a population of at-risk students, approximately half of whom are minorities. The purpose of this study is to provide the reader with a better understanding of the context and to describe students' experiences in this context by addressing two questions: *What does it mean to be a first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney? What is the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney?* The data collected for this research includes students' maps of their experiences in the research setting, interview conversations and survey responses. In one sense, this is a study about retention that emphasizes the importance of social integration into the university. Both social and academic integration have been of primary concern of the retention research that is reviewed in this study. In another sense, this is a study about first-year composition and teaching writing. This research calls for teachers of writing to consider how students' backgrounds and how their experiences, past and present, may clash in particular ways with the university and with what we aim to teach in the classroom setting—particularly in a context where social integration into the university is complicated by issues of race and remediation. This study also makes clear the connection between retention and composition, drawing on and extending Mary Louise Pratt's contact zone pedagogy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to thank the many students who contributed to this research and who so generously shared their experiences. Without your drawings and your words, this dissertation could not exist. Thank you to Dr. Ben Rafoth, my dissertation chair, for your support, guidance and always “spot on” revision suggestions. I do not know how you knew what I was thinking before I knew what I was thinking, but I am so grateful that you did. To my daughter, Ava Grace, who reminds me every day that life is much less about planning and much more about just living. I could not have written a word without knowing it was, in some small way, for you. Also, to my husband, Tyler, who has been infinitely patient during this process. Tyler, you had no idea exactly what you were getting yourself into, and yet, you are still here. I also wish to thank my mom, who has always been my biggest fan, and my dad, who, despite our differences, is always proud. Thank you also to my in-laws, Tammy and Steve, who have never made me feel like anything less than family and whose help and support has been invaluable during this process. A very special thank you to my editor, Dr. Emily Wierszewski, who, despite my late-night phone calls to the “dissertation hotline” and frantic emails, is also still my best friend. I am grateful to Dr. Dawn Fels, who answered every pesky question promptly and with a smile and to Dr. Jennifer Wells, my “dissertation twin”, who made our day of defenses one for the record books. We have the drawings and photos to prove it. Thank you to Dr. Lynn Shelly, a colleague and friend who supported this research by offering her books, her perspective and insight and her class time so that I could collect much of this data. Brian Cope: Truly, you are the “one who knows”. You are a good friend who has taught me so much. Thank you to my colleagues at Clarion University, who pushed, nudged and gently reminded me that I needed to graduate, and to all of my IUP friends who, through Facebook, helped me stay focused, maintain my sanity and encouraged me to click “print”. You are good people.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE	AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION ..... 1 Composition and the First-Year Student..... 1 An Introduction to the Students ..... 4 The Larger Context..... 8 Our Nation’s Belief in Education as Essential..... 8 The Consequence of Education as Necessity: An Increased At-Risk Population ..... 11 The Relevance of Retention to Composition ..... 12 First-year Composition Means First-Year Students ..... 12 The Unique Position of First-Year Composition as a Site of Intervention ..... 14 Narrowing the Context..... 20 The Research Setting: An Introduction to IUP- Punxsutawney ..... 20 Statement of the Research Questions..... 25 Introduction to the Research Methodology and Rationale for this Research ..... 26 Limitations ..... 29 A Brief Summary of Chapters 2-5 ..... 29
CHAPTER TWO	A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ..... 32 Chapter Overview ..... 32 The Importance of Studying Retention..... 35 Increased enrollment: National and Institutional Numbers..... 36 Increased Minority Enrollment: National and Institutional Numbers..... 37 IUP’s Attrition Rates Compared to National Rates ..... 41 IUP’s Graduation Rates Compared to National Rates ..... 43 Early Retention Studies..... 48 Retention After McNeely and Johnston..... 61 A Response to Expanding Higher Education..... 61 Prediction, Psychology and the Individual Characteristics of Students..... 66 Moving Forward ..... 71 Recognizing the Impact of the Environment on Retention ..... 71 Recognizing Methodological Limitations in Earlier Research..... 74 Defining “attrition” and “dropout” ..... 74 The use of ex post facto methodology ..... 80 The 1970s: Retention Meets Theory..... 81 William Spady’s “Dropouts from Higher Education” ..... 83

	Vincent Tinto’s “Dropouts from Higher Education” .....	89
	The 1980s: Tinto is Reconsidered.....	93
	The Past Ten Years of Scholarship: Testing Theory and Preventing Attrition.....	97
	Patterns and Themes in Recent Research .....	98
	Academic Integration.....	99
	The influence of faculty .....	99
	The influence of the institution .....	104
	The influence of programming .....	106
	Social Integration .....	107
	Cocurricular involvement .....	107
	Peer and social support .....	109
	Comfort and a sense of belonging .....	112
	Conclusion .....	114
CHAPTER	METHODS AND METHODOLOGY .....	115
THREE	Where This Study Fits .....	115
	Developing a Research Methodology.....	115
	The Influence of My Experiences in the Research Setting.....	115
	The Influence of My Separation from the Research Setting.....	119
	Framing the Lived Experience with Phenomenology.....	120
	A Tradition of Lived Experience in Composition Studies.....	121
	Design of the Study.....	130
	Data Collection .....	132
	The First Method: Maps.....	132
	The Second Method: Interviews .....	135
	The Third Method: Survey.....	138
CHAPTER	DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA .....	140
FOUR	Chapter Overview .....	140
	Situating the Student Maps in Context .....	142
	Collecting the Maps .....	155
	What it Means to “Make Meaning” .....	156
	The Process of Thematic Analysis.....	159
	Category Descriptions and Sample Maps .....	174
	Category 1: Just School .....	174
	Category 2a: School and Community, Few Places (FP) .....	180
	Category 2b: School and Community, More Places (MP) .....	187
	Category 2c: School and Community, More Places Local (MPL).....	193

	Category 3: Just Community (JC).....	197
	Category 4: Just Home (JH).....	198
	Category 5: Just Punxsy (JP) .....	198
	Category 6: Just Pennsylvania (PA) .....	201
	Category 7: Word Maps (WM).....	202
	An Outsider’s Perspective: A Second Way to	
	Consider the Data.....	209
	A Brief Analysis of an Outsider’s Coding .....	213
	Campus Spaces .....	213
	Homes/Dorms in General vs. Homes/Dorms	
	Belonging to the Student.....	214
	Places Outside Punxsutawney, Recreation and Retail ....	215
	Survey Analysis .....	215
	Students’ Perspectives on Race and Prejudice.....	223
CHAPTER	SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS .....	247
FIVE	Recapping the Results.....	247
	Interpreting the Results .....	255
	Suggestions for the First-Year Experience .....	262
	Future Studies .....	269
	Concluding Thoughts.....	270
REFERENCES	.....	272
APPENDICES	.....	290
	Appendix A – Admissions letter IUP-Punxsutawney.....	290
	Appendix B – Additional photographs of IUP-Punxsutawney campus.....	291
	Appendix C – Additional student maps .....	293

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1 IUP's Main Campus First-Year Cohort by Race for AY 2003-2004 and 2007-2008.....	39
2 IUP-Punxsutawney's First-Year Cohort by Race for AY 2003-2004 and 2007-2008.....	39
3 Rates of Attrition on IUP's Main and Punxsutawney Regional Campus for AY 2003-2004 to 2009-2010.....	41
4 Four-year and Six-year Graduation Rates for IUP's Main Campus.....	44
5 Four-year and Six-year Graduation Rates for IUP's Punxsutawney Campus.....	45
6 Summary of the Categories Used to Sort Maps.....	173
7 The Results of the Data Set Coded from an Outsider's Perspective.....	212
8 The Influence of Family and Friends on Students' Views of Race.....	228
9 The Influence of Place/Upbringing on Students' Views of Race.....	229
10 White Students' Accounts of Witnessing an Act of Prejudice.....	232
11 White Students' Perceptions of and Experiences with African-American Students.....	235
12 Minority Students' Firsthand Experiences With Prejudice.....	238- 239
13 Local Students Describe the Community's Resistance to Diversity.....	242

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
1	Causes of attrition in McNeely’s study.....	55
2	Spady’s explanatory sociological model of the dropout process.....	86
3	Tinto’s sociological model of the dropout process.....	91
4	Recurrent themes in the research from <i>JCSR</i> and <i>JFYEST</i> , 1999-present.....	99
5	Map of Pennsylvania.....	142
6	The borough of Punxsutawney, PA.....	143
7	IUP-Punxsutawney’s Living Center and its main entrance.....	144
8	A closer view of the main entrance of the Living Center.....	145
9	A view of the first floor of the Living Center.....	145
10	The second floor hallway in the Living Center.....	146
11	An exterior view of the hallway that connects the Living Center to the Learning Center.....	148
12	The west entrance to the Learning Center.....	149
13	The hallway that connects the two halves of the building.....	150
14	The main hallway and the cafeteria in the Learning Center.....	151
15	The main space of the Learning Center, where students often gather.....	152
16	The cafeteria at IUP-Punxsutawney.....	153
17	The south, main entrance of the Learning Center and the staircase leading up to the second floor.....	154
18	A student map that includes locations not present on many other maps.....	162
19	A student map that includes only the school.....	164

Figure	Page
20 “McDonald”: Punxsutawney as one student has experienced it.....	164
21 A house on Foundry Street.....	166
22 Punxsy is “blank”.....	166
23 A student map from the <i>Just School</i> category with a classroom as its focus.....	169
24 Another map included in the <i>Just School</i> category.....	170
25 A third map included in the <i>Just School</i> category.....	170
26 Point A to point B.....	175
27 School is boring.....	176
28 “My Punxy”.....	178
29 My family: The map of a dual enrollment student.....	182
30 Four places.....	184
31 Road to success.....	186
32 “My Map”.....	189
33 “You never get across”.....	191
34 An MPL map from a local student.....	196
35 “Not sure”.....	200
36 Zooming way out: Punxsy is small.....	202
37 Go groundhogs.....	204
38 Small, quiet and one race.....	206
39 “It’s too small”.....	208
40 Raw totals by place.....	218

Figure	Page
41 A comparison of responses by race and location.....	219
42 A student maps an experience with prejudice.....	244
B1 Staircase leading to second floor in the Learning Center.....	291
B2 Recreation Room in the Learning Center.....	291
B3 PossiPHILity outside the Learning Center.....	292
C1 “Punxsy is IUP” .....	293
C2 Three points.....	293
C3 Neighborhood sketch.....	294
C4 Groundhog town.....	295
C5 Rain or snow? .....	296
C6 Groundhogs everywhere! .....	297
C7 Railroad building.....	298
C8 Railroad tracks.....	299
C9 Small boring town.....	300
C10 Learning Center sketch.....	301
C11 Parking lot sketch.....	302
C12 Campus sketch with flag.....	303
C13 Waste in Punxsutawney.....	304

## CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

### Composition and the First-Year Student

First-year composition remains, at many institutions, the only universal requirement. This means that those of us who teach first-year writing collectively teach nearly every first-year college student. Additionally, composition has also served to function as a “gatekeeper”—used to both limit and grant access to the rest of the liberal arts curriculum. For writing teachers concerned with issues of access, how composition serves to potentially limit access propels us to seek a better understanding of why some students fail first-year writing and why others succeed (Fox, 1999). This, naturally, leads us to consider what it is that we do in first-year writing, and composition scholars have long expressed this concern over student failure by situating this dilemma in the bigger picture: the transition of the first-year student into the university.

To most outside our discipline, and many within it, first-year composition functions solely to provide a “service” to the rest of the university by carrying out the institutional goal of initiation into academic discourse. This “ethic of service”, as Sharon Crowley (1998) calls it, has also *served* those of us who teach it as it continues to justify our place in the university (p. 250). First-year composition and remediation are based in what Crowley describes as a “discourse of need” (p. 257). The process of this initiation or transition into academia and our understanding of the composition course as a place in which we ask students to write in new, unfamiliar ways has also been the focus of much of our work in terms of academic discourse and academic literacy. We have sought to gain a better understanding of how students struggle to meet the demands of their first-year composition course, as well as the writing demands placed on them in other courses

(Bartholomae, 1985; 2005; Bizzell, 1992; Chiseri-Strater, 1991; Hull, et al., 1991; Rose, 1985; Shaughnessy, 1977; Sternglass, 1997). We understand the writing classroom as a place where students grapple with new, privileged forms of literacy and language use while trying to hold steadfast to the language practices with which they enter traditional schooling and academia—places that often discredit and devalue them—and that literacy acquisition, both inside and outside of school, is influenced by a range of political, social and economic forces (Brandt, 1998; Cushman, 1998; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1983; Heller, 1997; Hull and Schultz, 2002; Mutnick, 1996). And to do this work, we have also often considered life outside the writing classroom—the material, economic and social conditions that precede and coincide with a student’s enrollment in the university. We take a closer look at people’s lives, both inside and outside of our classrooms in hopes that we can effect change within them (Counihan, 1999; Rose, 1989; Sternglass, 1997).

Looking at students’ backgrounds and how they and their experiences, past and present, may clash in particular ways with the university, helps composition teachers contextualize the resistance and academic failure that we inevitably face. Taking a closer look at students’ lives outside the classroom also helps us to see that resistance and failure are inextricably tied to forces that have acted upon our students before they enter our classrooms and continue to act upon them when they leave.

In her longitudinal study of students’ experiences with writing and learning across the curriculum at the City College of New York, *Time to Know Them*, Marilyn Sternglass (1997) notes, “Composition instruction cannot be seen in a vacuum” (p. 141). The implications of Sternglass’ statement are two-fold. First, Sternglass reminds us that learning to write is a process. Therefore, “composition instructors should not believe that

they are the final influence, or perhaps even the most important influence, in the development of writing abilities” (p. 41). Additionally, Sternglass’ statement highlights the influence of the very real, material conditions existing outside of our classrooms that affect the performance and success of students inside the classroom. In her research, it was the stresses of everyday life, such as money and family problems, that took a toll on students’ abilities to achieve academically. This counters the thinking that learning to write or even learning in general, happens in places immune to the influences of and somehow separate from the “real world”. Developing curriculum that is responsive to the everyday conditions of our students’ lives and that takes into consideration how those conditions may be incompatible with what we aim to teach is not only realistic—it is also our responsibility. Therefore, we can continue to gain from research like Sternglass’, as well as numerous other works discussed in Chapter 3, that focus on the lives of our students.

With more and more colleges and universities adopting liberal admissions policies, we have seen an increase in the number of students in our classrooms—students who, 10 years ago, may not have been “college bound”. This is something I will discuss in more detail later, but here I will say that we have seen an overall increase in the number of students who are defined by their institutions as “at-risk”—students who stand less a chance of succeeding at the college level than their more academically successful peers. This study takes a closer look at the experiences of several of these students who start college on the Punxsutawney regional campus at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The Punxsutawney regional campus is devoted entirely to the education of first-year students, most of whom are placed on the campus because they enter the

university with SAT scores and/or high school grades that are below the university's standard admissions requirements.

This is largely a study about retention and how students' experiences both on campus and in the community are related to their ability to make a successful transition into the university. It is also, less directly, a study about access, remediation and how the circumstances under which students are admitted into the university impact their perceptions of it, as well as potentially impact their classroom performance. I approach this research as a compositionist and as someone who taught first-year writing on the Punxsutawney campus. The relevance of this research lies in the fact that every student who took part in this study, including the three introduced to the reader below, was also at some point enrolled in a first-year writing course. And as a first-year writing teacher, I feel compelled and obligated to develop a better understanding of this unique setting and site of remediation, the Punxsutawney campus, and to gather data about students' experiences in this setting because I consider this knowledge to be critical to understanding what it is that I *do* or *should* do in my classroom, particularly when working with at-risk students. This study is also relevant to composition because although our field has long been concerned with issues of transition, assimilation and the acquisition of academic discourse (and all the controversy these ideas represent), no one in the field has considered these issues more broadly in terms of retention, especially in a setting in which the relationship between remediation, location and race is endlessly complex.

### **An Introduction to the Students**

Staci (all student names are pseudonyms) is an 18-year-old, African-American, first-year, first-generation college student. She grew up in Philadelphia, PA, and she

graduated from one of the city's best schools, The Philadelphia School for Girls. However, finishing high school with a 2.4 cumulative GPA has limited Staci's college opportunities. During an interview conversation, she notes that she "applied to a lot of schools and didn't get into a lot of schools..." Staci's only option, other than community college, is to start college on IUP's Punxsutawney regional campus. Mostly out of her desire to move away from home, Staci accepts that she will not be able to attend the university's main campus for her first year, and despite her disappointment, she still decides to enroll on the regional campus. The campus is a first-year experience program designed to help students like Staci, who typically enter college with low high school grades and/or SAT scores, transition into college. The university admits these students, whom they consider to be "at-risk", knowing that they require additional support in order to be academically successful. Placing them on the smaller, regional campus (also termed a "transitional" campus) is, they believe, one way to provide this support.

James is another student who will start his first year on the regional campus. Like Staci, he is also an 18-year-old, African-American, first-year, first-generation college student who grew up in Philadelphia, PA. Unlike Staci, James maintained a "B" average throughout high school. The university's website notes the average high school GPA of an incoming first-year student on the main campus is a 3.2 ("Student Profile Information," 2011). Therefore, the average of James' high school grades was on par with that of students typically admitted to the university's main campus. However, it is possible that James' academic record revealed some irregularity that is responsible for his placement. As the university's website states, "Occasionally, a student... may be placed in a support program if the individual's transcript shows a lack of consistency. The

Admissions Committee will admit a student to a support program if it determines the student's success...hinges on academic assistance" ("Student Profile Information," para. 6). James notes that he barely passed his classes during his freshman and sophomore years of high school but did "much better" during his last two years. Additionally, his SAT score (reading and math combined) was less than 800. This SAT score falls approximately 200 points below the average score of 1000 of a typical student admitted to the university's main campus ("Student Profile Information"). According to data compiled by the university's Office of Research, Planning and Assessment, in 2009, the year James started college on the regional campus, the average SAT score (combined reading and math) of a student in the first-year cohort on the university's main campus was 990. The average score of a student in the first-year cohort on the regional campus was 805. Therefore, it is likely that his SAT score, combined with his inconsistent academic performance in high school, is what caused the university to also consider James to be "at-risk" and in need of additional support and to place him on the regional campus for his first-year.

"At-risk" is the term that I will use throughout the dissertation to describe the students who participated in my research. I also use this term when I discuss students, in general, who are considered in the related retention research to be the least likely to persist to graduation. This includes students placed into "basic" or remedial courses and students who are identified by their respective institutions and in other literature as "underprepared" to complete college course work. I chose "at-risk" over "underprepared" because the word "underprepared" implies that something or someone did not prepare these students for college. And while that may be the case, I am not

speculating about the source of this lack of preparation. I am focusing on how the institution that is the site of this research, as well as other institutions, might help students who are considered at-risk succeed and persist to graduation.

Anna is a third student who will also be attending the regional campus with James and Staci. Like them, she is also an 18-year-old, first-year, first-generation college student. Unlike them, she is white and from a rural community less than 10 miles from the regional campus. She does not know if she did well enough in high school and on her SATs to attend the university's main campus, though she believes that she did, but by her own admission she is "not ready" to attend college with 14,000+ other students. The regional campus was also recommended to her as a good starting place by one of her high school teachers. As a student, Anna feels that she struggles to understand new ideas and concepts presented in courses; she believes that in a smaller environment, she will be able to acquire the academic support she needs to be successful. She also does not desire to move away from home. Anna is one of approximately 15 students who, in 2009, made the choice to attend the university's regional campus instead of its main campus. Like Anna, these students are also white, and they also commuted to the campus from nearby communities. When they apply to the university, these students indicate their desire to attend the regional campus on their application, marking it as their first choice.

Anna's experience is very different from the application experiences of Staci and James, who applied to the university with the expectation of attending the university's main campus and who did not indicate a second choice on their applications. According to a member of the university's admissions staff, students who select the regional campus are typically students who, like Anna, live locally. When a student who does not live

within commuting distance selects the regional campus on his/her application, the admissions office calls the student to verify the selection is correct. More often than not, the student has picked the regional campus by mistake. As Staci noted in an interview during her second semester, “I would never have picked this.” Staci and James were admitted as part of what the university terms “Learning Support Program Admission” (“Student Profile Information”). The university’s website notes, “...the Admissions Committee determines on a case-by-case basis” which students would “benefit” from placement onto the regional campus (“Student Profile Information,” para. 9). In 2009, Staci and James were among 251 at-risk students who started college on the regional campus.

### **The Larger Context**

#### **Our Nation’s Belief in Education as Essential**

Before I continue with a closer look at the research setting, I think it is important to consider the brief stories of Staci, James and Anna within a larger, national context. According to the US Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, Staci, James and Anna are among the 70.1% of students who graduated from high school in the spring of 2009 and who were enrolled in a college or university three months later (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). This number is much higher than the 47% of 1973 high school graduates who enrolled in a college or trade school within a year of graduating. The steady rise of college enrollment since the 1970s and the push toward higher education is not surprising since a four-year-degree has been and still is often sold to high school students as a ticket to a better life—a way to realize the American Dream and achieve economic security. Nowadays, there is no denying that most decent jobs require education and training beyond a high school diploma. As noted by the Georgetown

University's Center on Education and the Workforce, 62% of jobs will require a college degree by 2018, and more than half of those will require at least a bachelor's degree (qtd. in Steinberg, 2010). President Obama even made clear his belief in the necessity of education when in March of 2009 he called it "...no longer just a pathway to opportunity" but a "prerequisite" (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2009).

Like our president, most people in the United States value education, and there are dozens of metaphors, like the one used by President Obama above, that stem from our belief in its power. To note a few: Education opens doors (and minds). Education is the pathway to success. Education (and knowledge) is power. In their recent "Inspire Thru Attire" t-shirt design contest, Westwood College called for entrants to "help inspire and communicate the power of education through [their] original t-shirt design". Several entries equated education with success and transformation. One entry represented education as a tree with the caption "Education: The Root of Something Greater" ("2010 Inspire Thru Attire T-shirt Design Contest," 2011).

Again, equating education with success and "something greater" is on par with public opinion. According to Public Agenda, a nonprofit organization dedicated to researching public opinion on a variety of issues, the percentage of Americans who believe college is "essential to success in today's world" rose from 31% in 2000 to 55% in 2005 (Johnson, Duffet, & Ott, 2005). This increase in the belief of college hopes and prospects as "essential to success" has been met with record enrollments at many colleges and universities across the United States.

For the most part, students believe that a four year degree will, in fact, lead them to "something greater". When I recently asked my first-year composition students why

they were in college, this is exactly what one said. When I asked this student to define “something greater”, he said “a good job”. While it is difficult to argue that, in the next 10 years, most jobs will require some form of higher education, as a society we also tend to romanticize the power of education and see it as an automatic pass to a better job and better life. Mike Rose (2009) challenges this notion in his most recent book *Why School?*. He writes, “Education *is* a means to enhance one’s economic prospects. But education alone is not enough to trump social barriers like racist hiring practices or inequality in pay based on gender (p. 13). In composition and literacy studies, the power of education is embodied in the “literacy myth”—the idea that literacy acquisition automatically leads to social equity and increased economic mobility (Graff, 1987).

Yet in recent years, the likelihood of a college graduate landing a “good” job, or any job for that matter, has decreased. While the national unemployment rate continues to hover around 10%, CBS Evening News correspondent Priya David (2009) reported that, “the jobless rate among college graduates has more than doubled from [2008] to 4.3%. Almost 2 million college graduates are unemployed” (para. 6). Furthermore, as Mary Beth Marklein (2010) points out, a four-year degree, even with a job, does not automatically lead to economic success. She writes, “About 25% of those with bachelor’s degrees earn less than those with two-year degrees” (para. 13). And it is likely the students who attended four or more years of college owe more in student loans. When their schooling does not pay off as promised, they are left only with a pile of debt they cannot afford to pay back. But while it may be true that a college degree does not guarantee a better job, or even a job, what both of these articles fail to point out is that the unemployment rate for those with only a high school diploma is still over twice as high as

the unemployment rate for college graduates. In March of 2011, these rates were 10.7% and 4.4%, respectively (United States Department of Labor, 2011). Therefore, the odds of securing employment still favor the college educated.

### **The Consequence of Education as Necessity: An Increased At-Risk Population**

So then it is not surprising that enrollment is on the rise at many US colleges and universities, and in 2009, many schools saw record enrollments. In general, schools are admitting more first-year students each year. In the fall of 2011, IUP estimates there will be close to 3,000 students in its first-year cohort. And with the view of education as a necessity come more and more students like Staci and James—students who are identified by their institutions as at-risk and in need of additional support. These students often enter the university with weak academic skills in one or more subject area, and they often find themselves enrolled in remedial course work or placed into courses with the words “basic” or “developmental” in their titles. In 2007-2008, the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that 20% of all incoming first-year students were enrolled in at least one remedial course, 6.6% were enrolled in two courses and 4.4% were enrolled in three or more courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010a). These are students who, twenty or thirty years ago, may not have chosen to pursue college degrees. These are the students whom we commonly think of when we utter the somewhat forbidden phrase, “College is not for everyone”.

And while enrollments have risen sharply at colleges and universities since the 1970s, graduation rates have remained flat. Currently, 60% of white students who enter college earn a bachelor’s degree in six years. For Hispanic and African-American students, the graduation rate is 49% and 42%, respectively (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2009). Nationally, over 40% of students who start college do not finish, and most of these drop out sometime during their first year. On average, four-year, public institutions fail to retain over 25% of their first-year students to the second year (American College Testing, 2010). Some of these students may leave school because they cannot afford to pay their tuition, some may leave because they have family obligations that make attending college too difficult and others are forced to leave because they fail their courses and are dismissed from the institution. While students leave for various reasons often in combination (i.e. family and work obligations take time away from their studies and ultimately, this leads to failure), this study focuses on the first year as an opportunity for intervention—a time during which dropping out or leaving, for any reason, can be prevented. In particular, I focus on the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney, the regional campus described above that is part of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, one of the 14 public universities in Pennsylvania’s state system. IUP’s regional campus in Punxsutawney is devoted entirely to the development of first-year students, most of who, like Staci and James, are defined as at-risk and identified as being in need of additional support.

### **The Relevance of Retention to Composition**

#### **First-year Composition Means First-Year Students**

Before I further describe the research setting as well as the nature of this research, I want to further address the fact that this is a retention study that I undertook as a compositionist and to more directly discuss the relationship between retention and composition and the implications of retention research for those of us who teach writing. For the past seven years, my graduate studies firmly rooted me in composition and

literacy studies, and it is with this background that I approach retention research. I have also had more than one person ask me to explain what this research has to do with composition and teaching writing.

To begin, I teach first-year composition, and if a student is going to leave school, he/she is most likely to do so during the first year. Since the 1970s, (see Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975), a student's transition or integration into the university, successful or otherwise, has been theorized as a process that involves the interaction of multiple variables. While many of these variables are a function of what a student experiences after he/she enters the university, such as interactions with faculty and integration into peer groups, whether or not a student persists has also been noted by scholars like Alexander Astin (1991) and Vincent Tinto (1993) to be largely determined by who the student is before he or she even sets foot on campus. Entering the university, the student collides with the culture therein. And this collision happens quickly—during the first semester of the first year. This makes any first-year classroom a prime site of intervention and, therefore, puts those of us who teach first-year students in a unique position to help make this transition, or collision, as smooth as possible.

And helping students succeed from the moment they enter our classrooms is important; in fact, academic achievement during the first year is considered to be one of the most crucial indicators of student retention. In one of the earliest retention studies that will be reviewed in the next chapter, J.B. Johnston (1926) made this connection between first-year student grades and persistence nearly a century ago, and more recently, Marsha Belcheir (1997) found a student's GPA during the first semester of college “is the most important predictor for retention” (p. 7). Given all of this, studying retention as

someone who teaches first-year students makes sense. Still, what does retention have to do with first-year composition?

### **The Unique Position of First-Year Composition as a Site of Intervention**

If anyone is in a position to intervene and help prevent students from dropping out, it is, arguably, those who teach first-year writing. Those of us who teach writing tend to learn more about our students' lives than their professors in other disciplines. We come to know our students through their writing. Most semesters, I begin with the personal narrative or a memoir that asks students to consider themselves as writers. Though I stress that the personal narrative is not a "confessional" and, in the latter, I am asking them to discuss themselves as writers, I still get small fragments of their lives—snapshots of their pasts, their struggles and their vulnerabilities that are otherwise opaque in the classroom setting. This is different from how I first view them, but through writing, and through smaller classes that allow me to interact with students in small groups or one-on-one, the student at the back of the room who always puts his head down halfway through class becomes the student whose parents dropped him on the doorstep of the university, despite the fact that he "has no idea" why he is here. The student who arrives consistently ten minutes late and does not appear to be interested in the course becomes, through her writing and my interactions with her, the student who started school in the university's summer bridge program for at-risk students, is struggling in all of her courses and trying desperately not to disappoint her parents, neither of whom are college educated.

The relevance of retention to composition studies is also articulated by Pegeen Reichert Powell (2009) in a recent article in *College Composition and Communication*.

She writes, “The unique context of the writing classroom as an interface between students’ past and future educational experiences, as an introduction to the discourse practices of higher education, and as one of the only universal requirements at most institutions makes it a prime site for retention efforts” (p. 669). Retention, previously considered an issue for student affairs is now a university-wide concern, to which faculty from across the university are being asked to respond. In composition, we are uniquely positioned to do so because through the writing that we often invite into our classrooms, the struggles of students to transition into the university are magnified. As writing teachers, we have insight about students that we are obligated to share with our colleagues across the university, as well as with administration. But our relationship to retention is not simply one defined by service to the rest of the university. We are also obligated to take part in this conversation because institutional changes made in the name of retention will, if they have not already, re-define the work we do in first-year writing. Some of these changes are addressed below.

To further illustrate how retention now concerns faculty across the entire university, I consider my own involvement in university-wide retention efforts. At my own institution, I am part of a retention committee that includes individuals from administration, academic affairs, student affairs and financial aid, as well as faculty from several different departments. Recently, our conversations have revolved around the impact of academic advising on first-year persistence rates, and several members of the committee are working on a proposal for a first-year advising center that would be “staffed” by faculty from across the university who understand the unique needs of first-year students, i.e. faculty who teach first-year courses. Though many faculty may not

think of it this way, academic advising—a time-consuming, yet important aspect of our work—has an impact on retention.

Advising is related to retention partially because it is important that students receive good advice over the course of their academic careers about what courses they need to take to fulfill the general education, major and minor requirements of their institution. Additionally, through advising, faculty can help students figure out, based on a student's long-term goals, what major or minor would be a good “fit”. Students who are poorly advised and who end up in classes that they do not need or that do not “count” toward requirements often become frustrated and sometimes, even drop out. Faculty advisors are also in a position to make recommendations to students about additional academic support, such as tutoring, that an advisee may benefit from. Lastly, and perhaps, most importantly, advising is also related to retention because it provides an opportunity for students to interact with a faculty member outside of the classroom. In their study on the impact of faculty-student interactions on student persistence, Ernest Pascarella and Patrick Terenzini (1991) derived that “freshman to sophomore persistence was positively and significantly related to total amount of student-faculty nonclassroom contact with faculty and particularly to frequency of interactions with faculty to discuss intellectual matters” (p. 394).

In composition, contact with students outside of the classroom typically happens in the context of a writing conference. In my own teaching, I have debated the usefulness of the writing conference—particularly when I think about the number of students each semester who do not show up at all or show up without any of their writing, and due to their time-consuming nature, I have admittedly considered doing away with conferences

all together. However, considering the writing conference from the perspective of someone concerned with retention, it is still important that the student show up but less important that he/she bring a piece of writing. The purpose of the conference does not have to be confined or limited to what is written on the page—or even to a discussion of writing. As anyone who has experience conferencing with first-year writers knows, writing conferences sometimes have less to do with writing than they do with the struggles and triumphs of the student's transition into the university. The student who rushes in 10 minutes late with a paper still warm from the printer is learning how to simply (and there is nothing truly simple about this) be a student at the university at the same he/she is learning to write at the university. If we, as writing faculty, consider the impact of non-classroom faculty contact on retention, we can use this information to reconsider the purpose of the writing conference.

In addition to seeing a connection between retention and the writing conference, I also see retention efforts overlapping in distinct ways with what many of us in composition do as part of the work in our courses. On my university's retention committee, we also proposed a first-year seminar course that aims to, among other things, help students successfully transition into the university by acquainting them with the culture of the university and the language practices privileged therein. This goal is one commonly shared with first-year writing. Other members of my department who serve on this committee see the ways in which the course overlaps with first-year writing as a potential threat; their initial response was that this was a time to step up and take ownership over what we do and distinguish what we do from what would happen in the proposed course. And while I understand their concern for reasons that I will note in just

a moment, I instead considered this an opportunity for us in composition, and in particular for those of us who teach first-year writing, to re-consider what it is that we do and *how* what we do in our classrooms can work with and in support of these broader retention efforts. This re-consideration is necessary because we will, inevitably, see changes made to our curriculum in the name of retention.

And although many faculty may not see retention as a concern, we do involve ourselves with student learning and student success in the classroom. As M. Lee Upcraft, John Gardner and Betsy Barefoot (2005) note, we are “absolutely correct” in seeing ourselves “dedicated to student learning” and not to “keeping students in college” (p. 6). Furthermore, effective retention programs and interventions should be developed with the purpose of improving student learning and student success and not just as a means to keep our classrooms full. Therefore, if administrators want to get their faculty on the “retention bandwagon” they have to focus retention efforts on the goals that they have in common with faculty—improving student success and learning. Otherwise, faculty are likely to view retention as an administrative effort to simply fill their classrooms, a view that is justified when administration and faculty do not share the goal of helping students learn and succeed. Tinto (1993) states, “Education, the social and intellectual development of individuals, rather than just their continued presence on campus should be the goal of retention efforts” (p. 145). In turn, faculty, when presented with the opportunity I described above, need to take part in the conversation and realize that successful retention efforts are not those that separate what *we* do from what *they* do; the most promising initiatives are those that take into account what *we all* can do—together.

And yet, I do understand my colleagues' hesitation to take part in the planning of the first-year seminar course described above. We will, no doubt, also see changes made in the interest of retention that are not for the best and that are not centered around student learning and success—at least not from a faculty standpoint. Powell notes that, at her institution, she has witnessed “the removal of the writing center from the authority of the English department faculty and into a more general academic support center” (p. 669). At my institution, the English department still has control over the writing center, but next year, it is moving to a “one-stop shop” for student services that is currently being renovated across campus. The writing center's physical distance from the English department signifies the loss of authority over the center that is soon to follow. Powell notes that these changes that are taking place “in the name of retention” are re-shaping our roles within the institution, and in ways that may not be for the best (p. 669). The possible negative effects of such changes, as they pertain to student success and learning, need to be brought to the attention of the people making these decisions and are calling on all of us, loudly, to participate in the conversation.

But having a voice in this discussion and working with fellow faculty and members of administration and devoting energy to retention efforts—programs and interventions to help students succeed and persist to graduation, also means facing a somewhat bleak reality: as many as 50% of the students I see every semester in first-year writing will not graduate. This is a dismal truth that Powell acknowledges in her article, but still, she urges us to push past the reality and the fact that first-year composition itself may not “make or break” a student's chances at succeeding. She writes, “The inevitability of students dropping out does not mean that we shouldn't try to prevent it

from happening” (p. 678). To me, this is only another reason why our efforts have to extend beyond the boundaries of our own classrooms. If we take up retention as a serious concern and keep student success and learning at the heart of the matter, we may better and more thoroughly understand the potential positive impact of face-to-face interaction with a student outside of class or the possibility that exists in a first-year writing course being combined with a first-year seminar.

I undertook this research because I believe teachers of composition have a place in this conversation, and because I believe in the first-year writing course as a site of intervention, despite the bleak truth noted above. This means that I am seeking to position my research in a space that is not clearly defined—a place between retention and composition/literacy studies that I am paving for myself. Although there are teachers of writing, like Powell, who argue that all of us who teach writing should be concerned with retention, the field as a whole has yet to truly immerse itself in the discussion. Therefore, with this study I am seeking to make a case for an increased awareness of retention in composition and I do this by focusing my research on a very unique and specific context—a regional campus dedicated to the development of at-risk, first-year students.

### **Narrowing the Context**

#### **The Research Setting: An Introduction to IUP-Punxsutawney**

I met Staci, James and Anna on Indiana University of Pennsylvania’s Punxsutawney regional campus. Located 27 miles north of IUP’s main campus, which is in Indiana, PA, the Punxsy campus was established in 1962 by a group of local people who wanted to offer students in the community the opportunity to begin college closer to home. In its early years, the campus consisted of multiple buildings that were torn down in 2006 and replaced with the current structure, a “Living-Learning Center”. Essentially,

this is an academic building and dormitory of suites separated by an indoor walkway. A more specific layout of the building is provided in Chapter 4. Since its inception, the campus has offered mostly first-year courses, but at one time it did offer some associate's degree programs as well.

Approximately 11 years ago, the mission of the Punxsutawney campus changed as administrators decided that the campus' strength was grounded in the development of first-year students, particularly first-year students who might benefit from the additional support and smaller environment. After changing its mission to a focus on the first-year experience, the campus reached out to communities beyond its Jefferson County location, recruiting students from as far east as Philadelphia. At that time, the campus had a mostly local enrollment of 158 students. During the 2009-2010 academic year, Punxsutawney's enrollment reached 298 students, representing five states and 48 counties across the commonwealth.

Of the 251 first-year, full-time students attending IUP-Punxsy during the 2009-2010 AY, 93 (37%) identified themselves on their college applications as African-American, 142 (56%) identified as white and 16 (7%) identified as "other" with no explanation. In the words of the campus' former Dean, Dr. Valarie Trimarchi, "The diversity of the campus is quite rare, as is its first-year mission. There are universities that offer first-year programs, but there are none that could be identified who have dedicated an entire campus to this mission. As for diversity, it is rare to find a student body that reflects nearly 50% minority enrollment." Yes, the diversity of the Punxsutawney campus is rare, but it cannot be overlooked that this diversity can be directly attributed to the placement of students like Staci and James.

In 2009-2010, the year in which I concluded this research, the enrollment on the campus was 298. Forty-seven of these students were part-time (10), second-year freshmen (24) and dual enrollment students (13). The remaining 251 were first-year, full-time students, most of who did not apply to IUP intending to start college on the Punxsutawney campus. The exception here would be the 15 students like Anna, who chose to attend the campus. This leaves approximately 235 students who, due to insufficient grades and/or test scores, were not accepted to the university's main campus and instead, received a letter that offered them enrollment at the regional campus for their first year. The language of this first letter describes the first-year program on the regional campus in a way that reveals how the university views the program, or at least how it wants students and their parents to view it, as well as how the university views the students that it admits to the regional campus. These letters provide one representation of the program and the students that, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, differs greatly from some of the perspectives presented by the students themselves. Therefore, while I am discussing the admissions process, it is worth taking a closer look at the first admissions letter that students receive from the university. This letter is included in its entirety in Appendix A.

All students who apply to IUP on-time typically receive their first letter from the university during February of their senior year of high school. This first letter comes from the Director of Admissions, and like most acceptance letters, opens by congratulating the student. In the second sentence, the distinction is made, with bolded and italicized font, that the student has been accepted to the ***Punxsutawney Campus***.

The paragraph that follows this opening paragraph describes this discrepancy for the student who, by this time, probably desires some sort of explanation:

After careful review of your academic record, the Admissions Committee believes that the academic environment and personal attention that you will receive is crucial to your continued academic success. Our review of your credentials has convinced us that you have the ability to meet the educational challenges at the IUP at *Punxsutawney Campus*, for your first year before completing your IUP education at the Indiana Campus.

The letter continues with a description of the “exciting” Punxsutawney Summer Opportunity Program. This program allows students to enroll in courses in a 5-week session that begins in July. The rest of the letter describes how students can obtain more information about the program, as well as housing for the fall and includes deadlines for the submission of a tuition deposit. This letter is accompanied with a green response card that students are asked to fill out and return with their \$150.00 tuition deposit.

Remember, most of the students who receive this letter apply to the university with the expectation of attending the main campus, and on their applications, many of them ignore the regional campus as an option or second choice. Some students are not even aware that the campus exists until they receive this letter in the mail. The language of the letter is an attempt by the university to take what is an initial disappointment to most of the students reading it and spin it into an opportunity. Using consistently positive language, the university takes something that could be, and often is, perceived as bad and turns it into something good. There are no words or phrases in this letter about the student being deficient, not good enough or not possessing the academic skills desired by

the university, and there is no mention of the student *not* being accepted to the main campus. The letter states, “you have been admitted” in its opening congratulatory sentence, and the student is told that he/she has “the ability to meet the educational challenges” on the regional campus. The use of “continued” in the phrase “continued academic success” in the paragraph included above even indicates that, up to this point, the student has, in fact, realized academic success. However, as the stories of Staci and James indicate, the student reading this letter has probably realized academic success on only a limited or inconsistent basis. If the student were already well-acquainted with academic success, he/she would not likely receive this letter in the first place. How the university views the student, or at the very least how the university wants the student to feel that he/she is viewed, is made very clear in these word choices.

IUP-Punxsutawney and the university as a whole are also presented in this letter in a way that is very particular and intentional. The regional campus is a place where students receive “personal attention” that will help them succeed. There is also the implication that the “academic environment” on the regional campus is a better fit for the student; the tone and word choices of this paragraph imply is that the university is familiar enough with the student to make suggestions about his/her needs, and instead of presenting this in a manner that is condescending, the university makes placement on the regional campus sound like advice from a caring friend who has the student’s best interests at heart.

Lastly, the phrasing of the final sentence of the above excerpt is somewhat interesting. The regional campus is a place where students go for one year, “before completing” their “IUP education”. This defines the Punxsutawney campus very much

as a transitional space—a stepping stone to main campus. I also find the choice of “completing” to be interesting. Why not say “continuing”? With this very first letter, the university’s focus and goal is graduating the student—not necessarily educating the student. The emphasis here is on graduation. Also note that the student will not complete just an “education” but an “IUP education”. Using the name of the school here is a way to communicate to the student that he/she is now a part of the university. Certainly all schools employ similar language to promote themselves as unique or special to their incoming students. However, the student opening this letter is starting his/her first year on the periphery of the university—embraced through learning support admission but also held “at arm’s length”, 27 miles from the university’s main campus.

As a whole, the students on the Punxsutawney campus who receive a letter just like the one previously discussed are like James and Staci; they are at-risk of not persisting to graduation. This particular cohort of students entered the university with an average high school GPA of 2.5 and an average SAT score of 805. Collectively, these students represent the 40% of students in the United States who start college but do not finish. Because most of the students who start at the regional campus are also specifically defined as at-risk of not persisting to graduation, IUP-Punxsutawney is a rich site for retention research.

### **Statement of the Research Questions**

The ultimate goal of much retention research is to reveal why students leave or what prevents them from making a successful transition into college. The purpose of determining this would be to make recommendations for how we, both in the classroom and at the institutional level, can better focus our efforts on preventing student attrition.

However, before we can devote more of our efforts to studying why students leave, how to help them persist to graduation or even why they fail our courses, we need to consider what we know about first-year students beyond their grades, SAT scores and the degree to which they are able to meet the demands of their college courses. We need to also consider what we know about this particular context. Therefore, I begin this study by posing the following questions: *What does it mean to be a first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney? What is the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney?*

### **Introduction to the Research Methodology and the Rationale for this Research**

Because the site of this research is IUP's Punxsutawney campus, the emphasis is also on what it means to be a first-year student in this particular setting—a setting in which all students who are defined as at-risk are remediated by placement on the campus itself and also, in the year I conducted my research, by placement in a mandatory developmental studies curriculum. The campus is, in itself, a programmatic intervention—an effort by the university to increase the retention and graduation of first-year students. And it is a program that no one has previously researched. Therefore, much of the work of this dissertation is in describing the context itself, and I do this by gathering various artifacts that define the first-year experience, like the admissions letter discussed above, and weaving them into a meaningful discussion that answers the question: What is this place?

Of course, the answer to that question is also intimately connected to the experiences of the students who are themselves immersed in this context. In fact, their experiences, year after year, are what define the context. Responding to these questions requires that I focus my research on the lived experiences of these students—gathered

through my own observations, student drawings, interview conversations and finally, a survey. This combination of methods is, to the best of my knowledge, an approach that is unique to research on underprepared, first-year students. While there are studies that take an ethnographic approach to studying the “culture” of the first year, such as the somewhat controversial research of Rebekah Nathan (2005) who learned about the first-year experience by posing as a first-year student, and there are numerous studies that seek to isolate factors that seem to impact a student’s ability to successfully transition into the first year (see Chapter 2), no study exists that, at its core, aims to understand the essence of what it means to be an at-risk, first-year student. Taking this approach means gathering the lived experiences through the methods noted above of not only the first-year students at IUP-Punxsutawney but also of the campus faculty and staff who play their own roles in defining and shaping this experience. In short, the lived experiences of these individuals were gathered from 2009 through the end of 2010. All of the methods of data collection will be described in depth in Chapter 3.

An emphasis on the lived experience serves as the rationale of this research for another reason as well. As noted above, while we do have quite a bit of knowledge about first-year students, this knowledge is limited. In his book *Researching Lived Experience* Max Van Manen (1990) explains how our knowledge of a phenomenon becomes limited because, ironically, we know *too much*. In his book, he uses the example of parenting. He notes that we know what parenting *is*, and we know what parents do or should do, but we possess this knowledge before we “actually come to an understanding of what it means to be a parent in the first place” (p. 47). This metaphor can be transferred to the previously mentioned knowledge that professors and college administrators possess about first-year

students. What we already know about any phenomenon, be it parenting or being a student, can also interfere with our ability to understand its essence. We cannot understand the essence of what it means to be a parent if we are unable to put aside our preconceived notions about effective parenting or, for example, our opinions related to how parents should discipline their children. Although I do not take a purely phenomenological approach in my own research, Van Manen's analogy about parenting can be directly applied to my context and the act of *being* a first-year student.

Looking at this research, if only briefly, through a phenomenological lens, also helps the reader understand my position and perspective as the researcher. Edmund Husserl (1970) used the term "bracketing" to describe how a researcher must take hold of his preconceptions regarding a phenomenon and place them outside of his knowledge (p. 33-42). Unfortunately, humans are most often unable to forget the things that they wish to. We cannot approach our research with a "blank slate". Therefore, a more practical way to deal with our presuppositions is to make them explicit and come to terms with how they might influence or slip into our research. Much of what I know about the first-year students at IUP-Punxsutawney I have already made apparent, but in Chapter 3, I will describe the impact that my own subjectivities, very much a consequence of my closeness to the research setting, have had on this study.

A final key to the rationale of this study is the setting itself. In a place where there are only first-year students, all of the struggles and triumphs that students experience during the first year are magnified and made more apparent. Better understanding the experiences of students in a place that is truly unique can be useful to

the faculty, staff and administrators not only on this particular campus but also on other college and university campuses where at-risk students are admitted.

### **Limitations**

What is essential to the rationale of this research, the specific nature of the research setting, is also a detail that limits the overall generalizability of the study. IUP-Punxsutawney is only one campus, and my research aims to define and describe students and their experiences in only this one place. Although I justify entering into retention research as a compositionist in ways that make it relevant to those outside of this setting, the reader should keep in mind that the data and therefore, what the data reveals is derived from a very unique and particular context. And while I do believe that this research is useful to anyone who works with first-year and/or at-risk students, the reader should remember that, above all, context matters.

### **A Brief Summary of Chapters 2-5**

Chapter 2 opens with an overview of data compiled nationally and at the institutional level regarding persistence and graduation rates. At the institutional level, I discuss the persistence and graduation rates of students on both the main and Punxsutawney regional campus. One purpose of this is to situate the regional campus numbers in the context of the institution and to, in turn, situate the institutional numbers in a national context. This comparison gives readers one way to look at and understand the context—in numbers. As retention becomes a growing concern for colleges and universities, more and more schools are developing first-year experience programs, like the one at IUP-Punxsutawney to increase student persistence. The program itself exists as a way to improve the retention and graduation rates that I discuss in Chapter 2.

However, the questions driving this research indicate that what we know about the program and its students is limited. Therefore, if the primary goal of the program is to improve the retention and graduation rates of this at-risk population, we need to know how many students who start at IUP-Punxsutawney persist to graduation and how these numbers compare to institutional rates. The graduation rate of students who start on the regional campus points to a need for some type of support or first-year programming for this at-risk population, but, most importantly, it points to the need to study and to evaluate the program that already exists—to begin a conversation about what seems to be working and what could be better. This research, which aims to define and describe the program as well as the experiences of the students, is perhaps the beginning of that conversation, but if every student who started at IUP-Punxsutawney earned a degree within six years, it is not a conversation we would need to have.

Chapter 2 continues with a review literature related to the research questions. This review is historical and includes the earliest studies on retention that I was able to locate, as well as a discussion of the theoretical models that still drive much of the research today. I also review studies that seek to identify factors such as, but not limited to, race, gender, living situation and level of involvement in campus activities that may enable or inhibit a student's ability to make a successful transition into the first year. The last half of the literature review emphasizes more current research, as well as provides a brief overview of first-year experience programs.

In the third chapter, I take a closer look at the research methodology. To do so means to examine the multiple roles that I played throughout this research process—from the assistant director of the writing center who lived in the dorm to the college writing

instructor who lived an hour away to the grad student researcher, etc.—and to examine how with these changing roles came shifts in perspective and subjectivities that have shaped this research in particular ways. In this chapter, I will also explain the various methods of data collection that I utilized to explore the research questions.

In the fourth chapter, I offer an analysis of the data. The primary source of data that is the subject of this analysis is student drawings or “maps” that depict Punxsutawney as they experienced it. I also discuss students’ responses to several survey questions about their experiences and how these responses speak to the analysis of the primary data source. An emphasis in this chapter is placed on issues of race, which is relevant due to the fact that in recent years, the majority of students at IUP-  
Punxsutawney have been minorities.

In the final chapter, I reflect on the significance of this research as it relates to the field of composition and the discussion we have been having for years about remediation, access and standards. I will also make recommendations for how this research could be utilized to increase retention on the Punxsutawney regional campus and improve first-year programming. To more directly respond to but to also complicate the research questions, in this chapter, I also return to the profiles of Staci, James and Anna.

## **CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter provides an overview of the significant research published in retention studies during the last century. Retention is not explicitly addressed in composition studies. Therefore, to better understand the experiences of the students who participated in this research, as well as the setting of the regional campus and how the experiences and the setting play a role in retention, it was necessary to review scholarship from a field entirely devoted to this matter.

I also review discuss data compiled by IUP's Office of Research Planning and Assessment, The National Center for Education Statistics and The National Center for Higher Education Management regarding enrollment, persistence and graduation rates, both institutional and national. The purpose of this data is to situate the research more specifically in a national context and to also briefly distill what we know about the persistence and graduation rates of minority students, who make up the majority of the student population in the research setting.

What follows the presentation of this information is a historical review of the related literature that begins with a discussion of the earliest known studies on retention, the work of J.B. Johnston (1926) and John McNeely (1937). The purpose of this discussion is to show how the aim of the earliest studies varied from those of more recent research and to note how some reasons for attrition identified in early research are still relevant today.

Then, I will discuss the impact of historical events, such as World War II and Sputnik, and how these events, and the increased enrollment in higher education of minorities and working class students that came about as a result of them, led to period of

scholarship in the 1950s and 1960s that focused on predicting attrition by analyzing dropout rates to determine who was leaving college and relating individual characteristics, like social class, to retention. This includes noting behaviors and characteristics associated with attrition that are still relevant today, such as parental involvement and motivation. This section concludes with a discussion of the work of John Summerskill (1962), who was the first scholar to consider in-depth how motivation is associated with attrition.

Next, we turn to a shift in the research from the psychological to the sociological that moves beyond the individual student to consider how the campus environment impacts retention. As described in this section, the campus environment also plays a pivotal role in the retention of students in my research setting.

The chapter then continues with a look into the two primary limitations of most studies published prior to 1980 and still present in current research. The first of these is inconsistent definitions for “dropout” and “attrition” that cause research to be misleading. The second limitation is the use of ex post facto methodology to figure out what causes students to leave school. My research involves students who are considered at-risk and likely to leave the university without graduating, and the data for my study was collected while the students were enrolled—not after they had left. Therefore, a discussion of the limitations of existing research in the field is important as it helps to define how my study differs from prior research and where it fits in the field.

Following the discussion on limitations, I then move on to the 1970s, when the field of retention studies saw its first theoretical model, developed by William Spady (1971) and expanded and revised by Tinto (1975). While the majority of studies

conducted in the field since 1975 invoke only the work of Tinto, it was Spady who should be credited with beginning what Susan Berger and Joseph Lyon (2005) describe as the “theoretical boom” in retention research (p. 19). It is important to carefully examine the theoretical models of both scholars as they continue to shape present-day research.

After a discussion of both models, I briefly overview additional theoretical contributions to the field, such as the work of John Bean (1980) and Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), as well as note challenges to Tinto’s theoretical model. The purpose in describing the revisions and challenges made to Tinto’s theory is to note that no single theoretical model can account for the variety of contexts and increasingly diverse student bodies that demand and can benefit from retention research. The key to successful research is not in blindly applying previously developed theories but in revising them to suit the present context.

Finally, I conclude the chapter with a concise overview of research published in the past decade in the *Journal of College Student Retention*, as well as in the *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*. Founded in 1999 and published through the Center for the Study of College Student Retention, *JCSR*, is the only peer-reviewed journal in the field of education that focuses solely on retention research. According to its website, “The purpose of the journal is to provide the educational community and the federal and state government with the latest research related to retention and attrition, including articles on new theory and innovative interventions aimed to prevent attrition” (“Editorial Policies,” n.d.).

Following discussion of the *JCSR*, I take a look at the last five years of scholarship published in the *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*. While providing research and scholarship about retention is also a primary purpose of this year, as its name implies, the *JFYEST* focuses on the success and survival of students during the first year. This journal is published on a semiannual basis by the University of South Carolina's National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. Founded in 1991, the center's mission is "to support and advance efforts to improve student learning and transitions into and through higher education" (University of South Carolina, n.d.).

The overview of recent scholarship in these two journals is brief because its purpose is namely to show how research in the past decade seems to possess one or more of the following traits: (1) the research tests earlier theory, usually Tinto's (2) the research focuses on preventing attrition and (3) the research discusses a program or intervention designed for such purposes. Because the site of my research is in itself a program designed to prevent attrition, this discussion is another way to situate my research in the field. This review of prior scholarship offers a starting place from which to consider the current research context. However, it is important to always keep in mind a primary goal of the current research—to understand and describe the research setting for what it is, somewhat on the margins of the existing research and academia in general.

### **The Importance of Studying Retention**

First, I want to explain the need for retention research. The increasing importance that society places on higher education and the obtainment of a college degree is the driving force behind the need for retention research. The following data, both national

and institutional, makes a case for the importance of studying retention. In summary, nationally, enrollment numbers are up, but graduation rates continue to remain flat. In the case of the institution, Indiana University of Pennsylvania's (IUP) main campus and its regional campus in Punxsutawney, the numbers presented here show that, overall, retention and persistence rates are falling at a significant rate among the school's at-risk, minority population. This is with the exception of 2009-2010, when the persistence of the regional campus' minority student population surpassed that of its white students. The reasons for this sudden rise in the persistence of this group will be discussed in Chapter 5, when I discuss the institutional implications of this research. Because the site of my research is a retention initiative designed to help increase the persistence of these very students, the following data makes a compelling case for the need for retention research on the Punxsutawney campus. The data included in the following section also serves to situate the regional campus in a larger, institutional context and to also situate the institution in a wider, national context.

### **Increased Enrollment: National and Institutional Numbers**

Colleges are experiencing record enrollments. In fact, the National Center for Education Statistics notes that, in the fall of 2009, enrollment at degree-granting institutions reached 20.5 million (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010b). The NCES also predicts that colleges and universities will see even higher numbers from 2011-2019, predicting 23.4 million students would be enrolled in degree-granting institutions by the fall of 2019. Overall, the NCES predicts a 9% increase in enrollment over the next eight years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010c). Part of this is due to an increase in non-traditional students, defined by the NCES as those who attend

part time or begin postsecondary education when they are over the age of 24. In 2009, the National Center for Higher Education Management (NCHEM) reported that 7% of the nation's individuals, aged 25 to 49, were enrolled in higher education. This means that nationally, 5,160,774 people between the ages of 25 and 49 were enrolled in a postsecondary institution in 2009. This number was up from the 5.7% or 4,299,113 individuals in this age range who were enrolled in higher education just two years prior, in 2007 ((National Center for Education Statistics, 2010c). This increase is likely a consequence of the economic downturn that resulted in rising unemployment and many people returning to school to raise their education levels, and with that, their prospects for employment.

### **Increased Minority Enrollment: National and Institutional Numbers**

With the record enrollments at colleges and universities across the United States come increased numbers of students who are at-risk of academic failure and not persisting to graduation. Students like these—students like James and Staci who were described in Chapter 1—make up the majority of the students who begin college in the setting of my research, IUP's Punxsutawney regional campus. In addition, many of these students are also minorities who, in the past 10 years, have been enrolling in higher education, in general, in record numbers. Data compiled by the NCES notes that in 2003, approximately 5 million minority students, defined by the NCES as African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native and Hispanic, were enrolled in degree-granting institutions, making up 29.8% of the total national enrollment. In 2009, this number reached over 7 million or approximately 34.3% of the total enrollment at degree-granting institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010b).

IUP is no exception to this recent increase in minority enrollment. Table 1 and Table 2, included below, offer a comparison of the race of students in the 2003-2004 and 2007-2008 first-year cohorts on both IUP's main campus and its regional campus. Although I later provide more recent enrollment data for the regional campus, I wanted to compare the make up of the first-year cohorts from both campuses for the same academic years. Because the most recent data that I have for the main campus is from the 2007-2008 academic year, the data provided below for the regional campus is also from the 2007-2008 academic year. The data below was compiled by IUP's Office of Research, Planning and Assessment. It is important to note that the "first-year cohort" is defined by the institution as incoming students who are entering college for the first time on a full-time basis. Therefore, these numbers do not include transfer students. They also do not include students who in their second year but who have not earned enough credits to reach sophomore status. They also do not include students who are starting college on a part-time basis.

Table 1

*IUP's Main Campus First-Year Cohort by Race for AY 2003-2004 and 2007-2008*

Academic Year 2003-2004			Academic Year 2007-2008		
Total Cohort: 2275			Total Cohort: 2231		
	# of Students	Percentage of Cohort		# of Students	Percentage of Cohort
White	1935	85%	White	1734	77.7%
African-American	126	5.5%	African-American	252	11.3%
American Indian	6	< 1%	American Indian	9	< 1%
Asian	21	1%	Asian	23	1%
Hispanic	16	< 1%	Hispanic	50	2.2%
Multi-Racial	16	< 1%	Multi-Racial	23	1%
Non-Residents	37	1.6%	Non-Residents	28	1.3%
Unknown	118	5.2%	Unknown	112	5%

Table 2

*IUP-Punxsutawney's First-Year Cohort by Race for AY 2003-2004 and 2007-2008*

Academic Year 2003-2004			Academic Year 2007-2008		
Total Cohort: 193			Total Cohort: 236		
	# of Students	Percentage of Cohort		# of Students	Percentage of Cohort
White	140	72.5%	White	100	42.4%
African-American	35	18.1%	African-American	115	48.7%
American Indian	2	1.0%	American Indian	0	0%
Asian	3	1.6%	Asian	1	.5%
Hispanic	2	1.0%	Hispanic	6	2.5%
Multi-Racial	2	1.0%	Multi-Racial	4	1.7%
Non-Residents	0	0%	Non-Residents	0	0%
Unknown	9	4.7%	Unknown	10	4.2%

These numbers indicate, at the very least, that the university's main campus is admitting a higher percentage of minority students each year, relative to the size of its first-year cohort. While the first-year cohort on IUP's main campus is still noticeably white, it has become increasingly diverse. In 2003-2004, minority students, including African-American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic and Multiracial, comprised only 8.1% (185 students) of the first-year cohort. By 2007-2008, this number had doubled to 16% or 357 students.

Perhaps what has happened on the regional campus in terms of an increase in diversity is even more interesting. While only 35 African-American students were a part of the regional campus' first-year cohort in 2003-2004, in 2007-2008, African-American students made up the majority of the campus' 236-member first-year cohort with 115 students, compared to 100 white students. When combined with additional ethnic groups including Asian, Hispanic and Multiracial, 126 out of 236, or 53%, of the regional campus' 2007 first-year students identified themselves as minorities. The diversity of the campus, as noted in the first chapter, finds its roots in a system of placement that offers admission to the regional campus primarily to students who are entering the university with grades and test scores that are below admissions requirements. The steady increase in the minority population at the regional campus from AY 2003-2004 to AY 2007-2008 can be attributed to a shift in the campus' mission to support these at-risk students, as well as active recruitment of minority students from urban areas who are identified as needing extra support to succeed in college.

## **IUP's Attrition Rates Compared to National Rates**

While the first-year cohort on IUP's regional campus is approximately only 10% of the size of the first-year cohort on the university's main campus, percentage-wise, minority students make up a much larger percentage of the regional campus' first-year cohort. In addition, student attrition, or dropout is also higher on the regional campus. Measuring freshman-to-sophomore persistence is important because students are most vulnerable and likely to leave during the first year and because institutions can quickly implement interventions to prevent the loss of their students. In Table 3, I compare the rates of attrition on both campuses for the academic years 2003-2004 through 2009-2010. The years mentioned here and below, are the years in which the cohort, established by the university, first enrolled at IUP. Therefore, when I discuss 2003-2004, I mean the students who started in the first-year cohort, on their respective campuses, in the fall of 2003. I calculated these percentages from data provided by IUP's Office of Research, Planning and Assessment.

Table 3

*Rates of Attrition on IUP's Main and Punxsutawney Regional Campus for AY 2003-2004 to 2009-2010*

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b><u>IUP-Punxsutawney</u></b>			<b><u>IUP-Main Campus</u></b>		
	<b>Total Cohort</b>	<b>Did Not Persist</b>	<b>Rate of Attrition</b>	<b>Total Cohort</b>	<b>Did Not Persist</b>	<b>Rate of Attrition</b>
2003-2004	193	73	37.8%	2275	523	23.0%
2004-2005	236	76	32.7%	2193	489	22.0%
2005-2006	236	71	30.0%	2070	476	23.0%
2006-2007	257	82	32.0%	2221	572	25.8%
2007-2008	236	80	33.8%	2231	564	25.0%
2008-2009	249	74	30.0%	2749	683	24.8%
2009-2010	247	60	24.2%	2658	602	22.6%

Like the graduation rates that I will discuss in a moment, on both the main and Punxsutawney regional campus, the university has seen relatively unchanged persistence rates from the first to second year, as displayed on Table 3. In the years included on Table 3, the rate of attrition for IUP's main campus ranges from 22.0% to 25.8%. These numbers are perhaps easier to think of in terms of persistence rates—subtracting the attrition rate from 100. This means that the persistence rates range from 74.2% to 78% during the given years. Although this range coincides well with the 76.8% persistence rate among public universities reported by NCHEM in 2008, as well as the overall average of 74.7% reported for all colleges and universities, both two-year and four-year, public and private, IUP's main campus persistence rate does fall below Pennsylvania's average, which is 81% for all schools and 82% for public schools (NCHEMS Information Center, 2009). The persistence rate for African-American students on the main campus for 2009-2010 was 65.3%, while it was 79% for white students.

On the Punxsutawney campus, persistence rates have ranged from 62.2% to 75.8% for the given years. This 75.8% persistence rate from 2009-2010 is the highest rate the campus has seen in recent years. Possible reasons for this will be discussed in Chapter 5. And while the persistence rate of African-American students on the regional campus has also been historically lower than the persistence rate of white students on the regional campus, this past year, the numbers were flipped. In 2009-2010, the persistence rate of white students on the regional campus was 70%, while it was 83% for African-American students. These numbers contrast with persistence rates from 2007-2008 that are lower for both populations. The persistence rate of white students on the regional

campus was 67%, while it was comparatively lower, at 60%, for African-American students. This is over 20% lower than numbers reported two years later.

Not considering race, persistence also seems to be higher among females than males. The persistence rates among females on the main and regional campuses in 2009-2010 were 79% and 78%, respectively. For males, the retention rates on the two campuses were slightly lower at 75% and 72%, respectively.

### **IUP's Graduation Rates Compared to National Rates**

Record numbers of students entering college underprepared to meet the demands of their college courses also means that, although minority enrollments at some schools are at an all-time high and in general, enrollments are on the rise, graduation rates are anything but. The subtle climb in the six-year graduation rate noted by the National Center for Higher Education Management (NCHEM) in 2009 and previously mentioned in the Chapter 1, seems even more subtle when considered in comparison to data compiled by the Census Bureau from 1957 to 2003. As you may recall, NCHEM reported that the six-year graduation rate in 1997 was 52.2% and in 2008, the organization reported the six-year graduation rate to be 55.9%. If the subtle increases and decreases in the years between 1997 and 2008 are considered, NCHEM's rate also appears to be relatively flat. This can be supported by Census Bureau data reported in 2003. As cited by Tom Mortenson (2005), "The 2003 graduation rate of 50.6 percent is nearly identical to the 50.2 percent reported in 1957" (p. 46). The Census Bureau data shows a trend that remains relatively steady year to year, and to its advantage, the Census Bureau data captures the students who transfer from one school to another, while the NCHEM measurement is institutional. This means that, year to year, the institution

tracks the persistence of students who are first-time (never previously enrolled in a college or university), full-time, degree-seeking students in their particular cohort or “class”, and they calculate their rates based only on the graduation of this group of students. The cohort is established by the institution, for research purposes, during the first semester. This data then does not account for students who transfer in and out of schools, even if they eventually graduate from the university to which they transfer.

This is very much how graduation and persistence is measured at IUP and how “first-year cohort” is defined in the data given above. Because the Census Bureau data was developed from the responses of 25-29 year olds in a survey of 60,000 households, it offers a glimpse at the bigger picture. To situate these national graduation rates in the context of this research, Table 4 and Table 5 provide the four and six-year graduation rates for academic years 2004-2005 through 2009-2010 for IUP’s main campus and the Punxsutawney regional campus.

Table 4

*Four-year and Six-year Graduation Rates for IUP’s Main Campus*

<b>AY</b>	<b>Cohort Yr.</b>	<b>4 Yr. Graduation Rate</b>	<b>Cohort Yr.</b>	<b>6 Yr. Graduation Rate</b>
<b>2004-05</b>	2000	22.23%	1998	50.45%
<b>2005-06</b>	2001	26.08%	1999	47.05%
<b>2006-07</b>	2002	28.62%	2000	49.09%
<b>2007-08</b>	2003	32.72%	2001	51.11%
<b>2008-09</b>	2004	31.20%	2002	54.93%
<b>2009-10</b>	2005	32.91%	2003	57.02%

Table 5

*Four-year and Six-year Graduation Rates for IUP's Punxsutawney Campus*

AY	Cohort Yr.	4 Yr. Graduation		6 Yr. Graduation	
		Rate	Cohort Yr.	Rate	
<b>2004-05</b>	2000	6.61%	1998	31.43%	
<b>2005-06</b>	2001	7.18%	1999	31.69%	
<b>2006-07</b>	2002	8.94%	2000	22.31%	
<b>2007-08</b>	2003	9.90%	2001	26.67%	
<b>2008-09</b>	2004	10.78%	2002	19.57%	
<b>2009-10</b>	2005	11.91%	2003	27.08%	

In 2005, NCHEM reported a national six-year graduation rate of 55.8%. However, it also showed that in Pennsylvania, the six-year graduation rate averages between 60.9% and 67.7%. Therefore, while on par with the national average, IUP's main campus graduation rate in 2005 fell below the state's average. At the end of the 2009 academic year, this rate remained practically unchanged at 57.02%. NCHEM's most recent data, reported in 2008 and noted above, shows a national average of 55.9%. Therefore, with its subtle rise, IUP's six-year graduation rate remains comparable to the national rate but still below its state's average range of 61.5% to 69.1%, also reported by NCHEM in 2008 (NCHEMS Information Center, 2009a).

What is most significant and troubling about all of this data is the fact that students are taking longer and longer to graduate and too many are not graduating at all, particularly when they begin college on IUP's Punxsutawney campus. The six-year graduation rate for students on the regional campus is significantly lower than the national and institutional average for the same years. Because, in recent years, at least half of the students who have been placed onto the regional campus have been at-risk minority students, the graduation rate also calls into question the responsibility that the

university has to these students to help them succeed and persist to graduation. The issue of retention in higher education is often framed in terms of access, but it is not enough to simply open the doors or mail the letter and invite student to campus. As Watson Swail, Kenneth Redd and Laura Perna (2003) posit,

Institutions also have an ethical obligation to retain students. By admitting a student, an institution not only makes a contractual commitment to that student but also incurs a moral obligation to provide him or her with an appropriate level of education and support. Through admissions, the institution essentially states, ‘You belong here, and we’re here to help you.’ Institutions that admit students without providing adequate resources or support are not doing themselves or their students any favors. In fact, in many case, they could be causing more harm than good. Students who leave before graduation—especially low-income and disadvantaged students—often do so with a sizable loan burden and poor prospects for employment without the degree they originally sought. As a further complication, these students have a high propensity to default on their student loans, affecting their credit rating and digging themselves into a deep financial hole. (pp. 8-9)

Historically, colleges and universities have often increased admissions of academically at-risk students to increase their enrollments and fill their classrooms. As Rose (2009) notes, “American institutions of higher learning as we know them are made possible by robust undergraduate enrollments. And if we’re going to admit people, for pure and pragmatic reasons, then we’re obliged to do everything we can to retain them” (p. 120). And although the first-year program at IUP-Punxsutawney campus is perhaps

one step in the direction of the institution doing everything it can to help retain students, it is, as the above data indicates, certainly not everything.

Although I will not argue that IUP's Punxsutawney campus does not provide an educational opportunity for many students who would, otherwise, have limited or even no access at all to higher education, I do think there is an argument to be made that admission of this population of students also serves the university quite well. These students bring with them money—from their parents, from scholarships, from government funded grants and loans. Simply put, admitting this population of at-risk, minority students puts money into the university, which, like most institutions of higher education cannot deny the fact that it is a business—money comes in and money goes out. If a student does not persist to graduation, as is likely the case of a student who starts at IUP-Punxsutawney, the institution still benefits financially from the student's one year of attendance. Of course, this can also be viewed the other way as well: because institutions of higher education rely on student tuition payments to operate, increasing persistence beyond the first year is also economically viable. Perhaps most importantly, when a university improves its retention and graduate rates, its students are likely to benefit.

The data, combined with the above discussion, makes a clear case for focusing this research on IUP's regional campus. Because the program is designed to help retain under-prepared and at-risk first-year students, and because graduation and persistence rates are not improving among this population of students, there is much to be gained from IUP developing a better understanding of these students' experiences in the classroom, on campus and in the community and of their interactions with faculty and

peers. This myriad of experiences and interactions that are the focus of this research has the potential to “make” or “break” a successful transition. Now, that I have situated the research setting into both its institutional and national contexts, I continue this chapter with a historical overview of related retention studies.

### **Early Retention Studies**

Here, we will take a close look at two important early retention studies: the work of Johnston (1926) and John McNeely (1937). I include a discussion of these studies to show how the purpose of early research differs from that of later scholarship; however, I also aim to point out that, nearly a century later, the work of Johnston and McNeely is still relevant. For example, in his research, Johnston indicates the importance of the first year in retaining students. The significance of the first year still prevails in today’s research, as indicated by the presence of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition and the publication of the journal of the same name. It was Johnston’s early research that influenced the field in a positive way by drawing attention to the importance of the first year and helped to focus later research on the FYE. In his work, McNeely points to several reasons for student dropout, such as financial difficulty, that are still associated with attrition today.

Of course, studying retention was not always necessary or even practical. What I mean by this is that, nowadays, the ultimate goal of enrolling at a college or university is to earn a degree. However, in the early or even mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, this was not always the case. And if graduation is not a primary goal or concern of the student or the institution, then studying why some students succeed and others do not is a matter of little importance. In fact, the earliest studies on retention did not even express this as their

fundamental goal. Instead of aiming to increase the success of all students enrolled at a college or university, the earliest studies, like those conducted by Johnston (1926) from 1921-1924 were about predicting who belonged in college and who did not. Put another way, a goal of such research was *exclusion*. This is a far cry from inclusion and the legislation supporting it that would bring a rapid increase in the enrollment of minority and working class students into higher education in the 1960s. Although focused on predicting dropouts as opposed to preventing them, early studies like Johnston's clearly indicate the connection between a student's academic achievement during the first-year and his/her later success in college. The idea that the first year "sets the tone" for the rest of a student's academic career still prevails today. In this early literature, we also see the development of retention as a university-wide issue, as well as the first data from case studies, which indicate the importance of intervention during the first year.

In the earliest retention study, Johnston researched three different groups of students in 1921, 1923 and 1924. All three groups were "native-born white pupils who graduated from the high schools of Minneapolis and St. Paul in June and entered college in September of the same year" (p. 83). Johnston's study involved mainly the collection of the students' grades during their freshman year, in order to answer this question: "how far are freshman marks a measure of a student's ability?" (p. 83). Johnston was trying to figure out *to what extent* the grades a student receives during the first year indicate his/her ability to succeed in college work. The premise behind this is that students who cannot succeed are not suited for college. His work builds on earlier, informal studies from a few years prior that show a positive correlation between freshman grades and

overall college success. His point is that this correlation is not “one size fits all”. As he notes,

Among those whose ratings fell below threshold and whose freshman work was unsatisfactory, the following should be mentioned. Two men, although retarded in progress by one year, have now satisfactory marks in law and dentistry, respectively. One man after the repeating the freshman year at another university has satisfactorily completed his junior year in liberal arts. One woman...and two who have transferred to the College of Education have attained C standing but have not completed the normal number of credits. From these statements it appears that no student whose ratings fell below the threshold can be regarded as a wholly satisfactory college student; that the records of a few stand as a credit to the college for helping them to find themselves after a poor start and that some of these will eventually graduate. (p. 83)

Johnston’s point is that not all students below “C standing” during their freshman year can be counted out entirely in terms of their ability to succeed in college—though he does note that only “1 in 100” who fall below a C standing will “prove successful” (p. 88).

Still, the students described above were able to raise their grades and make progress toward graduation. Therefore, freshman grades can only go so far in predicting the likelihood that a student will succeed or fail in college. Also important to recognize here is that Johnston seems to indicate that these students were able to turn their academic careers around partially due to some sort of intervention on the part of the university.

The idea that retention is a university-wide issue is hinted at even in this earliest research, and it continues to be relevant today as more and more schools are combining the efforts

of academics and student affairs to recruit and retain students. This is also particularly relevant to this study because the first-year experience program at IUP-Punxsutawney is an example of student affairs and faculty working together in a small setting to help students successfully transition into college. The idea that it is solely the responsibility of student affairs to retain students until graduation is becoming, as a whole, much less the norm. This trend is particularly apparent in the *Journal of College Student Retention*, which is reviewed in more detail in the final section of this chapter and which contains research from faculty in a variety of disciplines.

At the end of his article, Johnston discusses what he feels his research has accomplished. Like those who study retention today, he is concerned with the students who do not graduate and prove “successful”. However, unlike the retention researchers of today, he advocates that the results of his research be used to recommend alternative paths to those likely to fail in college, and he defends this use:

When the mental ability is lacking, the duty of the faculty is to try to place the student in an occupation suited to his capacity. This procedure is no less sympathetic than that of the personal and intuitive adviser and no less satisfying to our human desire to be helpful. We can be most helpful when we understand the facts and when we bring the student to face the facts. By this means we can place the student where he can be most successful. And that is where he will be most happy. (p. 88)

Johnston’s recommendation is the tracking that our present-day society, as a whole, rejects, and the prevailing mindset that college is essential is also the mindset that drives most, if not all, of the retention research developed in the last sixty years. In the mid-

1950s, the goal of entering college shifted from the casual pursuit of knowledge to graduation and degree obtainment, and the focus of the research quickly followed this shift. Retention scholarship beginning in this era became devoted to keeping students in college and helping them succeed.

However, before this shift would take place, McNeely, on behalf of The United States Department of the Interior's Office of Education, would conduct the first comprehensive study of student attrition. Like Johnston, McNeely's study, *College Student Mortality* (1937) aimed to determine if all students who were attending college, were, in fact "college material". Bess Goodykoontz, Assistant Commissioner of Education, posits this frame in the foreword to the study: "Without implying that all students should continue in college to graduation, those students who leave college constitute one of the major problems confronting the colleges" (p. vi). She goes on to note three questions that McNeely's research aims to answer: "Is it socially advantageous that they leave college? Does this withdrawal reflect upon the curriculum or the methods of teaching found in the colleges? Should these students have been admitted to college in the first place?" (p. vi). It is this third question that clearly demonstrates the focus of the research is not on preventing attrition because, in the 1930s, degree obtainment was still not the primary goal of college. Therefore, both Johnston and McNeely's studies focus on *predicting* attrition, rather than *preventing* it. The trend of preventing attrition comes along first in the 1950s, when, again, a college degree is first thought to increase a person's opportunities or chance of success. Also of interest here is the second question posed by Goodykoontz as a focus of the study: trying to determine if the reason why students leave has anything to do with the "curriculum" or "methods of teaching". This

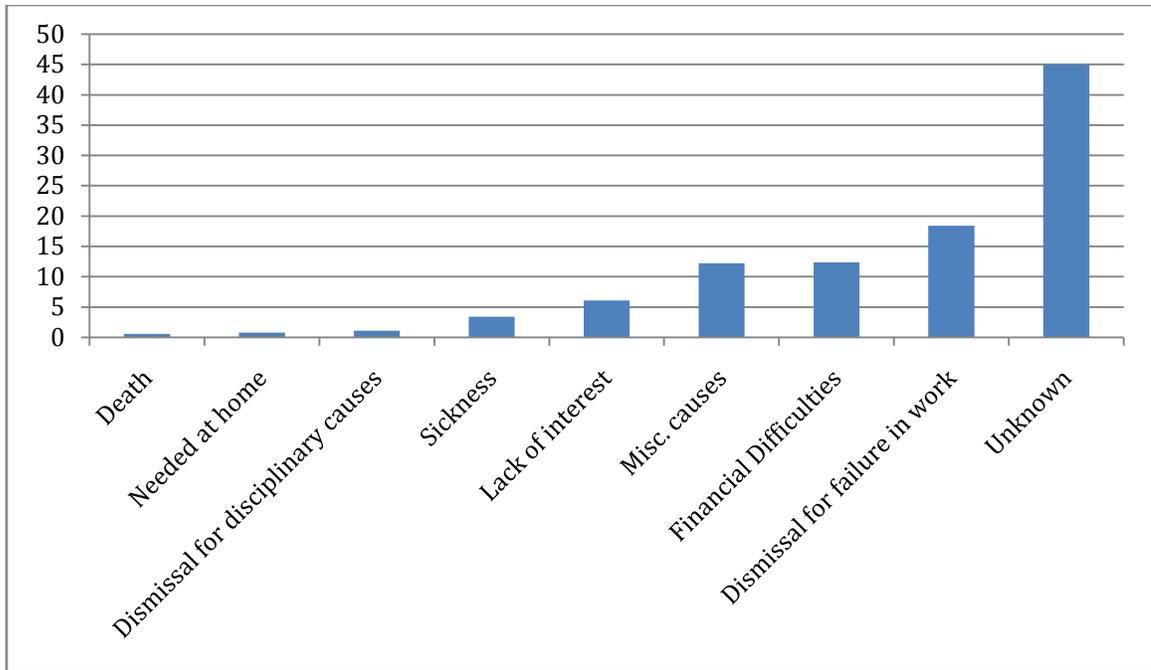
begs a larger question: Does the reason students leave originate within the institution, or, even more specifically, within the classroom? This is interesting because the results of the study, discussed below, indicate reasons for leaving originate within the individual—from his characteristics and circumstances. This is an idea that would prevail in research through the 1950s. Then, in the late 1960s, reasons for attrition are theorized for the first time as resulting from interactions between the individual and the institution.

So while the institution is rarely, if ever, considered solely responsible for student departure in present-day research, the individual reasons identified by the subjects in McNeely's study are still relative to the institution, particularly if they are present in large numbers. For example, if most students are dismissed for failure, one could consider the academic standards of the institution. If a number of students leave due to financial difficulties, this could raise questions about cost. Both of these instances could also result in the development of interventions designed to prevent dropping for these reasons, such a tutoring center or work-study programs. While this line of thinking was not necessarily what Goodykoontz may have had in mind, starting to ask *why* is what would eventually guide the field to consider preventing attrition, rather than just predicting it.

McNeely's study is worth mentioning for two additional reasons. To begin, McNeely's study made a credible contribution to the field simply because of its size. McNeely collected data on 15,535 students at 25 universities. These were students who entered the university during the 1931-32 academic year and registered as "degree-seeking". During the same year, there were 294,104 freshman enrolled at colleges and universities across the United States (p. 7). McNeely recognizes how his student sample compares to the total: "This mortality study, therefore, is based upon 1 out of every 16

students entering these types of institutions of higher education in 1931-32” (p. 7). At the time of this research, student “mortality”, as attrition was previously called, was rather high. At the universities he studied, 14 public and 11 private, 62.1% of students who entered left “during or at the end of a year period without obtaining a degree” (p. 9). The fact that earning a college degree was still not the ultimate goal of college attendance is likely one reason for such high attrition rates at this time. In addition, the Great Depression would have prevented many individuals from enrolling and staying in institutions of higher education. Despite its empirical shortcomings, McNeely’s research is also important because it attempts to understand additional factors that play a role in attrition. It was the first study that attempted to determine why students leave higher education by gathering information from the students themselves.

To begin to determine why students leave, part of McNeely’s study was devoted to collecting a variety of data on the 9,305 students who left the university, including the reasons for their departure. They were asked to provide these reasons on questionnaires distributed by the schools they had attended. From the results of these questionnaires, McNeely divided the initial causes of attrition into nine categories. A summary of this data is shown in Figure 1, below. For a breakdown of this data according to gender and institution, see pages 46-47 of *College Student Mortality*.



*Figure 1. Causes of attrition in McNeely's study.*

This data indicates that dismissal due to academic failure was prevalent. Even though the average among the 25 schools was only 18.4%, at some schools, such as Massachusetts State College and Tulane University of Louisiana, the percentages of mortality that can be attributed to failure were well above this reported average at 46.9% and 26.9%, respectively; McNeely also observes that, at 13 schools, more students left due to dismissal than to any other known cause (p. 45-47). This data led McNeely to conclude that dismissal due to failure is “one of the principal known causes responsible for the students leaving the universities” (p. 45). Dismissal due to failure still remains a prevalent cause of departure, and on IUP’s regional campus, the majority of students who leave do so because they are unable to meet the academic demands of their college courses.

A second principal cause of mortality that McNeely notes is financial difficulties. While again, the average is only 12.4% across all the universities, at schools like the University of Mississippi, financial difficulties accounted for 40.4% of all student departures. As McNeely notes, “There were 10 universities in which a larger percentage of students left because of financial difficulty than for any other single cause” (p. 48). At this time, it is my assumption that these were difficulties experienced in paying for tuition and housing. In the context of my own research, I have seen financial difficulties play a different role in departure. Over 80% of the students who enter college on the regional campus are first-generation college students and nearly all of the campus’ students are attending school on government grants and loans. During my three years working and teaching on the campus, I saw financial difficulties prevent students from purchasing course materials in a timely manner. Students often borrowed books from one another, and I also witnessed others trying to get by in courses without any access to a copy of the text. In this way, financial difficulties can hinder a student’s ability to complete course work successfully and have a negative impact on a student’s grades. Therefore, ultimately, financial difficulties can play a role in a student’s dismissal from the institution.

In terms of miscellaneous causes, McNeely describes these as “marriage, family moved from community in which university is located, student obtained job, too many extracurricular activities, inadequate high school foundation, and the like” (p. 50). Also included in this category were students who left the university to transfer to a different school. As with the causes already discussed, in some cases, the percentages of students leaving the school for a reason defined as “miscellaneous” was rather large. For

example, at the University of Georgia, this number was 43.3% (p.47). Although this leaves reasons for student departure largely open to interpretation, the miscellaneous causes that McNeely cites as examples result from circumstances that arise in the lives of individuals and have little to do with the institution itself. Some of these, such as getting married, moving or obtaining a job, would be considered in later research as circumstances that “motivate” a student to discontinue his/her education. This is very much the “everyday” of students’ lives—the larger web of contextual factors that we need to know more about.

Finally, students appear to leave the university for reasons that are largely unknown. McNeely attributes this high percentage to “inadequacy of student records” (p. 50). At the time of his research, not many colleges and universities had begun to track students as they entered and exited institutions, and when they left, very few attempted to contact students to find out the cause of their departure. In fact, it is possible that McNeely’s study was the first time they were prompted to collect data of this nature. The high average percentage of mortality due to unknown causes would, in the next decade, prompt universities to not only keep better records but to also start naming more specific causes for student attrition. While it is important for universities to understand why students voluntarily leave an institution, it is equally if not more important that they understand the process that leads to others being dismissed. My own study, in which I interview students during their first year of college, is an attempt to understand this process. Future research in the same setting would benefit from being more longitudinal in nature, in order to follow up with students who left the regional campus during the first year.

Also worth mentioning in detail is McNeely's consideration of five factors on student mortality. These are (1) age at entrance of student, (2) location of home of student, (3) place of lodging of student, (4) participation of student in extracurricular activities and (5) engagement by student in part-time work (p. 61). When considering a student's age as he/she entered the university, McNeely comes to the conclusion that "among the older students the mortality was considerably higher than among younger students" (p. 65). What is considered "older" in McNeely's study is "20 years or over". This group has an attrition rate of 72.0%, while those who entered college at "less than 17 years", had an attrition rate of 47.0%. Today, most students enter college when they are approximately 18 years old. In McNeely's study, this group was described as "18 years to 18 years 5 months", and the attrition rate among this group was 56.8%, over 10 percent higher than the youngest group (p. 66). Nowadays, it is not uncommon for a person to start college at the age of 20, nor is it common for someone to be in college under the age of 17. Therefore, present-day attrition rates by age of entrance into the university would make some interesting comparisons to McNeely's data.

When considering where students lived, in terms of distance from the university and place of lodging, McNeely is unable to draw very many conclusions. However, not surprising is that there was a higher mortality rate among students who came from homes at great distances from the university, including from another state. In the context of IUP-Punxsutawney, students commute from nearby communities, live on campus or live in the town within walking distance of the campus. In this setting, distance from the campus seems to most affect commuter students, who, scholars have noted, tend to be less involved and engaged in the campus environment.

Student involvement has been most notably theorized by Astin (1984, 1989) who defines involvement as the energy that students put into the academic experience as whole. This includes their involvement in activities both inside and outside of the classroom. Recently, Scott Silverman, Sarvenaz Aliabadi and Michelle Stiles (2009) note how, for commuter students, involvement on campus is greatly impacted by “logistical issues”, such as weather, traffic and road conditions, as well as family obligations and full-time jobs (p. 224). For more on this, see also Banning and Hayes (1986) and Jacoby (2000). In general, another reason that commuter students experience more difficulty engaging with the campus environment is that they are often returning adult students whose family and work obligations often extend beyond those of the typical, traditional, first-year student.

In the case of IUP-Punxsy, commuter students tend to also be tied to the community—through family, work, etc., and although a familiarity with the environment surrounding the university can increase their ability to make a smooth transition, their investment in work and family often outweighs their investment in the campus environment. For this reason, the university staff and faculty face difficulty engaging commuter students in out-of-class activities and projects that require group work outside of normal class time.

Following distance and lodging, the author considered how a student’s participation in extracurricular activities could be tied to his/her mortality. His conclusions here are interesting because they clearly pave the way for later studies that examine this same relationship. McNeely found that only 27.2% of the students who departed from school participated in any extracurricular activities at all (p. 72). Since the

publication of McNeely's work, there have been numerous studies that demonstrate participation in extracurricular activities has a positive impact on retention. Studies by Bemis (1962), Goble (1957), Koelsche (1956) and Stone (1965) support McNeely's findings by noting that dropouts are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities than students who remain in school. More recently, Astin (1999) shows a positive correlation between higher levels of involvement and student learning and personal development, and George Kuh, Shouping Hu and Nick Vesper (2000) found that participation in extracurricular activities, such as athletics, student government and fraternities and sororities, is often associated with student success.

In 2009, Thanh-Thanh Tieu and S. Mark Pancer shifted the conversation about the impact of involvement in extracurricular (now termed "cocurricular") activities to consider the *quality* of that involvement, as opposed to just the *quantity* of that involvement. Tieu and Pancer conclude that students who participated in activities that they found to be meaningful were able to transition more easily into the university. In their study, a meaningful or quality activity was defined by the student as one in which he/she became easily absorbed or engaged. Students also noted that more meaningful activities brought about a desire to connect with other people also involved in the activity and helped them develop a sense of direction or purpose. Therefore, the fact that less than one-third of the students who left school in McNeely's study participated in any extracurricular activities is also not entirely surprising. Lastly, McNeely examines the relationship between student attrition and working a part-time job, but due to inaccuracies in the data, he is unable to report any findings.

McNeely's study was the first large-scale empirical study on retention, and while the author himself notes the limitations and inaccuracies of the data he collected, the mere undertaking of a study of this size undoubtedly shaped the discussion on retention that would follow. One final important piece of data that McNeely collects that is worth noting is that of the 62.1% of students in the study who left the university during or at the end of a 4-year period without obtaining a degree, 33.8% of these did so during their freshman year. This means that in McNeely's study, over half of those who left did so during the first year. Presently, this number is not so different and while McNeely's study focuses on predicting attrition by considering a wide variety of factors and causes, the large percentage of students who left, and still leave, during the first year has provided a catalyst for later retention studies focused on preventing student attrition—with a specific emphasis on the first year. Much of this research will be discussed in the fourth chapter, as it becomes relevant to the data analysis.

### **Retention After McNeely and Johnston**

#### **A Response to Expanding Higher Education**

Studying retention was not necessary during the time when Johnston and McNeely were conducting research. The high attrition rates of this time period speak to the fact that college was not yet considered a necessity and it was easier to maintain a comfortable lifestyle without a college education. In addition, as previously noted, the Great Depression likely impacted the financial ability of many students to attend and persist at the college level. So why did Johnston and McNeely study retention? In the early 1900s, studying retention was about *exclusion*—colleges and universities were trying to figure out who belonged in college and who would be better suited to doing

something else. This, of course, contrasts sharply with the principles of *inclusion* that drive retention research today. Now, studying retention is about helping students from all backgrounds succeed in higher education—no matter their level of academic skill or the likelihood that they will persist to graduation.

After McNeely's study, the field would remain mostly silent throughout the 1940s. The lack of research during this time period has been attributed by Berger and Lyon (2005) to two important historical events: the aforementioned Great Depression and World War II. As they note, both of these events "turned the nation's resources and interests away from postsecondary education" (p. 14). They go on to say that "The post-World War II boom began higher education's golden age of expansion and provided the genesis for renewed interest in student access and degree attainment" (p. 14). In fact, despite an uncertain economy and our nation being at war, twice, college enrollments remained steady during this time and in the late 1940s, after World War II, they even grew. Approaching 1950, there were over 2 million students enrolled in college across the United States (p. 14). Our society's concept of a college degree shifted greatly from the 1920s to 1950s. Viewed as non-essential in the 1920s and 1930s, a college degree in the 1950s was now considered desirable. Berger and Lyon posit that this growth in enrollment makes sense "in an increasingly industrial and technologically oriented society" (p. 14). This meant that more and more new jobs required more and more education and training. Obtaining a degree was a way for individuals to remain competitive in the work force, and to therefore achieve economic security. This is not so different from how we currently view the role of college today, but in the 1950s those who were uneducated began to feel for the first time the impact of being such as

economic and social mobility became increasingly attached to level of education. In the 1950s, education in our country became intimately wedded to success. While minority groups are still highly underrepresented in higher education, access to higher education has increased greatly for minorities since the 1950s. This increased access has historically brought with it issues of attrition and how to deal with helping diverse populations succeed. While access has increased, retention and graduation rates are another matter. According to Swail, Redd and Perna (2003), students of color earn degrees at a ratio of 1:2 compared to white students and 1:3 compared to Asian students (p. 2).

Students from minority groups often come from secondary school systems that do not adequately prepare them for college because, for one, many lack the resources and funding to properly do so. While the inequality in our education system still prevails today, the rather staggering inequality that persisted through the 1960s made it nearly impossible for students from minority groups to succeed in college, and attrition rates among minority groups was very high at this time. As noted earlier, current attrition among minority students on both of IUP's main and Punxsutawney campuses has historically been higher than it is among white students.

The United States government and its money are largely responsible for the expansion of higher education that occurred during this time. In 1935, the government developed the National Youth Administration to fund college for students who could not afford it. While this led to a notable rise in enrollment, as Roger Geiger (1999) observes, it was the GI Bill of 1944 that filled many institutions beyond capacity; over 1.1 million ex-GIs took advantage of the bill, and Harvard alone received over 60,000 applications

from ex-soldiers (p. 61). The GI Bill was followed by the launch of Sputnik, which in turn led to the National Defense Education Act of 1958. Sputnik called into question the ability of the United States' education system to compete with that of other countries. The NDEA provided funding to students and institutions of higher education, with a particular focus on students pursuing science, mathematics and foreign language. Later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 also increased government funding for postsecondary education, and, just like the NDEA, encouraged college attendance. This legislation expanded the government's role in higher education by establishing new financial aid and academic support programs, such as the TRIO programs (Upward Bound, Student Support Services and Talent Search). The purpose of all of this was to expand access to higher education to more lower and middle class families.

And this is exactly what happened. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, colleges were faced with not only increasing numbers of students but also with increased diversity. With the Civil Rights Movement, and the above legislation, African-Americans and other minority groups were granted increased access to higher education. In addition to minorities, colleges and universities were also faced with an increased number of students from middle and lower class families. As Berger and Lyon (2005) note, state and federal funding made it possible for these students to attend college, but, like the increased groups of minority students, they came with "educational backgrounds that had not prepared them for the academic expectations and social norms of college. Many institutions were unprepared and lacking knowledge about how best to meet the needs of a more diverse student body" (p. 16). Today, schools still struggle to meet the

needs of their minority students, particularly those who enter higher education at-risk for failure. The site of my study is one way that one institution is working to meet the demands of a diverse and at-risk student body.

In the 1960s, institutions of higher education experienced great change and unrest that began with the Civil Rights Movement and ended with the Vietnam War. It was a period that saw an increase in student activism and demands that was marked with protests, strikes and sit-ins. This increased rebellion provided a “wake up call” of sorts to higher education as dissatisfied students did not hesitate to walk out of schools that were not meeting their needs (p. 17). In part, this shifted the conversation about retention as institutions began to recognize that a student’s academic success and intellectual ability only provided a small piece of what would later be termed the “departure puzzle”, and out of this, the field would eventually develop institutional models of student departure. Though “institutional model” indicates that the college or university is at the center, these models actually begin to understand retention as a process of interaction between the student and the institution. Therefore, while the earlier studies previously discussed in this chapter focus on understanding attrition for the benefit of the institution, the theory that developed in the 1970s indicates an increased role in the centrality and importance of the student in higher education. Though perhaps coincidentally, this also coincides with the shift in composition studies toward “student-centered” writing pedagogy in the 1970s. This shift in retention studies would take nearly a decade to unfold, but the unrest of the 1960s was strongly pushing the field in this direction.

## **Prediction, Psychology and Individual Characteristics of Students**

While the need to study how to prevent the attrition of students—in particular, minority students—arose at this time, studies during the 1950s and much of the 1960s still largely focused on predicting attrition and analyzing attrition rates to figure out who was leaving college (Iffert, 1958; Little, 1959; Summerskill, 1962). Much of the research of these two decades also focused on relating certain variables (in isolation), such as social class or financial situation, to attrition. This includes the work of Abel (1966); Alfert (1966); Angers (1961); Astin (1964); Barger and Hall (1965); Bertrand (1955); Bragg (1956); Carew (1957); Chickering and Hannah (1969); Congdon (1964); Demos (1968); Dole and Weiss (1968); Eckland (1964); Farnsworth et. al. (1955); Freedman (1956); Fullmer (1956); Grace (1957); Heilbrun (1964); Henry (1967); Iffert (1958); Jex and Merrill (1962); Koelsche (1956); Lins (1954); Little (1959); Marks (1967); Marsh (1966); Nelson (1966); Newcomb (1962); Panos and Astin (1968); Rose and Elton (1966); Sanford (1956); Slocum (1956); Stone and Ryan (1964); Summerskill (1962); Trent and Ruyle (1965); Waller (1964); Weigand (1957); Yoshino (1958) and dozens of other scholars.

While the conversation extended well beyond academic ability, it would take the synthesis of Spady (1971) and later, Tinto (1975), to really focus the field on the prevention of attrition and the understanding of student attrition as a process, unfolding in a specific context and involving the interaction of multiple variables.

Understanding attrition as a complex process is essential to the site of my own research. IUP-Punxsutawney is a very specific and unique setting. It is the only regional campus in the United States devoted to the education and development of only first-year

students. The campus' location, 27 miles north of the university's main campus in a rural, nearly all-white community, also makes it distinct. This is particularly relevant when the community population is considered in relation to the student population. For the past five years, the student population at IUP-Punxsy has averaged 50% minority students; the majority of these students are African-American. These students not only struggle to transition into the campus environment and college in general, but they also struggle to make the transition from diverse, urban areas into a primarily white, rural community. In interview conversations, several minority students reported being shouted at out of car windows as they walked down the street, and one student was yelled at to "go home" by a group of local teens in the McDonald's parking lot. This message, "go home", is quite powerful considering that at that time, the student was trying to transition into a new "home". This interaction between the home environment, or what the student is used to, and the campus and community environments is, to say the least, complicated. The theoretical models of Spady and Tinto will help to illuminate the richness of this interaction.

What the literature that came before this theory does demonstrate, however, is that there are certain student behaviors and characteristics that do seem to be clearly linked to attrition. For example, several studies at this time noted that the quality of a student's relationship with his/her parents seemed to impact the decision to dropout. W.L. Congdon (1964) notes that successful students tended to have more open, accepting and casual relationships with their parents while students who were failing often had parental relationships marked with tension and constant demands. Although Congdon came to this conclusion over 40 years ago, throughout my own study and during the time I taught

at IUP-Punxsy, I saw students who were constantly being called home by their parents, sometimes three or more times a month, for what they described as “family emergencies”. Inevitably, this interrupted their school work and caused them to fall behind. This also brings me to another point: as educators, I think we often assume that our students have the full support of their parents and family members to attend college. We take for granted that many of our students, particularly those who are at-risk, come from homes where having a job is sometimes viewed as more important than having an education. For these students, transitioning into the university is really a cultural shift.

Also during this time, Jones (1955) and George Weigand (1957) show that lower achieving students often have authoritative parents, and James Trent and Janet Ruyle (1965) found that college graduates had parents who were openly interested in their success and who often praised them. In turn, these students were more likely to solicit their parents’ advice. In terms of behavior, William Brown, Norman Abeles and Ira Iscoe (1954) suggest that dropouts tend to be indecisive and to procrastinate more often than students who persist to graduation, and findings by Hood (1957), Iffert (1957), Theodore Newcomb and Richard Flacks (1964) and Lawrence Pervin (1966) all argue that an absence of meaningful relationships is also associated with dropping out. None of these findings are very surprising. Anyone new to retention research and even only somewhat familiar with student behaviors would think of these conclusions as common sense, yet it was such studies that dominated the literature of the time period. Their usefulness lies in the fact that they give later researchers certain “truths” from which to develop theoretical models.

Continuing through the 1960s, most studies took a psychological approach to understanding the problem. This means that the research emphasized only how individual characteristics or behaviors, like those noted above, were linked to attrition, as opposed to considering the context in which the behaviors took place. For example, the work of Summerskill (1962) has been credited by other scholars such as Pantages and Creedon (1978) as offering an analysis of national rates by synthesizing 35 studies on retention. However, Summerskill still only considers attrition through a psychological lens. He discusses various student behaviors and characteristics associated with dropping out that have been reviewed by other scholars, and then he turns the conversation to heavily emphasize the link between individual motivation and attrition, and it is with this that his work makes a distinct contribution to the field (pp. 637-645). The idea that the reasons for attrition or persistence originate solely within the individual again, dominated the discussion during this time. As Summerskill writes, “the largest number of dropouts involve motivational forces—goals, interests and satisfactions relative to college and other facets of the student’s life” (p. 637). He goes on to note that, while the link between motivation and attrition appears to be strong, it is difficult to prove or to develop a strong framework for attrition with motivation at its center because, at the time his work was published, there had been “little critical experimentation” in this area (p. 638). However, he argues that because numerous other studies point to “‘lack of interest in college’, ‘lack of interest in studies’, ‘marriage’ or ‘marriage plans’, ‘transfer’, ‘entered military service’, ‘accepted job’ and so forth” as motivational forces behind attrition, there is a need for research in this area (p. 638).

Later studies reaffirm Summerskill's conclusions about motivation. Alfred Heilbrun (1964) observes that dropouts indicated a lower need for achievement, Kathryn Daniel (1963) notes that the freshmen dropouts in this study considered themselves less curious and motivated to learn and Stone (1965) found that a student's desire for achievement was positively related to persistence beyond the first year. Pervin (1966) posits that a lack of motivation contributed to students dropping out at Princeton, and George Demos (1968) interviewed students about their poor motivation to discover that, for men, poor motivation in the face of academic rigor contributed to their decision to drop out—even though the students pinpointed various other causes.

It is important to note and emphasize that a “lack” of motivation leading to attrition is not the same thing as laziness or just not wanting to do the work. While many students were and still are dismissed due to academic failure that stems from simply not doing their work, when Summerskill discusses motivation, he is discussing the multiple forces that push and pull students in a variety of directions, including parents, significant others, friends and circumstances within the institution that cause a change in a student's motivation. Described in these terms, motivation is still essential to understanding student departure, and what it means then is a student who “lacks” the motivation to continue his studies and complete a degree may have, for example, just been drafted into military service or made plans to marry. Therefore, “motivation” in this sense takes into account external forces acting upon the student, as well as those characteristics idiosyncratic to the individual that motivate him/her from within. An example of circumstances within the institution causing a change in motivation or what Summerskill defines as a “conflict” between the student's motivation and an external force would be a

student who, in the 1960s, started college at a liberal arts institution but decided that instead, he/she wanted to become a doctor. At this time, it was unlikely that a liberal arts degree would have opened the door to medical school, so a student with these ambitions who was motivated to change his/her career path would have likely had to transfer schools.

## **Moving Forward**

### **Recognizing the Impact of Environment on Retention**

Toward its end, Summerskill's work makes an important suggestion regarding future research. He notes the "need for basic research with emphasis on student motivation in specified college environments" (p. 648). With this recommendation, Summerskill pushes for a more sociological approach to retention research that takes into account the interaction between the student and his/her environment. As he points out, "In research concerned with the tabulation or immediate prediction of dropouts institutional variables have typically been taken for granted or treated as constants" (p. 649). With student populations becoming ever more diverse in terms of race and social class, the scope, purpose and shape of the college was also changing. At this time, there was an increase in the number of community colleges, and there was also a sharper distinction between liberal arts colleges and schools that put students on a more vocational track, like medicine or industrial management.

As students demanded more from college, so too did colleges demand more from students. Summerskill argues that these changing demands, also termed "environmental pressures" that range from the stated academic requirements of the institution to arrangements for housing and dining, needed to be assessed and considered along with

the characteristics of the individual students. He even goes so far as to say that the attrition rate itself “can be an environmental factor causing dropouts” (p. 648). In the context of my research, this is important. As argued by Farnsworth et al. (1955), “the entire college atmosphere, both intellectual and social, is different on a campus where almost the entire student body will graduate from that on a campus where only a minority of the entering students will graduate” (n.p.).

Extending this to IUP-Punxsutawney, I think this statement could also be applied to the academic skills with which students enter college. To borrow from Farnsworth et al., the entire college atmosphere, both academic and social, is different on a campus where students enter with grades and test scores that surpass admissions requirements from that on a campus where students enter the university under-prepared, with grades and test scores that fall below those requirements. Studying and comparing rates of retention at IUP-Punxsutawney and Yale without considering the glaring differences that exist between the two environments and the two bodies of students would be ignorant and shortsighted, to say the least. However, as Archibald Mackintosh (1948) and McNeely (1937) pointed out early on in retention research, and as Summerskill reiterated in 1962, institutions possessed little knowledge concerning their dropouts (p. 649). Therefore, researchers often had to find their own sample of dropouts from which to gather data. This is what led to the data most often being focused on factors that originated with individuals and not within the institutions. Better data collection on the part of institutions would, eventually, allow for more comparisons across contexts and better consideration of environmental factors. This was supported by Nevitt Sanford (1956), when he noted that attrition may have “less to do with factors in the student than with

certain condition in the college itself, and this condition might immediately assume greater practical importance than withdrawal because it was now perceived as something that affected all the students” (p. 61). Therefore, the missing piece to the “departure puzzle” is not the answer to an either/or question (students or the environment). It is, instead, a description of the interaction between the two, across a variety of contexts, considering a diverse range of student bodies. This call for place in retention studies would lead to the development of theoretical models that hinged upon the myriad of interactions between the student and the institution.

Conducting research that emphasizes the importance and impact of place and characteristics of the campus and community environment on retention, I find this push to consider the context interesting and essential. Still even more recently, the call for retention researchers to better describe the settings of their research was extended by John Braxton, Amy Hirschy and Shederick McClendon (2004): “Scholars conducting studies of the college student departure process should provide more detailed descriptions of the institutional setting for their studies” (p. 82). In retention research, context matters.

In turn, researchers have also noted that the institutional setting or campus environment is shaped by its students. As Braxton, Hirschy and McClendon note, “The characteristics of the students attending a particular college or university play a substantial part in the shaping of its environments” (p. 45). If the institutional setting is molded by the students attending the institution and if the students are, in turn, affected by that setting, then it makes sense that in addition to providing detailed description of the institutional contexts of their studies, researchers also describe in-depth the students who attend the institution. This is another matter of large importance when considering

the site of my own research as the student population is comprised of over 40% minority students and the majority of the entire campus population has been defined as underprepared or at-risk. A large part of my analysis will show that the interaction between the setting and the students is key to their adjustment, transition and retention.

Returning to Summerskill, along with the above recommendations for future research, he also notes assumptions that can and cannot be made when considering future research. The most important of these would be picked up by Spady and Tinto nearly a decade later: “we can assume multicausality in attrition” (p. 649). Considering reasons for attrition, such as “financial”, “academic” or “medical” in mutually exclusive categories is “of little value” and does not “cope with the realities of college dropouts” (p. 649). Understanding attrition as a web of complex causes was a concept well established by other scholars (Farnsworth, 1959; Feder, 1950; Iffert, 1957; Pope, 1931).

### **Recognizing Methodological Limitations in Earlier Research**

**Defining “attrition” and “dropout”.** In addition to suggesting that retention researchers consider institutional contexts and also research the interplay of the variety of causes of attrition, Summerskill’s work also draws attention to a huge shortcoming in the field: defining attrition. The literature that I discuss in this section shows that defining dropout has been historically problematic. This has been noted by Bruce Eckland (1965), Frank Jex and Reed Merrill (1962), Pantages and Creedon (1978), Spady (1971) and Tinto (1975). To begin, the definition has changed over time, and the word “attrition” has been used interchangeably with “dropout”, in a way that has been inconsistent and misleading. This is important in the context of my own research because the primary goal of the first-year experience program at IUP-Punxsutawney is to prevent students

from leaving school, voluntarily or involuntarily, and to help them to make a successful transition into the university. Defining the terms consistently is, therefore, key to my own research. In earlier studies, unclear definitions led to results and conclusions that were misleading. A second methodological limitation that I will discuss is the use of *ex post facto* methodology in retention studies. Much of the research today still relies on this methodology to determine why students leave school. However, in my study, I interviewed students while they were still enrolled. Therefore, the purpose in discussing this second limitation is to emphasize how it differs from my own methodological approach.

Pantages and Creedon (1978) describe this first methodological limitation simply as problems in defining “attrition” and “dropout”. Summerskill (1962) explains that “attrition rate” has been variously defined as the percentage of students lost to a particular division within a college, lost to the college as a whole, or lost to higher education as a whole. Adding to the problem are the various criteria by which a student comes to be classified as a “dropout” or “nondropout” (p. 629). As Summerskill writes, “Attrition rates have been computed on a graduation-in-four-years basis; on a graduation-in-four-years-or-still-enrolled basis; on a graduated-eventually basis” (pp. 629-630). Pantages and Creedon (1978) argue that researchers need to come to a consensus regarding these terms if their studies are to be useful to other researchers and to the field as a whole (p. 51).

The lack of consistency in defining attrition and the consequences of such were, prior to the work of Pantages and Creedon, explicated by Spady (1971) in his article, “Dropouts from Higher Education: An Interdisciplinary Review and Synthesis”. Spady

notes two primary definitions of attrition that have dominated the field and the consequences associated with using each. He defines attrition in the following two ways: “*Definition 1* includes anyone leaving a college at which he is registered. *Definition 2* refers only to those who never receive a degree from any college” (p. 65). The first definition is useful on the institutional level, but as Spady notes, “scholars with a system-wide orientation find it narrow and misleading” (p. 65). This definition regards any student who leaves his initial institution as a dropout. Unfortunately, this is how most institutions, including IUP, still measure student persistence rates—by not accounting for transfers. Earlier, I also briefly discussed the scenario of a student transferring from a liberal arts school to a medical school. According to the first definition, the student would have then been considered a “dropout” from that first school, even if he/she went on to complete his degree elsewhere.

Spady further illustrates how this first definition can be terribly misleading and leave studies lacking in usefulness to other scholars by discussing the work of Iffert (1957). For a more precise discussion, we turn, for a moment, directly to Iffert’s work. Under the direction of Iffert, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare conducted a survey of 12,667 students who entered 149 different institutions of higher education in 1950 (p.4). In summary, these schools lost approximately half of their students in the four years that followed and only 39.5% graduated in four years (p. 17). With the help of numerous college registrars, Iffert estimated that “59 percent is the probable maximum percentage eventually graduating” (p. 19). This was an attempt to account for transfer students and students who leave the institution but who eventually return. However, no real data is provided so Iffert’s estimate of 59% must be taken lightly. Iffert’s study is

very similar to the previously discussed work of McNeely (1937), and Iffert's findings largely coincide with those of McNeely, who found that the attrition rate to be slightly higher, at 62.1%.

In Summerskill's review of 35 attrition studies, he found median loss (attrition) in four years to be 50% and the median percent graduated in four years 37% (p. 630). Comparing his findings to those of McNeely and Iffert, Summerskill concludes that "the attrition rate has not changed appreciably in the past forty years" (p. 630). Remember, these numbers are just averages. Part of the problem, as previously noted, is that variability in attrition rates among colleges is great. In the studies reviewed by Summerskill, the rates ranged from 12% to 35%. This variability is yet another reason why studying attrition in particular contexts and taking a closer look at environmental factors is essential to the research. But again, first, we have to come to a consensus about what attrition means. While the findings of McNeely, Iffert and Summerskill all support one another when it comes to national attrition rates, these studies are subject to criticism because of how they define attrition. They stick closely to the first definition described above: a dropout is anyone who leaves a college at which he/she is registered. While Iffert modified the definition to include students who failed to graduate after attending college for eight consecutive semesters, the definition is essentially the same in that it does not account for transfer students who still complete their degrees within four years or students who take longer than four years to graduate. Spady illustrates this shortcoming in his work by discussing how attempting to apply Iffert's definition to the study done by another scholar, Eckland (1964), yields misleading results.

In his study, “Social class and College Graduation: Some Misconceptions Corrected”, Eckland conducted research on a sample of University of Illinois freshmen who entered school in 1952. As he notes, “Only 28.5% of the entrants graduated from the university in the prescribed four years” (p. 43). Therefore, as Spady argues, “by Iffert’s criteria, the remaining 71% would be regarded as dropouts” (p. 66). However, Eckland goes on to discuss how 3.9% transferred to another institution and still graduated on time, 17.3% graduated after more than four years (from their original university or another school) and lastly, 24.5% had dropped out but later returned to school and either graduated or were expected to graduate soon (p. 43). Using Spady’s second definition to define dropouts as those who never receive a degree from any college yields a much higher graduation rate than using the first definition, modified according to Iffert or not. In fact, the eventual graduation rate of the students in Eckland’s study is closer to 74.5%, leaving a dropout rate of approximately 25% (assuming all of the final 24.5% did, in fact, graduate). Using Iffert’s criteria, all students except the 28.5% who graduated in four years would be considered dropouts. Again, that is a 71% dropout rate compared to a 25% rate when using the second definition.

Eckland’s findings are also supported by Jex and Merrill (1962), Dorothy Knoell (1960) and Trent and Ruyle (1965). In a longitudinal study, Jex and Merrill estimated that approximately 60% of students who drop out do eventually return to school and graduate—either from the same or a different institution (Pantages and Creedon, 1978, p. 55). Knoell, who analyzed the findings of several other long-term studies that indicate only 35% of students manage to graduate in four years, but many more do eventually graduate (Spady, 1971, p. 66). What is interesting is that some schools still prefer to

measure graduation rates in four years, even though five decades of research shows that the majority of students who earn four-year degrees do so within six years. The work of the scholars discussed above, along with that of Alan Bayer (1968), Robert Panos and Alexander Astin (1968), William Sewell and Vimal Shah (1967), James Trent and Leland Medsker (1968), illustrate a shifting graduation rate and further support the findings of Eckland's research.

Defining “dropout” and “attrition rate” is, arguably, no less problematic than it was fifty years ago. However, what scholars do know, and what Panos and Astin concluded in 1968, is this: “The point is simply that it is important in any research on dropouts that ‘dropout’ be unambiguously defined, and that the definition make sense with regard to the problem being investigated and to the possible application of the findings” (p. 70). What Panos and Astin are arguing for is the need for research to be both contextualized and able to be generalized. In my view, there is a constant “tug of war” between the two. I would say it depends on *where* you want the findings to be most useful—to that particular context or to the field as a whole. Further complicating this is the issue of reliability. For studies in retention to be reliable, Pantages and Creedon (1978) conclude that “studies of attrition should incorporate both a definitive unambiguous operational definition of ‘dropout’ and a longitudinal design of ten years” (p. 56). They also recommend that scholars distinguish between students who graduate in four years, from the institution in which they initially enroll, those who drop out and later reenroll (at the same or a different institution) and graduate, and those who drop out permanently (p. 92). This system of classification or Spady's (1971) “*Definition 2*” requires the longitudinal studies that they recommend. According to Pantages and

Creedon (1978), distinguishing “only between students who graduate in four years and those who do not has obscured many important details of student withdrawal” (p. 92).

In my own research, defining dropout is no less problematic. Although proven misleading, I will be adhering to *Definition 1*: A dropout is anyone who leaves a school at which he is registered. The constraints under which I complete this research do not allow me to differentiate between students who leave the regional campus and higher education as a whole from those who may transfer and enroll elsewhere. However, I do hope to be able to engage in this kind of research in this future. In addition, while the relevant goal of this research is to consider reasons for student departure during the first year and the process that leads to that departure, that goal is very much long-term and something that this current study can only achieve indirectly. Because the primary goal is to describe the research setting and what it means to be a first-year student in this specific setting, that is where the study finds its focus—in discussing the process of transition with students who are currently enrolled—the larger goal being to make recommendations for what the institution can do to help students stay and succeed. For as many students as I am able, I will also provide information about their academic careers after the first year, but that is not the primary focus. We must first understand the process before we can speculate about the end results. Therefore, I will use the “truths” that have developed in retention studies over the years to help readers better understand the research context and participants, but much of the work here is in defining the setting for what it is, using this scholarship mostly as a guide.

**The use of ex post facto methodology.** A second methodological limitation identified by scholars in the 1950s and 1960s is the use of *ex post facto* methodology in

attrition research. Pantages and Creedon, along with Jex and Merrill (1962) and Edmond Marks (1967) are critical of the heavy use of *ex post facto* methodology in attrition research. During this time, and even still today, it was common to interview students or look at their academic records and try to piece together their reasons for dropping out after it had already happened. However, the above researchers support abandoning this approach for the longitudinal method so that, as students are going through the dropout process, the various factors, both individual and institutional, can be explained as they are acting on the process.

In terms of my own research and from Max Van Manen's (1990) phenomenological perspective, any attempt to capture lived experience is *ex post facto* because the individual is reflecting on the experience. Every description of the lived moment is a reflection on that moment; the moment is gone just as it is described. Still, having students reflect on, consider and share experiences as they are living them helps bring researchers away from the *prediction* that dominates most of the field and toward *prevention*. The criticism of the use of *ex post facto* methodology makes sense. We cannot prevent attrition if we cannot intervene at some point of the process, and while studies that interviewed students after they left school are useful because they help shed light on what we might do differently as we begin the *next* process, they are not as useful as studies that bear witness to the experiences that unfold *during* the process.

### **The 1970s: Retention Meets Theory**

Understanding dropping out as a process was recognized by scholars like Pantages and Creedon, and the fact that it is a process that involves the interaction of multiple variables was also noted by a number of the scholars discussed to this point.

However, theorizing that process was first undertaken by Tinto (1975), whose contributions to the field were somewhat unapparent at the time Pantages and Creedon published their synthesis of studies of college attrition. A pivotal precursor to Tinto, the work of Spady (1971) is, in fact, not even mentioned by Pantages and Creedon. Still, in my review of the literature the theoretical work of Spady must be discussed as it helps to set the stage for the work of Tinto and other scholars who began to theorize retention in the 1970s. These later theoretical models are also significant to my understanding of IUP-Punxsutawney. What follows then, is a review of the first theoretical model in retention studies, the work of William Spady, after which I will also review the work of Vincent Tinto, whose sociological model would dominate the conversation about retention starting in the 1975, and today, remains one of the most widely cited publications in the field. Following the review of Tinto's 1975 publication, I will also address revisions that Tinto himself has since made to his theory, as well as challenges to his work presented by other scholars.

Berger and Lyon (2005) also credit Spady with starting the theoretical era of retention studies. The purpose of this era was, in their words, to “construct a knowledge base to inform retention concerns and issues throughout most of higher education” (p. 19). This era was about scholars answering this question: What *do* we know about retention? While many scholars had synthesized the work that existed in the field to date in order to articulate common conclusions drawn among scholars, many of which I have previously noted, Spady was the first to propose a theory or framework within which to consider this existing knowledge. Spady's work shows that dropping out is a cyclical, flexible process that is marked by the interaction of numerous variables, both institutional

and student-based, that had been proven in previous studies to be associated with the dropout process.

### **William Spady's "Dropouts from Higher Education"**

Spady's article, "Dropouts from Higher Education: An Interdisciplinary Review and Synthesis" includes, as all credible scholarship must, a synthesis of the empirical research already present on dropouts. However, instead of waiting until the end to make recommendations for future research, Spady articulates clearly toward the beginning of his work that his aim is to propose a serious change in direction for the field. He reduces the existing knowledge of the field to a "few comfortable and familiar generalizations", and he criticizes it for a lack of "theoretical and empirical coherence" (p. 64). These generalizations I previously discussed as "common sense" above. He then calls for a "more interdisciplinary-based, theoretical synthesis of the most methodologically satisfactory findings and conceptually fruitful approaches to this problem" (p. 65). Spady recognizes that at this time, scholars had come to certain "truths" about attrition, as noted above, but they had not fully considered the interactions between these "truths" and turned away from bivariate analysis in favor of multivariate analysis.

In his model, Spady incorporates several variables that he believes had been established in the field as clearly associated with dropping out, as well as others that he believes, when combined, "may help to explain dropping out as a conditional phenomenon" (p. 77). His model is sociological and one in which dropping out is a process that involves the interaction between the student and his/her environment. When a student arrives at school, he/she does so with certain skills, attitudes, beliefs, interests, etc. that influence his/her interactions with the surrounding environment. In addition, in

that environment, the student is exposed to demands, expectations and influences that come from a variety of sources, including faculty members, administrators, courses and peers (p. 77). Spady argues that the interaction that results is one centered on assimilation. A student who persists will fully assimilate into academia and into the social groups therein.

He describes the process of dropping out as a decision, although he does account for students who are forced to withdraw due to low grades. This will be discussed below. Spady notes that this decision to withdraw is based on a system of rewards. The most obvious way that students are rewarded in college is with grades. Grades provide a tangible, extrinsic reward. For lower-achieving students, grades seem to be a large source of motivation. However, higher-achieving students, or students who view education as integral for personal growth, respond just as well to what Spady calls “intellectual development”. While grades are extrinsic, intellectual growth and development is the intrinsic reward present in the system. The student most likely to receive this rewards is the one who has attitudes, beliefs and interests that are compatible with those privileged within the social system (academia and the social groups therein). Success, in terms of persistence, comes with this compatibility or what Spady terms, “normative congruence”. This is similar to the concept “ecological transition” later developed by Uri Brofenbrenner (1979). In short, large differences between the home environment and college environment can account for student attrition.

In addition to compatibility, Spady notes the importance of what he terms “friendship support”. He writes, “The literature on dropouts reveals that various measures of interpersonal orientations and friendship support are generally associated

with staying in college” (p. 76). At this time, the link between an absence of close, significant friendships and attrition had been suggested by numerous scholars, such as Elizabeth Alfert (1966), F.G. Brown (1960), Albert Hood (1957), Iffert (1958), Newcomb and Flacks (1964), and Pervin (1966). “Normative congruence” and “friendship support” are the two major components of “social integration”. A student who is unable to assimilate or integrate into the social system lacks close, consistent interaction with others and likely possesses values and interests that are dissimilar or even marginalized by the social system as a whole. The resulting model is best understood when viewed, and so I have included it as Figure 2. This model includes my own annotations to identify the independent variables (**IV**), as well as key points, noted in parentheses, that will be part of the discussion that follows.

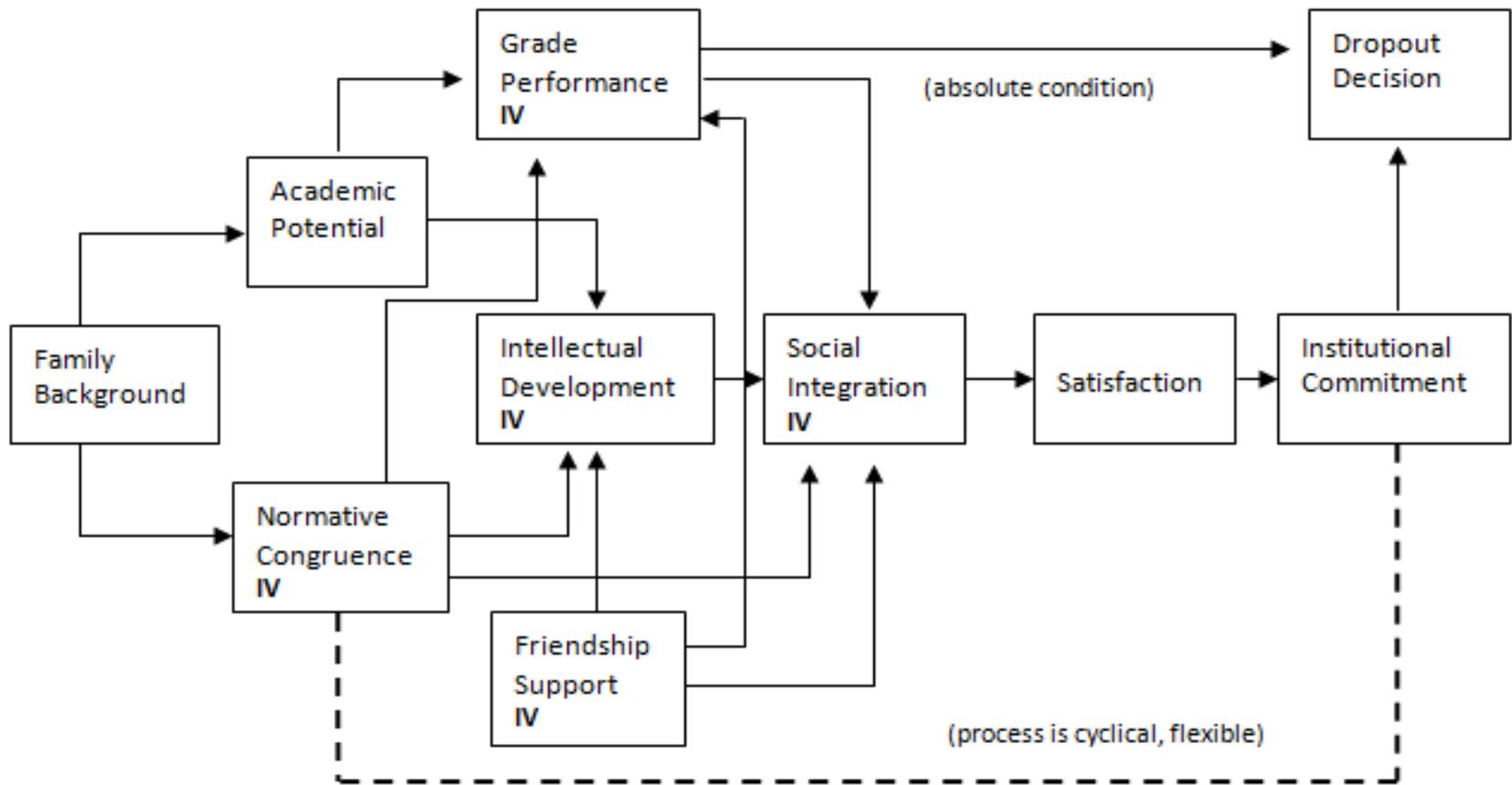


Figure 2. Spady's explanatory sociological model of the dropout process.

Spady's model is to be understood as a process, though, as I will discuss in a moment, it is not necessarily linear. The model begins with family background, and while there were, at the time, known variables within family background that influenced a student's academic performance and specific attitudes and beliefs, for simplicity's sake the relationship is left somewhat ambiguous as to *how* family background influences academic potential and normative congruence. Here, it seems sufficient to simply say that it does. Later, Tinto's model would more specifically account for family background and its role in the dropout process.

Within Spady's model there are five independent variables, delineated with "IV" in their respective boxes. Social integration is the independent variable influenced *by* the other four but also interacting *with* to them to influence attrition. It is important to notice that the link between social integration and dropping out is not direct. This is because, as Spady observes, "intervening are at least two critical variables that from the integration process: satisfaction with one's college experiences, and commitment to the social system (i.e., college)" (p. 78). Because satisfaction depends on both social and academic rewards, social integration cannot be directly responsible for a student's persistence. Similarly, Spady views a student's commitment to the institution as requiring "both a sense of integration in the system and a sufficient number of positive rewards" (p. 78). Therefore, commitment also intervenes between social integration and the dropout decision.

There are also other pieces of the model that should be discussed if it is to be fully understood. First, the role of grade performance is not the same as the other variables in

the model. The line from grade performance to dropout decision implies an absolute condition. This is the line in the model that accounts for students who do not make the decision to dropout but who are forced to withdraw due to low performance. Another line that needs to be explained is the dashed line running from institutional commitment to normative congruence. Remember, normative congruence deals with the compatibility between the student's attitudes, interests, beliefs, etc. and those of the social system. The broken line between the two variables indicates that the process is cyclical and flexible. In Spady's words, "We are suggesting here that the result of this whole process maybe lead to changes in the attitude, interests, goals or motivation that will in turn have repercussions at later stages of the college career" (p. 79). Looking at the model, changes in a student's personal attributes could alter his/her compatibility or normative congruence and as a result, influence the rest of the process.

Lastly, normative congruence is worth discussing because it is not only the compatibility of the student's attitudes, interests and beliefs with those of the social system, as noted above, but it is also the consequences of the interaction or even clashing of the student's attributes and the various subsystems of the environment. To illustrate, we can return to my earlier example of the student who leaves a liberal arts college because he/she decides that instead he/she would like to study medicine. This student is achievement and career-oriented and views college as essential to get a job. In the 1970s, this student's values and beliefs would have made him/her normatively incongruent with a college that emphasized liberal arts or a developmental undergraduate program, and this type of student may have chosen to voluntarily withdraw from this type of college. However, if this student develops close, significant relationships with people who have

similar goals and attitudes, the affiliation with the subgroup might be strong enough to supersede the influences exerted by the system as a whole. Normative congruence is one of the more complex variables in Spady's model, and because it opens the model up to any number of scenarios, it makes sense that the line between normative congruence and institutional commitment allows the model to remain open and flexible.

As the first explanatory model of the dropout process, Spady's model provides a knowledge base for other researchers to analyze, test and put into practice. For this reason, it was somewhat revolutionary, but because it was the first model introduced into the field, Spady was aware of its complexities and possible shortcomings. It was his goal that the model would serve to guide further research. Not only did it achieve this, but Spady also set off what Berger and Lyon describe as a "theoretical boom" in retention studies that continues with Tinto's "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research".

### **Vincent Tinto's "Dropouts from Higher Education"**

Vincent Tinto's above work, published in 1975, started a conversation about student persistence and retention in higher education that would span the next three decades. While his work has been criticized, rejected and even revised by Tinto himself, it remains the dominant sociological model in the field for understanding how students navigate higher education, successfully or not. It is useful to developing a clearer understanding of how students interact with their environment on the regional campus, and therefore, it seems necessary to discuss here. Because the contribution of Tinto's work to retention studies is not in his review of previous scholarship, I will focus my

discussion of his early work on the model itself, which I have included for the reader in Figure 3. Then, I will turn to a discussion of revisions and challenges to his model.

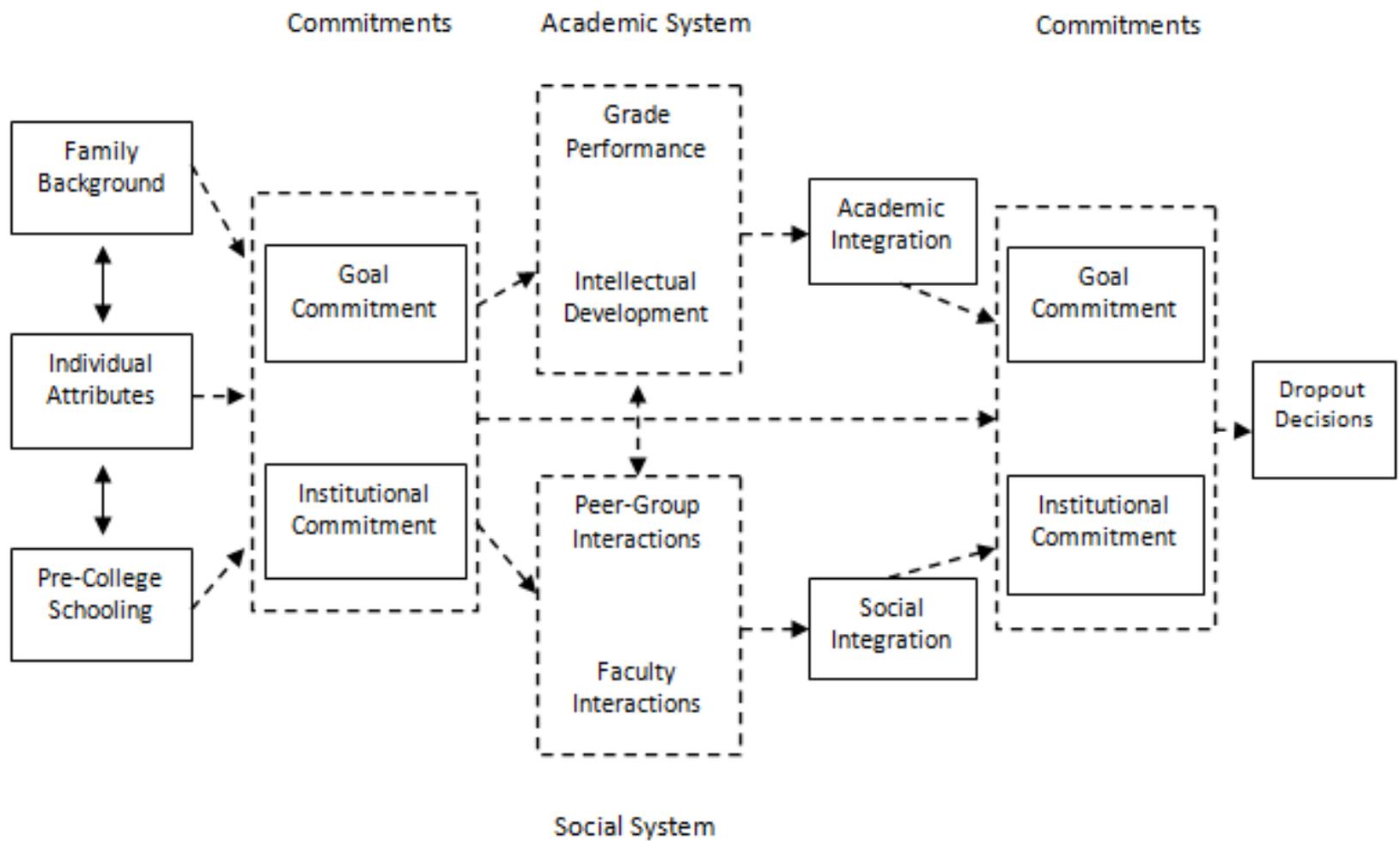


Figure 3. Tinto's sociological model of the dropout process.

At first glance, there are some apparent similarities between Tinto's model and the model previously developed by Spady. Both Spady and Tinto take into account the "rewards" built into the academic system to which students respond: grades, the most obvious form of reward, and intellectual development. They also both indicate the importance of social integration, but Tinto indicates that social integration can develop from interactions with peers, as well as faculty. In Spady's model, social integration is closely connected to the development of meaningful relationships, but he does not specify if this is with both peers and faculty. Another noticeable difference here is Tinto's inclusion of individual attributes and pre-college schooling along with family background.

Lastly, and most importantly, Tinto's model includes a student's commitment to goals and to the institution as a more integral part of the process. When a student enters the university, he/she does so with certain characteristics and individual attributes that, as Tinto notes, "influence the development of the educational expectations and commitments the individual brings with him into the college environment. It is these goal and institutional commitments that are both important predictors of and reflections of the person's experiences, his disappointments and satisfactions, in that collegiate environment" (p. 96). Taking into account individual characteristics, prior experiences and commitments, Tinto's model argues that it is the student's integration into the academic and social systems of the university that most directly relate to persistence. The student enters the university at one level of goal and institutional commitment that then influences how he/she integrates into both the academic and social system, i.e. a

highly committed student will study hard and seek out meaningful peer interactions. This integration into the system, if it is done well, then reinforces those original commitments and ultimately, the student persists. On the other hand, a student who enters the university with a low level of goal and institutional commitment may ultimately decide to drop out if he/she fails to integrate into both the academic and social systems.

In Tinto's words, "it is the interplay between the individual's commitment to the goal of college completion and his commitment to the institution that determines whether or not the individual decides to drop out from college and the forms of dropout behavior the individual adopts. Presumably, either low goal commitment or low institutional commitment can lead to dropout" (p. 96). But again, this is not a concrete formula. A student who is highly committed to finishing college but who fails to integrate well into the academic and social systems may, as Tinto notes, "stick it out" until graduation, or, if integration into the academic system is too low, until he/she is dismissed. In addition, a student could also demonstrate a low level of institutional commitment but a high level of goal commitment, and upon failing to successfully integrate into the social system choose to transfer to another school. In this model, the possibilities are, in fact, endless. Like Spady's model, Tinto's model is flexible and circular, but he notes that application of the model to longitudinal data could result in the identification of certain "paths" that students take during the dropout process.

### **The 1980s: Tinto is Reconsidered**

Since its publication over 35 years ago, scholars have continued to challenge Tinto's model almost as often as they have cited it. But before it would be revised, by Tinto himself, Tinto's model would be used by other researchers as a starting point in

their own research on persistence and attrition, as well as tested on various student populations. Based upon the theoretical models of Spady and Tinto and Astin's "theory of involvement", John Bean's (1980) study aimed to investigate why persistence rates, as reported by Summerskill (1962), had remained flat. To develop his own framework, Bean applied the concept of job turnover to higher education, suggesting that reasons for employee departure could be applied to student departure. In 1981, Bean followed up on his first study by synthesizing the work of Spady, Astin and Tinto and expanding on it by adding additional variables, such as academic variables and external and internal environmental factors. The purpose of this was to show departure not only as an interaction between student and institution, but also as influenced by external factors that impacted a student's intent and the likelihood for departure. Around this same time, other researchers continued to build on the work of Spady, Tinto and now, Bean. This includes Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), who developed a theory of involvement based upon student interaction with faculty and peers, which was a key part of Tinto's model. In separate work, they focused solely on the relationships between students and faculty to conclude that students who spent more time with faculty, during class and outside of class, were more likely to persist.

Responding to emerging criticism that his work did not give enough consideration to institutional contexts, Tinto revised his theory in 1987 to include five major theoretical bases for understanding the evolving nature of student persistence research. These included psychological, societal, economic, organizational and interaction factors. In this revision, he distinguishes between formal and informal student experiences within the institution and its academic and social system. Interactions with faculty and staff are an

informal component of the academic system, along with academic performance, which is considered formal. The social system was also revised to include peer-group interactions (formal) and extracurricular activities (formal). Another significant change involves accounting for external commitments as impacting a student's intentions and commitments. This was likely the result of Bean's work, which focused on external forces leading to departure.

Later use of Tinto's work seems to center on the possibilities that he did not consider in the development of his model and its revision. This includes a model of retention that would fit students attending non-residential campuses or a model that could be useful to understanding attrition in a two-year college setting. Tinto's model was also reliant on students who started college at the traditional age, and it also did not take into account minority students, for whom integration into the academic and social systems of college is arguably a more complex process.

In addition, scholars have also extended Tinto's work to re-emphasize the role that individual psychological processes have on retention. This includes the work of John Bean and Shevawn Bogdan Eaton (2000) who developed a psychological model of student retention under the assumption that "behavior is psychologically motivated" (p. 49). In summarizing their model, Bean and Eaton write, "Students enter college with a complex array of personal characteristics. As they interact within the institutional environment, several psychological processes take place that, for the successful student...lead to academic and social integration, institutional fit and loyalty, intent to persist, and to the behavior in question, persistence itself" (p. 58). Bean and Eaton's model essentially adds another layer, a psychological layer, to the sociological models of

student departure of Spady and Tinto that pushes us to think about how students cope with the stress of transitioning into college and respond to pressures in this new environment.

As they have revised Tinto's model, scholars have also tested it on different groups of college students. When applied to first-generation, working-class college students, Robert Longwell-Grice and Hope Longwell-Grice (2007) suggest that Tinto's theory requires some reconsideration. In both the original model and its revision, Tinto advocates a strong association between faculty support and student retention. However, as Longwell-Grice and Longwell-Grice note, "first-generation, working-class students are intimidated by the idea of seeking out faculty for support, resulting in a lack of support from their faculty" (p. 407). Because, like Tinto, they believe faculty support is important, they are not necessarily challenging the theory itself but instead, challenging schools to consider how they apply the theory across different populations of students. In this case, they suggest that "colleges need to be more strategic and systematic in finding ways to develop faculty-student interactions for first-generation, working-class college students" (p. 407).

Applying Tinto's theory to different, varied populations of students highlights the fact that no single theoretical model can take into account the diverse student bodies and institutional settings across which the research must continue to span. Therefore, in applying the theory of Tinto or any other scholar, the researcher should remember to do so in service of the research setting and its participants and not to use the setting and its participants to simply enforce or enact the theory—to make it work. Theories should be applied, and only insofar as they are useful. This is an idea supported recently by Tinto

(2006) himself. He writes, “In the world of action, what matters are not our theories per se, but how they help institutions address pressing practical issues of persistence... Take for instance the concept of academic and social integration. While it may be useful to theorists to know that academic and social integration matter, that theoretical insight does not tell practitioners... what they would do to achieve academic and/or social integration in their particular setting” (p. 6). To that end, the purpose of reviewing the literature in this chapter thus far has been to acquaint the reader with what we do know about retention and persistence. And while all of this prior knowledge gives us a starting place from which to consider the context of this research, we cannot assume a “one-size-fits-all” approach in the application of this literature. In addition to understanding the research setting for what it is on its own, another goal of this research is to offer concrete recommendations for what can be done to help students on the regional campus successfully transition into the university. As Tinto notes, “It is one thing to understand why students leave; it is another to know what institutions can do to help students stay and succeed” (p. 6).

### **The Past Ten Years of Scholarship: Testing Theory and Preventing Attrition**

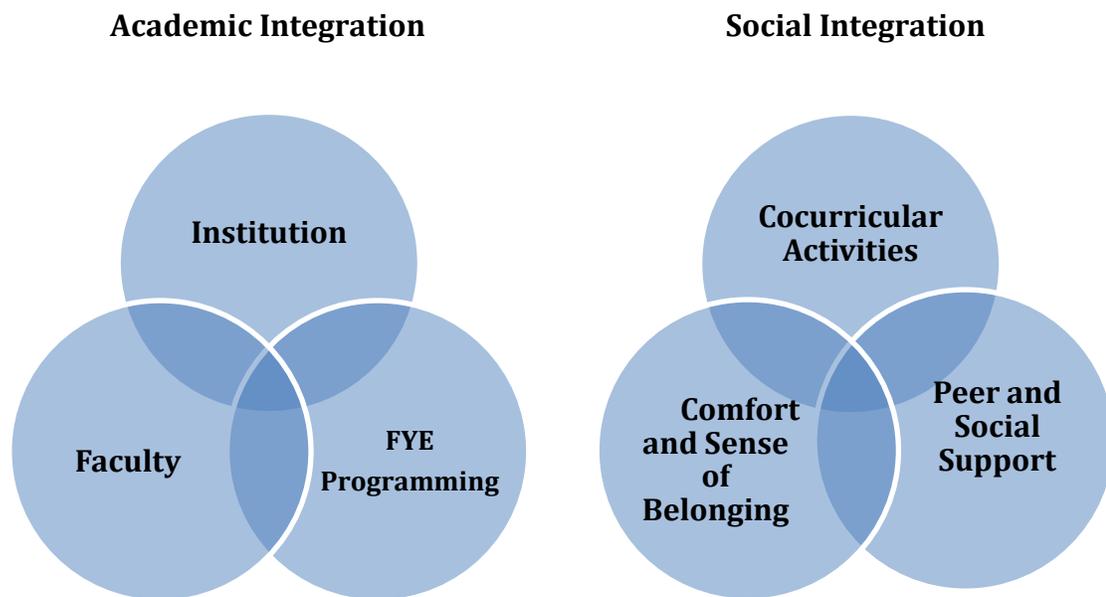
Student success during the first year, as noted originally in M. Lee Upcraft (1985) and discussed again by M. Lee Upcraft and John Gardner (1989) requires more than students passing their courses and earning credits toward their degrees. According to Upcraft and Gardner, to be successful, students must achieve educational *and* personal goals that include “developing academic and intellectual competence; establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships; developing an identity; deciding on a career and lifestyle; maintaining personal health and wellness and developing an integrated

philosophy of life” (p. 2). This concept of student success is clearly drawn from the theoretical work of Spady and Tinto, which emphasizes both academic and social integration into the university. Today, the variety of combined efforts of academic and student affairs personnel at college and universities that include, but are not limited to, first-year seminar courses, orientation programs, academic advising, mentoring programs, counseling services, living-learning programs and campus wide activities, are largely developed and originate from this broad definition of student success. The scholarship related to retention efforts and increasing student success often focuses on testing the impact of certain interventions, like mentoring programs, and certain student characteristics, like degree of social support, on one dimension of student success. This becomes apparent in the following overview of recent scholarship from the *Journal of College Student Retention* and the *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*.

### **Patterns and Themes in Recent Research**

Founded in 1999, the *Journal of College Student Retention*, or *JCSR*, is the leading peer-reviewed journal in the field of retention studies. Preceding *JCSR* by nearly a decade was the *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, or *JFYEST*. In my review of these journals, I looked closely at the past decade of scholarship and worked to identify patterns in the research. This resulted in the identification of several overlapping themes, or important “spheres” in the existing research, which are also relevant to my own study. The relationships that I identified between these different spheres are represented in Figure 4. Based on the theoretical work of Spady and Tinto that still very much dominates the field today, I divided these

spheres into two categories “Academic Integration” and “Social Integration”. While their theoretical work has been heavily revised, most of the research in the field is still considered within these two broad categories.



*Figure 4.* Recurrent themes in the research from *JCSR* and *JFYEST*, 1999-present.

### **Academic Integration**

**The influence of faculty.** To develop the above diagram, I considered that a student’s academic integration into the university is influenced by the faculty, the institution and first-year experience programming, including orientation and first-year seminars. The overlap between these spheres is apparent as faculty are a part of the larger institution and involved in FYE programming, which, in turn, is also developed on

an institutional level. In my review of both journals, I was surprised by the frequency of articles that discussed the influence of faculty on retention. Doing a keyword search for “faculty” in *JCSR*, I came up with 265 articles. From there, I narrowed the results to include those that contained any or all of the following key words and phrases: “student retention”, “student persistence”, “attrition”, “retention”, “student success”, “retention rates”, “degree completion”, “graduation rate” and “degree attainment”. This left me with 162 articles related to the role of faculty in student retention. While some of the articles indicate an indirect or less direct relationship between faculty and student persistence—like “faculty” is present as a keyword because a first-year experience course is facilitated by a faculty member—most of these articles, including those I will discuss below, argue that the influence of faculty on retention is significant.

In *JFYEST*, the results of a search for “faculty” revealed only 19 articles with the term in the abstract and only five with it in the title. Further searching indicates that the journal is heavily focused on testing the impact of first-year experience programming and institutional policies and practices that affect student transition into the first year, some of which will be discussed below. Still, considering *JFYEST* has been in publication for a full decade longer than *JCSR*, these search results were somewhat surprising, but maybe they are also what one might expect. I note this because, prior to engaging in this research, I was more familiar with retention as an institutional concern, like most faculty in higher education. However, what the literature demonstrates is that faculty members do impact retention in ways with which they should be concerned.

In *JCSR*, Richard Giaquinto (2010) examines the relationship between classroom instruction and retention, arguing that the instruction students receive during their first

semesters of college has a direct impact on their persistence from the first to second year (p. 268). He notes that first-year students often prefer “more direct instruction” and while they often appear to respond favorably to group work, during their first semesters of college they prefer a teacher-dominated classroom in which they “passively sit and listen and take notes” (p. 269). During their first year, he argues, students are not comfortable or ready for self-directed learning. This mismatch between student expectations and teacher instructional strategies can lead to students performing poorly and ultimately, to their failure to persist.

Audrey Jaeger and Derik Hinz (2009) consider the effect of part-time faculty on first semester freshmen retention, positing that part-time faculty are less available to students than their full-time colleagues and are often less invested in the campus environment. The authors note that the relationship between presence of part-time faculty and freshmen persistence is worth exploring because, as the literature widely supports, most students who fail to persist to graduation leave college during the first year. At the site of their research, between 1999 and 2003, the average first-year student “received nearly one-third of his or her total first-year instruction from part-time faculty and graduate students” (p. 281). The likelihood that a student who drops out of school will do so during the first year coupled with the prevalence of part-time faculty instruction during the typical student’s first year makes this an issue worth researching. While Jaeger and Hinz’s research is largely inconclusive, they suggest that institutions find better means with which to support part-time faculty, and call for additional research on the course level to explore student retention rates and academic success in courses taught by part-time faculty.

The issues brought up by Giaquinto and Jaeger and Hinz are particularly relevant to the context of my own research, and this is why these are the articles I chose to discuss in more detail. During my last year working on the Punxsutawney campus, I was teaching first-year writing as a temporary faculty member. At that time, there were approximately 10 other faculty teaching on the campus; like myself, most of them were temporary faculty members and nearly half of them split their teaching load between the Punxsy campus and the university's main campus, 27 miles away. Dividing their time, teaching and office hours between the two campuses, these faculty members were less available to students, and, as Jaeger and Hinz support, this also resulted in them being less engaged with the campus environment.

In addition, the prevalence of temporary faculty members on the regional campus also results in high "turnover". These faculty members are appointed to their positions on a yearly basis, for a maximum appointment of three years. Even if they had the time to become invested in the campus environment and the students, their temporary status does not allow for that to happen. In the three years that I worked on the campus, there was only a handful of faculty who remained constant and who really understood the unique culture of the regional campus and the needs of its underprepared population. Teaching on both campuses, some of the faculty would draw comparisons between their students on the main campus and their students on the regional campus. These comparisons most often portrayed the regional campus students as less capable. I wish I could say that this was merely faculty lounge banter, but I saw these comparisons made in the classroom as well. Instead of considering these differences in achievement and using them to reflect on their teaching practices and tailor them to better fit the context,

faculty members most often treated poor student performance as the result of something the student was not doing well, and they continued to deliver their course material in the same manner. While the connections I make here to the literature are anecdotal, they are no less significant. Because the first-year experience program is a retention effort, it is important to consider how, in the context of the literature, the status and placement of faculty on the regional campus has direct implications for the impact of the program. Anecdotal evidence provides an opening for this conversation.

The influence of faculty is also prevalent in the literature in terms of mentoring. Searching through *JCSR*, I found 80 articles with “faculty” and “mentoring” present in the abstract and 13 that include the exact phrase “faculty mentoring”. The influence of faculty as mentors was recently addressed by Silvia Santos and Elena Reigadas (2005). In their article, “Understanding the Student-Faculty Mentoring Process: Its Effects on At-Risk University Students”, Santos and Reigadas study the perceptions and academic achievement of 65 students involved in a faculty-mentoring program. They conclude that participating in a mentoring program can be beneficial to at-risk students in a number of ways, but even more so when the faculty mentor is from the same ethnic background as the student. Students with mentors from their same background reported that their mentors seemed more supportive, and they were also likely to meet with them more often. This research has a direct connection to my context, where the majority of the students are at-risk and also minorities, but where the presence of minority faculty or “better able” peers is practically non-existent.

While there are considerably fewer articles in *JFYEST* on faculty mentoring, in recent research, Caroline D’Abate (2009) seeks to better define peer and faculty

mentoring, believing that mentoring could prove even more effective if mentors and mentees clearly understood their roles and were able to articulate the purpose and goals of entering into the mentoring relationship. Because both peer-peer and faculty-student mentoring programs are becoming more popular as part of retention interventions, it is important to clearly define the roles and expectations that exist in any mentoring relationship.

**The influence of the institution.** In addition to the influence of faculty, how well a student integrates into the academic system of the university is also largely determined by institutional policies and practices. The following articles are key pieces of scholarship from *JCSR*. In *JFYEST*, institutional policies and practices dealing with retention most often take on the form of orientation, transitions programs or, even more frequently, first-year seminars. This is represented in Figure 4 as “first-year experience programming”, and it will be discussed below.

At most universities, the conversation about retention often begins with determining *who* is responsible for student retention, and to do that, institutions must figure out why students are leaving. As R. Eric Landrum (2002) points out, “it is necessary to know whether the causes of attrition are primarily student-oriented or university-oriented. If these causes reside primarily with the student, the university may not have many options to help the student persevere. If the causes of attrition are mainly due to university policies, procedures and allocation of resources, the university may have better recourse in trying to aid students (p. 196). For this study, Landrum compiled a list of 81 potential reasons for student withdrawal from the university. He then asked university personnel and students to answer questions like, “Who is responsible for a

student's ability to find and use campus resources?" (p. 199). The results of his study indicate that "students and university personnel do share views about the level of responsibility the university has in retention of students", but, as Landrum notes, there are also some meaningful differences (p. 210). For example, students attribute more responsibility to the university for improving and developing job skills than the university attributes to itself. These differences invite exploration into student perceptions that may result from a lack of communication. For example, maybe the university does sponsor or provide internships to students, but they are not widely advertised. These perceptions are worth exploring because, as Landrum points out, in this case perception is reality as a student's perceptions may drive his/her decision to withdraw from the university.

There are also specific institutional practices that play a distinct role in retention. These practices include everything from recruitment, orientation and the presence of a first-year seminar course to required advising and mid-term grade reporting. In one of the first issues of *JCSR*, the research of Winston Frost (1999) indicates the importance of academic advising in his discussion of a community-based retention model at Trinity Law School in southern California. Institutional practices that play a key role in this model include faculty dinners, a student mentoring program and regular study assistance. Frost concludes that the institution's success can be readily attributed to its "well-defined mission" and faculty commitment to that mission (p. 217). The Trinity Law School model provides a good example of the overlap of these different "spheres" represented in Figure 4, and how different areas of the university can work closely together to ensure that students make a successful academic integration into the university. More recently, Mary Ziskin, Donald Hossler and Sooyeon Kim (2010) explore various institutional

practices, finding that institutional policies surrounding the advising of first-year students seem to significantly impact retention. The authors also find a link between residentialness—the proportion of first-year students living on campus—and retention (p. 114).

**The influence of programming.** Developed at the institutional level, first-year programming is often designed with the purpose of increasing retention and persistence rates. Since its inception, *JFYEST* has published 37 articles on the “first year-seminar”. Arguably, this journal is the “go to” source for information on the first-year seminar. In the May 2009 issue alone, two articles (Friedman & Marsh, 2009; Strayhorn, 2009), examine the effectiveness of the first-year seminar. The first-year seminar, depending on how it is designed, has been considered historically as having the ability to increase student success by helping students achieve any or all of their educational and personal goals. After doing an extensive review of the literature about the impact of first-year seminar participation, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded, “...FYS participation has statistically significant and substantial, positive effects on a student’s successful transition to college and the likelihood of persistence into the second year as well as on academic performance while in college and on a considerable array of other college experiences known to be related directly and indirectly to bachelor’s degree completion” (pp. 402-403). Tracy Skipper (2002) notes that more than 70% of American colleges who responded to a national survey have implemented a first-year experience course, and D.J. Lang (2007) posits that students who participate in a first-year seminar course “may attain higher GPAs in their first semester; persist to their second, third, and fourth semesters; and graduate within four, five and six years more often than their nonparticipant counterparts” (p. 19).

However, as noted, the design of a first-year seminar course greatly impacts its success. In a recent *JFYEST* article, Daniel Friedman and Elizabeth Marsh (2009) compare two approaches to a first-year seminar, an academic theme vs. a college transition theme, to determine which is most effective in terms of persistence and academic achievement. They conclude that while students seem to favor the college transition theme seminar because it provides them with more information about how to get involved on campus and campus policies, the type of seminar does not seem to have any bearing on student GPAs or persistence. In the following issue of the journal, Deborah Smith, Ruth Goldfine and Melissa Winham (2009) compare the achievement of learning outcomes in two first-year seminar courses—one embedded in a learning community and the other independent. They hypothesize that students in the embedded course are more likely to perceive that the course learning outcomes have been met at the end of the semester, but according to student course evaluations, this is not the case.

### **Social Integration**

**Cocurricular involvement.** The relationship between student participation in extracurricular, now most often termed “cocurricular”, activities and student persistence is present even in the earliest studies reviewed at the beginning of this chapter. The positive impact of involvement in clubs, organizations and activities outside of class on preventing student retention is also supported in the theoretical models of both Spady and Tinto. Both scholars espouse the idea that social integration into the university is just as important as academic integration, and one without the other often results in a student dropping out or failing to persist. Astin’s (1984, 1999) “theory of involvement”, which builds on the work of both scholars, posits that when students make meaningful

connections through this participation they are more likely to persist to graduation, and Kuh, Palmer and Kish (2003) conclude that “engaging students in educationally purposeful activities outside the classroom enhances student learning and contributes to student success, broadly defined to include student satisfaction, persistence and educational attainment” (p. 12). In their research, George Kuh, Megan Palmer and Kelly Kish found that participation in a fraternity or sorority during the first year appears to have a negative impact on critical thinking, particularly for young men, while service-learning and volunteering seem to aid in the development of critical thinking skills (p. 3).

The most recent scholarship that specifically studies the impact of cocurricular involvement appears in the May 2009 issue of *JFYEST*. Thanh-Thanh Tieu and S. Mark Pancer examine the impact of “cocurricular involvement” on a student’s transition by considering if it is “quantity” or “quality” of involvement that seems to help students successfully transition into the university. Tieu and Pancer conducted their research on 191 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in Introductory Psychology at a university in Ontario, Canada. The students listed all of the activities in which they were involved outside of coursework and paid employment. They were then asked to identify the activity that they considered to be most important and then responded to a series of statements about that activity, developed by the researchers as the Quality of Involvement Scale, or QIS. Statements that reflected what the researchers determined was high-quality involvement included, among others, “this activity is very important to me” and “I feel a sense of connection to others who participate in this activity”. In the end, Tieu and Pancer are able to support their hypothesis—that quality of involvement does matter. They write, “Scores on the QIS were a better predictor of adjustment during their first

year then were scores on any of the measures of quantity or frequency of involvement, including the number of hours students devoted to their major activities...” (p. 58).

**Peer and social support.** Closely related to cocurricular involvement in terms of impacting retention is the peer and social support that a student receives during the first year. The relation is clear because students often make meaningful connections with their peers during or through participation in outside of class activities. Therefore, there is a positive correlation between this participation and social and peer support. In terms of social support, this is also where we see an overlap between academic and social integration. Relationships with faculty in terms of mentoring and advising are thought to not only help a student integrate academically into the university but also socially as faculty often provide students with social and, sometimes, emotional support—particularly students who are having difficulty transitioning into the university and who reach out to faculty members. The impact of social support and peer relationships on persistence is discussed in several recent articles in *JCSR*. Michael Skahill (2003) examines social support networks among residential and commuter students at an urban technical arts college, concluding that one reason why commuter students may be less likely to persist than residential students is because they tend to make fewer friends and to be less involved or invested in campus life. He argues that the residential students in his research also reported achieving more personal and academic goals than the commuter students. Breck Harris (2007) considers social support in terms of creating a sense of community among returning adult students. Not unlike first-year undergraduates, college for non-traditional or returning adult students is often like wandering into a “foreign country”. To ease this transition, Harris suggests that

universities utilize a “closed-cohort” format to help students “develop genuine bonds of trust and support with each other” and to, ultimately, increase retention and graduation rates (p. 101).

Megan Nipcon et al. (2007) explore the impact of the social support that students receive from family and friends and how that relates to persistence by gender. The authors claim that women typically receive more social support throughout their academic careers from friends and family than what men receive, but they are not able to positively link that social support to academic performance—only to positive academic persistence decisions. This indicates that increased social support from friends and family may help students make better decisions about their academic careers (p. 354). They also discuss the relationship between loneliness and non-persistence in college, noting that loneliness and emotional distress may be heightened for students who do not “fit in” to the college environment, an idea that originates from the theoretical models of Spady and Tinto (p. 347).

Diane Sorrentino (2007) describes how social support from peers can develop through a student-student mentoring program. Her research was conducted on the SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) mentoring program at the College of Staten Island, CUNY. Comparing the academic performance of students who participated in the program with the academic performance of those who did not, Sorrentino concludes that the mentoring program is successful in helping at-risk students improve their grades and study habits, increase their confidence, develop better time management skills and adopt a “goal-setting perspective” (p. 247). She notes that the “mentoring relationship combined with tutoring best meets the needs of the students

academically and personally”, and after completion of the program, many students continued with the positive behaviors that they had developed during the program (p. 249).

The relationship between peer relationships and persistence is also considered by Lisa Swenson Goguen, Marnie Hiester, and Alicia Nordstrom (2011) through the lens of Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development. As the authors note, previous research done by Theodore Newcomb (1962) suggests that, “for better or for worse...peers affected students’ progress in college” (p. 320). The impact of peer relationships on student success in college was also supported by Tinto (1975), who found a positive correlation between friendship support and student persistence. In their research, Swenson Goguen, Hiester and Nordstrom looked at the quantity and quality of student friendships and also explored how attachment and conflict in these relationships were related to academic achievement. The findings of their research are interesting, though not entirely surprising. They note, “...trust and loyalty between peers was a key factor in the academic achievement of first-year college students. Having a trustworthy and loyal friend was associated with a higher GPA during the first college semester” (p. 332). They hypothesize that the existence of this relationship likely has something to do with friends acting as a “buffer” to stress. Another interesting conclusion of their research is “students who had friends with whom they engaged in common activities were more likely to persist to the second year of college” (p. 332).

In the November 2009 issue of *JFYEST*, Eunyoung Kim examines the role of peer networks in the transition of first-year, minority, immigrant students. This study, and others like it, demonstrates a clear understanding of the importance of developing

interpersonal relationships to student success, something that scholars have been noting for decades, but Kim's study considers the impact of peer relationships for first-year, minority, immigrant students—a population that scholars, like Tinto, had neglected in earlier research.

Recently, social support has also been considered as it exists in online environments, specifically on the very popular social networking site, Facebook. Jason Morris et al. (2010) find that Facebook usage is statistically significantly related to Tinto's concept of social integration, and that second year persistence rates were higher among students in the study who used Facebook as opposed to non-users. Persisters were likely to use the social-networking site to form university-based ties and relationships, to both student clubs and organizations, as well as to peers and faculty members. With over 64 million users worldwide and 47,000 regional, work related, collegiate and high school networks, Facebook is an integral part of the social fabric for many college students. The research of Morris et al. indicates that Facebook also appears to be a behavioral measure of social integration and a facilitator of the college transition process.

**Comfort and sense of belonging.** Finally, I want to conclude my literature review with an element of social integration that is very much a part of my own research: student comfort and sense of belonging. Indirectly, this is discussed above as students “fitting in” or having a “sense of community”. However, I think that these issues extend beyond what I have noted above, and the article that I picked to include in this section clearly indicates that comfort and sense of belonging have their own place in the research.

Most recently, Andrea Dixon Rayle, Sharon Robinson Kurpius and Patricia Arredondo (2007) investigate the relationship between self-beliefs, social support and university comfort to academic persistence for female first-year students. Self-beliefs, both positive and negative, are related to lower and higher levels of self-esteem. Simply put, students who think they can succeed are more likely to do so. Social support, which has been discussed extensively already, is also clearly related to persistence. It is the last element here, university comfort, and its relation to the other two that make this study so interesting and also particularly relevant to my research. Dixon Rayle, Robinson Kurpius and Arredondo define university comfort as “perceptions of warmth and receptivity in the university environment, a sense of cultural congruity and level of perceived academic stress” (p. 328). While their research focuses on women, the authors note that “universities continue to reflect Euro-American, male-dominated, middle class perspectives” and because of this, “women may find themselves in an environment where their personal values...are not supported. This sense of not fitting in or feeling culturally incongruent in the university setting can result in less university comfort and often is related to increased academic non-persistence decisions” (p. 328). They conclude that, for all of their participants, “self-beliefs, social support and university comfort were significant predictors of academic persistence decisions, together accounting for over half of the variance in persistence decisions” (p. 337).

In Chapter 4, I discuss how comfort with the university and surrounding community relates to student’s experiences in this setting. Part of this discussion includes the results of a survey in which I asked students to rate their level of comfort in the Punxsutawney community.

## Conclusion

While the contents of these journals is not surprising, and while these studies do contribute to the field and help us better understand the interventions that could assist students in transitioning successfully into college, this research, and the decades of research that precedes it, is not sufficient for understanding the context of this study. I have identified primarily two reasons for this. To begin, focusing on the development of the first-year student did not become the mission and purpose of the IUP-Punxsutawney campus until 2004. Therefore, the program is relatively new, and in the existing literature, there are no interventions that fit this model. This retention effort, which includes admitting only first-year students to the regional campus, is truly unique. The new and distinctive nature of IUP-Punxsutawney means that it is not simply a place to *do* research. It *is* research. In addition to the unique nature of the research site itself, the approach with which I chose to study this context, described in the following chapter, is also distinctive.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Where This Study Fits**

Most of the studies described in the previous chapter are quantitative—empirical studies designed to test the effectiveness of various programs and interventions on student success and retention. This study differs from those discussed previously because it focuses on the lived experience and the process of *being* a first-year student, more specifically an at-risk first-year student, and what that means in the setting of IUP-Punxsutawney. In addition, using student-drawn maps to understand student experiences is a method of data collection that I have not seen in retention research. With this study, I aim to make a unique contribution to the literature on retention and the first-year experience, as well as bring retention studies into composition. To do this, it will take an uncommon methodology applied to an even less common setting. However, this was not how I had always envisioned it.

### **Developing a Research Methodology**

#### **The Influence of My Experiences in the Research Setting**

As this study originated, my intent was to also design an empirical research study aimed at identifying specific factors that enable or inhibit a student's ability to make a successful transition into the first year. I had even compiled a list that well represents the literature of the field that was reviewed in the previous chapter: race, gender, living conditions, home environment vs. school environment, level of involvement in campus activities and experiences in the surrounding community were all factors that I identified as having the potential to “make or break” a student's ability to transition successfully

into the first year. I developed this list from my own observations from the beginning of my time at the research site.

In this setting, where I witnessed an overwhelming amount of dropout and academic failure, it follows that my first inclination would be to figure out why students were leaving. This initial focus also makes sense because of my immersion in the research setting. For two years, I held a position in the campus' Writing Center, and as part of the position I was provided with housing in the residence hall. For two years, I was, quite literally, immersed in the first-year experience. I was in a unique position where my own observations and experiences and the informal conversations I engaged in with students continuously played off one another: What I observed (through the lens of my own experiences), students openly chatted about during writing conferences, and what they chatted about, I observed.

For example, coming from an urban environment, from the moment of my own arrival on the campus I was puzzled by its location. Frankly, I did not understand why a university would bring such a large population of urban, minority students to a nearly all-white, rural area. This seemed to be working against common sense, but also against the decades of research discussed in the previous chapter—particularly the later research that pushes for a clearer understanding of how the campus environment, and how that environment compares to a student's home environment, plays a role in retention.

Uri Brofenbrenner (1979) describes the disparities between a student's home and school environment and how those affect transition as the concepts of "ecological environment" and "ecological transition". In short, Brofenbrenner likens the ecological environment to a set of Russian nesting dolls--"a set of nested structures, each inside the

next” (p. 3). Bronfenbrenner argues that the relation between these “nested structures” or different environments, such as home and school, play a key role in human development. He posits that “a child’s ability to learn to read in the primary grades may depend no less on how he is taught than on the existence and nature of ties between the school and the home” (p. 3).

In retention research, context matters. In Bronfenbrenner’s view, the relation and ties between contexts also matters. Contested relations or dissimilarities between settings or contexts put stress on the transition from one environment to the next. This stress is determined by the degree to which the contexts are dissimilar or “at odds” with one another. He writes, “the capacity of a setting—such as the home, school or workplace—to function effectively as a context for development is seen to depend on the existence and nature of social interconnections between settings, including joint participation, communication and the existence of information in each setting about the other” (pp. 5-6). A shift from one setting to another is, in Bronfenbrenner’s words, an “ecological transition” (p. 6). In terms of the transition to college, a student is more likely to make a successful transition if the home (sending) environment is similar in nature to the college (receiving) environment and the ties between the sending and receiving environment are relatively stable. This means that the two environments may share a common culture or value system, which is very similar to how Spady describes “normative congruence” in his theoretical model discussed in Chapter 2. A student whose beliefs and values are congruent with those privileged within the university is more likely to successfully integrate into the university environment than one who enters the university with beliefs and values that are challenged, not supported or devalued within the environment. The

more dissimilar or “incongruent” the two environments, the more likely a student is to not make a successful transition, the end result of which is dropout, for academic and/or social reasons.

Initially, this was the “I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore” feeling that I wrestled with for a good part of my first semester. Through my interactions with students, I quickly learned they battled it too. It was a commonality that I felt, despite our differences (I was older, had been to college, etc.), bonded us in some way. Like them, I was a student in transition, and also like them, I was seeking to identify with my surroundings. These feelings of alienation that we shared and that tied us together, however loosely, became important to my own transition into the environment, and because I viewed them with such importance, they also began to determine the direction of my thinking about the research context and the people within it.

To be general, my views were negative. The African-American students often told me stories of being followed around local stores or shouted at out of car windows. This reinforced my initial thinking that bringing urban, minority students to an all-white, rural area is simply not a good idea and maybe even irresponsible on the part of the institution. While at the time of my entry into the research site I had no intention of studying it, it was these initial thoughts that sparked my interest. I wanted to tell anyone who would listen about the prejudice students told me they experienced. I wanted others to understand how ridiculous it was, in my view, to bring nearly 300 students who are defined as at-risk to the same place to start their first year and to expect them to successfully transition into college and learn how to *be* students in a place totally void of upperclassmen to model the behaviors essential to student success.

I witnessed, over a two-year period, a discouraging amount of student failure. I knew students who stopped going to classes; I knew others who went home over the holiday break and never came back. Others, though “passing” academically, were “failing” to adjust socially. I saw students get into fights, get arrested and get kicked off campus. In such a small environment, one student’s failure, academic or social, feels like that of ten or even twenty elsewhere. In short, I wanted to figure out what was causing students to fail to transition and to simply not survive the first year. This is how I initially came to isolating certain factors that, as an overwhelming amount of literature in the field show, are related to student success and persistence. And while I do not deny that this is the case, as I will describe below, I did not know enough about the research setting or the students to begin with these assumptions.

### **The Influence of My Separation from the Research Setting**

I realized that, despite my observations, I did not know much about the experiences students were having at IUP-Punxsutawney. After two years as the assistant director of the writing center, I moved out of campus housing and into a house near Clarion, PA, 60 miles from the campus. I also no longer worked on the regional campus but was, instead, appointed to a teaching associate position on the university’s main campus. Therefore, I returned to the campus as a researcher—an insider-turned-outsider. In my role as a researcher who no longer lived in the research setting, it was my responsibility to look at the bigger picture and attempt to “bracket” my own experiences—mindfully suspending them in the interest of the research. Because of its uniqueness, the regional campus is not a place to blindly apply the research of other scholars in order to better understand it. Therefore, starting with pre-determined lists of

student characteristics and considering only how they influence the transition process would not work. IUP-Punxsutawney is a place that needs to be understood for what it is, outside of the existing research. This is why one of my research questions is devoted to defining the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney and asking: What *is* this place? This is, of course, inseparable from the other research question that aims to better understand what it means to be a student in this setting. Again, the regional campus *is* research, and the only way to begin to understand it is by focusing on the lived experience.

### **Framing the Lived Experience with Phenomenology**

I am adopting the phenomenological frame that Van Manen (1990) describes in his text, *Researching Lived Experience*, and while I use the term rarely in my own research, I use it the way he uses it: an approach to understanding the lived experience. This is because the goal of my research is primarily descriptive. I am seeking to characterize and detail what it means to be an at-risk, first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney. I aim to describe the nature of that experience, as well as to depict the research setting itself. In his book, Van Manen compares, at length, the nature of the phenomenological question with that of the questions typically researched in the social sciences in a way that speaks clearly to my own research. He writes,

In experimental research, the cleaner and less ambiguous the research question, the less ambiguous the interpretation of the research findings. In much social and human science research, it is assumed that a productive research question is formulated in such a clear-cut or prosaic manner that any competent and ‘disinterested’ social or behavioral scientist can deal with the question. That is

why so much research can be contracted out or delegated to assistants, research teams or agencies. The matter lies quite differently with phenomenological research. A phenomenological question must not only be made clear, understood, but also ‘lived’ by the researcher. (p. 44)

From Van Manen’s perspective, my initial closeness to the research setting proves useful, and to really understand why IUP-Punxsutawney is a place worth researching, I would agree that for awhile, the question had to be lived. Ironically, it was increased distance from the setting and time spent *not* living the question that allowed me to shed my original thinking in order to focus on the lived experience. I am no longer asking *those* questions, however useful, queried by other scholars and researchers. Instead, I am asking *the* questions: *What is the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney? What does it mean to be a first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney?*

### **A Tradition of the Lived Experience in Composition Studies**

Focusing on the lived experienced in a study about student retention is, again, a unique approach that could make a real contribution to the field, and it was something I came to over time, as I moved away from the context of the study and as I continued to develop as a scholar in composition and literacy studies. It is important to reiterate that I come to this research as a composition scholar and writing teacher, and while there are numerous quantitative, empirical studies within my own field of study, research of this nature does not dominate composition and literacy scholarship as it does the body of scholarship on retention that was reviewed in the previous chapter. Retention studies do not emphasize or rely on the lived experience as it is often emphasized and even the very essence of numerous composition and literacy studies. Because this is the field in which

I have studied, it is the research that exists therein that influences how I approach my own work, and when deciding how to conduct this study, I considered several key works in the field.

A natural starting place for this discussion is Shirley Bryce Heath's *Ways with Words* (1983). In this widely-cited text, Heath takes an ethnographic approach to studying the language practices of children in the home and school environments of two communities in the south-eastern United States, "Roadville" and "Trackton". The populations of both communities are primarily working class, but Roadville is a white community and Trackton's residents are black. Notably, Heath's work reveals a startling disconnect between the home and school environments of the children, particularly for the children from Trackton. These children often do not use language in the ways it is traditionally used within the school environment. For example, as Heath describes, both the children from Roadville and Trackton children often use "ain't". For the children from Roadville, "ain't" is the negative form of "to be". The children from Trackton, however, use "ain't" in place of "didn't". The teachers view this usage as an error and constantly try to correct it (p. 277). A specific example of this is when a teacher misinterprets this use of "ain't" as meaning "doesn't" in a conversation with one of the Trackton children, Lem:

A teacher asked one day: "where is Susan? Isn't she here today?"

Lem answered: "She ain't ride de bus."

The teacher responded: "She doesn't ride the bus, Lem."

Lem answered: "She do be ridin' de bus."

The teacher frowned at Lem and turned away. (p. 277)

Lem is trying to say that Susan does usually ride the bus, but she just did not ride the bus today. He is answering the teacher's question, but this is not what the teacher hears; instead, she attempts to correct Lem. As Heath notes, Lem "rejected this shift of meaning and asserted through his use of *do be ridin'* that Susan indeed regularly ride the bus"—she just did not do so today (p. 278). The teacher becomes impatient and annoyed with Lem, and she ends the conversation.

Misunderstandings like this are common in the Trackton children's interactions with their teachers, and, as Heath observes, they ultimately lead to the children being left behind because their language practices do not fit and are not privileged within the school environment. It is only after teachers figure out how to reach the children on their own terms and using the rules that are already embedded in their language use that the frustration dissipates and the students are able to realize success in the classroom (see chapter 8 of Heath's text, "Teachers as Learners").

Focusing on the lived experiences of these students, in particular the day to day interactions between these students and their teachers, is the only way Heath could have fully realized the impact that the discontinuity between the students' home literacy and language practices and those of schooling had on their ability to do well in school. The lived experience was essential to this research and any other approach could not have yielded such important conclusions. Heath's work is still widely cited because it paved the way for a number of other studies that aim to capture the lived experience.

One such study that follows Heath's is Denny Taylor and Catherine Dorsey-Gaines' (1988) *Growing up Literate: Learning from Inner-City Families*. The authors open their text offering readers a close look into the lives of five African-American,

inner-city families, and they spend the rest of the text describing the literacy practices of the children, both at home and at school, and how all of the family members use reading and writing in their daily lives. They identify different types of reading, such as news-related and recreational, and different types of writing, such as social-interactional and financial, that perform a specific function or purpose in the day-to-day lives of these families (pp. 136-139, 157-167).

For example, living below the poverty level, the families were required to complete the paperwork necessary to “obtain the assistance they needed”, and these forms almost always required that they provide, at the very least, a statement of finances and income (p. 166). This is the financial writing that they identify, and one of the conclusions that the authors come to regarding daily literacy practices deal with this type of writing. The authors argue that applications for food stamps and other forms of assistance are examples of “print in various forms...used to intrude upon the ways in which they live—private becomes public when you are poor” (p. 199). They support this by noting that when one of the women, Tanya, was pregnant with her daughter and applying for food stamps, she was asked “how many times she had sexual intercourse and where it had taken place” (p. 199). As Tanya notes, ““They know everything about you”” (p. 199). Through observation and interviews that focus on the lived experience one of the conclusions that Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines come to is that “literacy is not always liberating” (p. 202). The notion that literacy automatically leads to liberation and some kind of empowerment, or the “literacy myth”, falls flat when considered within the context of the daily lives of these poor, African-American, inner-city families.

To best understand the role and reading and writing played in the daily lives of these individuals, observation was necessary, particularly when it came to understanding how the children were becoming literate in the household. When discussing their observations of the children, the authors write, “For us, it was merely a matter of observing, spending time, and hoping that we see reflections of the literate lives of the children as we visited their homes. We watched for the children to write or read, and we collected examples of their work whenever an opportunity arose” (p. 61). They note that they did not have to “bide” their time for long, as “literacy is indeed an integral part of the children’s everyday lives”, and as their work demonstrates literacy practices are deeply embedded in the everyday lives of all of the family members (p. 61). Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines’ focus on how the material conditions of everyday life influence literacy acquisition and language development reminds us that neither of these things are immune to social, political and economic forces. Sternglass (1997) extends this same point to writing instruction that, although it was previously addressed in Chapter 1, bears repeating: composition does not exist “in a vacuum” (p. 141). For this reason, it is worthy to also examine the lived experiences of our students in the same way that Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines examined the everyday literacy lives of these individuals. This type of research allows us to more fully understand the implications of these external forces on student success and learning and to make appropriate changes in our curriculum and classroom practices.

Both Heath’s work and the work of Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines seek to challenge assumptions that educators tend to make about literacy and learning. Rose (1990) extends this to the presuppositions with which educators approach children who are

educationally underprepared in his book *Lives on the Boundary*. Rose's interest in the educationally underprepared stems from his experiences with schooling. Misplaced in the vocational track for the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades after his test scores were switched with those of another student, Rose encountered numerous teachers who "had no idea how to engage the imaginations" of him and the other kids who were "scuttling along at the bottom of the pond" (p. 26). He describes vocational education as a "dumping ground for the disaffected", and the time he spent in this "dumping ground" inspired him to become a teacher of underprepared students and challenge other teachers to figure out better, more effective ways to teach these "problem" children, who are too often left behind in education. The book is an account of his experiences as a student but also his experiences as a teacher of a variety of at-risk individuals, ranging from children with disabilities to veterans who are sent to "academic boot camp" to learn the speaking, reading, writing and math skills necessary for college (p. 133). Through his account of the lived experiences of others, he makes a case for rethinking remediation programs and argues that even the most underprepared students are "literate people, straining at the boundaries of their ability, trying to move into the unfamiliar" (p. 188).

Rose follows up this first of account of schooling in America with *Possible Lives* (1999), a more hopeful view of American education born out of four years of traveling to various schools across the country. In his travels, he meets students, teachers and administrators who, despite having the odds stacked against them for a variety of reasons are learning, succeeding and doing good work in their communities. Arguably it is these accounts of lived experiences, gathered by Rose through interviews and informal

conversations, that are most persuasive when considering educational reform because large-scale studies do not really show us how people live and learn.

Studying how people learn—specifically, how they learn to read and write—and observing the various literacy practices that individuals undertake in their everyday lives and the power and impact of those practices is the focus of a number of other texts as well. Deborah Brandt's (1991) *Literacy in American Lives* focuses largely on how people acquire literacy, with a particularly fascinating chapter devoted to describing how four generations of women in one family learned to write (see chapter 4). Brandt's work is methodologically similar to the texts described above. Throughout the course of her research she interviewed nearly 100 people about their literacy acquisition—how they learned to read and write. She situates their stories within their respective historical contexts and like Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, examines the social, political and economic forces that act upon their literacy acquisition in particular ways.

In *Other People's Children* (1995), Lisa Delpit returns to the classroom and extends many of the issues brought up in Heath's work—describing in-depth the conflicts and misunderstandings that occur between children from minority backgrounds and their teachers who are, most often, white. This includes differences in language use that are also the subject of Heath's work. Delpit's work is derived from her own observations in the classroom but also from numerous conversations with parents, teachers and students. While nearly 15 years old, Delpit's work remains valuable because many educators have still not learned how to fully accommodate diversity in the classroom.

Returning to the inner-city and offering a very specific account of everyday literacy practices that reiterates and builds on the work of Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines,

particularly their discussion of financial writing and literacy as not liberating but at times, intrusive, is Ellen Cushman's (1998) *The Struggle and the Tools*. Cushman's work focuses on the struggle of inner-city African-Americans to gain access to various community resources and social institutions. Her text is based on over three years of fieldwork during which she observed, interviewed and gathered artifacts of the lived experience. In my own research, I include artifacts of the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney, including photographs, institutional documents and maps of students' experiences.

The hardships faced by individuals moving along the margins of American life is also at the heart of Caroline Heller's (1997) *Until We Are Strong Together*. Heller's work is an account of her experiences teaching an inner-city women's writing group. Through their participation in the workshop and the sharing of their writing, Heller comes to know the women and the roles that reading, writing and other acts of literacy play in their daily lives.

Similarly, and more recently, in *Harlem on Our Minds: Place, Race and the Literacies of Urban Youth*, Valerie Kinloch (2010) studies the in and out of school literacy practices of Harlem youth and explores the relationship between these practices, the community in which they take place and the ways in which her research participants engage in literacy practices to both resist and to make sense of the changes taking place within their community—changes that are taking place as a result of its gentrification. Similar to my own research, Kinloch includes a wide range of perspectives and voices. She involves students, teachers and community residents, both old and new, whose experiences work together to illuminate the context.

Today, to be literate does not mean the same thing as it did twenty, ten or even five years ago. With shifting conceptualizations of literacy come narratives that shift their focus away from print literacy and onto people's experiences with computer or technological literacy. Notable among these works is Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher's (2004) *Literate Lives in the Information Age*. This text compares well to Brandt's (1991) earlier work that discusses primarily print literacy practices. In their work, Selfe and Hawisher center their case studies on a discussion of how individuals acquire digital literacies and how this acquisition is influenced heavily by factors that include, but are not limited to, race, culture, socioeconomic status and level of education. The authors also address the process of negotiating the transition from print to digital literacy and how the "literate lives" of the individuals they interview are forever shaped by these new forms of literacy. Their literacy practices are defined and constantly (re)defined in an age where print is no longer the norm. In addition to their work on literacy in the age of technology, Selfe and Hawisher, with the help of James Paul Gee, have most recently focused on a specific literacy related to technology, "gaming" literacy. In their book *Gaming Lives in the Twenty-First Century: Literate Connections* (2007), the authors provide case studies of gamers in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century in order to discuss the relationship between playing video games and literacy acquisition. This focus is not at all new to Gee, whose *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Literacy and Learning* was published in its second edition in 2007.

With this discussion, I am seeking to position my own research in a space that is not clearly defined—a place between retention and composition/literacy studies that I am paving for myself. Although there are teachers of writing like Pegeen Reichert Powell

(2009) who argue that all of us who teach writing should be concerned with retention, the field as a whole has yet to truly invest itself in the discussion. The subject matter of my research pushes me somewhat on the margins of composition, and in turn, focusing on the lived experience pushes me on the margins of retention. By choice, I go forth into this largely undefined space to study the lived experiences of first-year students and others who are embedded, through their own work, in the first-year experience.

### **Design of the Study**

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at IUP in December of 2008. In December of 2009, when the original IRB expired, I requested an extension to collect additional data, for reasons I will describe later. This extension officially brought the study to a close in January of 2011. In the original IRB, I note that part of my intent is to “strengthen campus and community relations”. This goal was derived from the conversations with students that I described above. When I first designed the study, I had not yet considered description of the lived experience as the primary focus and goal of the study, and while all studies should be systematic and conducted in an orderly fashion, the research continued to develop and take shape as I lived through it. I describe this process of constant reflection because, instead of hurting the integrity of the study, I think these reflections indicate that, as a researcher, I was forever mindful of the process in which I was engaged and trying to ensure I was asking the “right” questions. Also, the changes I made throughout were not to the primary methods of data collection or to my interactions with my research participants. The biggest changes were to the research questions that continued to develop over time.

As I noted, I started out with questions to “identify factors”, but in the end, I took a step back from the context and considered a less narrow approach. The end result was the development of these two questions: *What does it mean to be a first-year student?* *What is the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney?* This change is of little matter as far as the IRB is concerned because the overall nature of the study and methods of data collection remained unchanged. However, shifting to a focus on the lived experience that seeks to also define the research setting focused my research and led to some necessary changes.

For example, within the original IRB, I indicated that I would be utilizing three methods of data collection in order to achieve the goals (answer the questions) of the study which, as noted, changed. I also indicated that I would include community members in my research. Including community members was tied to the goal of strengthening campus and community relations. When the study began, I planned to have students, faculty, staff and community members participate in the following ways: (1) complete maps of IUP-Punxsutawney and the Punxsutawney community as they had experienced it, (2) share their experiences in one-on-one interviews and (3) attend focus groups to discuss the issues that came up during the interviews. I envisioned that I would carry out the study in this order, and for the most part, I did. I first collected the maps, as I will describe in a moment, and from the maps, I identified interviewees. I did this first by distinguishing students whose maps seemed somewhat interesting and seeing if the student was interesting in participating in an interview conversation, but when I solicited maps from students, they also completed informed consent forms on which they indicated whether or not they desired to contribute their perspective to the research by sitting down

for an interview or participating in a focus group. Out of the 142 students who initially completed maps and filled out informed consent forms, 13 volunteered to be interviewed and 3 indicated interest in the focus group. The idea of the focus group was to get students together with faculty, staff and members of the community. Because I changed my questions to focus on defining the context and what it means to me a first-year student in this context, the focus group and community member participation no longer seemed relevant and also expanded the research in a way that made it unmanageable. Also, student interest in the focus group was low from the beginning of the research. I do not think dropping this final method hurt the study. Instead, it allowed me to focus more on the maps and the interviews—the data that would best serve to answer the questions.

Lastly, during the close of the first year of the study, I distributed a survey to 122 students at IUP-Punxsutawney. The survey asked students to respond, anonymously, to questions based off of themes I noticed in the interviews and the maps. The purpose of the survey was to gather a broader sampling of student perspectives without conducting hundreds of interviews; because it was designed mindfully, taking into account recurring themes and issues present in the other data, the results, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, are still very telling. I learned throughout this study that it would not matter if I conducted 100 interviews, or even 1,000, if those interviews did little to answer the research questions. I knew the context was rich, and I wanted it to be represented as such.

## **Data Collection**

### **The First Method: Maps**

This study officially began in January of 2009, with the collection of 142 maps that I mentioned above. These were students' personal depictions of Punxsutawney as they knew it and had experienced it. This idea came directly from a book I was reading at

the time: *Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture* by anthropologist Michael Moffatt (1989). Wanting to know what college was “really like”, from 1977-1984, Moffatt became a participant observer, living, off and on, in the dorms at Rutgers University. Also a faculty member at the university, and feeling out of touch with his students, Moffatt’s ethnography is an attempt to better understand student culture and student life. Although Moffatt’s approach is ethnographic in nature, his goal—to better understand what college is like for students—is very similar to my own objective. Therefore, I looked to his text as a sort of model of what I might achieve through my own research, and I found his collection of student maps to be particularly interesting. He asked students to draw college “as they knew it”, and in his book, he offers a brief analysis of three student maps, which I will discuss here (pp. 55-57).

Moffatt describes the first map, drawn by a first-year, male student, as “small in scale” because it “centers on the dorms and the campus buildings immediately surrounding them” (p. 55). Moffatt also notes that the student’s drawing indicates he is “academically-oriented” because he draws the library, which is off campus, as his favorite place to study, but he has not drawn anything else that is outside of the campus. He compares the drawing of this student to that of a senior female student. In contrast to the drawing of the first-year, male student, the drawing of the senior female is “centered on off-campus life” and emphasizes her extracurricular activities (p. 57). Still, despite the off-campus focus, she appears to make wider use of the campus than the first-year student. In the final drawing, created by a female student who Moffatt describes as “old for a sophomore”, the focus is mostly on the town, with the exception of only three buildings on campus: one classroom, a fraternity house and the Art Library (p. 58). The

student's focus on the town is, as a viewer might assume, a consequence of the fact that she lives farther downtown than most students. Therefore, Rutgers, as she knows it, is as much a town as it is a university campus.

Finding these maps to be quite telling about the experiences of these students at Rutgers, I thought that asking students to draw Punxsutawney as they knew it would be useful to answering my research questions. Collecting the maps was the first step of my research process, and I gathered the majority of the maps during the first month of the study from 142 students enrolled in six different English courses; two of these were humanities literature courses and four were college writing courses. I picked the English courses for two reasons. First, knowing the English faculty, it was easy to gain access to these students. Having access to research participants is key to any study getting off the ground. Additionally, sticking with English, I guaranteed I would not receive more than one drawing from each student as the writing course is a prerequisite for the literature course. This means a student would not be enrolled in both courses at the same time. Collecting the maps in only the English courses still provided me with a decent sample. The 142 students who completed maps represent over 50% of the total population of the campus for the 2008-2009 academic year. Students completed the maps during class time, after I passed out the informed consent form that described the research study. I provided them each with standard-sized sheet of white printer paper, as well as brief instructions. For the most part, the activity was outlined, very briefly on the informed consent form. I asked students to draw a map of Punxsutawney as they had experienced it. While they drew, I stayed at the front of the room. During the process, several students asked questions, such as "Is this right?" My response to the questions involved

only a simple repetition of the instructions, and I was careful not to offer comments that were evaluative and could potentially influence the data.

### **The Second Method: Interviews**

From the inception of the study, I had no doubt I would be utilizing the interview as a primary method of data collection. It seemed clear that if I wanted to better understand the experiences of students at IUP-Punxsy, I needed to sit down and talk to them. Interviewing is also an obvious method of data collection for a researcher focusing on the lived experience. As Van Manen (1990) notes, the interview can be used as “a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” (p. 66). The “phenomenon”, in this case, is the act of *being* a first-year student in this particular context, and it is similar to the way that Van Manen describes parenting that I discussed in Chapter 1. We know what students should or shouldn’t do and, generally, how they behave, but we do not know what it really means to *be* one in this setting. Van Manen distinguishes the uses of interviewing in lived-experience research from how the interview is often used in the social sciences. He argues that the interview conversation should not be used to “study the ways individuals see themselves and others (psychological perception)”, or to “study the way people feel about certain issues (social opinion)” (p. 66). Instead, the phenomenological interview is used to collect accounts of personal experiences. As Van Manen also points out, when conducting this type of interview, it is important to “stay close to experience as lived” (p. 67). This means asking for concrete details and specific instances.

Throughout the study, I found that students were eager to share the details of their experiences, and while I tried to stay true to the research questions throughout the interview process, I was always afraid I would end up on what Van Manen describes as the “chaotic quest for meaning” with interviews that “go everywhere and nowhere” (p. 67). In fact, this fear is one reason why I requested an extension on the original IRB. With interviewing, there is a definite learning curve. My first interviews were awkward, and as I reviewed the transcripts, I discovered that many of the questions I asked were even somewhat leading and too specific. While the first round of 13 interviews did provide some interesting data for analysis, I was not completely satisfied with them. Therefore, during the fall of 2010, I requested an extension on the original IRB, and I interviewed 14 more students. To acquire these volunteers, I visited several classes on the campus to discuss my research. At this stage, I was more comfortable with the interview process, and I feel this second round of interview conversations focuses more on the lived experiences that this study aims to capture. For example, in an early interview I led a student to focus on issues of race in the community by adding my own knowledge to a story that he was relating. In later interviews, I learned to say less and listen more, and in these interviews I asked students two primary questions: (1) Can you describe your experiences at IUP-Punxsutawney? (2) Can you describe your experiences in the community? These two core questions generated hours of interview material, and I felt more comfortable that by asking students to describe and to only elaborate throughout the interview, I had succeeded in not allowing my own experiences to creep in and influence the conversation.

In addition to interviewing these 27 first-year students, I also interviewed five members, current and former, of the campus faculty/staff. Because the campus is small, I asked every member of the faculty and staff to participate in my research. In the end, I interviewed five members of the faculty and staff. Due to the small size of the campus, I could not guarantee any of them complete anonymity—something they all requested. Therefore, I speak of their interview conversations in only general terms.

For the final three interviews, I sat down with former IUP-Punxsy students. Two of these students were seniors when I interviewed them in the fall of 2010, and they both graduated in May 2011. The third student was a junior who is scheduled to graduate in May or December of 2011. Every account of lived experience can only be reflection on that experience. By this I mean before we can describe what a moment “is like”, the moment is gone. The description, therefore, becomes a reflection. While the majority of the students I interviewed were asked to describe their experiences as first-year students, they were experiences that, if only five minutes prior, had been lived through; they were over. However, they were, at the moment of their interviews, still first-year students and still having experiences as such. Adding the reflections of students who had lived through similar experiences, but two or three years ago, I believe adds depth to this research. Their interview conversations are reflections in the way that we most often think of a reflection—an account of something in our more distant memory.

Including these former students, I interviewed 35 individuals throughout the course of this study. With the exception of the final three interviews, which took place in the library on IUP’s main campus, all of the other interviews took place on the Punxsutawney campus, in the cafeteria and in the writing center, a space that I was given

to use by the director, a former colleague and participant in this research. Because they were true conversations, the interviews ranged in length from 22 minutes to 90 minutes. Of the 30 students I interviewed, five were male and 25 female. In terms of race and ethnicity, the numbers better represent the student population. Nine of the students I interviewed are African-American, three are Hispanic and the remaining 18 are white. While interview conversations offer a more in-depth look into the experiences of some of the students, the data collected through the maps and through the survey, described below, better represents the range of student experiences.

### **The Third Method: Survey**

In order to gather additional data, I developed a survey of 36 questions that I distributed to 150 students. The survey was broken down into two parts. In Part 1, “Your Campus Experiences”, I began with requesting some basic demographic information, such as race/ethnicity and hometown. I also asked questions to determine how each student came to start his/her first year at IUP-Punxsutawney. While most students are placed onto the campus, some students live locally and choose to attend the campus for their first year. This distinction is important to make because the experiences of the commuter students who are from the area are clearly different from the experiences of the at-risk students who mostly come to Punxsutawney from large, urban areas. The differences in the experiences of the students are apparent in the survey responses as well as on the maps and in the interviews. In the rest of Part 1 of the survey, I asked students to indicate their level of agreement with several statements that have appeared on the IUP-Punxsutawney website and/or in a short film designed for prospective IUP-Punxsutawney students. These statements include “IUP-Punxsutawney prepares students

to meet the demands of future college courses” and “The campus provides the resources that students need to be academically successful”.

In Part 2, “Your Community Experiences”, I asked students to identify, from a list, places they had visited in the community. On the same list, I asked them to circle places they visited on a regular basis (defined as three or more times each month), and I also requested that they underline the places they had “never heard of”. In this second part of the survey, I also asked them to indicate, on a scale of 1-10, how “comfortable” they felt in the Punxsutawney community, and finally, I requested information about their involvement in service learning projects that I knew to be a part of some of the courses.

The maps that were the initial form of data in this research helped to inform the interviews. In turn, the interviews, combined with the maps, served to inform the design of the survey. The study was continuously shaped and re-shaped by the data as it was collected, and although it is not traditional to make these moves from specific (interview) to general (survey) and back again (additional interviews), I justify this as another decision made by a reflective, thoughtful researcher. The mindfulness with which I conducted this research only results in adding depth and richness to the data; this will become clear in the analysis and discussion of Chapter 4. The three types of data speak to one another in ways that are complex and interesting.

## CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

### Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I offer an analysis of the primary source of data, student maps, which I collected to answer the two research questions: *What is the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney? What does it mean to be a first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney?* The additional data collected as a part of this research, interview conversations and survey responses, will be analyzed and considered in the context of the themes that developed from the student maps. The other two types of data help to contextualize and add meaning to the maps, but again, they are not the primary sources of data. I believe that the way in which I structure my analysis and the discussion of the data best represents its richness and complexity.

A portion of this chapter is devoted to explicating the process of making meaning from the 142 maps that I collected near the beginning of this study. Prior to this explication, I discuss, more broadly, what it means to “make meaning” out of lived experience and what it means to develop themes from data in order to bring oneself closer to the essence of an experience. I frame this section using Van Manen’s (1990) *Researching Lived Experience* from which I also drew the methodological frame for this study that I described in Chapter 3.

After this, I briefly discuss the process of developing the seven categories that I use to look at this data set in a particular way—a way that I feel serves the research questions. Sorting the data into these categories allows for a discussion about how the experiences of some students seem more “limited” to certain locations than the

experiences of other students. As I discuss each category, I note how the data in that category, as a whole, responds to the research questions. However, I also take a closer look at several maps individually because each one represents the unique experience of one student.

Sorting maps into categories frames the data for analysis and discussion in one particular way. Aware of potential limitations, the data was also coded by someone who is not familiar with the research setting. The specific way in which this outside reader coded the data was different from the process I undertook. This second particular way of looking at the data suggests that, as a whole, most students experience Punxsutawney as five or fewer places; in most cases, this consists of the IUP campus, combined with a few chain retail and food locations. My discussion of the outside reader's coding scheme follows the descriptions of the seven categories.

A third way to consider the student maps is in the context of the other forms of data collected during this study: the survey and the interview conversations. In this final section of the chapter, I closely analyze the results of a survey that asked students to focus on places they had experienced during their first year at IUP-Punxsutawney. This final data collection allowed me to gather the perspectives of additional students. On this survey, I asked students to identify how often they had visited 23 different places in the community. Eleven of these were local businesses or geographic locations, and the other 12 were popular food and retail locations. The survey results reveal that, as a whole, the students do not visit the local places as often as the popular chain locations. Their familiarity with the local places also varies by race.

Finally, I put the analysis of the survey into conversation with the analysis of the maps to consider an additional question that this data raises: *Why do the experiences of minority students in the Punxsutawney community appear to be more limited than those of the white students?* I answer this question by using survey and interview data to highlight how issues of race and prejudice play a distinct role in the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney. At the end of the chapter, I briefly discuss the implications of this for the transition and persistence of the campus' at-risk minority population.

### **Situating the Student Maps in Context**

Most of what I learned about the students who participated in my research comes through their maps of IUP-Punxsutawney and Punxsutawney as they had experienced it. I first position this data in the larger context by offering a brief description of IUP-Punxsutawney and the Punxsutawney community. With the following account and the accompanying images, I aim to give readers a sense of the location before I turn to students' depictions.



Figure 5. Map of Pennsylvania.

Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania is a small, rural town located 90 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, 100 miles south of Erie and 300 miles northeast of Philadelphia. In Figure 5, the reader can see Punxsutawney 27 miles north of Indiana. The borough of Punxsutawney is 3.4 square miles and is home to approximately 6,300 people. According to the borough’s official website, “the name of the town was derived from the Native American word for sand flies, a gnat-like insect that was abundant in the area. The name "town of the ponkies" became *Punxsutawney*” (“Punxsutawney Living”, n.d., para. 4). IUP’s regional campus is located on a hill, just north of Punxsutawney’s main street, Mahoning Street, near the eastern edge of the borough. A map of the borough is included as Figure 6. The location of IUP-Punxsutawney is indicated on the map with the following symbol: ♦.

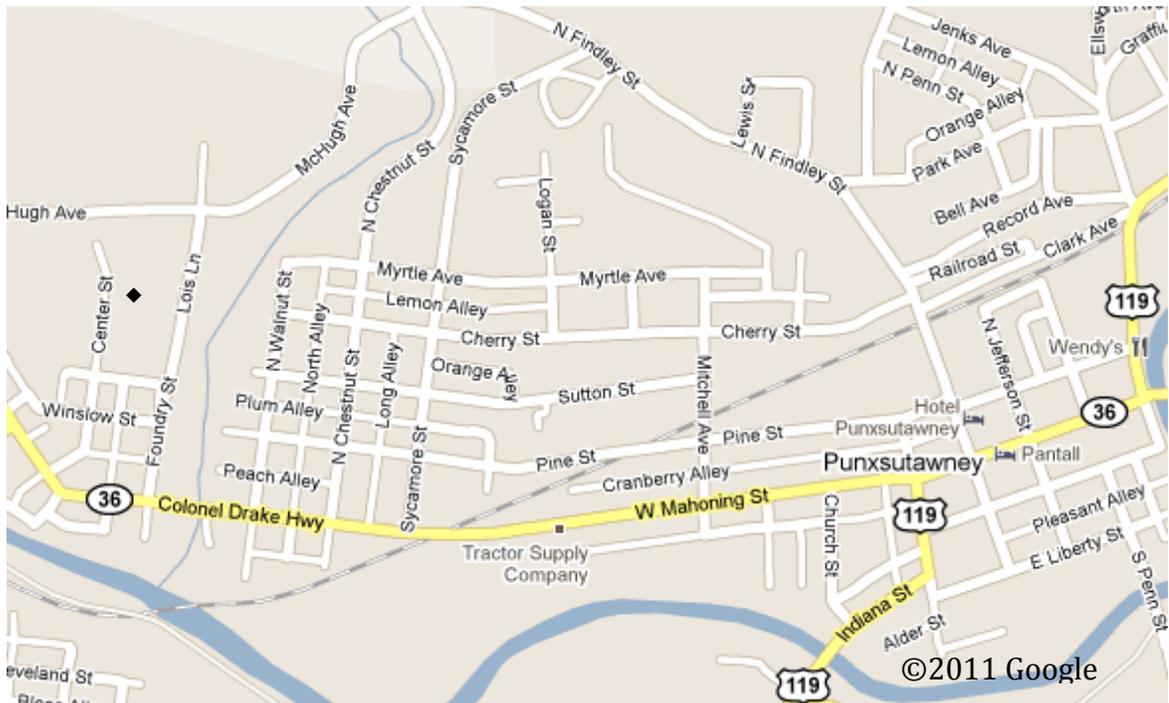


Figure 6. The borough of Punxsutawney, PA.

The existing campus structure, a “Living-Learning Center”, was completed in the summer of 2006. When I moved into my apartment on the second floor of the building, which was provided by the school as part of my position in the campus writing center, the paint in the hallways had yet to completely dry and campus maintenance workers were still moving furniture and appliances into the student suites. The Living Center is organized into three floors. Each suite is designed to accommodate up to four students each, in either a two or four bedroom configuration. All of the suites have a centrally located kitchenette that includes a full-sized refrigerator, a microwave and a small amount of cupboard/countertop space. Each suite also includes a furnished living area, complete with a couch, oversized chair, coffee table, end table and television stand. Photographs of the exterior and interior of the Living Center are included in Figures 7-10. Additional images can be found in Appendix B.



*Figure 7.* IUP-Punxsutawney’s Living Center and its main entrance.



*Figure 8.* A closer view of the main entrance of the Living Center.



*Figure 9.* A view of the first floor of the Living Center.



*Figure 10.* The second floor hallway in the Living Center.

The Living Center is connected by an indoor hallway to the Learning Center, where students take all of their classes. This means that, in the course of a day, a student who lives on campus does not have to go outside. The campus Learning Center is 46,000 square feet of space that houses twelve classrooms on two floors. Also included in this space are the campus library, bookstore, cafeteria, recreation room, workout room, a suite of administrative offices and two computer labs. The first floor of the Learning Center is dominated by a bright, open room that looks more like a warehouse or factory than a school. This open space could be considered the main hall of the Learning Center. In this space, students gather to eat, talk, and, less frequently, do homework, either in the comfy chairs and tables lined up along the windows or in the cafeteria (see Figure 14). I say “less frequently” because on a typical day, this is not a quiet place to work. The openness of the space combined with the metal ceiling and cement floors means that voices easily travel and echo, bouncing and booming off the walls and often, up to the second floor and into classrooms. The cafeteria is separated from this main space only by several evenly-spaced cinderblock columns (see Figure 14 and Figure 15). Photographs of the indoor hallway that connects the two halves of the building and photographs of the interior of the Learning Center are included in Figures 11-17.



*Figure 11.* An exterior view of the hallway that connects the Living Center (left) to the Learning Center (not pictured).



*Figure 12.* The west entrance to the Learning Center.



*Figure 13.* The hallway that connects the two halves of the building.



*Figure 14.* The main hallway and the cafeteria (pictured right, on the other side of the cinderblock columns) in the Learning Center.



*Figure 15.* The main space of the Learning Center, where students often gather.



*Figure 16.* The cafeteria at IUP-Punxsutawney.



*Figure 17.* The south, main entrance of the Learning Center and the staircase leading up to the second floor.

This overview of the layout and design of the Living-Learning complex, as well as the description of the campus' location within the borough of Punxsutawney, is important to understanding the students' depictions of the campus and community in the data that follows, and serves well to situate that data in the context of the research site.

### **Collecting the Maps**

I collected the first data for this study in January of 2009, one week after the start of the spring semester. Because I was asking students to draw Punxsutawney as they experienced it, I thought it was important to wait until the spring semester to give them time to actually have experiences there. The enrollment in the six courses from which I gathered the maps represented over 50% of the student population, or 163 students. I collected 142 maps.

Calling this data “maps” was a decision that I made mindfully. On the informed consent form, I asked students to “create a map titled ‘My Punxsutawney’ that depicts the campus and town as [they] have experienced it”. I believe that simply asking students to draw the campus and town was too vague of a request, and because I was studying the lived experiences of these students, I made sure to emphasize that the map should represent their experiences. Also, a map indicates *place*—and the locations that appear on a map help to define that place *for what it is*, thereby helping the researcher develop a response to the first research question, which can be summarized as: *What is this place?* IUP-Punxsutawney and the town of Punxsutawney itself only exist insofar as they are experienced—by students, community members, etc. The locations that appear on students' maps also define these places for them—the “mapmakers”. It was, therefore,

my thinking that the locations that appeared on students' maps were the places they had been—the places they knew and the places that were a part of their first-year experience.

As I described in the previous chapter, in Michael Moffatt's (1989) book, *Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture*, Moffatt asked students to draw Rutgers "as they knew it". He did not ask them to draw maps, but the examples he discusses in his text are examples of students "mapping" their experiences at Rutgers. Asking students specifically to "create a map" was simply a way to provide some necessary guidance that I do feel influenced the data.

### **What it Means to "Make Meaning"**

In his text, Moffatt does not offer any specific details as to how he sorted and analyzed the maps that he collected, but taking his research as a whole, the maps appear to be a very small part of the data he collected. As an anthropologist, he took an ethnographic approach to studying student life at Rutgers, and most of his data was collected through participant observation, as I described in Chapter 3. Therefore, his text was of no use in helping to determine a process for making meaning from this data. For this, I return to Van Manen's (1990) *Researching Lived Experience*. Van Manen's text provides a basic understanding of what it means to explicate meaning or themes from data grounded in lived experience.

The second question driving this research aims to uncover the essence of what it means to be a first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney. Van Manen notes that in everyday life, we have no trouble *seeing meaning*, but we do have trouble explicating or *making meaning* (p. 77). To illustrate, he provides the example of how he *sees* his son's teacher. He writes,

I see a person who differs from other men and women precisely in that respect which makes me talk of this person as a ‘teacher’. I, as everybody else, have a notion of what a teacher is. But what is much more difficult is to come to a reflective determination and explication of what a teacher is. This determination and explication of meaning then is the more difficult task of [lived experience] reflection. (p. 77)

In the context of my research, when I *see* a student at IUP-Punxsutawney, I know I am seeing a student, and I know how that person differs from people who are *not* students. Still, I could not explain the essence of what it means *to be* a student without collecting data, such as student maps, that focus on this lived experience—the experience of *being*. But then, what does a researcher do with this data? How does a researcher reflect on it and make meaning from it?

An important point that Van Manen makes about this process of reflection is that the researcher approaches reflection from a certain pedagogical position. He notes that when he reflects on the lived experience of teaching, he does so as someone who is himself a teacher, and also as someone who is a parent (p. 78). Furthermore, it is this pedagogical positioning that often drives the research and the reflection in the first place. Van Manen may want to better understand what it means to be a teacher because he is also a member of the same profession and because he has children who are educated and influenced by their teachers. There are real-life implications for him to better understanding the essence of teaching. With this example, engaging in research that focuses on the lived experience could be considered, in some ways, to be self-serving for the researcher. However, this investment is also essential to the research. The desire and

motivation to make meaning is part of the human condition. When we read a novel that intrigues us or see a film that confounds us, we cannot help but ask, “What does it mean?” As Van Manen writes, “Desire [to make meaning] refers to a certain attentiveness and deep interest in an aspect of life... Without desire there is no real motivated question” (p. 79).

In the terms of my own study, I see my position as a teacher inseparable from my research and reflection on what it means to be a student. Van Manen captures this idea well when he says, “I am not *just* a researcher who observes life” (p. 90). In particular, it was my own experiences in this context that brought this research into existence and motivated me to undertake this study. It was my frustrations and questions and my desire to make meaning out of these experiences that led to research focused on students’ experiences, but the two are not separate.

Teachers exist only insofar as they have students to teach. Furthermore, I see the essence of *being* at teacher as relative to my students and their experiences—to the essence of *being* a student. I believe that the experiences of my students outside of the classroom have a direct influence on their experiences in my classroom and their perceptions of me, of the classroom environment and of university as a whole. I only know how to *be* a teacher in relation to how they *are* students. Therefore, better understanding their experiences helps me define my classroom practices, including my everyday interactions with students. And now, I work to make meaning of this research, keeping in mind that I am inextricably linked to them in a much larger, complex web of experience. This is one of the primary reasons why this data was also coded by an outsider.

## **The Process of Thematic Analysis**

Conducting thematic analysis is one way to begin untangling this web. While we often think of themes as generalizations, in lived experience research, Van Manen writes that uncovering themes can be likened to putting "...knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun..." (p. 90). Therefore, while a valuable part of thematic analysis involves sorting, categorizing, counting and developing statements that capture reoccurring themes, the process of which I will discuss in a moment, it is important to remember that this type of analysis always results in a reduction of the lived experience. Van Manen notes, "...a so-called thematic phrase does not do justice to the fullness of the life of [an experience]. A thematic phrase only serves to point at, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of the [experience]" (p. 92).

In my first reading of the data set, I was trying to make sense of what students had drawn but not in a way that was analytical; in this first reading, I was simply making sure I knew "what was what". For the most part, students labeled what they included on their maps, and in most cases, it was easy to distinguish what these items were.

For example, several of the students' maps include Punxsutawney's local McDonald's, and although most students labeled the fast food restaurant with the entire word, "McDonald's", or, in one case "McDiiiis," several others included only the first letter, "M", rounded like the famous "golden arches" that it represents. After comparing several of the maps that contained only this letter "M", either on or above a sketch of a building, I concluded that these maps also contained the local McDonald's.

Also, several students included various representations of a groundhog on their maps. Some of these were specifically labeled "Phil" or "Punxsutawney Phil" to indicate

they were *the* famous groundhog. Others were small, furry animals that I surmised, after comparing several maps, were also groundhogs but not necessarily *the* groundhog. Given the context, it was reasonable to conclude that these were not rabbits or squirrels, and the only animal that appears on any of the maps is a groundhog.

The next step was to develop my own labels and sort them into piles. First, I labeled each map by asking myself this question: What did the student draw? This part of the process involved a second “reading”, but this time, with the aid of a large stack of scrap paper, I began to note what I saw on the map. This goes beyond listing the locations and objects that students had already labeled because doing this would have been redundant. Instead, as I attached one or several notes to each map, I worked to summarize what I saw, and I also scribbled down anything that struck me as interesting. This was the beginning of developing themes.

Van Manen would describe my initial approach as “the wholistic reading approach” (p. 93). While he is referring primarily to the analysis of verbal data, this approach could be applied to the reading of student maps as texts. With this approach, the text is considered as a whole and the reader works to capture the “fundamental meaning or main significance” of the text in one phrase (p. 93). I would describe this approach as an attempt to summarize the “gist” of each map. For example, on the map included as Figure 18, I wrote “campus and town”, “lives off campus”, “maybe from the area”, “detailed” and “many places”. These labels, particularly “detailed”, “many places” and “campus and town”, would become useful as I worked the maps into initial groupings, from which I later developed categories and subcategories. The other two summary labels on this map, “lives off campus” and “maybe from the area”, were also

useful in beginning to distinguish this student from others and to contextualize her experiences. For example, I know that because her map contains the sketch of a building clearly labeled “my apartment”, she lives off campus. I suspected that her familiarity with the local businesses that she includes in her map was related to her off-campus living situation or possible prior knowledge of the area.

At this point in the analysis, I took the “wholistic reading approach” described above, and I also applied what Van Manen describes as the “selective or highlighting approach” (p. 92). This means that I was also working to identify items included in each map that seemed to be particularly revealing about the student’s experience. Sometimes, this was the presence of a place that was not on any or many other maps. For example, few maps include the names of smaller, lesser-known, local businesses, such as “Punxy Phil’s”, a local diner located about one mile southeast of the campus. Because of its rare appearance in the data, when I saw this on any of the maps, I included it in my notes. On the map, included as Figure 18, the student also includes Gobbler’s Knob, the site of Punxsutawney Phil’s famous, yearly appearance, as well as the Weather Discovery Center, Punxsutawney’s version of a science center. Therefore, when I labeled this map taking the “selective or highlighting approach” I noted “Punxy Phil’s” and “small, local businesses”. These labels distinguish this map from others.

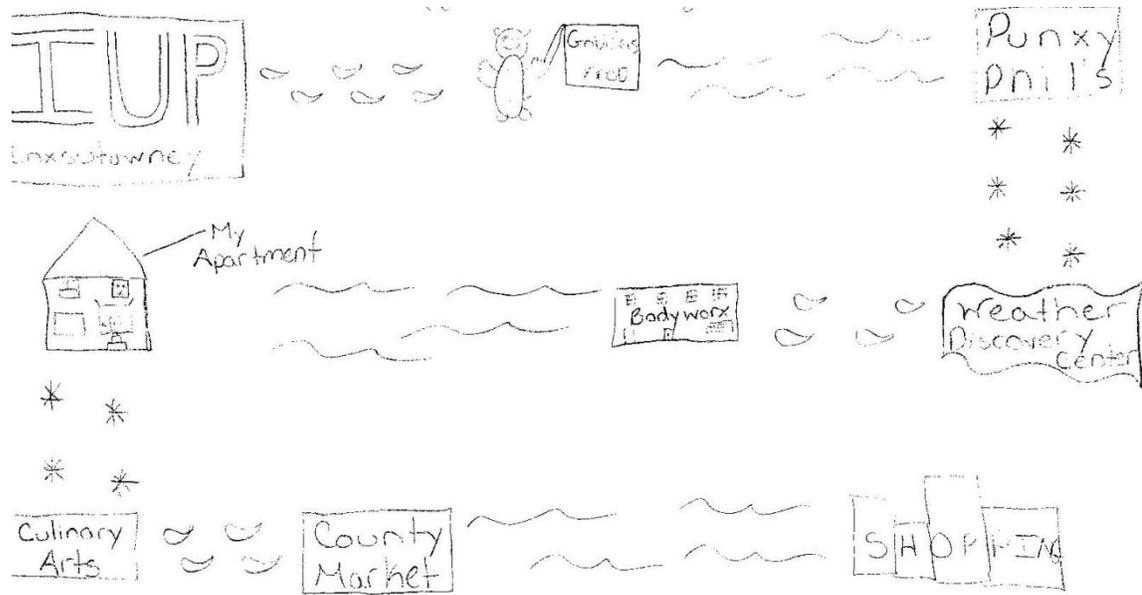


Figure 18. A student map that includes locations not present on many other maps.

In addition to what I noted above, this student also includes Body Worx, a workout facility located approximately two blocks south of the campus that was renovated and transformed into student apartment housing. When I first looked at this map, I suspected that she included it because she had friends who lived there, and it was, therefore, a place that she often visited. She also included County Market, a grocery store at the far end of town. County Market, if it were included in Figure 6, would be off of Route 119 on the eastern edge of the map, directly across the street from the Wendy's, which is marked on the map. The viewer could assume, as I did, that this student buys her groceries there—that this place is a part of her first-year experience. Through labeling, taking both a “wholistic” and “selective” approach, I started to do a closer reading and analysis, considering how each map could respond to the questions driving this research. These observations were even better informed by further analysis and the survey data.

In contrast to the sample data that I included as Figure 18, the majority of students' maps included far fewer locations. So while the map discussed previously was easily summarized as “detailed” and “many places”, a significant amount of other maps were labeled “less detailed” and “few places”. Two such maps are included for the reader as Figure 19 and Figure 20.

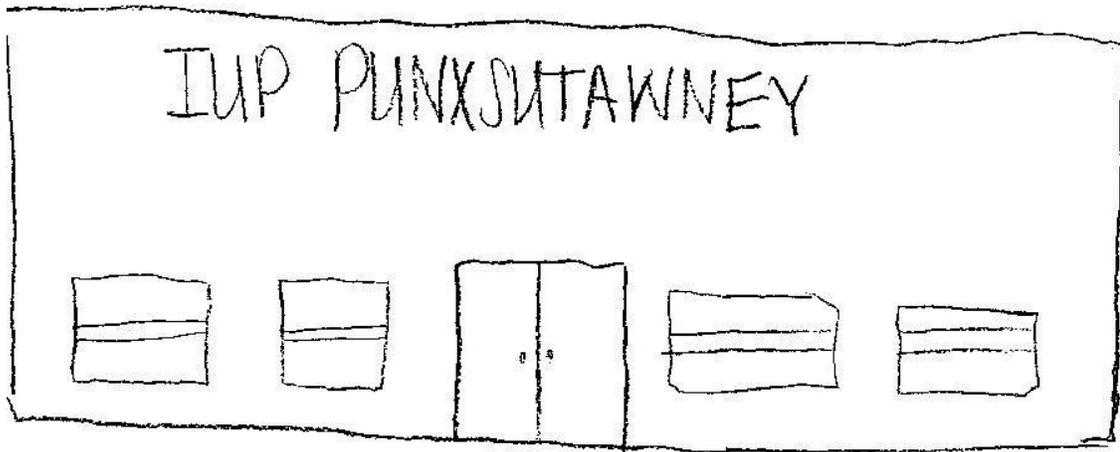


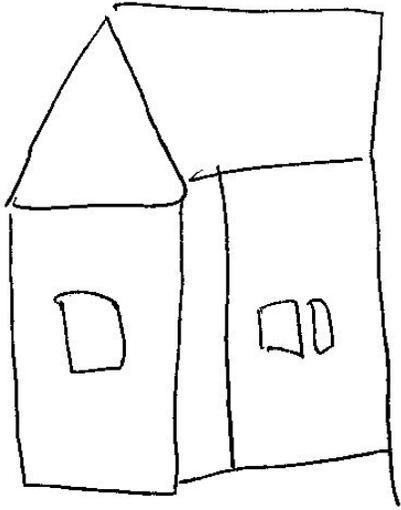
Figure 19. A student map that includes only the school.



Figure 20. "McDonald": Punxsutawney as one student has experienced it.

Figure 19 includes a clearly labeled representation of the school, and it is all that was included in this student's depiction of Punxsutawney as she had experienced it. Whereas the student who drew Figure 18 includes nine locations, this student has included one place—the school. Other student maps were equally “less detailed”, but in other ways.

Figure 20, like the map included in Figure 19, also includes only one location, but that location is labeled “McDonald”, which judging by the curve of the letters, the viewer can assume to be Punxsutawney's local McDonald's. While both of the above maps were labeled “less detailed” during my second reading, they are clearly quite different. Therefore, it was at this point that I had to determine what I meant when I wrote “less detailed” and whether or not this label was very useful. Was I referring to the extent to which the student detailed individual items (buildings, roads, etc.) on the map? Or when I wrote “less detailed”, did I actually mean “fewer locations/objects”? At this point, I returned to considering *what* was included on each map and with that, also what was not included or represented. I also began to count the number of locations on each map. Two additional examples that support this essential turn in the analysis are included as Figure 21 and Figure 22.



Foundry street-

Figure 21. A house on Foundry Street.

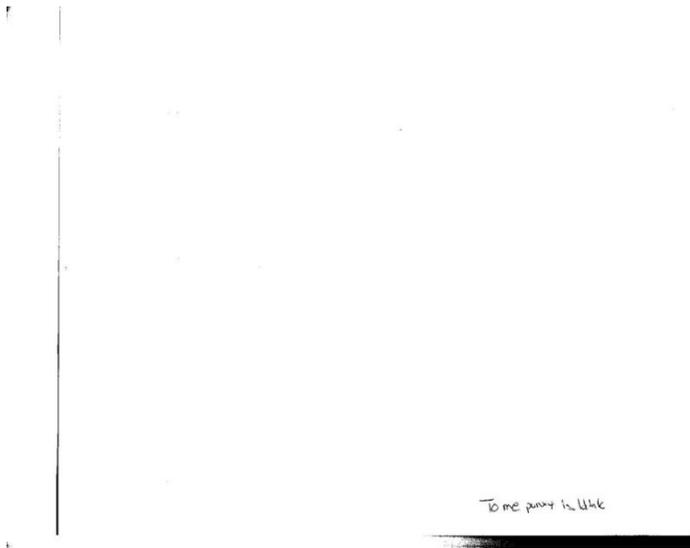


Figure 22. Punxsy is "blank".

In Figure 21, this student did not include the school or any local businesses. Instead, he includes only the house in which he rents a room on Foundry Street, just across the street from the campus.

In Figure 22, the student wrote nothing but “To me punxy is blank” in the lower right corner. I remember the class in which I collected this map, and I also clearly remember this student. The reader might be thinking that he labored over this and that when he couldn’t think of anything, he gave up and scribbled this caption at the last minute. Instead, as soon as I had finished passing out sheets of blank paper, he was already at the front of the room where he put his sheet of paper, face up, on the front table. Not wanting the rest of the group to think there was a “right” or “wrong” way to complete the task, I hid my somewhat puzzled reaction to what he had come up with as I waited for everyone to finish.

Figures 19-22 represent “outliers” in the data set, but they are outliers or extremes that, nevertheless, helped re-define the process of sorting and categorizing. This increased the complexity of the sorting process in ways that required me to read and sort through the data set several times. However, had I stopped at “less detailed”, I would have included all four of the maps above in the same category, and this did not seem like a proper way to present them, particularly when considered in light of the research questions. Though they are all somewhat minimalistic in their design, these four maps represent student experiences that are arguably very different. Considering the research questions, *what* the student chose to draw should somewhat outweigh *how* he/she drew it—with “more” or “less” detail. For example, it would not matter so much whether, in Figure 20, the student drew his house with or without windows so much that it matters

that he *only* drew his house. Therefore at this point in the analysis, I began to rely more on the content of each map and *how much* the student drew, in terms of the number of locations.

As the reader will soon learn, many of the student maps contained five or fewer locations, and I draw conclusions about students' experiences based on the high volume of these maps and the fact that most of them were created by minority students. To understand why it is possible for me to do this, the reader should know that although students completed the maps in the classroom setting, they were fully aware that I entered their classroom as a researcher who was studying their experiences in Punxsutawney. Therefore, they understood the maps were not part of a classroom assignment but would be used as data by an interested researcher. In fact, when students completed their maps, they were also given an informed consent form that described the research project. The activity took approximately 20 minutes in each classroom, and although some students, like the student who drew Punxsy as "blank", took only a minute or two, other students took the entire time to create maps that they believed represented their experiences. There was no indication during the process that students were putting little or no effort into the activity, and it is my impression that they took the task seriously. Therefore, I feel that I am justified in drawing conclusions about the high volume of student maps that contain five or fewer locations, as well as maps in the other categories, because it is my impression students were deliberate and thoughtful during the activity.

Of course, this entire process means making choices about the data, and even when I sorted the maps in a way that I felt would work well for the analysis and that clearly spoke to the survey and interview data, the maps within each category still

represent a variety of experiences. This is what Van Manen means when he notes that thematic analysis does not “do justice to the fullness of the life of [an experience]” (p. 92). For example, Figure 19 was one of 30 maps that included only the school and was placed into a category that I titled *Just School*. These representations differ in their amount of detail, particularly regarding the interior of the building, but all of them make reference only to the school and what exists on the campus. Many of the maps in this category are like Figure 19, focusing on the building as a whole. Others, like those included as Figure 23 and Figure 24, have a more narrow focus—a classroom and a dormitory suite, respectively. And still others, like Figure 25, offer a somewhat more detailed representation of the campus and the layout of the buildings.

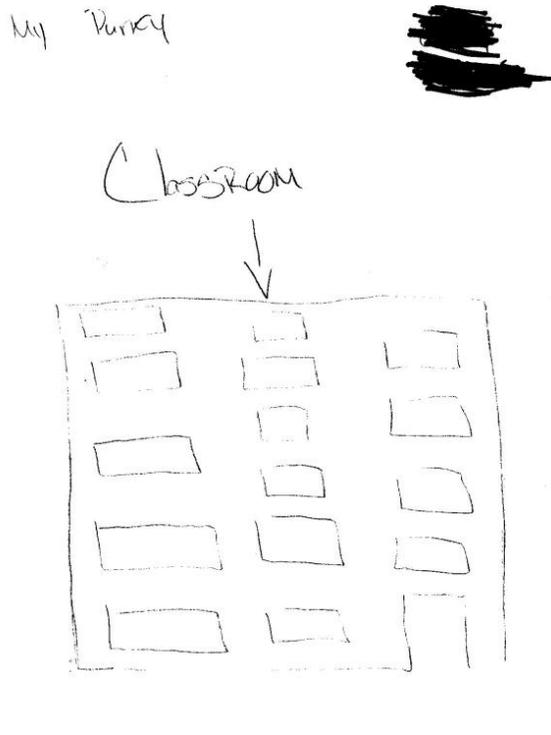


Figure 23. A student map from the *Just School* category with a classroom as its focus.

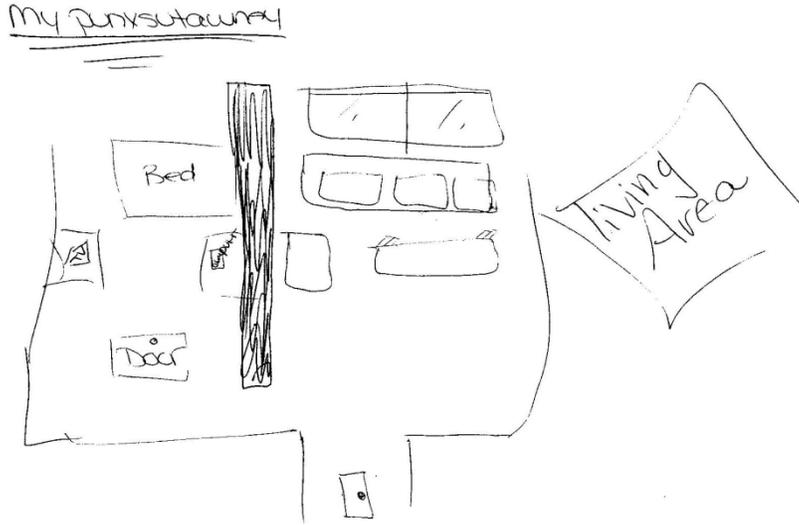


Figure 24. Another map included in the *Just School* category, focusing in a dormitory suite in the Living Center.

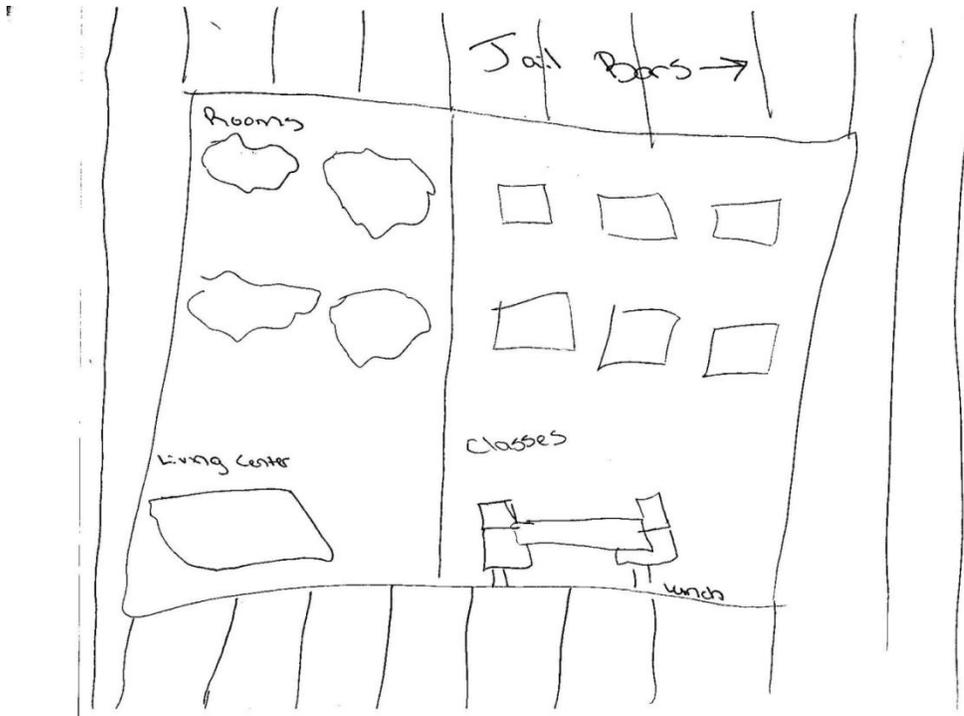


Figure 25. A third map included in the *Just School* category.

Though the details in Figure 25 are minimal, this student seems to separate the building into its two halves, the Living Center and the Learning Center, and she notes the former contains “rooms”, while the latter contains “classes” and “lunch”. Framing the entire building in jail bars is quite telling, and the student is comparing her experience as a first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney to that of someone who is incarcerated. Because the majority of the students are placed onto the campus, this feeling—of being in jail—is truly significant. This idea of being put or placed somewhere, even if the student does make the final decision whether or not to accept the placement by attending the campus, plays a significant role in the culture of the campus. Simply put: it is not a place most students *want* to be. And with this map, we see also see that, despite any categorization, *how* a student represents the locations that he/she includes is, in fact, important. This is why some of the students’ maps must also be considered on their own, somewhat outside of the categories developed for analysis.

The potential for categories to reduce the lived experience is also clear when Figures 22-25 are considered together. All of these maps were included in the *Just School* category. However, within this category students represented their experiences in a variety of ways, like with the metaphor of “jail” discussed above. Throughout this chapter, I will take a closer look at a number of student maps. Developing categories in which to consider the data is useful to discuss the general *extent* of students’ first-year experiences, but again, individually they also tell the individual stories of how students experience these places. Table 6 provides a title of each category with a brief description of each, as well as the number of maps included in the category. Overall, there are seven

categories, numbered 1-7 and one category divided into three subcategories: 2a, 2b and 2c. Following the table, I provide a more detailed description of each category, as well as more samples to clearly illustrate the range of students' experiences.

Table 6

*Summary of the Categories Used to Sort Maps*

<u>Category Name</u>	<u>Category Description/Definition</u>	<u>Number of Maps</u>
1 Just School	Include only the school.	30
2 School and Community	Include the school and community.	
2a Few Places (FP)	Include six or fewer locations.	55
2b More Places (MP)	Include more than six locations.	26
2c More Places Local (MPL)	Include eight or more locations, at least one of which is a small, local business or community landmark.	11
3 Just Community (JC)	Include only the community—no mention of school.	4
4 Just Home (JH)	Include where the student lives, off-campus, and nothing else.	2
5 Just Punxsy (JP)	Include a representation of the town as a whole without a specific location.	4
6 Pennsylvania (PA)	Includes Punxsy relative to other places but no details about the campus or community.	1
7 Word Maps (WM)	Include descriptions of the school and community in lists or webs—not drawings or maps like the others. Evaluate both with adjectives and description. Draw comparisons.	9
<b>Total Number of Maps</b>	.....	<b>142</b>

*Note.* Category 7 contains nine word maps which will be discussed in the following section of the chapter, but they are not included in the outsider coding that is discussed later. This is because they do not represent places and locations in the same way as the maps, and therefore, they could not be coded using the same scheme.

## Category Descriptions and Sample Maps

### Category 1: Just School

The maps included in this category are those that contain images of only the school and/or the campus. Maps that were placed into this category are included in Figure 19 and Figures 23-28. As previously discussed, the level and amount of detail of the maps in this category vary, as well as their central focus—from the entire building, to a classroom, to a dormitory suite. Also, this data shows that many students who focused on the school in their depictions of Punxsutawney tended to be saying something specific, often with words and captions, about the school and their experiences. This is apparent in Figure 25, in which the student depicts the school as “jail”. It is also important to note that 20 of the 30 maps in this category were created by African-American students. This indicates that the experiences of these minority students are limited to the campus and its immediate surroundings. Figures 26-28 are also included as representations of the variety of lived experiences present in Category 1.

In Figure 26, we see the Living-Learning Center reduced to point “A” and point “B”; the student also includes the indoor hallway that separates the two points from one another. The essence of his experience as a first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney is somewhat reduced to this movement back and forth between the two halves of the building. It is significant not only that he does not include anything outside of the campus but also that he chooses to represent his experience on the campus in such a minimalistic way. This is an example where level of detail does play a role in the analysis of the student’s experience. There is no detail to indicate what he *does* in this space, other than travel the same path, back and forth.

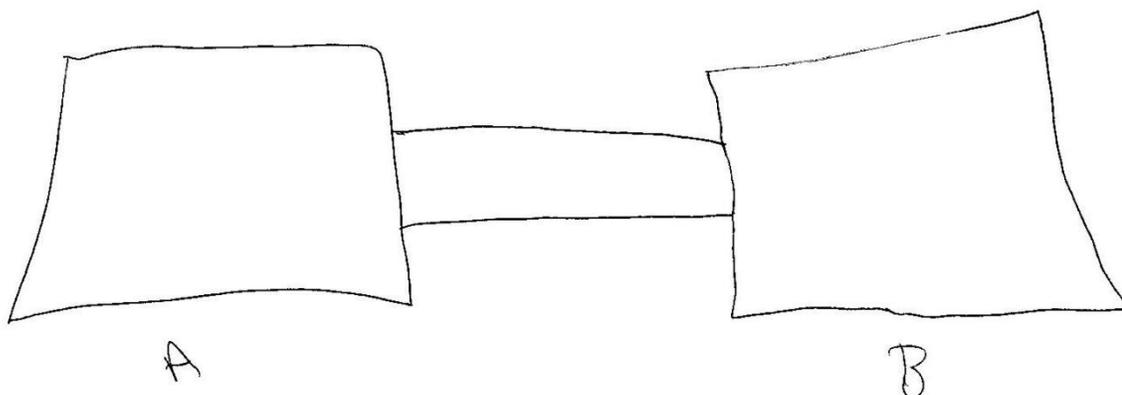


Figure 26. Point A to point B.

Two years later, this student reflected on his experience at IUP-Punxsutawney and his map during an interview conversation. He notes,

Being at Punxxy it was...very, very familiar. And then the campus it was all in one building. You could literally wake up five minutes before your class, and go to class on time in a T-shirt, basketball shorts, and slippers on while it was snowing or raining outside. You didn't have to go outside for anything—just go back and forth. Everything was in one building. And we didn't have that college feel. It felt like the 13th grade.

Although I did not interview every student who drew a map, what this student shares during the interview conversation demonstrates that his minimalistic representation of Punxsutawney speaks to how he experienced it. His first year at IUP-Punxsutawney did not feel like college for him; it was “the 13<sup>th</sup> grade”. It is not surprising that his map provides the viewer with no information about what he *did* in this space, except for move back and forth, because to him, Punxxy did not feel like college and there was nothing notable about his experiences. As he also stated during the interview, “I just kept to myself and didn't do much. I didn't really like being at Punxxy”.

In Figure 27, the message is perhaps, even clearer: “School [is] Boring”. Similar to Figure 26, in Figure 27, the school is just a building, but here it is surrounded by what appears to be two trees and some grass. The student does not include any detail about the interior of the building, and if she had not labeled it as “school”, this building, with two windows and a set of double doors at the entrance, could pass for any number of places. I only know that because she is a student at IUP-Punxsy her map of any school is, most likely, the one she attends. Again, in this map, there is no indication of what the student *does* in this space; we only know that, whatever it is, she finds it “boring”.



Figure 27. School is boring.

In contrast to Figures 26 and 27, Figure 28 seems to represent a different experience. This is clear not only in the details present in this map that are not present in the others, but this is also clear in some of the student's word choices. Her map is titled "My Punxy" and includes five different campus locations. At the center of her map, she includes what she calls "my room". The space itself contains no detail other than this label, so it is not clear if she is referring to the suite she shares in the Living Center or if she is referring specifically to her bedroom within the suite. However, the presence of "my" indicates the latter as I most often heard students refer to entire dormitory suites with the article "the", as in, "I am going back to *the* room". What is also interesting about this map is that the student places her living space at the center. Spatially, the Living Center is most often represented as adjacent to or across from the Learning Center, which would be more accurate. Yet, in this map all other locations branch off of the student's living space. What she *does* in this space and where she goes is all considered in relation to her room. And here, we also get a better idea about this student's experiences on campus. Like most students, she goes to class and she eats in the cafeteria. Additionally, her experiences in the "gym", a small workout room located adjacent to the cafeteria, and the "pool room", also adjacent to the cafeteria, are not unique to those of other students. However, what is significant is, first, that she chose to represent them in her map. Secondly, *how* she represents them is also relevant. She uses "my" twice in the map, which shows a sense of connection to and ownership over her surroundings. This is *her* school.

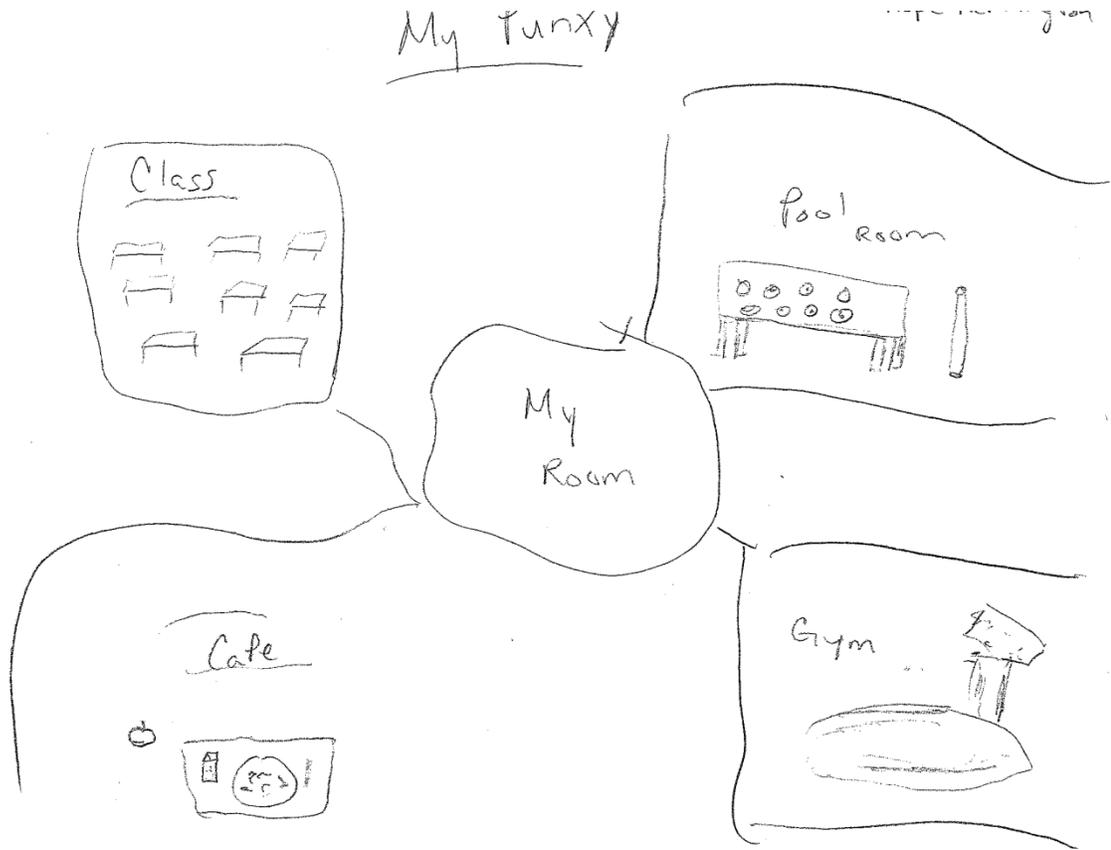


Figure 28. "My Punxy".

Arguably, this student's experience on campus and her perceptions of IUP-Punxsutawney are much different from the student who, in Figure 25, includes four different places on her map of the campus but then frames it with "jail bars". This student does not feel a sense of ownership over her experiences; instead, she seems to feel "owned"—likening her experiences on the campus to being in jail. This could be, as I noted above, due to her placement on the campus, or her comparison of being a student to being a prisoner could be related to an inability to travel far from campus. To contextualize, this student is an African-American student from Philadelphia, which is over 300 miles from Punxsutawney. Most of the students who come to IUP-Punxsy, in general, do not have their own cars, and this is nearly always the case for the students who come from Philadelphia. To return home over holiday breaks, most students utilize a bus service arranged, though not paid for, by the university. Others grab rides with friends and some are picked up by a parent or other relative. The fact that this student draws the school as a place a person cannot leave unless "released" or "bailed out", may signify her reliance on others for transportation. Therefore, her experiences at IUP-Punxsy would be mostly limited to the campus and locations within walking distance—a conclusion also supported by the survey data.

The volume of maps that are included in this category (30) and the 55 maps that are included in Category 2a, *School and Community, Few Places*, speaks to the fact that, for many students, the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney is somewhat limited. The data also reveals that a minority student is more likely to have a more limited first-year experience than a white student. This is important when we consider that both academic and social integration are essential to the transition process. A student whose

social integration is limited to his immediate campus surroundings is likely to be less invested, as a whole, in the college experience and more likely to fail, drop out or transfer to another school.

### **Category 2a: School and Community, Few Places (FP)**

The maps in this category are those that include the school, as well as locations off of the campus. The total number of locations on each of these maps, including the school, is six or fewer, and 22 of these maps out of 26 contain four or fewer locations. The data in this category is significant because, like the previous category, there is a high prevalence of maps from African-American students. In this category, 26 out of the 55 maps were completed by African-American students. As I discuss the next two categories, the reader will see the percentage of maps by African-American students noticeably decline.

Many of the maps in Category 2b contain a triangle or square of locations that can be summarized as “Wal-Mart, home, school” and “Wal-Mart, school, apartment”. Many, if not most, of the locations on these maps are also within the walking distance of the campus. This includes Comet, a small grocery store one block from campus, Nic’s Tobacco, located directly across the street from Comet and McDonald’s, which is approximately one mile from campus. The maps included in this category are dominated by locations that provide basic necessities, such as food, shelter and gasoline, and in this category there is a reduced presence of non-essential locations such as churches, the community center and geographical features, like trees, rivers and groundhogs that are included in other categories. Figures 29-31 are samples of the maps present in this category that represent different student experiences. Figure 29 is included as somewhat

of an exception to the characteristics noted above that seem to dominate the maps in this category.

In Figure 29, the student's experience is represented by four locations: IUP-Punxsutawney, home, church and her school, Punxsutawney Area High School. She also includes two groups of people: "my family" and "my friends". With the exception of IUP, all of the locations on the map are prefaced with "my", indicating a connection to and sense of familiarity with these places. This student is a dual enrollment student. This means that she is still in high school and she is taking one or two classes on the regional campus, earning college credits before she ever graduates from high school. The circumstances under which this student is attending the regional campus are drastically different from those of other students. Whereas most of the students on the regional campus are considered academically at-risk, this student excels academically. Otherwise, she would not be eligible to participate in the dual enrollment program. This student's participation on the regional campus is also voluntary, which is in contrast to the placement of the majority of the student population. Her experiences on the campus are, not surprisingly, limited to her participation in one or two courses, and while the campus exists at the center of her map, the rest of the map focuses outward—to the family, friends and places that a part of her everyday life. Although her inclusion of her family is unique to the entire data set, it is related to the fact that she is from the area. Unlike the majority of IUP-Punxsy students, this student still lives at home and sees her family every day.

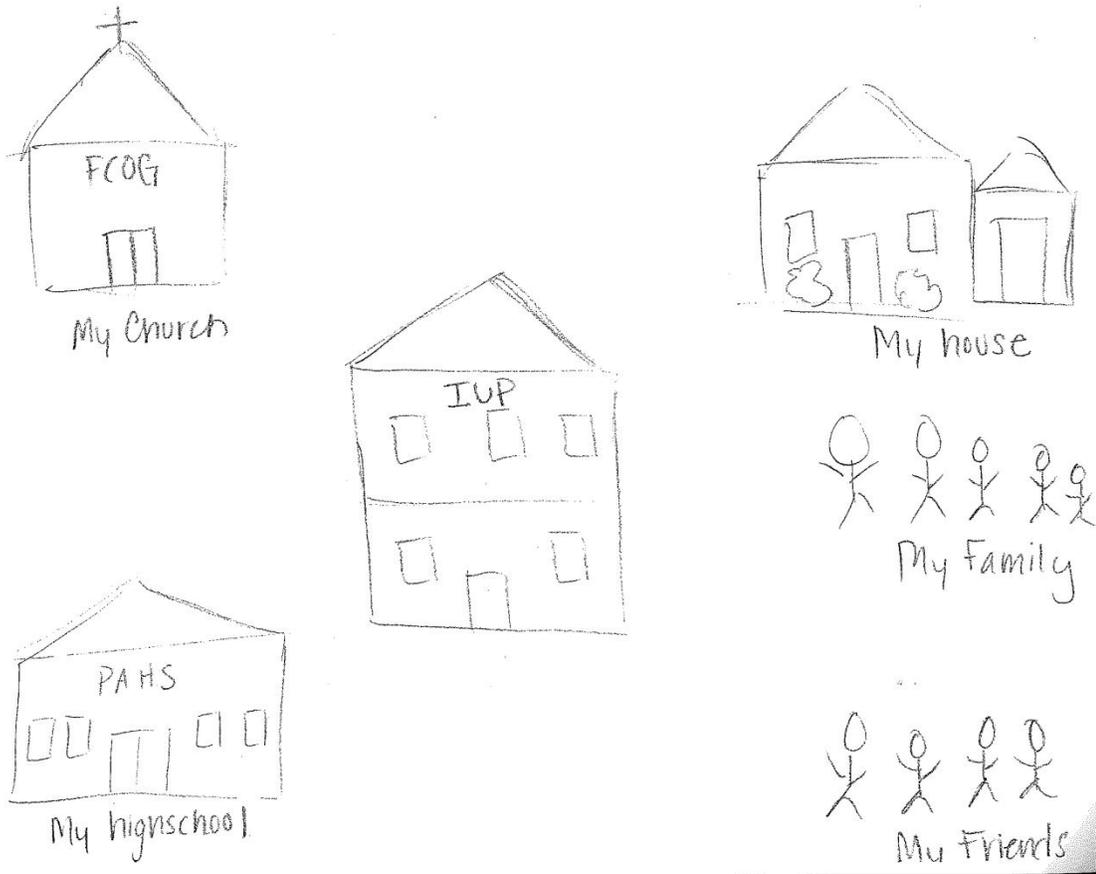


Figure 29. My family: The map of a dual enrollment student.

Figure 30 is distinctly different from Figure 29. In this map, the student depicts Punxsutawney as a larger square in which he includes four smaller squares. These smaller squares represent the school, Body Worx, Sheetz and Wal-Mart. Body Worx, a student apartment complex across the street from the campus, could be where he lives, or it is possible that he knows and visits people who live there. Although Body Worx is within walking distance of the campus, Sheetz is located at the eastern edge of the borough, easily a 30-minute walk from the campus. In the four years I lived and worked on the campus, I did not see anyone walk to Wal-Mart. Its location, on top of a steep hill and on a road that does not contain a pedestrian walkway, makes it practically inaccessible by foot. Therefore, we can assume that this student either has a car or he secures transportation from a friend. The university also owns two vans that provide student transportation to Wal-Mart on the average of once or twice each week. What is most notable about this map is that Punxsutawney as this student has “experienced it” is limited to these four locations.

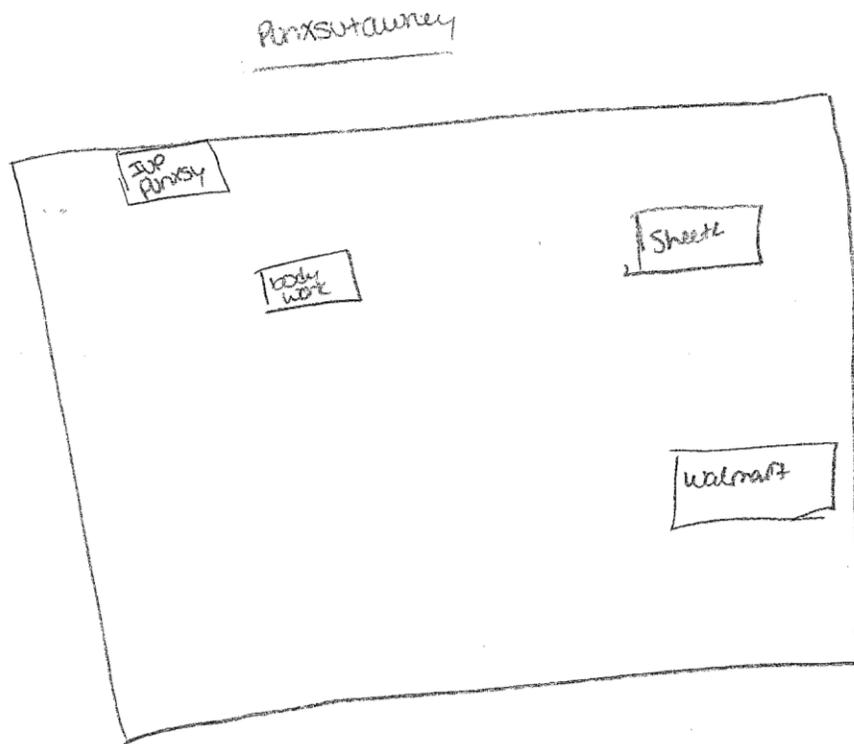


Figure 30. Four places.

Although Figure 31 does not contain any more locations than Figure 30, Figure 31 represents a different first-year experience. This is the only one of the 133 maps (see Table 1; this number excludes Category 7) in which the student indicates her experience at IUP-Punxsutawney has been, at least academically, somewhat positive. This map communicates a certain optimism with the “Road to Success” that is visible just above her representation of the campus. There are two off-campus locations included in this map. One of these is the local McDonald’s that is present in many of the maps. The other is DuBois, a community located 20 miles north of Punxsutawney. The “Road to Success” seems to go through IUP, as indicated by the arrow pointing down to the campus, and then continue to DuBois. Although there seems to be an emphasis here on going some place else, the student appears to view Punxsutawney as a positive step to getting there.

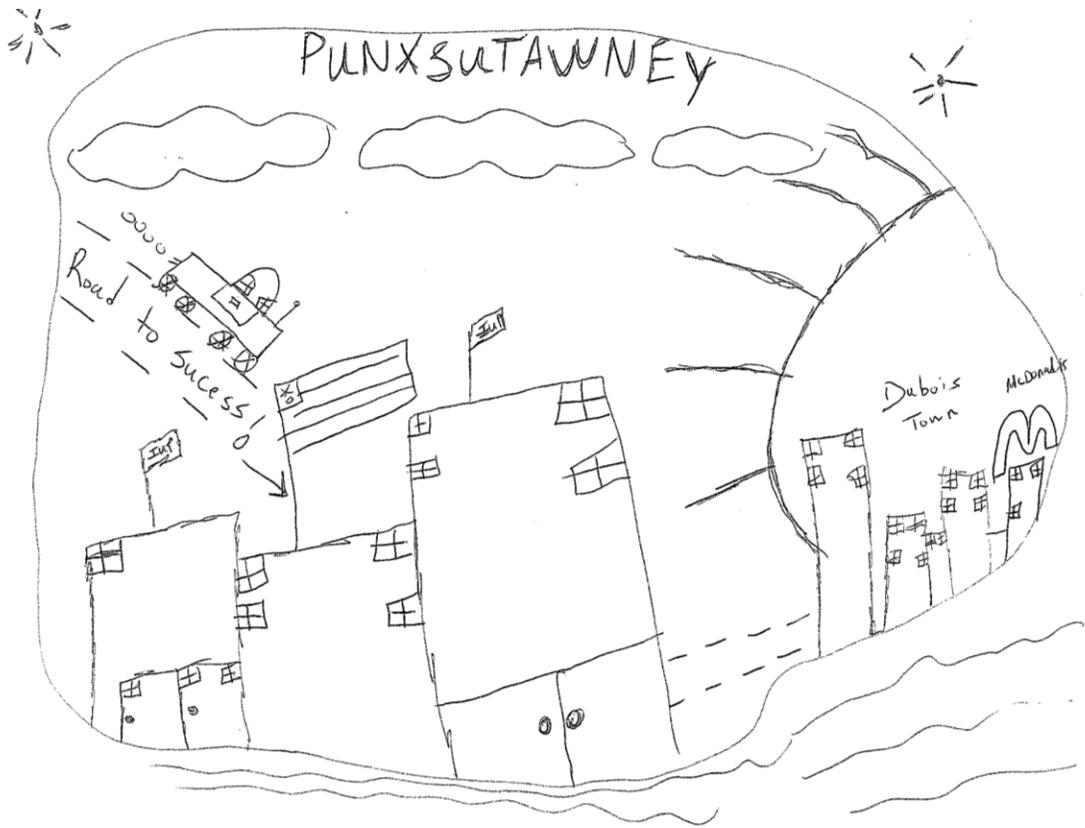


Figure 31. Road to success.

### **Category 2b: School and Community, More Places (MP)**

The maps that I placed into this category include more than six but fewer than eight locations, and just like the previous category, these maps include representations of both the campus and places located off-campus. Although in Category 2a, *Few Places (FP)*, nearly half, or 26 of the 55 maps, were created by African-American students, in this category, maps by African-American students represent less than half of the total, or 10 out of 26. In this category and the next, in which the maps contain more and more locations, including local businesses, the presence of maps by African-American students noticeably drops. This data suggests that the experiences of African-American students, as reported by their maps, are limited to mostly popular retail and convenience stores, as well as places within walking distance of the campus. The discussion of the outsider coding scheme supports the idea that the experiences of many students are limited. The analysis of survey questions that comes near the end of this chapter indicates this is a particular truth for the African-American students. For the most part, the maps in this category look very similar to those in the *FP* category, except that they contain, on average, one or two additional locations. Maps in this category that are worth taking a closer look at because they are different from others are included in Figure 32 and Figure 33.

The map in Figure 32 looks similar to the map of the dual enrollment student that was discussed above. In this map, there is even more of an emphasis on ownership with the use of “my”. In fact, the student writes “my map” in the corner, and she uses “my” to label all five locations on the map. Additionally, she includes a representation of herself on the map—a face floating in the upper right corner exclaiming, “My Punxy!” The use

of “my”, as well as the inclusion of herself in the map makes it distinct. As I will discuss later, of the 734 places that students included on all 132 of the maps, only 11 of them are references to themselves or others, such as friends or family. Another detail that makes this map unique is that while this student labels every place on the map with “my”, the labels are, otherwise, generic. Instead of naming a specific retail location, she writes, “my store”, and instead of naming IUP, she writes, “my school”. So while we can conclude that several places are a part of her experience as a first-year student, we do not know, specifically, which places these actually are.

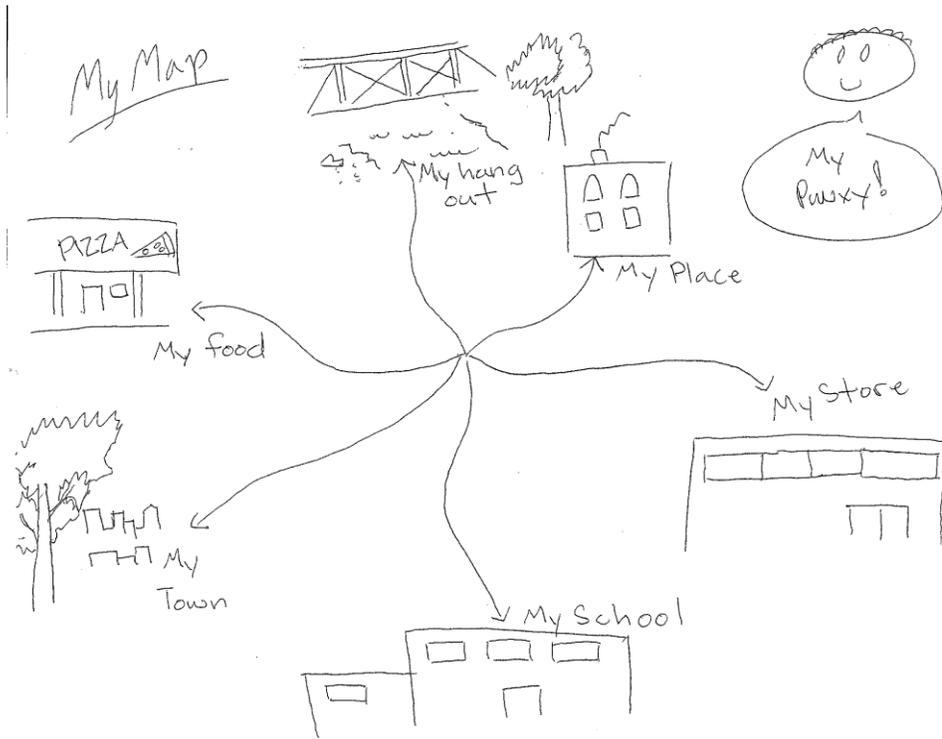


Figure 32. "My Map".

In Figure 33, the student includes six locations, including the school. Five of these locations are in Punxsutawney. It also appears that she includes a sixth location to the right of “Nic’s”, but that location is not entirely visible in the map. The final location in this map is her “home”, which she notes, rather precisely, is 62 miles from Punxsutawney. The caption “not in Punxy” with a smiley face indicates that she prefers her hometown to Punxsutawney. This is one of the few maps in the data set that includes a doctor’s office, on the left side of the map. This is likely because, during her first-year at IUP-Punxsy, this student needed to see the doctor.

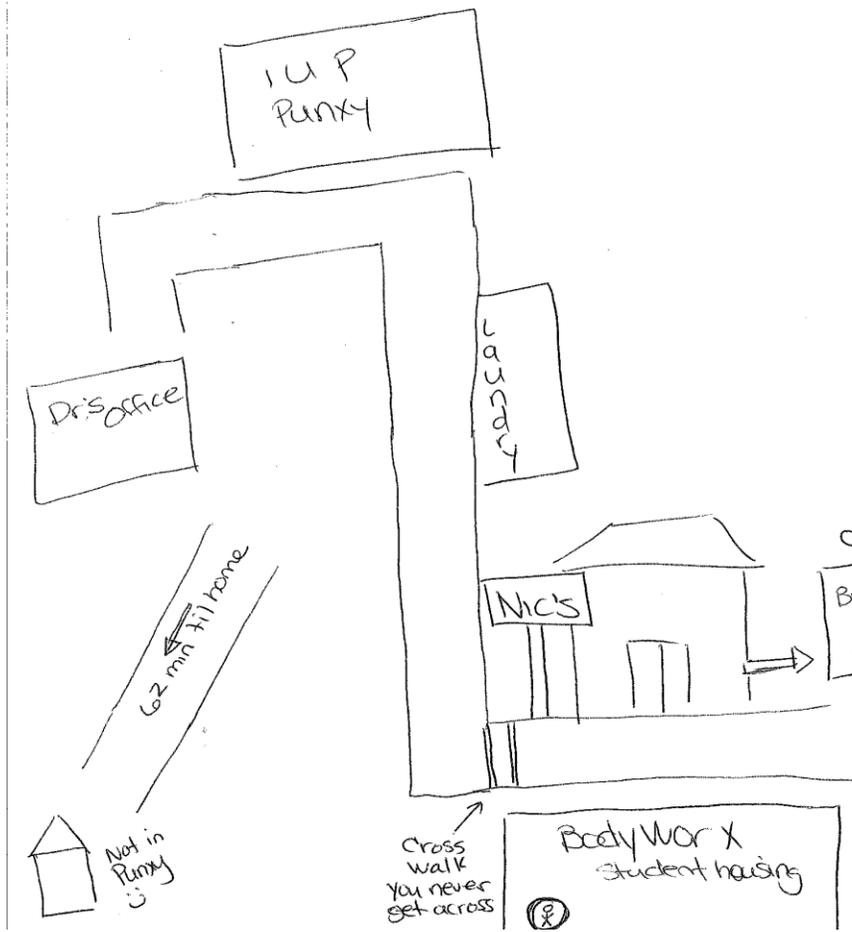


Figure 33. "You never get across".

The right side of the map is dominated by what appears to be the student's daily path. Like many students, she includes Body Worx, student apartment housing, and although in other cases I could not be sure if students included it because they lived there or visited friends, in this case, it is safe to assume that the student lives there. To begin, she labels one building "laundry". This is probably the place where she washes her clothes. A student who lived on campus would not have the need for this type of off-campus facility as there is a laundry room on the second floor of the Living Center. She also situates the laundry facility between her student housing at Body Worx and the IUP campus. This would be an accurate representation. The path from Body Worx to IUP is uphill, and a person on this path would see the laundry facility to the right as he/she climbed the hill. Reversing the path, the student includes Nic's at the bottom of the hill. It is not clear whether she includes Nic's because she purchases tobacco or because it is simply on the path she takes from her apartment to the campus and back again. At the bottom of the hill, in front of Nic's, she includes the specific place where she crosses the street when she goes back and forth. While the cross walk is clearly marked for pedestrian traffic, the student's caption, "you never get across", indicates frustration and the difficulty she experiences when crossing the street. This is a shared sentiment among students that, in the course of four years, I heard time and time again.

Not only is this map interesting because the student seems to focus on her daily path, which is somewhat limited, but this map is also worth looking at because of how it differs from many in the same category. With the exception of Nic's, this student does not include any retail locations on her map. Instead, she includes a doctor's office and laundry facility, which will both be defined in the outsider coding as "service" locations,

and she also includes a specific reference to a road marking—the only such reference in the entire data set. The fact that she labels the crosswalk and, more importantly, points out that she has difficulty crossing the street, indicates that the crosswalk, which she expects to enable her to cross the street safely, is ineffective and not meeting these expectations. The main road that separates her apartment from the university is almost a barrier—something that gets in her way on a daily basis. The fact that she mentions it symbolizes this ongoing frustration.

### **Category 2c: School and Community, More Places Local (MPL)**

At this point in the discussion, the category descriptions turn away from a close look at multiple maps within each category and toward consideration of each of the remaining categories as a whole. This is because there are fewer maps in these final categories combined than there are in each of the categories previously discussed. Due to the decreased size of the sample in each category, there is also more of a consistency to the experiences represented in the maps. With the exception of Categories 5-7, I have already included samples from each category in this chapter, which I will reference when appropriate.

In Category 2c, *MPL*, there are 11 maps, all of which were created by white students. Nine of these students are from the area and the other two students are from rural areas within one two hours of Punxsutawney. Like the previous subcategories, the maps in this category include the regional campus and locations in the community. In this case, there are eight or more places represented in each map. Maps in this category also contain at least one specific, local place that is not present on any map in any of the other categories. A sample from this category is Figure 18, which I discussed near the

beginning of this chapter. The student who drew Figure 18 is from a rural area just over an hour from Punxsutawney. Although she is not from the area, the locations on her map represent a wider range of experiences. This could be a consequence of her living situation; she resides in an apartment nearly one mile from campus. Therefore, her daily path from home to school and back again is longer than that of the typical student. Most off-campus student housing is located within two or three blocks of the campus.

As a whole, the maps in this category suggest a familiarity with the area that makes sense, considering most of the students who drew them grew up in or just outside of Punxsutawney. This familiarity is present in the specific labeling of local roads. On six of these maps, students label Route 36, which runs north toward Brookville, a small community 19 miles from Punxsutawney. These students also label less-traveled roads, such as Findley Street, a downtown side street, and Walston Road, which is near Punxsutawney Area High School. There are also specific geographic locations identified on these maps, such as the Mahoning River and railroad tracks.

With the exception of the two maps by students who are not from the area, all of the maps in this category cover more distance and a wider geographic area. The students make references to other communities, such as Brookville, Big Run and Dubois, and to smaller, lesser-known towns too, like Frostburg, located just outside of Punxsutawney. It is more likely than not that these students all have their own cars or access to a family vehicle. The increased area covered in this maps lends them more of an “open” feeling that is much different from the closed square and triangle representations of Punxsutawney that dominate the other categories. The reality is that these students can

leave Punxsutawney, relatively without restriction. This is in sharp contrast to the circumstances of most of the students who attend the regional campus.

Lastly, although these maps also include retail locations, there is an increased presence in this smaller set of data of recreational or “voluntary” spaces—in contrast to retail spaces that offer food and other basic necessities. These include, among others, the golf course at the country club, the Punxsutawney Community Center, churches, the local park, the Groundhog Zoo and the Jackson Theatre. The reader can view an additional map from this category that represents these characteristics in Figure 34.

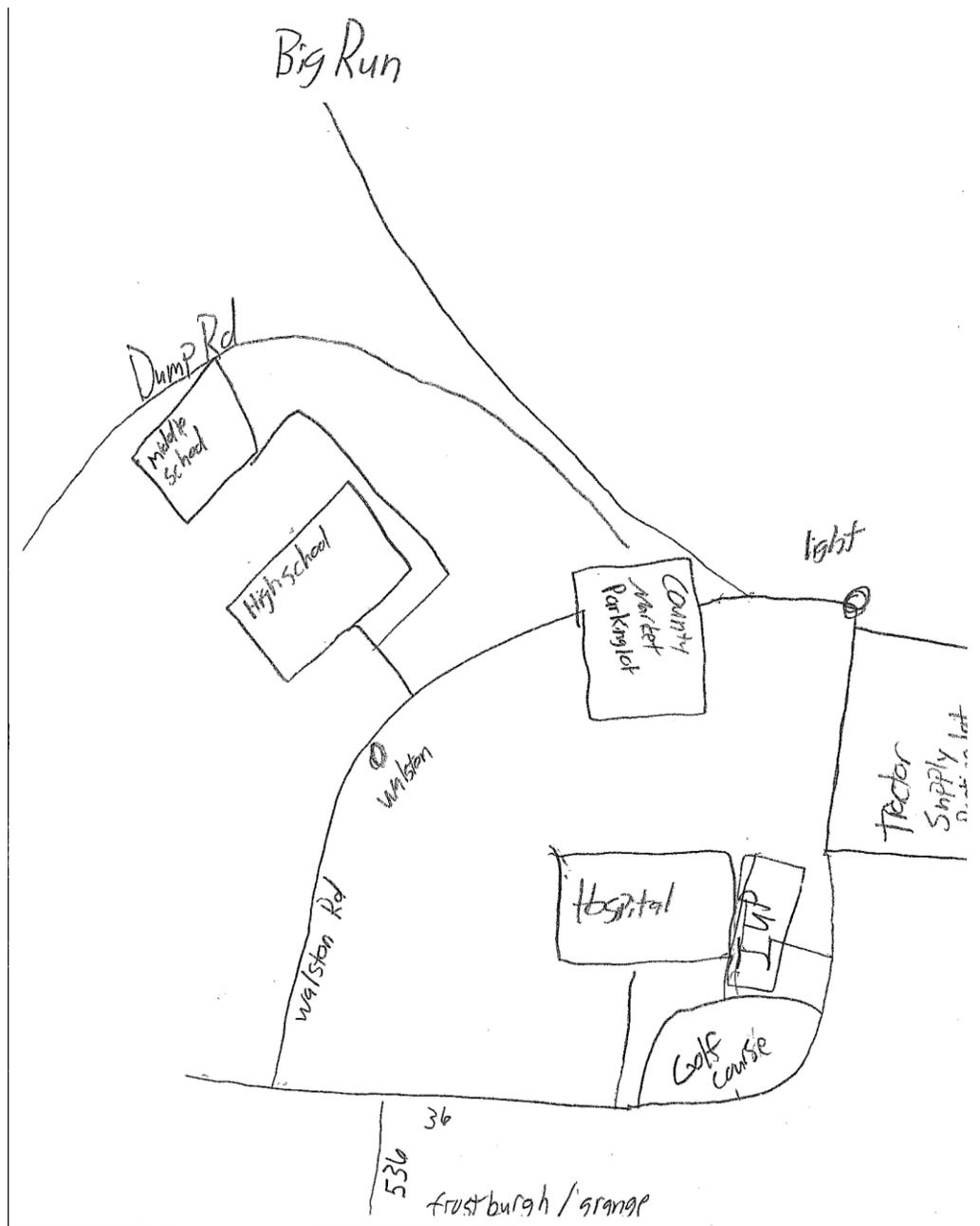


Figure 34. An MPL map from a local student.

### **Category 3: Just Community (JC)**

This category contains only four maps, and none of the maps in this category include any mention or representation of the school. One of these maps was previously discussed and included as Figure 20, “McDonald”. Another map in this category includes only McDonald’s and Subway. The third is a map of Body Worx, where the student likely lives, a local tanning place, Subway, Nic’s Tobacco and Wal-Mart. The final map in this category also includes Body Worx and Wal-Mart, along with a large sketch of a groundhog that takes up one-fourth of the page. The focus of these maps begs one obvious question: Why is the school not included? Because there are only four maps in this category, it is possible that not mentioning the school was sort of a “fluke” on the part of these students. Maybe they got caught up in what they were map and simply ran out of time. Also, in the case of the two students who included Body Worx, it is also possible that not living on campus somewhat shifts the focus of their experiences. Although I will not rule out either of these possibilities, it is significant that not only do the maps not include the school, but they also seem to be representations of very limited experiences. All of the maps in this category were created by African-American students. The maps that included Body Worx came from female students, and the maps that contained only fast food locations were drawn by male students. In this category, the range of locations included on map ranges from 1-5. There is something almost sad about a student representing his first-year experience as the local McDonald’s, and the maps in this category seem to indicate alienation or disconnect from the campus/school environment.

#### **Category 4: Just home (JH)**

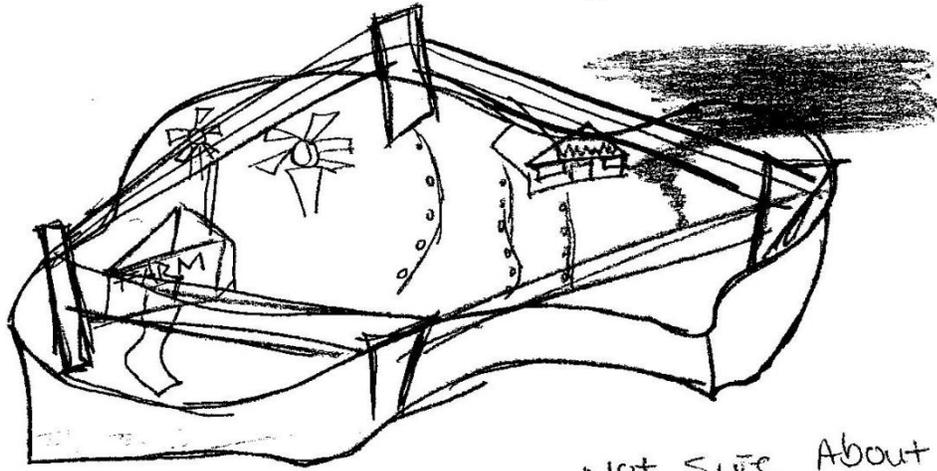
The maps in this category each contain one building, the place where the student lives. There are only two maps in this category, both from male students, one who is African-American and the other who is white. The map from the white student is the house on Foundry Street, which is included earlier in this chapter as Figure 21. The other map is of an off-campus apartment building. Like the maps in the previous category, the students who created the maps here do not make any connection to the school or indicate that it is a part of their experiences. Also, other than the fact that these spaces provide shelter for these students, we know nothing about what takes place within them. So while we can discern that living in the house on Foundry Street or the apartment building a few blocks from campus means that the students experience these places, it is not clear *how* they experience them or what they *do* in these spaces.

#### **Category 5: Just Punxsy (JP)**

There are four maps in this category that all include a representation of the town as a whole but without any specific locations. Like the map included in Figure 35, these contain mostly unmarked buildings and geographic features, only some of which are labeled. In Figure 35, the student includes a fence around a rural landscape that depicts a farm and what appear to be two windmills. She also captions the map with two phrases, “not sure about the location” and “not many people”. To contextualize, this student is an African-American student from Philadelphia, so, in general, the rural landscape would be mostly unfamiliar to her. Writing “not sure” maybe also is a way to communicate that she does not know much about it or has limited experiences in the community. Her map that represents Punxsutawney as a rural, farming community suggests that this is the

dominant, overall impression she has of the area. The fact that she does not include any specific locations, including the school, indicates that she views Punxsutawney as existing separate from herself. Unlike most students, when she completes her map she does not consider the school or town as she has *experienced* it. Instead, these places are *something else*—the town, in particular. It is not a place she lives or even a place in which she goes to school. It is *just a place*.

Punxsutawney ??



- Not sure About  
The location  
- NOT MANY People

Figure 35. "Not sure".

## Category 6: Pennsylvania (PA)

This category contains only one map, so the reader might be wondering what makes this map worthy of its own category. As I have moved through the descriptions of each category, the reader has likely noticed that some categories contain maps that specifically focus on one place, as is the case with *Just School* and *Just Home*. The category I just discussed develops a broader focus—the Punxsutawney community as a whole with no specific locations. Think of this move from *Just School* to *Just Punxsy* as a photographer zooming in on the campus or one building in the town and then zooming back out again, maybe to get a view of the entire community. In this final category of maps, we are zooming even further out, to the entire state of Pennsylvania. In this map, represented in Figure 36, there is nothing distinct about Punxsutawney, except that it clearly differs in size from the larger, urban locations of Pittsburgh, Harrisburg and Philadelphia. The label on Punxsy is small in comparison to the labels on the three cities, and the building that marks Punxsy’s place on this map is much smaller than those that mark Pittsburgh and Philadelphia; they appear to be high rises or skyscrapers typical of urban environments. The emphasis is placed on what Punxsutawney is *not*. It is not these larger, urban cities with which the student might be more familiar, although it is not clear which of these larger places the student calls home. She places a star on Harrisburg which could mean that it is where she is from, but she could also just be recognizing that Harrisburg is the state capital.

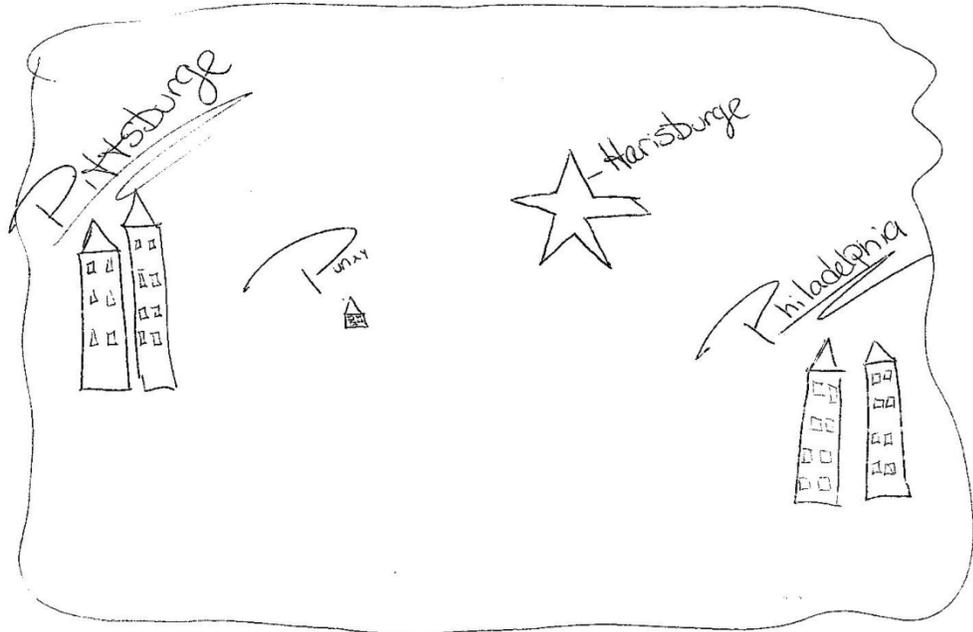


Figure 36. Zooming way out: Punxsy is small.

### Category 7: Word Maps (WM)

This final category does not contain maps in the sense of the other categories but descriptions of the school and community in what I call “word maps” or “webs”.

Although these maps take on a variety of shapes, the emphasis here is on words and not images. It is interesting that when I asked students to “map” their experiences, they did so in this manner. Six of these word maps look like webs. At their center, three students wrote “Punxsutawney”, two wrote “My Punxsy” and one wrote “Punxsy”. Two of these are included as Figure 37 and Figure 38. The other three word maps each contain two lists, laid out either horizontally or vertically. What is distinct about these maps is that all three of them title one list “town” and the other list “campus”. The division between the town and campus is very distinct, and in each, the town and the campus are described in these separate lists. One of these is included as Figure 39. On three of the six word maps

that resemble webs, the students created smaller clusters that also separate the town and the campus.

Because these maps rely on words as opposed to images to represent Punxsutawney as students have experienced it, they are, in some ways, more descriptive. The viewer is able to develop a clearer understanding of these students' perceptions of the area from these descriptions. In Figure 37, the student notes that Punxsutawney is "quiet", "peaceful" and "enjoyable". Additionally, she indicates that the people are "nice". However, she also associates Punxsutawney with "prejudice". While it is not clear if this is something she has experienced firsthand, she does make an association between the community and prejudice. This web of words also provides the viewer with some understanding of what she does in Punxsutawney. She writes "Punxy park" and "late night walks" in two bubbles near the bottom of the web. While we do not know the extent of her experiences in the community, it is clear that her first-year experience includes more than the campus.

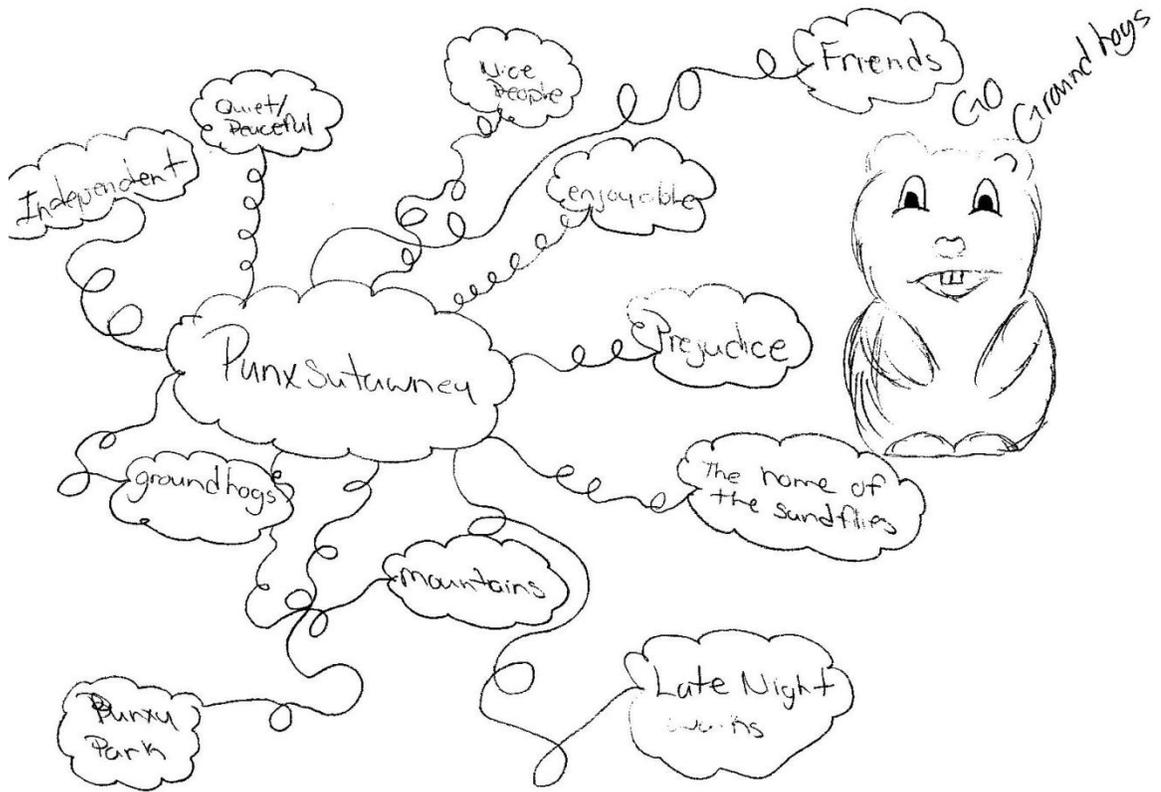


Figure 37. Go groundhogs.

In Figure 38, the student seems to comment more on the people of the community. She includes, in separate bubbles, “older people”, “Amish”, “old-fashioned”, “one race”, “racist” and “teenagers”. In contrast to Figure 37, this student seems to take a somewhat more critical perspective on the community and its people. In Figure 37, the student includes positive adjectives, such as “nice” and “enjoyable”, but in Figure 38, there are not any phrases to communicate that this student’s experience in Punxsutawney has been positive. As far as *what* she has experienced, she includes Wal-Mart and Comet in her web. Like Figure 37, with its inclusion of “prejudice”, this student’s mention of “one race” and “racist” is not necessarily indicative of firsthand experiences. Although students noted in interviews, during informal conversations and on several surveys that they had witnessed acts of prejudice, these stories have also become part of the narrative IUP-Punxsutawney. I do not say this to minimize or negate these experiences because even if it were one student who was the victim of a racial slur, this is still one student too many. However, to fully understand the impact and implications of these experiences, I believe that these stories should be examined individually and with additional data to support them.

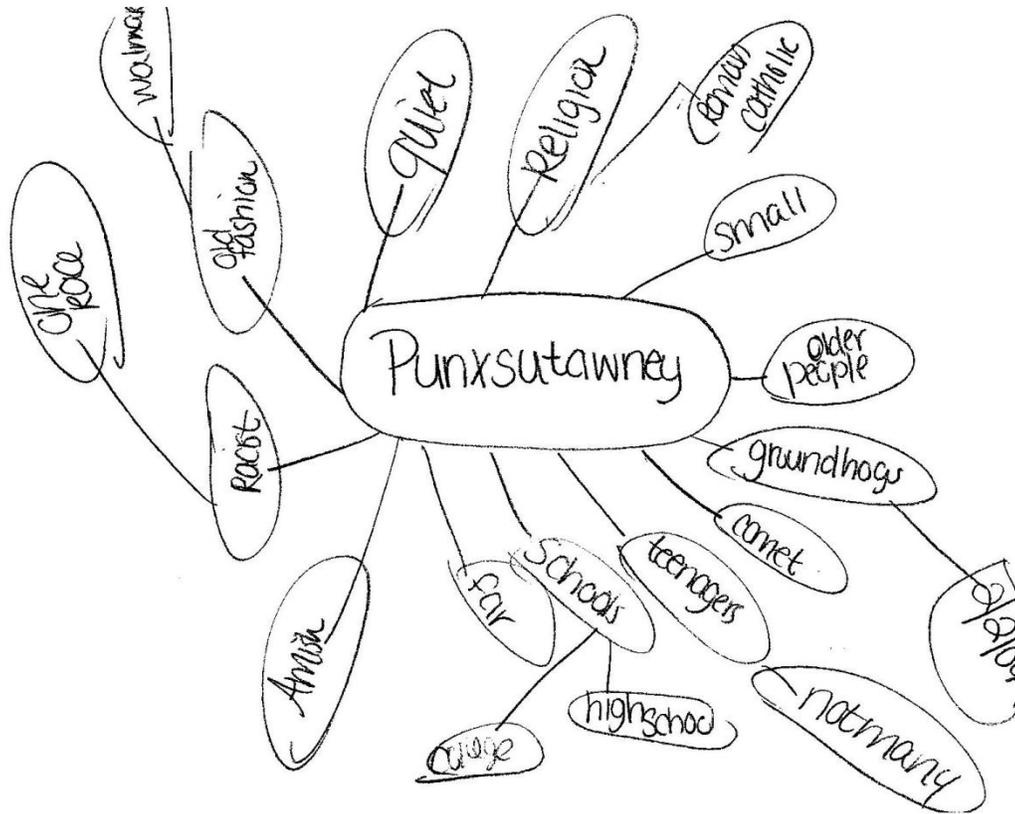


Figure 38. Small, quiet and one race.

Figure 39 is representative of the final three word maps that each makes a clear distinction between the campus and the town. On all three of these, the campus is portrayed more favorably than the town. In Figure 39, the town is “too small” and has “nothing to offer”. In contrast, the campus is “convenient”. This student notes that she has come to Punxsutawney from New York City and that it is hard for her to “accept” Punxsutawney. When I looked at this word map, I considered it in relation to my own experience transitioning to Punxsutawney from the suburbs of Detroit, and although I did not feel as if I had to “accept” living in the community, I can understand the student’s sentiment about the community having “nothing to offer”. This sentiment is relative, of course; a student from a larger, urban area is much more likely to express this than a student who comes from rural community similar to Punxsutawney. In a second one of these maps, the town is “weird” and “boring” while the campus is described as “easy access”. This seems to be similar to what the student is expressing in Figure 39 when she writes “convenient”. In one sense, it seems that students appreciate that the campus is contained all within one building, but maps in the other categories indicate that this convenience somewhat limits their first-year experience, as in the case of Figure 26, where the student reduces his experience to point “A” and point “B”.

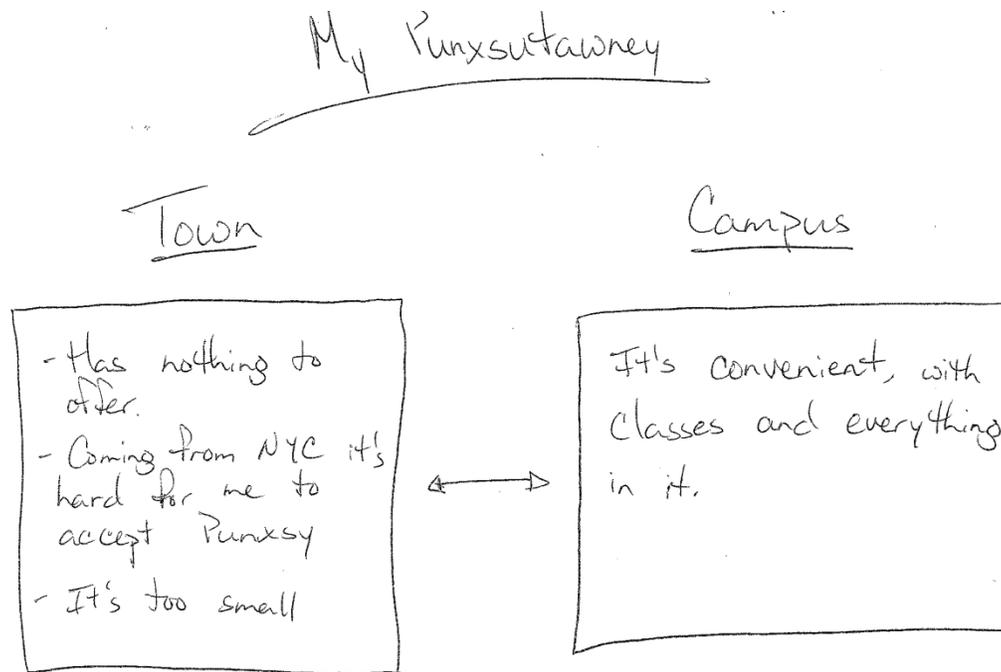


Figure 39. "It's too small".

To summarize, considering the data set within these seven categories is one particular way to look at the data and respond to the research questions. Sorted and analyzed in this way, I drew several conclusions from the data throughout this discussion. The two most important conclusions are included below.

First, while many first-year students at IUP-Punxsutawney seem to have experiences that are limited to six or fewer locations, the experiences of African-American students at IUP-Punxsutawney seem to be even more limited than those of the white students. This is supported by the high volume of maps by African-American students in Category 1, *Just School*, and Category 2a, *School and Community, Few Places*. The locations present on these maps, such as Comet and Nic's Tobacco, also indicate that these students are more familiar with retail locations within the walking distance of the campus. The prevalence of places like Comet, Wal-Mart and McDonald's

demonstrates that when off-campus, students spend more time in these places that provide basic necessities than they do in recreational spaces, like the community center or the local park. These recreational or “voluntary” spaces are frequented mostly by students who are from the area, as the discussion of Category 2c, *School and Community, More Local Places*, indicates.

Secondly, students’ representations of their experiences show various relationships and connections to both the campus and the community. Some students used “my” to indicate ownership over the locations they include in their maps—their dorm rooms, their classes or their “hang out”, as in Figure 32. However, other students represent their experiences in Punxsutawney and on the IUP campus in ways that indicate either a forced connection (see Figure 25, where IUP-Punxsy is represented as jail) or a total lack of connection. This is suggested in Figure 26, in which the campus is portrayed not even as a building, but as two square, indistinct spaces: point “A” and point “B”. Maps like this and others like it do not provide us with as clear of an understanding of students’ experiences in these spaces as much as they do of their perceptions of the spaces themselves. The statements this student makes during an interview two years later indicate that his map does, in fact, represent his experiences.

### **An Outsider’s Perspective: A Second Way to Consider the Data**

Due to my familiarity with the research setting, the way in which I sorted and analyzed the data is certainly influenced by my own experiences. As I noted early in this chapter, I am linked to these students and their experiences in a larger web of experience—a consequence of my time living and working on the campus. My analysis puts “knots” in this web, around which meaning revolves and is “made”, but because my

own experiences are also a part of this web there are limitations to this analysis.

Therefore, to add credibility to the conclusions that I have developed in the previous discussion, I sought an outsider's perspective during this process.

Instead of dividing the data into categories, this person, whom I will call Jennifer, coded the entire data set by looking specifically at each item (object or location) that students included in their maps. When she was approximately one-third of the way through the data set, she had items in one large list of over different 50 categories. With dozens of maps left to code, she made the decision to combine certain locations and items into categories. For example, instead of leaving Wal-Mart in its own category, she combined it with places like Rite-Aid and Peebles, a department store, into a category titled "Retail—chain". She then developed a different code for local retail places, like Country Market, a grocery store approximately two miles from campus. Similarly, fast food chains like McDonald's, Burger King and Wendy's were also placed into their own "chain" category, and local restaurants, like Punxy Phil's, a diner, and Caterina's, a coffee shop, were placed into a "local" category. These examples illustrate that she made distinctions between local businesses and those that are part of larger, better-known chains. It is significant that she developed these codes on her own, as an outsider unfamiliar with the context. As someone who had never lived in the community, the local businesses struck her as places she had "never heard of". When I consider these same places, not only do they sound familiar to me, but I can also not think of them without thinking about my own experiences in them. Her outsider's perspective is more objective than my own, and therefore, her analysis lends credibility to the research.

Although she made most of the decisions during this coding process independently, we also engaged in conversations during this process that were important and useful to the research. For example, although her lack of familiarity with the research context lends a certain amount of credibility to the study and makes the findings more reliable, it also meant that, on occasion, I had to provide clarification about some of the maps. To illustrate, on one of the student's map that I placed into Category 2c, *School and Community, More Local Places*, the word "Walston" became a point of confusion. Due to its position on the map, I concluded that this must be a reference to Walston Rd., but without the inclusion of "Rd.", this is not clear. Because she was counting each item and location on in the data set, clarifications like this were necessary. A particular decision that I influenced during this process was the development of a code for businesses within walking distance of the campus. I defined "walking distance" rather narrowly, to include only businesses within two blocks of the campus. This was a decision I made off of my own initial impressions of the data set, and I felt that instead of dividing the businesses closest to campus into the "local" and "chain", considering them in their own category would be more "telling" and support conclusions developed in my above analysis, as well as in the survey analysis that follows. The results of her coding are included in Table 7 and are followed by a discussion of how they relate to the previous analysis.

Table 7

*The Results of the Data Set Coded from an Outsider's Perspective*

<b>Map locations (including examples)</b>	<b>Number of occurrences</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Campus spaces ( <i>excluding dorms</i> )	151	21%
Retail – chain ( <i>Wal-mart, Rite-Aid, etc.</i> )	99	14%
Homes/dorms in general	76	10%
Food – chain ( <i>McDonald's, Burger King, etc.</i> )	75	10%
Geographic features and landmarks ( <i>rivers, trees, etc. that were labeled; groundhogs</i> )	64	9%
Businesses within walking distance of campus ( <i>Comet, Nic's Tobacco, Kwik-Fill</i> )	55	8%
Services ( <i>post office, hospital, doctor, other schools</i> )	49	7%
Convenience – chain ( <i>Sheetz, other gas stations</i> )	33	5%
Homes/dorms belonging to the student ( <i>marked as "my house" or "where I live" etc.</i> )	32	4%
Places outside of Punxsutawney	20	3%
Recreation ( <i>parks, bowling alleys, bars, etc.</i> )	17	2%
Retail – local ( <i>Country Market, etc.</i> )	16	2%
Community centers ( <i>churches, community center, etc.</i> )	12	2%
Self/others	11	1%
Unlabeled/non-specific maps of town or campus	11	1%
Food – local ( <i>Punxsutawney Phil's, etc.</i> )	7	<1%
Unofficial locations of personal significance ( <i>"accident site," "my hangout," etc.</i> )	6	<1%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>734</b>	<b>≈100%</b>

## **A Brief Analysis of an Outsider's Coding**

Unlike the process of my own coding, Jennifer's process involved counting every distinguishable item on each map. This includes geographic features that students labeled, such as the Mahoning River, and places outside of Punxsutawney, like the towns of Brookville and Big Run. These results are arranged on Table 7 so that the reader can easily identify what types of places appeared more frequently than others. Below, I highlight some important points of these results, and later, I will return to Table 7 to more fully connect Jennifer's results to my analysis of the survey.

### **Campus Spaces**

Because there were 30 maps that included references only to the school, and only 20 of the 142 maps that did not represent the campus at all, it makes sense that 21% of the items on the maps were "campus spaces". It is important to point out that this excludes the dorms, including references to "my room". There were 151 occurrences of "campus spaces" out of 122 possible maps. If the reader considers some of the maps already included in this chapter, this coding scheme becomes clear and the results make sense. In Figure 19, the student drew IUP-Punxsutawney as a square building with few details or features. This was coded as "1" under "campus spaces". In contrast, in Figure 28 the student includes labels for the "class", "café", "pool room", "gym" and "my room". The first four spaces that she labels would also be included in the "campus spaces" category, but the final space, "my room" was coded as "homes/dorms belonging to the student". This distinction is important. Compared to Figure 28, the representation of IUP-Punxsutawney in Figure 19 suggests a student experience that is more limited. Numerically, it makes sense that this generic representation of the building is worth less

in the coding scheme than the representation in Figure 28, which was counted as 4 occurrences. Additionally, counting “my room” in a separate category highlights the ownership over and connection to this particular space that the student expresses about her room but not necessarily about the other four places. Also, separating the spaces of the Living Center from the spaces of Learning Center in the coding scheme provides a better sense of *how* students identify with their campus surroundings. This is visible in Figure 24, in which the student focuses her map on a suite in the living center. Her omission of any part of the learning center indicates a closer connection to and identification with her living quarters.

### **Homes/Dorms in General vs. Homes/Dorms Belonging to the Student**

The results of another distinction that Jennifer made during this coding process also seem to be significant. Although there are a total of 108 items on in the data set that could be considered “homes” or “dorms”, only 32 of these are identified by the students as places where they live—like “my room” (see Figure 28) or “my house” (see Figure 29). Even the student who includes in his map only a house on Foundry Street does not indicate this is *his* house (see Figure 21). In fact, the only label he provides is “Foundry Street”. And it is not necessarily significant that his lack of labeling leaves the viewer to question whether or not this is actually his house. However, it is significant that he does not make this identification in the first place. The high volume of “Homes/dorms in general” suggests that students view the homes and dorms less as spaces in which they live and more as objects or structures that *house* them. In this sense, they are shelter—a basic necessity like food or clothing.

### **Places Outside of Punxsutawney, Recreation and Local Retail**

The rest of Table 7 will be pulled apart more in the following section, but a final point that I want to make here relates to the inclusion of local retail, recreational spaces and places outside of Punxsutawney. The results in Table 7 indicate that all three of these codes or categories fall toward the bottom of the list. Places outside of Punxsutawney account for 20 of the 734 locations that Jennifer coded, or 3%. There are even fewer, or 17, recreational spaces, which make up 2% of the total, and there are 16 local retail places, which also make up approximately 2% of the total. Combined, this is only 7% of the locations accounted for on all 133 of the maps that Jennifer coded. However, 26 out of 53, or nearly 50% of these places were on maps from Category 2c, *School and Community, More Local Places*. The reader may recall that 9 of the 11 maps in this category were collected from students who had grown up in or just outside of Punxsutawney. Therefore, their familiarity with local business makes sense, as does their knowledge of the surrounding area. Still, the fact that 50% of these places are found in the category of maps that comprises only approximately 8% of the data set strongly supports the idea that students who come to IUP-Punxsutawney and move to Punxsutawney as outsiders experience the community in a way that is much more limited than students who are from the community. Although access to transportation is certainly a factor that limits the experiences of many students, the following data shows that a lack of transportation cannot be the only factor.

### **Survey Analysis**

Toward the end of this study, to gain an even fuller understanding of students' experiences at IUP-Punxsutawney, I distributed a survey to 122 students in six different

courses. The survey included 36 questions, divided into two parts. The first part of the survey was titled “Your Campus Experiences”. The second part of the survey was titled, “Your Community Experiences”. The reader will note that the two different sections of the survey represent the two core interview questions: (1) Can you describe your experiences at IUP-Punxsutawney? (2) Can you describe your experiences in the community? The survey responses generated a large body of data—more than can be analyzed in the context of a single research study. For this reason, I focus my analysis in the results of three key questions. The first question asked student to indicate their level of familiarity with 23 different places located in Punxsutawney. The next question I considered was one that asked students to indicate, on a scale of 1-10, the level to which they were comfortable in Punxsutawney, and the final question I looked at was one that asked students to note their perceptions of race issues and *if* they felt there were problems in the community related to race. If they noted “yes”, I requested that they describe any *firsthand* experience. I listed these questions separately to emphasize firsthand recollection of these experiences. I understand that in such a small environment, one such incident can become several such incidents as a story is told and retold. Therefore, by stressing that any such description should come from firsthand experience, I was seeking to limit the problem from being over-represented.

For the first question, I worked up a coding scheme that assigned a numerical value to the various marks that students could make on the list of locations. To make sure my marks were aligning with possible experiences, I tested this coding scheme on 10 additional students by having them respond to the same question and discussing their responses with me. These were “test” responses and so they were not included in the

analysis. After calibrating the coding scheme, I went through each survey and coded students' responses on an Excel spreadsheet. For the most part, I clearly understood the marks that students made, and if I could not distinguish a mark, I did not include that part of the response. The results of this analysis are presented in Figure 40 and Figure 41. In Figure 40, I provide the raw totals for each of the 23 locations. I developed these numbers by simply adding the coded responses (0-4) from all of the students for each place. The places that received higher totals, like Wal-Mart, are places that students indicated they visited on "a regular basis" (4) or more than once or twice (3). Places with lower scores, like Neko's, a local restaurant, are places that students marked as having visited "once or twice" (2), not at all (1) or that they had "never heard of (0). In Figure 41, I also present students' responses organized by location, but on this table, I compare the average responses of the 48 white students who completed the survey with those of the 66 African-American students who also completed it.

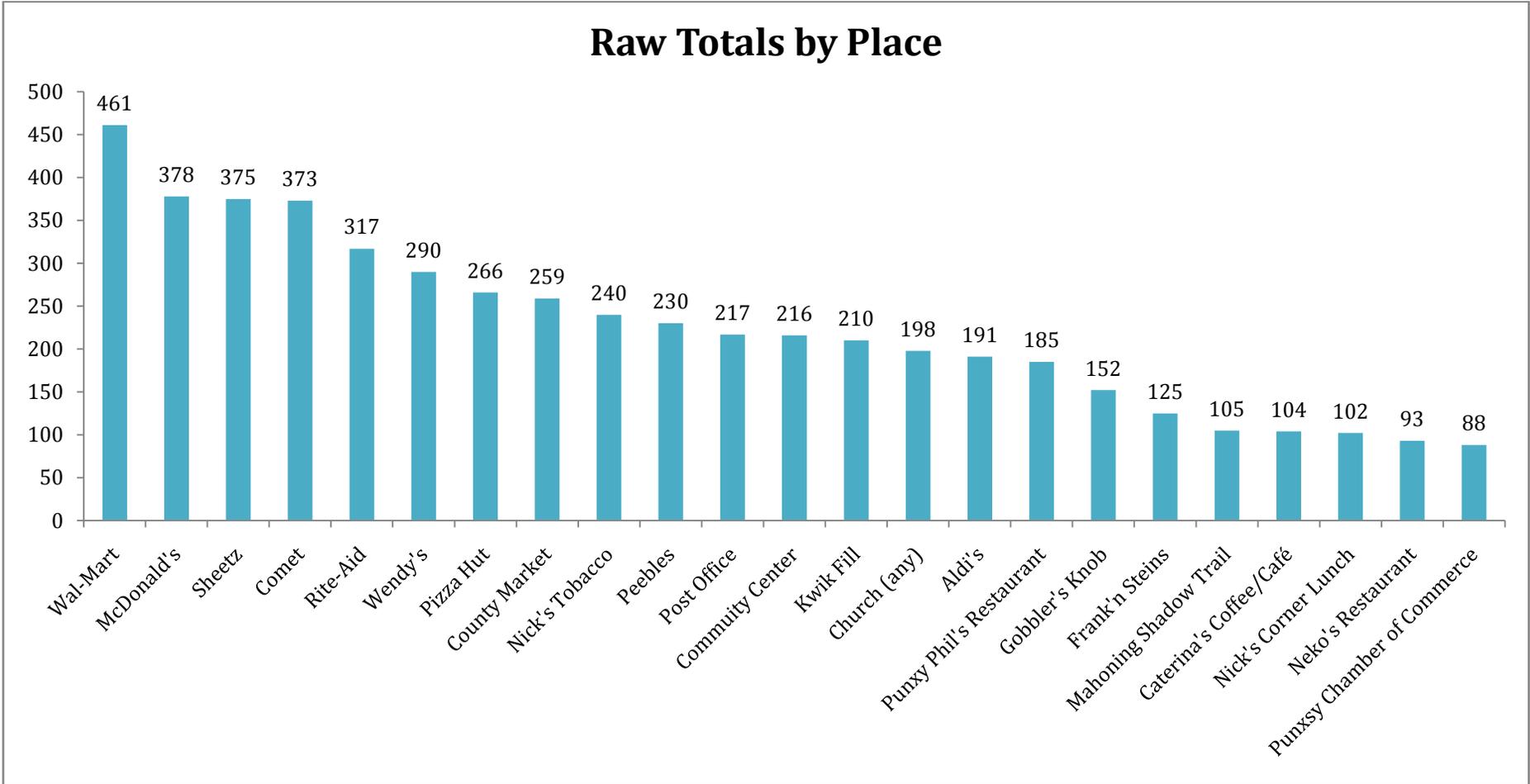


Figure 40. Raw totals by place.

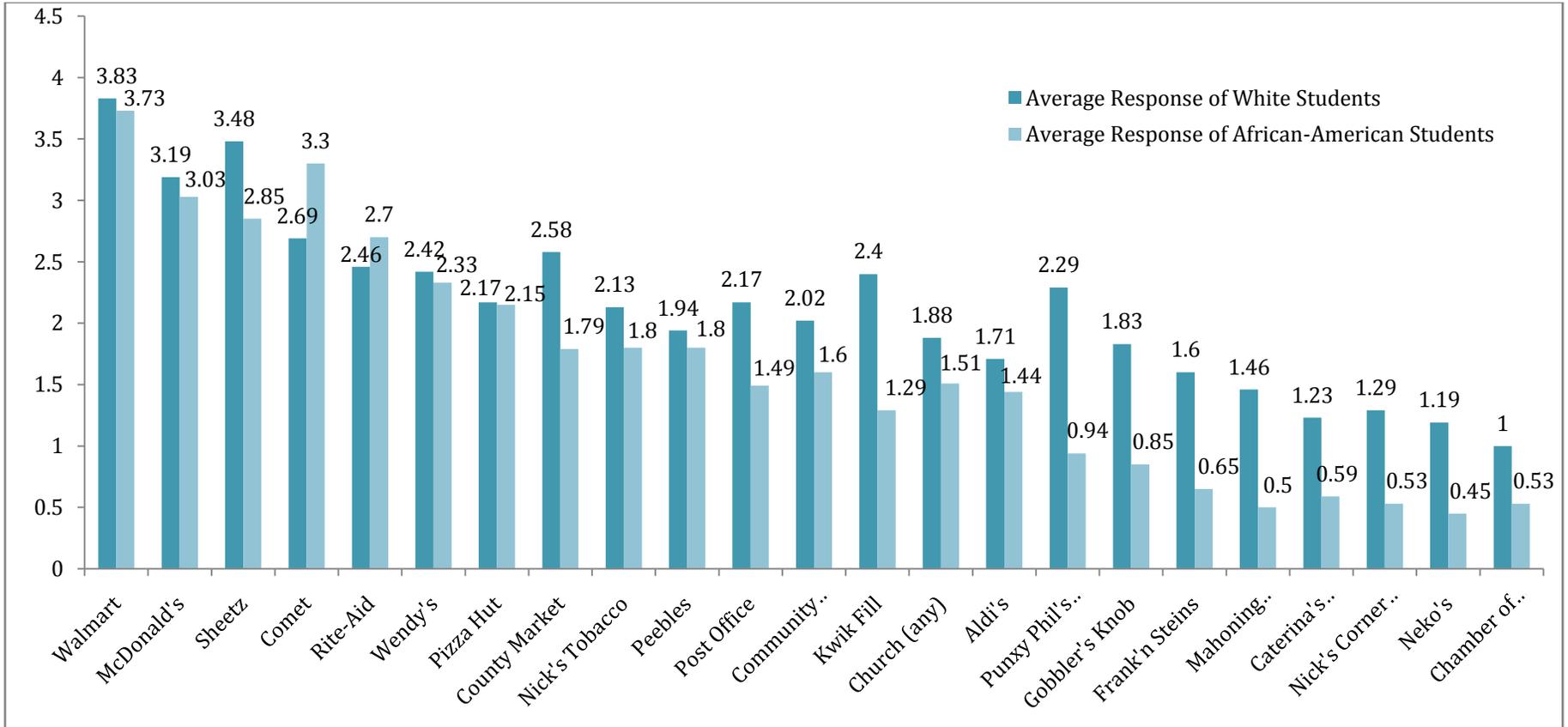


Figure 41. A comparison of responses by race and location.

The totals in Figure 40 represent the experiences of all of the students who completed the survey. Similar to the coding results in Table 7, there is a high prevalence of retail food and retail chain locations. On Table 7, retail chain locations, such as Wal-Mart, account for 14% of all of the items that Jennifer coded. The only locations with a higher prevalence are campus spaces. In the survey results, seven places with the highest totals are all retail food and chain locations. As noted, Wal-Mart received the highest total of any location (461), and McDonald's received the second highest total (378). Both of these places also had a dominant presence in every one of the seven categories that I described earlier in this chapter. This survey data also indicates what is supported in Table 7 and with the low volume of maps in Category 2c *School and Community, More Local Places*: local businesses, both retail and food locations, are not as much a part of the average student's first-year experience as the popular places that are present on the left half of Figure 40. In fact, all of the eight locations with the lowest totals are local businesses; two are geographic locations, Gobbler's Knob and the Mahoning Shadow Trail.

In Figure 41, the data is analyzed to compare the average responses of the white students with those of the African-American students. The data here is particularly significant because it supports, numerically, assumptions that came out of the earlier analyses: compared to the white students, the minority students experience IUP-Punxsutawney in a way that is limited to popular retail and food locations. For the most part, the African-American students do not identify with the local places that are included in this data set. Although there is little difference between the experiences of white and African-American students when it comes to locations like Wal-Mart, McDonald's, Rite-

Aid, Wendy's and other popular locations, the gap between the average responses widens considerably for the local places. And here, it is not so much the differences in responses between the two groups that seem to be as important as the lowness of the numbers for the African-American students.

For example, the eight local locations for which the African-American students' responses were the lowest were also low among the white students. However, the average response of white students to these places ranges from 1.0-2.29, and the average responses of the African-American students to these same locations are all < 1. So the white students are also not visiting these local places as much as Wal-Mart or McDonald's either, but they are more familiar with them. Remember, to score a one (1), a location would be left unmarked, indicating that it was recognized by the student but not necessarily visited. Averaging less than a one (1) for all of the local businesses indicates that many of the students had never heard of these places. In the case of Caterina's Café, the only coffee shop in Punxsutawney, 31 of the African-American students indicated, by underlining this item on the list, that they had never heard of it. The same amount of these students did not mark it at all, and only four students noted, with an "X", that they had been there "once or twice".

In contrast, 13 of the white students indicated that they had been to Caterina's and nine of them indicated they had been there more than once or twice by checking it on the list. The reader can see that the averages of the white students for these eight locations are also lower so, as a whole, the students do not visit these places as often. Still, the white students have heard of them. This suggests that even if they do not frequent them

either, they must be getting out into the community more if they are at least aware that they exist.

Lastly, I want to highlight a key point in this data related to previous discussions about students' experiences limited to businesses within walking distance of the campus. To some extent, the data, including the maps, the results in Table 7 and this survey, supports this idea. In the survey results, Comet, a local grocery store that is visible from the campus parking lot, received the fourth highest total on Figure 40, which was only five less than McDonald's. In Figure 41, we get a better idea of why Comet appears on the high end of the totals. Comet scored a 3.3 among the African-American students, making it the only popular retail location, other than Rite-Aid, to secure a higher response from this student population. Thirty-seven of the African-American students circled Comet on the list to note that they went there on a "regular basis". This is in contrast to the 10 white students who circled it. This demonstrates that for many of the African-American students, the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney is limited to places within walking distance, a consequence of the fact that many of them do not have cars.

However, transportation cannot be the only factor that limits their experiences. As I just noted, the average response of these students was also higher than the white students for Rite-Aid, with 16 students indicating they went there on a regular basis. Though the gap in responses between the two groups is not significant, I point this out to demonstrate that walking distance must not be the only factor in the low-level of African-American students' experiences and familiarity with local businesses. Caterina's, which 31 of the African-American students indicated that they had "never heard of", is directly across the street from the Rite-Aid. McDonald's is also located less than a block from

the Rite-Aid, a place that all of the students frequent nearly as much as Wal-Mart. Part of the reason for the difference between their familiarity with McDonald's and Rite-Aid and their lack of familiarity with the coffee shop is possibly that McDonald's and Rite-Aid sell necessities, such as food, toiletries and medications. The students visit these places because, in a way, they *need to*. The same does not apply to the coffee shop across the street. Still, I think there is an argument to be made here as well that the minority students' off-campus experiences do not include small, community-based businesses because, for the most part, these students do not feel comfortable in or embraced by the Punxsutawney community.

As part of the same survey, I asked students to indicate, on a scale of 1-10, how comfortable they were in the Punxsutawney community. On this scale, a 1 represented "extremely uncomfortable" and a 10 represented "extremely comfortable". The average response of minority students to this question was a 5.6, with responses ranging from 1 to 7. The average response of white students to the same question was an 8.35, with responses ranging from 5 to 10. The results of this one question, combined with the limited experience represented on the African-American students' maps above, suggests that the minority students do not feel as comfortable in the community as the white students. The following discussion includes data from surveys, interviews and an additional student map to help the reader understand *why* IUP-Punxsutawney's minority student population may feel somewhat "at odds" with the community.

### **Students' Perspectives on Race and Prejudice**

In addition to asking students to note their familiarity with various places in Punxsutawney, I also asked students whether or not they felt racism and/or prejudice was

an issue in the Punxsutawney community. I asked this question because during the time I lived and worked on the campus, I heard a number of minority students describe various incidents in which they felt victimized by prejudice. Sometimes, what they described took place on campus and involved other students, but more often than not, these incidents took place off campus and involved members of the community. The stories had become part of the narrative of the first-year experience, and despite the fact that some faculty and other administrators downplayed their existence, these stories were embedded in the context. In some cases, a student would even relate to me what he/she had heard from a former IUP-Punxsy student, demonstrating that these stories carry over from year to year. I realize that in this small setting, the victimization of one individual can quickly feel like that of the entire group, and it is not my intent to overstate the problem. However, in some ways one story is the victimization of the entire group if the reader considers that the university has placed the students into the setting. To fully understand the extent to which race is an issue and to which students experienced prejudice, I gathered multiple perspectives from both white and minority students. Again, in gathering this data I emphasized the importance of firsthand knowledge over “hearsay”.

Above, I describe how I addressed race issues in the survey questions. Some of the material in the following tables also comes from student interviews. This is not all of the data because it would be impossible to present and analyze all of the data that I collected. Therefore, in going through interview transcripts, I considered the material that could add another layer to the map and survey analysis. It is important to note that in the interviews, I never explicitly used the words “racism” or “prejudice” or even “race”.

However, when I asked the minority students to describe their experiences off campus or when I asked the white students to describe their transition into a diverse school setting, they revealed what I have included below, making it abundantly clear that race is an issue. The following are students' own words and perspectives on race and prejudice and their experiences with both during their first year of college in Punxsutawney. These brief accounts are organized thematically on Tables 8-13. I include this volume of data in the body of the dissertation to clearly illustrate the extent to which race issues are complicated in this setting. When I hear these students' voices I hear much that goes beyond "racist" or "not racist". I hear painful accounts of struggles to fit in or at the least, feel comfortable, in a place that is not always accepting. I hear the influences of family and friends on students' interactions with and perceptions of people who are different from themselves. I hear uncertainty about how to even talk about someone of another race. I hear confusion, awkwardness, sadness, tension and even, in certain moments, fear. For these students, transitioning into the university presents challenges that extend far beyond study skills and time management. The experiences that they share below represent the struggles of socially integrating into an environment that, for both the white and minority students, is totally unfamiliar. I include analysis and discussion where appropriate to contextualize this data for the reader.

Table 8 and Table 9 both illustrate what we already know: the way we perceive and interact with people from other races and cultures is closely related to how we were raised—we watch and listen to our grandparents, parents, older siblings and other people with whom we are in close contact, and we model our behaviors accordingly. Family beliefs, not only about race, but also about politics and religion, are often absorbed and

internalized. In short, we are all products of our environments. We know this, but in this setting, it is still worth pointing out, especially if the reader considers that most of these students are “on their own” for the first time. Out of the home environment, they still bring with them and are influenced by 18 years of “where I’m from”, but we also see them negotiating the dissonance they perceive between the thoughts and opinions of family and friends and those that they struggle to shape for themselves. This is clear in Table 8 in which students note the opinions of older family members, like fathers and grandfathers, about issues of race. In Table 8, one student even identifies “being racist” as one of her father’s “flaws”, and in Table 9, the students discuss attending non-diverse schools where “other” students made racist remarks. The focus on other people’s opinions and actions, such as in the longest comment in Table 8 where a student describes an act of prejudice carried out by friends in the Sheetz parking lot, is interesting. Of course, we do not often openly reflect on how the thoughts, words and behaviors of others influence our own, but here, there is an emphasis on looking outward—to what other people say or do.

This is not to say that these students harbor the same attitudes as their friends and family members, but the point is that, with the exception of the final comment on this table, we cannot really define their attitudes either. Two students who discuss their friends’ actions and attitudes in Table 8 express a level of discomfort with what they experienced. One student notes that it “bothered” her to see her friend yelling “white power” at the African-American male in the Sheetz parking lot, and the other says, “I don’t think it’s right” when her friends make similar comments. The third student knows

his white friends would be “mean” if they knew he had African-American friends and so he hides this fact from them.

All three of these students, like those who describe family members in Table 8 paint themselves as witnesses to the racist attitudes and actions of others, without really considering their own roles or how their friends and family might influence their thoughts and behaviors. Though not explicitly, they are struggling to reconcile what they might think is “right” with these other influences, and choosing to do what is “right”—like speaking up to a family member or friend when he/she makes a racist comment or telling your white friends that you have African-American friends, regardless of what they think—could very well put distance between them and these people. And these are people who have raised them and with whom they have grown up. At a time when their lives are replete with the unfamiliar and disorienting, it is understandable that they would stick with what they know and not risk alienating what is familiar. I am not advocating their behavior; I am simply saying that in this context, it makes sense.

The final comment in Table 9 perhaps best represents the attitudes of many of these students and bears including here as well: “When you grow up around other races, you’re less likely to be racist. I grew up around all white people, so I’m still learning”. Although the logic in this statement is somewhat flawed—exposure to other races and cultures does not *guarantee* anti-racist attitudes—the idea that one has to *learn* acceptance, tolerance and understanding as a process (“still learning”) fits this context quite well.

Table 8

*The Influence of Family and Friends on White Students' Views of Race*

My grandfather gets very disgusted when he sees a couple together and one of them is white and the other is black. My grandparents would be very disapproving if I were ever in a relationship with an African-American man.

I know many men in my hometown and even in other smaller communities who won't even speak to a black person. My husband has a friend who has a strong dislike for them. One of my dad's flaws is being racist. I think even the head of the local chapter of the KKK lives in Punxsy. Racism exists—maybe just on a smaller scale than it used to.

At orientation there was a girl who said her father was prejudice and forced her to say 'nigger' whenever she saw a black person on TV. She broke down and said she wasn't racist but because of her experience she felt weird around African-Americans.

My family wouldn't be considered racist at all, but if I were to bring a black boyfriend home, although my family would eventually be ok with it, there would definitely be some problems.

I hang out at Sheetz a lot—especially during the summer. One Friday night, there were about 20 of us sitting outside at the tables and in trucks. A car of people pulled up and parked right in front of us. One of the people who got out of the car was black. I am not racist, but I looked around at my friends who are, expecting them to say something. They didn't at first and let this guy go into Sheetz. But when he came out, one of my friends yelled, "white power". I put my head down on the table, but not before I saw this young man look around at all of us with hurt in his eyes. The thing that bothered me the most was that out of that many people, only three of us—me, my sister and another friend—were upset about what had happened.

I have some friends who are racist. Every time we go into town and they see a black person or someone else who is not white they will make comments out loud to make [that person] uncomfortable. I don't think it is right.

I have a lot of black friends here, but when I hang out with my other friends—like my white friends—I found out some of them are very racist. They say things about my black friends, but they don't know they are my friends. And I don't tell them either because they would be mean about it.

I have had a few people tell me they feel sorry for me because of the way I was brought up, but I see nothing wrong with it. I've just never met a black person I could be friends with.

Table 9

*The Influence of Place/Upbringing on Students' Views of Race*

I come from a small town that has no real diversity in it. We are all white and seeing someone of a different race is a shock. Most people in my town are racist. I will say at first I wasn't used to all the different cultures, but now that I am used to it, I wonder why people where I'm from are so against learning about different people.

When I came up here to Punxsutawney, the environment was very different for me. There are more black kids than white and it was weird for me.

There was maybe one black kid in my whole school, and even he acted white. A lot of students here are from small towns and never had experience with different racial backgrounds; it's a big change.

There were about five black students in my high school. None of the students said anything to the black students, but behind their backs, they would say racist things. They think that all black people steal and rob people or are lazy.

When you grow up around other races, you're less likely to be racist. I grew up around all white people, so I'm still learning.

Table 10 includes accounts of white students witnessing acts of prejudice. These accounts differ from those included in the above tables because here, the person responsible for the act is not a friend or family member—it is someone unknown to the student. Therefore, unlike in the tables above where the students express uneasiness for what they witness primarily because it puts them into a position in which they must choose what is “right” over what is familiar, in the experiences described below, the students have no stake in aligning themselves with the person committing the act. And although they do not discuss intervening or speaking out against what they witness, they are more inclined to judge the person. In the following two comments, white students observe what they perceive as “rude” and “nasty” behavior coming from other white people when they are out in public with their African-American friends. In the second of these comments, the student makes the connection between what she perceives as rudeness from store employees and the presence of her African-American friends. Though she does not openly say this behavior is prejudice, the connection she makes seems to indicate her awareness.

The comments on Table 10 are grouped and considered separately from those above because together they make another important point: Not only do many of the white students lack familiarity with people of other races, but the data here indicates that they are also unfamiliar with racism and prejudice as it plays out in everyday interactions. As members of the dominant culture, it is unlikely they have ever been a victim of racism or prejudice, but beyond that, “racism” and “prejudice” are simply words to many of them—abstract concepts without context to give them any real meaning. In the first comment on Table 10, the student expresses disbelief at seeing a classmate get called

“the ‘N’ word” when he tries to cross the street behind her. She notes, “When I came here, it was a very big shock to me that people could be so mean to someone just because of their skin color.” In the fourth comment, another student describes how it made him, “sick to [his] stomach” to hear one of his roommates get called “the ‘N’ word” outside of Sheetz. He notes, “I’d never seen anything like that”. For these two students, the words “racism” and “prejudice” are no longer intangible, and while not the victims in either incident, the experience of witnessing has brought these words to life in ways with which they are not comfortable.

Table 10

*White Students' Accounts of Witnessing an Act of Prejudice*

When I came here it was a very big shock to me that people could be so mean to someone just because of their skin color. I was walking down the street and went to cross and some man stopped [his car] and let me start walking. Only a few steps behind me was one of my classmates is an African-American. When my classmate started to walk as well the man laid on his horn and started to yell obscene things and make racist comments, like calling her the “N” word. I could not believe that to this day, people still act that way.

I live with a few black roommates and everywhere we go, when we're together, the locals give us nasty looks—like they can't believe it. Once we all went to the mall in DuBois and every store we went into, we got glared at.

I was in Wal-Mart with two of my black friends and the people were rude to all of us and probably me more because I was with them. If I go there by myself, or with my white friends, they don't act like that to us.

When I first pulled into my house here at IUP, I saw that all of my roommates were of a different race. I didn't care because I have a lot of black friends at home...I didn't think that many people here were racist until my roommates got called the “N” word when we were walking to Sheetz. It made me sick to my stomach; I'd never seen anything like that.

My roommate was called the “N” word two or three times when we were walking to class.

My black friend was spit on one day when we were walking home.

When I was out with my African-American friends, some guy starting hurling racial slurs at them.

I hear a lot of name calling—on campus and out on the street.

Of course, not all of the white students expressed discomfort with the racism and prejudice that they witnessed, or, as in Table 8 and Table 9, attributed those behaviors and attitudes solely to other people. Primarily, I believe because it was anonymous, the survey invited the perspectives and opinions of white students, included here on Table 11, that to many, would represent prejudice and, at the very least, less acceptable/popular beliefs. Their comments well illustrate the complexity of these issues.

When I requested that students indicate whether or not they felt race was an issue, these are not the responses I anticipated. In fact, I did not expect any of the white students to respond affirmatively to the question at all, but as illustrated in the previous tables, they had witnessed interactions they perceived as race related. In the first comment, a female student notes that she “almost got beat up” by an African-American female student. This student notes that “some black students are real rude and pushy”. She does not say “all” of the students are this way, but her perception, based on her experience, is that “some” are. This is in contrast to the use of “they” in the third comment and “their” in the fifth comment to attribute negative behaviors and characteristics to the entire group of African-American students and to indicate the possibility that these white students do not distinguish one African-American student from another. I think the use of this language also indicates an awkwardness and uncertainty of how to even talk about someone of another race. In the third comment, the implication is not only do all of the African-American students hang out together, but there, the student also attributes being loud to the entire group. In the final comment, the student indicates a dislike for “all” based on his experiences with his roommates. These quotes are disturbing, and they speak strongly to the need for a more open discussion of

these issues, perhaps in the classroom or via focus groups outside the classroom. It is certainly dismissive to label these students or the attitudes they hold as “racist” and move on. These comments speak more to ignorance, misunderstanding and how these issues are perhaps magnified because this is a setting of such “extremes”; arguably, inner-city Philadelphia is the complete opposite of Punxsutawney and the other rural communities that most of the white students call home. Again, I don’t find the attitudes they express to be acceptable, but as the student noted in Table 9, it is possible that these students are also “still learning”.

Table 11

*White Students' Perceptions of and Experiences with African-American Students*

Some black students are real rude and pushy. I almost got beat up because I said, "Excuse you" when this [black] girl ran into me.

The black students go to Wal-Mart and steal and get away with it. This is hurting our town and giving all IUP kids a bad name.

What makes me angry is when they [African-American students] are all together...they find it necessary to scream and yell and just be loud.

I had a confrontation in the café with a black student when I was working. He accused me of not giving him enough fries because he was black.

I don't like it when people say that bad stuff happens to them because they are black. On Monday night blacks (not all) take stuff from Wal-Mart because Wal-Mart can't say anything. It's bad enough we pay for their food, housing and college but don't steal stuff and give all college students a bad name. It's no wonder the people of Punxsy hate IUP and the people it brings into the community.

No matter what class I am in, there is always one black student who causes a scene and accuses the teacher of being racist because they don't accept late work. This takes the attention away from real race problems.

Both of my roommates are black, and I do not get along with them. I understand I cannot judge all based on the few that I met; it's just something that's hard for me to do.

In Table 12, I shift to the perspectives and words of the African-American students with data that, quite literally, speaks to the map and survey data included above. As the reader will recall, the map analysis indicates that the experiences of these students are primarily limited to locations within walking distance of the campus, as well as chain retail and fast food places. The survey data supports this and also suggests that these students, as a whole, are unfamiliar with small, locally-owned business, regardless of their location relative to places that the students *do* visit. As I pointed out, many had never heard of Caterina's, a local coffee shop, but they did indicate their familiarity with Rite-Aid, which is just across the street from Caterina's.

Although all of the tables in this section speak to the existence of race issues in the community, the quotes presented here that come from the African-American students themselves make these issues painfully clear and undeniable. I present this data over two pages to emphasize the high number of students who reported having such experiences. The reader should know that there were dozens of additional accounts that I did not include here, but those that are included represent a wide range of experiences. It is also important to note that all of these students, with the exception of one, describe an experience that took place *off* campus. The analysis of the map and survey data is then, not surprising, and the data below argues that the experiences of African-American students are more limited than those of the white students because they do not feel comfortable or accepted by the community.

Furthermore, in some instances, the students describe not feeling safe. Notably, in one instance, a female student describes being followed by a man in a pickup truck while she is walking home one night with a friend. She notes, "He called us niggers".

When she reported the incident to the campus Dean, the Dean found the two students housing on the campus. Clearly, the Dean was concerned for the safety of the students, and this was an appropriate, immediate response. However, as in many similar instances, there was no talk of the larger issue, and I never heard anyone in charge raise this question: *Should students be attending college somewhere they do not feel safe and have to worry about having experiences like this?* I will respond to this question in Chapter 5.

Table 12

*Minority Students' Firsthand Experiences with Prejudice (1 of 2)*

One day as I walk down the street to Bodyworks, as I reached the tobacco store a red truck drove past; the truck stopped and someone yelled, "KKK" and pulled away. I laughed. I laughed because I couldn't believe it happened. I laughed because people are so low in life they think they can break a whole race down to build themselves up.

While walking down the street, Caucasian people yell out their car windows, honk the horn and say, "Go home" or use the "N" word.

I have been called the "N word" in Punxsy more than once. Why? I don't know. I haven't done anything to these people.

We walk in groups when we go out to the stores at night. We don't feel good about walking alone.

One day me and my friends were walking to campus and this man in a red pickup truck called us "niggers". I didn't know how to react. That word was so powerful, and it took a lot to just ignore him. We reported it to the Dean. She did what she could and we moved on campus.

Everywhere we go the people here always stare at us and treat us differently than they do the white kids. If we go to Wal-Mart they always follow us around the store like we are going to steal something.

When me and my friends walk to the store down the street [Rite-Aid], we get called "niggers". People tell us they are going to run us over with their cars.

People look at us like they never seen our race before, but they hate us already.

People stare a lot, honk their horns and flip us off. This happens all the time.

I get shouted at from car windows when I go back and forth from my apartment to campus.

I was called the "N" word multiple times while in Punxsy.

Me and my friends were walking down Main St. and someone drove past and shouted, "niggers".

I used to live off campus and one night I was walking home at 10:00 pm and these people pulled up next to me in a car and said, "Nigga, what's up?" After that, I stayed in my friend's room on campus and didn't go out at night.

When we came home from a trip over the summer, someone wrote, "Go home niggers" on the sidewalk outside.

We were playing on the tennis courts and two Caucasian males were also on the courts. One got upset because the ball rolled onto this side. He said, "You people need to go back where you came from! Go back to Philadelphia."

Table 12

Minority Students' Firsthand Experiences with Prejudice (2 of 2)

Me and a group of friends were walking to Uni-Mart when a pickup truck drove by and this guy shouted, "Niggers go back where you came from."

The workers follow me and my friends around Wal-Mart.

I was walking with my boyfriend and this car swerved toward the curb into a huge puddle and getting us all wet.

One day I was walking to Rite-Aid with a friend and a man and his friends jumped out their car and yelled "white power" and then drove off.

A police officer stopped me for "jaywalking", but I was right behind two white kids who had just crossed the street.

I was waiting for a ride outside my apartment and some young white kids rode by on bikes and said, "move nigger".

I was walking to the pool over the summer and I got called the "N" word.

Walking down the street, I get racial slurs yelled at me all the time.

Once in class a student turned around to me and my friend and said, "Niggers be quiet".

Walking to Comet people yelled out, "Niggers" and threw rocks at me and my friends. That made my entire experience uncomfortable.

I include Table 13 last to illustrate how embedded these issues are in the local community. When I discuss this research and these students' experiences with any number of people, they often say that this problem is not particular to this context and respond with something like, "Yeah, but there's racism everywhere, right?" In other cases, they attribute the acts of prejudice I describe to a few close-minded individuals with, "Some people are just jerks. A lot of people in this town are nice." With that last statement, I cannot argue. Living in Punxsutawney for two years, I did meet many very nice people, some of whom I now call friends, but this statement, however true it is, also negates the bigger picture.

The perspectives of the local students offered in Table 13 show that these acts of prejudice may be woven into the fabric of Punxsutawney culture. In one instance, a student notes that Ed Foster, who held a "high status" in the Ku Klux Klan, lived just outside of Punxsutawney in the town of Walston. He also makes a note of Klan activity, such as rallies. During the time I was working and living in Punxsutawney, I heard stories of a KKK presence in the community from at least a dozen students. Wanting to know if there was any truth to these stories, I did some of my own research, and while I could not find any official documentation of Klan activity, I did find Ed Foster was the Grand Dragon of the Pennsylvania KKK, or at least he was when the Klan held a rally in Pittsburgh in 1998. Certainly what I offer as evidence here is primarily anecdotal, but the volume of local lore surrounding the KKK suggests that there is some truth to these stories.

And even if there was not any truth to these stories at all, the student comments offered here indicate a level of community resistance to diversity, as well as intolerance

for people who are not white, or in the case of one comment, not heterosexual. One student writes, “People from a small town know each other and do not want change. When IUP students become part of the town people judge them on their skin color and where they are from”. Another local student, somewhat apologetically, echoes a similar sentiment, “The people in this small town are mostly white and when IUP starts up, a lot of different ethnicities come into town and the people are not used to seeing kids from Philly and other large cities. They automatically put them in the category of ‘bad’ or ‘shady’. This should not be the case though.” And a third student notes, “The people in this town do not care for people who are different. They discriminate against black people and against gay people.” These students very openly describe what they perceive as their community’s resistance to diversity and collective opinion of people who do not represent the majority. Certainly none of them would say that every single person in the community feels this way, but they are quick to say “people” and to speak on behalf of the entire town, and notably, not one of them makes a point to emphasize that some people in Punxsutawney *are* nice. In fact, one student even notes that he “feels bad” that the African-American students even have to live in Punxsutawney. This statement suggests that if he were a minority, he would not want to live here.

Table 13

*Local Students Describe the Community's Resistance to Diversity*

People from a small town know each other and do not want change. When IUP students become part of the town people judge them on their skin color and where they are from.

The people in this small town are mostly white and when IUP starts up, a lot of different ethnicities come into town and the people are not used to seeing kids from Philly and other large cities. They automatically put them in the category of "bad" or "shady". This should not be the case though.

In a nearby town by the name of Walston, there lived an individual with a very high status in the KKK. This man was Ed Foster. He died several years ago, but this did not stop anything. The clan still had rallies in nearby towns. I went to school with kids who would wear t-shirts with confederate flags on them.

I think people stare because they never really had to have personal experiences with African-Americans.

It's like the school and town are two different places. Here [on campus], I sit with anyone, and no one stares or says anything. The town people should come to campus and learn how to treat people of other races.

In this town, there are no colored people. People often honk their horns when they see a colored person.

The people in this town do not care for people who are different. They discriminate against black people and against gay people.

I grew up here, but I still don't think it's right that people yell at the black kids. I feel bad that they have to live here.

So I feel that people in my town are not going to change...If a person was able to look past your skin color and just look at you as a person it would help. Only some people can do that.

Indications that racism and prejudice exist in the Punxsutawney community are not only present in the data discussed above, but the reader may recall that in Figure 27 and Figure 28, students also make references to race issues by including the phrases, “one race”, “racist” and “prejudice” on their word maps. In Figure 42, a student maps his experience at IUP-Punxsutawney to include an incident where local townspeople shout a racial slur at him and his friends.

In Figure 42, the student primarily represents Punxsutawney as the campus Living-Learning complex, and he also includes a sketch of Pennsylvania to show how far Punxsutawney is from Philadelphia, where he is from. He does not include any specific community locations. Instead, he focuses his off-campus experiences on an act of prejudice of which he and his friends were victims. This is Punxsutawney as he has experienced it, and this is also representative of how many African-American students experience it, based on the survey analysis include above. And although the primary research questions do not directly address race, it is a thread that is woven through this entire study, starting with the placement of African-American students in all-white community and continuing with the students’ maps, voices and experiences included in this chapter.

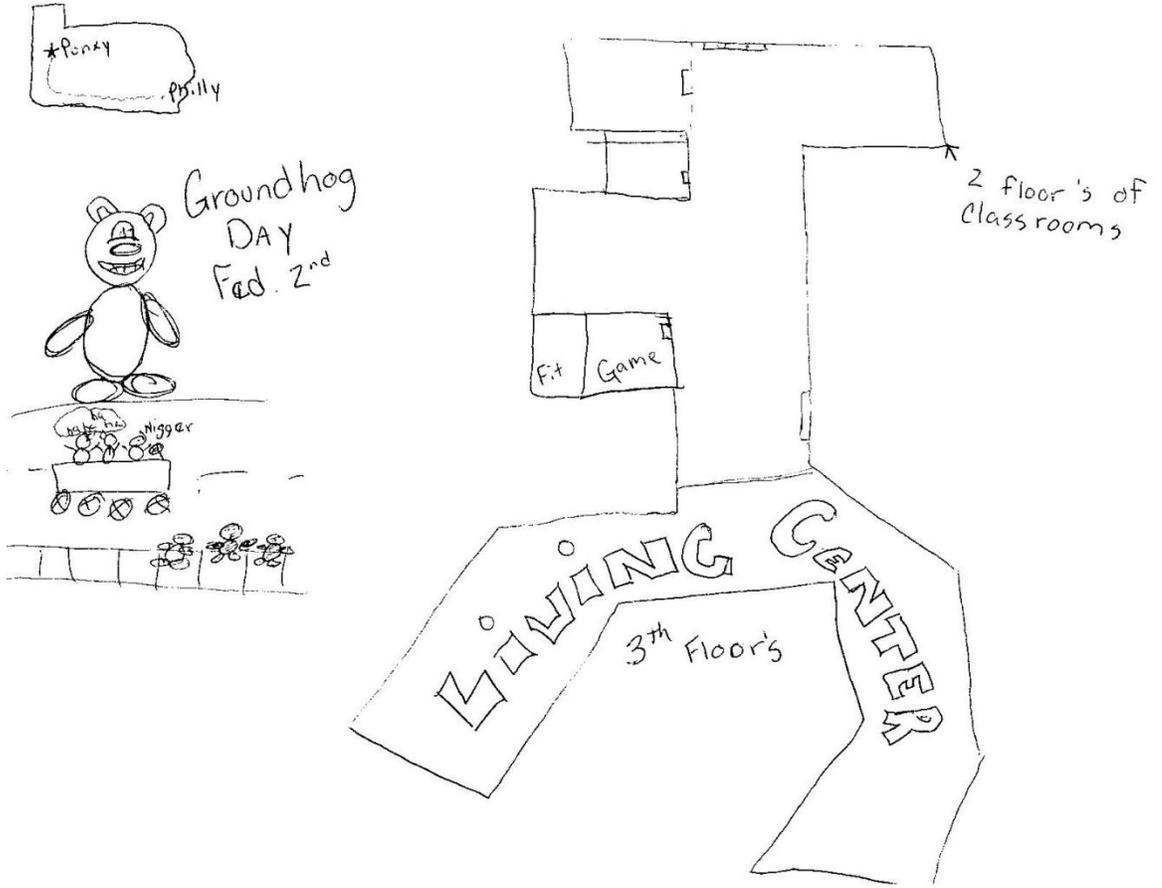


Figure 42. A student maps an experience with prejudice.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the process of transition is one of academic and social integration—in this case, onto a campus and into a community. The data here clearly shows that social integration and transition into this setting is a difficult and complex process and the experiences of a number of students with racism and prejudice add a particular complexity to this process of social integration. The process of social integration is complicated for the white students who come to Punxsutawney from rural communities that also lack diversity. Their limited experience with people of other races and with prejudice is evident in Tables 9-11. In Table 11, white students share their perceptions of African-American students that seem negative and to stereotype these students. In Table 9, white students express how the campus environment differs greatly from their home environment, and in Table 10, they bear witness to acts of prejudice that, despite their own possible prejudices, many of them find surprising. For the local students whose perspectives are shared in Table 13, the community's resistance to diversity is not surprising, with one student even noting the history of the KKK in the area.

However, the process of social integration and transition is undeniably a more difficult and complex process for the minority students who come to Punxsutawney from diverse urban environments. The sheer volume of students' firsthand experiences with prejudice included in Table 12 demonstrates that race is, most certainly, an issue. In addition to what I included in Table 12, there were numerous similar accounts of students being yelled at out of car windows also included in the survey and interview data. And while all of these incidents are significant and sad, I find the accounts of students being

told to “go home”—at a time when they are trying to transition into college, a place that should be their “home away from home”—particularly distressing and powerful.

In the next chapter, I “knot” this thread of race issues to the larger focus of this study: the retention, graduation and academic success of students in this context, and more specifically, to the composition classroom. Because of their potential to gravely impact the success and persistence of students at IUP-Punxsy, understanding these outside of class experiences is essential to the larger conversation about retention. These outside of class experiences also have serious implications for what teachers in this setting might do *inside* the classroom. In terms of composition, I make suggestions that take into account the larger context.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### Recapping the Results

In this study, I have worked to describe the experiences of first-year students at IUP-Punxsutawney, a regional campus designed to provide additional academic support for a population of at-risk students, most of whom are also minorities. The purpose of this study was to provide the reader with a better understanding of the context, a place that, to date, has not been researched and to describe what students experience in this setting. I was also seeking to answer these two questions: *What does it mean to be a first-year student at IUP-Punxsutawney? What is the first-year experience at IUP-Punxsutawney?* The goals of this research were first and foremost, descriptive. Put another way, with this research I aimed to take a description of the setting and of student experiences in that setting and put them into meaningful conversation with one another—a conversation that I believe is long overdue. The true work of this study was in gathering all of this information and putting it for the reader in one place, and the reader will note that this conversation—between student experience, the setting, the researcher, the literature and the data—has been taking place throughout the dissertation.

In Chapter 1, I thoroughly describe the setting, as well as offer profiles of three different students. The profiles of these students are representative of, in general, increasing undergraduate enrollments in higher education. Staci and James, two of these students, represent a larger population of at-risk students who are enrolling in higher education in higher number than they were in previous decades.

I approached this research as a composition and teacher of first-year writing who feels compelled to better understand the circumstances under which students are admitted

to the university, including the social, political and economic forces responsible for those circumstances and their out-of-class experiences. These larger contextual factors have very real implications for classroom practice and to ignore them is to pretend that what happens in the classroom exists somehow separately from context and is immune to its influence. Studying retention as a compositionist puts me in an undefined space between both disciplines. However, this research suggests that all faculty, in particular teachers of writing, have reasons to be concerned with retention research. In addition to better understanding students' experiences because they may affect students' ability to transition successfully into the university, as well as their classroom performance, I note in this chapter that compositionists should concern themselves with retention because institutions are making changes in the name of retention. These modifications, such as relocating writing centers and combining first-year seminar courses with first-year writing courses, will inevitably redefine our discipline and affect what we *do*. It does not make sense to me that we would be absent from this discussion. Therefore, I make a case for a continuing conversation between those of us who teach writing and those at our institutions whose primary concern is student retention. Ideally, this conversation would include members of administration, student affairs, admissions, enrollment management and faculty from other disciplines.

In Chapter 2, in addition to providing an extensive historical review of retention, I also include a summary of data compiled nationally and at the institutional level regarding persistence and graduation rates. At the institutional level, I discuss the persistence and graduation rates of students on both the main and Punxsutawney regional campus. One purpose of this is to situate the regional campus numbers in the context of

the institution and to, in turn, situate the institutional numbers in a national context. This comparison gives readers one way to look at and understand the context—in numbers. As retention becomes a growing concern for colleges and universities, more and more schools are developing first-year experience programs like the one at IUP-Punxsutawney to increase student persistence. The university wants to increase its retention and graduation rates, but it also wants to offer access to education to an at-risk population. It believes it can achieve both of these goals by admitting these students and offering them additional support in a smaller campus environment. Considered in the context of this data, IUP-Punxsutawney makes complete sense.

The historical overview of retention research in this chapter shows that the goals of retention research have changed over time. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when J.B. Johnston and John McNeely conducted their studies, the goal of retention research was to *predict* student attrition rather than to *prevent* it. During this time, institutions were more concerned with admitting students whose academic records indicated they were, indeed, “college material” than they were with increasing access to women, minorities and the middle and working classes. The field of retention studies shifted its focus to preventing student attrition in the 1950s and 1960s when, primarily as a result of government intervention, access to education increased for these groups. This shift in focus is also the result of a change in student goals too. Before this time, people did not enroll in higher education to necessarily earn a degree. However, a college education started to be viewed in the 1950s as a way to increase social mobility and economic status. Like the students in the setting of my research, many of these students who were new to higher education were also considered at-risk or “underprepared” by their respective institutions.

This led to the retention research of the 1950s and 1960s that emphasized the isolation of various student characteristics, such as family background and student motivation, and considered their impact on student attrition. The research at this time was focused on student attrition as psychological—originating from within the student. And although scholars have returned to psychology as a way of understanding the dropout process (see Bean & Eaton, 2000), arguably the most useful models to come out of retention studies were the first models developed by Spady (1971) and Tinto (1975). Both Spady's model and Tinto's, which is a revision of Spady's, take into account that to persist, students must both academically and socially integrate into the university setting.

The most authoritative research in the field comes from the *Journal of College Student Retention* and the *Journal of the First-year Experience and Students in Transition*, the most recent of which reflects a theme I call “comfort and sense of belonging”, a facet of social integration. This recent research, including the work of Dixon Rayle, Robinson Kurpius and Arredondo (2007), speaks in particular ways to the setting of my research. Notable about the work of these scholars is their investigation of what they term “university comfort” on student persistence. They define this as, “perceptions of warmth and receptivity in the university environment, a sense of cultural congruity and level of perceived academic stress” (p. 328). The authors note that “universities continue to reflect Euro-American, male-dominated, middle class perspectives” and because of this, “women may find themselves in an environment where their personal values...are not supported. This sense of not fitting in or feeling culturally incongruent in the university setting can result in less university comfort and often is related to increased academic non-persistence decisions” (p. 328). Although the research

of Dixon Rayle, Robinson Kurpius and Arredondo focuses on women, their work can be considered in the context of IUP-Punxsutawney's minority students as well. The data presented in Chapter 4, from the maps, surveys and interviews, argues that these students do like feel like they belong in Punxsutawney and some have even been told by people in the community to "go home".

In Chapter 3, we considered how this study makes a unique contribution to both composition and retention research. Studying retention as someone grounded in composition studies is important to my own field in ways that I have already described. In turn, composition studies has a tradition of research that is grounded in the lived experience with the works of scholars like Brandt (1998), Cushman (1998), Delpit (1995), Heath (1983), Heller (1997) and others that I discussed in Chapter 3, from which the field of retention—a field that has been historically dominated by empirical, quantitative research—stands to benefit. Research that focuses on the lived experience reveals complexities that purely quantitative research often masks. Although in my own data analysis, I took quantitative measures to give the reader the "bigger picture", I also took care to discuss the intricate nature of experience that the numbers represent. We did not only get an understanding of students' experiences from quantitative data, but more importantly, we get a sense of their experiences through many of their own words.

In this chapter, we saw the role that my own immersion in the research setting had on the study. Simply put: if I had never lived or worked in Punxsutawney, I would not have undertaken this research. My interest in this research is directly related to my own experiences in the setting. At first, I was a graduate student who came to IUP-Punxsutawney just as much an outsider as many of the campus' students. Later, I

returned to the campus to begin my research, focused mostly on a desire to better understand my own experiences transitioning into the setting and wondering what this process was like for the students who also came to Punxsutawney from urban areas.

The connection of this research to composition did not become apparent to me until, halfway through this study, I was hired by the university as a temporary faculty member to teach first-year writing on the regional campus. In the classroom, I faced an overwhelming amount of student resistance that, admittedly, made me wish that some days I was teaching somewhere else. What I define as “resistance” manifested itself in poor attendance, endless class disruption, students constantly asking *why* they had to “write this” or “do that” and more work turned in late than on time. My students tried my patience in ways that I never imagined, but I assumed the ever-present feelings of being overwhelmed and exhausted had more to do with me being a new teacher than anything else. And the more hours I logged in the classroom, the better I assumed things would become. I would develop confidence, plan more extensively, anticipate every possible question and try to smile more. In turn, they would come to class, listen, stop rolling their eyes and turn their work in on time. However, I quickly learned that my colleagues, some who had been teaching for decades, shared my frustrations, and the common sentiment became, “Teaching here is hard.” To me, this begged an important question: *Why is it so hard?*

In Chapter 4, I present data from student-generated maps and surveys in an attempt to address this question. In my own analysis of the maps, I found that, as a whole, the lived experiences of the African-American students in Punxsutawney were more limited than those of the white students. This is supported by the high volume of

maps by African-American students in Category 1, *Just School*, and Category 2a, *School and Community, Few Places*. The prevalence of places like Comet, Wal-Mart and McDonald's demonstrates that when off-campus, students spend more time in these places that provide basic necessities—places they *need* to go—than they do in voluntary, recreational spaces, like churches, the community center or the local park. According to the data, it is white students and specifically, local students, who are more familiar with these places.

In this analysis we also see that on some maps, students indicated a stronger connection to the campus and community than on others. Some students illustrated a positive relationship with and connection to their surroundings with the use of “my” and representations of themselves on their maps (see Figure 32). Other students seem to indicate a forced connection or relationship by representing the school as jail (see Figure 25), and still other student maps point to a total lack of relationship with or connection to their surroundings by representing their experience as movement between two indistinct spaces (see Figure 26).

My focus on students' lived experience continues in the analysis of the coding of this same data from an outsider's perspectives. This coding, displayed in Table 7, also supports my earlier findings that the experiences of many students are limited to the campus, as well as popular food and retail locations. The reader will recall that excluding dorms, campus spaces, including the Learning center as a whole, classrooms, the cafeteria, etc. were present on the maps in the highest frequency, accounting for 21% of all of the locations on the maps. Retail locations, such as Wal-Mart and Rite-Aid, were present in the next highest frequency, accounting for 14% of all of the locations. The

results also reiterate that not many students feel a personal connection to the campus and/or community as there are 106 homes/dorms included on all the of the drawings, but only 32 of these were identified as belonging to the student with “my house”, “my room”, “my apartment”, etc. Lastly, analysis of the outsider’s coding reveals that students who come to IUP-Punxsutawney and move to Punxsutawney as outsiders experience the community in a way that is much more limited than students who are from the community. This is evident in the fact that recreational spaces, local retail and places outside of Punxsutawney are primarily referenced by students who are from the community, with 50% of these places appearing on maps from Category 2c, *School and Community, More Local Places*, 10 out of 12 which were drawn by local students.

The results of the survey further support the conclusions developed from the analysis of the maps. Similar to the results in Table 7 of Jennifer’s outsider coding, in the survey results students indicate a high level of familiarity with retail food and retail chain locations. The two most popular locations are Wal-Mart and McDonald’s. These results, as reported by the students, also show that the African-American students are much less familiar with local businesses than the white students. Although a lack of transportation is one possibility for these students being more familiar with the businesses within the walking distance of the campus, I point that this must not be the only factor as they are very familiar with McDonald’s, as well as Rite-Aid, but many have never heard of the coffee shop that is less than a block from both of these places.

To better understand why the African-American students seem to have more limited experiences in the community, as the above data suggests, I shared with the reader numerous accounts of lived experienced on race-related issues. With this data I

argue that, as a whole, the African-American students do not feel accepted in the community, with many reporting being victims of various acts of prejudice. The accounts of several white students suggest that these students also experience difficulty adjusting to a diverse environment.

### **Interpreting the Results**

The data presented in this study illustrates that students at IUP-Punxsutawney face difficulties integrating into the university environment. It is useful, as a compositionist, to consider the data in terms of contact zone pedagogy. The lived experience of Punxsutawney students gathered in maps, surveys and interviews is reflective of what Mary Louise Pratt (1991) defines as *contact zones*, or “social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (p. 34). In the context of this study, the university, the campus and Punxsutawney are all potential contact zones—spaces where the culture of an at-risk, minority population clashes with the dominant, white, Eurocentric cultures of the university, the campus and the town of Punxsutawney.

Since the publication of Pratt’s essay two decades ago, numerous scholars in composition have considered what teaching and student learning *look like* in the contact zone. This includes the work of Beauvais (1996), Bizzell (1994), Ferreira and Mendelowitz (2009), Gottschalk (2002) and Maxson (2005). Pratt proposes that this includes “...identifying with the ideas, interests, histories and attitudes of others” and establishing “ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect” (p. 40). Although anyone who

desires to teach in an open, democratic and potentially empowering environment would be in support of what Pratt suggests, beyond the example of her son receiving positive feedback on an assignment in which he critiques school—a critique that is ignored and masked by his teacher’s star on his paper—she offers nothing about how she has responded to this “clash” of cultures in her own classroom.

Richard Miller (1994) critiques Pratt for not showing us “how her students negotiated this struggle in their own writing or how their teachers participated in and responded to their struggles on and over ‘the line’” (p. 391). Furthermore, he argues that our professional training does not prepare “teachers to read and respond to the kinds of parodic, critical, oppositional, dismissive, resistant, transgressive and regressive writing that gets produced by students writing in the contact zone of the classroom” (p. 396). He notes that we are more likely to recognize the “pedagogical shortcomings of restricting [our] commentary to the surface features and formal aspects of writing” when responding to a paper in which a student unapologetically expresses racist attitudes than we are in one about a summer vacation (p. 396). Responding to the former is not something for which we have been properly trained.

Miller focuses his argument on the very practical issue of responding to student writing, but I think we should also consider that our professional training not only fails to prepare us for how to respond to resistant and oppositional writing in the contact zone, it also does not prepare us for how to respond to resistant and oppositional *students* in the contact zone.

In “Frontiers of the Contact Zone”, Thomas Phillion (2002), describes secondary English teacher education as a “frontier” within the contact zone—a place where

beginning teachers "...have to negotiate the complexities of sociocultural norms and expectations that shape everyday life in spheres beyond that of the university..." (p. 83). Through the seminar in student teaching course that Phillion describes, students "become aware of the wide variety of ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds that exist in schools and literacy classrooms, as well as the complex ways in which these backgrounds inform, influence, promote, undermine, and disrupt teaching and learning" (p. 82-82). In short, these beginning teachers learn that they do not teach "in a vacuum" and that what happens in their classrooms is not immune to what happens outside of them.

Although I was never trained to teach secondary English, I remember numerous discussions throughout my graduate coursework that revolved around the very same issues. We often talked about understanding "where students come from" and how their backgrounds and the "baggage" that they bring with them into the classroom influences their behavior and performance therein. However, these conversations always ended in two familiar places: we would discuss how to comment on a student's writing in a way that is mindful of this "baggage," or we would discuss how to craft assignments that took into account the diversity of our students.

Like most of my colleagues, I comment on my students' essays in the quiet privacy of my home or office. With the exception of face-to-face writing conferences, the student is rarely present when I comment on his/her work, and even in the instance of a conference, I have developed and written my comments before the student arrives. Moreover, students are also not present when I develop my assignments, lesson plans and class activities. In both instances, I have time to reflect, to plan, to *think through* what it is that I am doing. And although we know the most carefully crafted comment can be

misinterpreted and the “best laid” lesson go terribly awry, I place emphasis here on the time, outside of the classroom, in which I do these things. I can fully take into account “where the student is coming from” if I have the time to do so. In this way, I am not always in “full contact” with the contact zone. However, the daily interactions of the classroom require a much more immediate response. Therefore, I argue that we develop pedagogy that extends beyond developing assignments and commenting on student writing and that better represents our struggles to respond to and respect our students in our day to day and moment to moment interactions with them. Before I more specifically define what I mean by this statement, I want to remind the reader of the complex nature of the research setting.

The students’ experiences gathered throughout this study illustrate that the social transition into the first year at IUP-Punxsutawney is difficult for both the white and minority students. The diversity of the campus could be considered “culture shock” to the white students who are either from Punxsutawney or who come to Punxsutawney from rural areas that also lack diversity. The differences between the campus environment and where they are from, as well as their descriptions of witnessing an act of prejudice for the first time, are detailed in the previous chapter. However, despite the difference that exists between the diversity of the campus and their hometowns, for most of them, the town itself bears a resemblance to the places in which they grew up and with which they are very familiar. And even if, like me, they come to Punxsutawney from diverse, urban areas, to see themselves in their new environment, they need to only set foot off campus.

For the minority students, the struggle to “fit in” to their new environment is arguably more difficult. Due to the racism and prejudice that many of them report experiencing in the community, it is not surprising that most of the 30 maps in the *Just School* category were drawn by African-American students. This discussion also gives us another way to consider Figure 25, one of the maps from the *Just School* category that was included in the last chapter. In Figure 25, the reader may recall that the student represents IUP-Punxsutawney as jail. In my earlier discussion, I noted that this could have something to do with the fact that the student has been placed on the campus by the university. She is “doing time” at IUP-Punxsy. In light of the prejudice that many students experience out in the community, it is possible that her representation of IUP-Punxsy as jail is also about being confined to this one place, the campus, due to not being accepted in the other, the community.

Furthermore, likening herself to a criminal is interesting. For the most part, when people are incarcerated they understand the reasons behind their incarceration. However, in interview conversations, many students expressed an uncertainty about the reason behind their placement on the campus. Lana, an African-American student from Philadelphia, notes during her interview, “They [the university] didn't tell me why I was here. They just told me I got accepted here, but I'm going to guess that my SAT scores weren't as good. But then I also get a lot of like, a lot of people say that this is like a pit-stop...It's not a real college”. Not being told why she is at Punxsy can be likened to Lana asking, *What did I do?* To students who are uncertain about why they are at Punxsutawney, the placement feels unjust—like being wrongly convicted.

In addition to expressing uncertainty, many other students were indignant about their placement, which they expressed during interviews as, “I don’t belong here” or “I’m not like these other kids”. This can be likened to: *I didn’t do it*. In contrast, other students, like Staci, one of the students profiled in Chapter 1, know they are there because they entered college with grades that fell below standard admissions requirements. Staci notes in her interview, “I got a letter saying uh you know you've been accepted to IUP, but you placed in the Punxsutawney campus. So I just I thought [sighs] I'm going to the regional campus. [Laughs]. That's what I thought like at first. I'm not smart enough to go to main campus...” Like Staci, Emily, a white student from a rural community outside of Johnstown, PA, also seems to understand the reason for her placement: “Because in high school I mean, I mean I tried but like I kind of just like blew it off. And that's probably why I'm here.” To students like Staci and Emily, placement on the Punxsutawney campus is punishment for doing something *wrong*—like not being “smart enough” or “blowing off” school—for which they now must “serve time”.

The majority of the students on the branch campus are thought to be lacking the skills necessary to succeed in the university—skills that they should have acquired in their past academic lives. They enter the university deficient and lacking and on the Punxsutawney campus, they can acquire what they lack—basic skills and knowledge of how to be a student who can succeed in the university culture. The central finding of this research is that my classroom experiences, like those of many teachers, can be interpreted as a direct result of students’ difficulty to socially integrate and “fit in” to this university culture. Because the campus itself is confined to one building, the “university environment” in this instance is both the campus and the community. Although I am not

denying that their “at-risk” status and lower academic skills are not responsible for some of the difficulty that I faced, I argue that the struggle of these students to adjust to their new surroundings and the tension that goes along with this is equally responsible for this classroom behavior, the resistance that I described above. Therefore, I also argue that to teach in this contact zone, and in others like it, our pedagogy has to extend beyond the traditional work of the classroom. In addition to taking time to carefully craft assignments and respond to student writing in ways that are mindful of the difficulties that students face as they transition into this environment, we must also pay closer attention to the daily interactions of the classroom, where it arguably matters the most. We must learn to foster mutual respect by showing students what it looks like, but thinking “on our feet” is not easy, and in this environment, it is not something for which any amount of training can prepare us.

To illustrate, forever aware of my position as the authority figure in the classroom and of the fact that I am white and at least half of my students were minorities, I spent much of my time teaching at IUP-Punxsutawney learning how to interact with students. I taught with a hyper-awareness for the situation—to the point of near paranoia. I was afraid to be viewed as anything other than “fair” by any of my student, and as a result, I struggled with how to address class disruptions and enforce course policies, particularly if the student disrupting class or not abiding by the policy was a minority student. I was fearful of any disciplinary action against a minority student who was habitually rude and disrespectful being turned around into an accusation of prejudice, and I was equally fearful that if I said or did nothing, the white students in the room would feel like I was ignoring or avoiding the situation because the student was a minority.

Furthermore, I was often left silent at the front of the room when a student, white or minority, would make a comment to the group that could be perceived as offensive or insensitive to other people in the room. For the most part, students were not comfortable interjecting or speaking up for themselves, so more often than not, they deferred to me and waited for me to say something—to stand up for them or agree with them. I regret that, in some instances, I did not know what to say and that my silence was translated into agreement or compliance with the offensive remark, or if I did say something, it disregarded the comment and moved on to another topic. I was, so many times, like the teacher that Pratt describes who puts the star on her son’s paper and ignores the bigger issue, which was, in this instance, the critique of schooling that represents resistance and opposition to mainstream culture. She will only recognize and sanction his completion of the assignment and her evaluation of it. Like her, I often ignored the opposition, the clash and the conflict and asked everyone to get out their books.

### **Suggestions for the First-Year Experience**

Just as teaching writing is about much more than assigning papers and commenting on them, being a student is about much more than taking notes, turning in homework and studying for tests. In this environment, being a student, *and* being a teacher, are processes of social integration—of “fitting in” to university environment. This research well illustrates, through the accounts of my experiences and those of students, that these processes are often uncertain, messy, awkward and scary. With that, I turn now to make recommendations for how IUP-Punxsutawney could be *better*. I am realistic that I will not effect change at the institutional level. However, I can and do

hope that my suggestions are, at the very least, taken seriously if the university wishes to continue regional the campus' first-year experience program.

To begin, I want to offer what I see as a long-term solution to addressing the issues of race that are so prevalent in this research, from which all of my other suggestions stem. Already somewhat “at odds” with the university and embraced by academia at an arm’s length, IUP-Punxsutawney’s minority students find themselves in a town with a history of racial discrimination. And although it is easy and even accurate to say that not everyone in the town is intolerant, my data suggests that this sentiment is part of local history and very much embedded in the culture. Placing a population of minority students into a community that expresses a resistance to diversity is, in my view, irresponsible on the part of the university.

The solution I suggest would require radical change on the institutional level but change that would be in the best interest of this population of students. I recommend that the university modifies the first-year experience program. Instead of placing its most at-risk students on the campus through a system of remediation, it could offer the smaller campus environment to students who express a *desire* for this type of environment, as opposed to forcing it upon students it decides are in *need* of it. In this way, the regional campus could still function as a transitional campus—a place where students like Anna, the local student introduced to the reader in Chapter 1, could make a smooth integration into the university and take their first year of courses before moving on to the university’s main campus.

It is important to note here that IUP-Punxsy really does have much that it can offer students, including faculty and staff who genuinely care about student success and

learning. These are people who also realize the struggles that students face to socially and academically integrate into the university and who devote time and effort to developing cocurricular activities and events to assist in this process. Many of these cocurricular activities are sponsored the IUP-Punxsy Writing Center, including poetry slams, workshops, movie nights and a celebration of learning, at which students display projects from their courses across the curriculum. In other courses, faculty have coordinated service learning projects to help students get out into the local community, and through the efforts of the campus librarian, students have come together to celebrate Black History Month by reading poetry and presenting projects on influential African-Americans. In this environment, learning does often extend beyond the classroom, and there are efforts made to ease the transition of students into the university and community environment. IUP-Punxsy also has an administrative staff that advocates for its students, often making phone calls on behalf of students to assist in problems with housing or financial aid and at other times just listening to students vent about roommate problems or family issues that are interfering with their school work.

In addition to the efforts of this well-meaning group of individuals, the campus itself also has much to offer. The Living-Learning Center is a new building that provides students with access to a small library, newer computers and decent cafeteria food. The problem does not, therefore, originate with the idea of a transitional campus or with the people who work there. The problem, as I see it, stems from the placement of students on the campus. Teaching students who are somewhere where they *want* to be, in a place that does possess many good qualities, a teacher is more likely to be able to help students successfully integrate, both academically and socially, into the college environment.

It logically follows to address at this point what the university might do with the at-risk population who would, in my revised model, no longer be attending the regional campus, except by choice. These students could be still be admitted to the university under “Learning Support”, but they could, instead, simply start on the university’s main campus. They might even be housed together in an “academic support dorm” that includes its own tutoring center and computer lab. It is important that first-year students, particularly those who enter the university at-risk, have ready access to the resources they need to be successful. This is one of the features of the regional campus that is beneficial to these students. The university could also consider enrolling these students in two or three of their general education courses as a cohort group. This serves both sides of the integration “coin”. Establishing friendships with people whom they also associate with their courses helps students connect the social aspect of college with the academic. In a sense, it allows them to forge an academic identify through social interaction, particularly if they also study and work on homework with the friends who are in their courses.

Starting on main campus is important for this group of students for another reason as well. As I noted, learning how to *be* a student extends far beyond the typical academic work of the classroom; it is also a process of socialization into campus and community culture. In an environment comprised primarily of individuals who need help learning how to be students, there is no one to model the academic behaviors or the social behaviors that are essential to student success. On main campus, students would have peer role models—more capable and academically successful peers whom they could look up to in order to develop their own *student-ness*. As one student noted during an

interview, “Having no upperclassmen to look up to—to see how things are done. It’s just us and we don’t really know what to do”.

I suggest ending the placement of at-risk students at IUP-Punxsutawney for another reason as well. Although I noted that having readily available resources is important to the success of at-risk students, in my interviews with former IUP-Punxsy students, all three of them discuss the difficulty of transitioning to the main campus for their second year. One student, Tina, describes her transition to main campus as “starting college all over again”. She says, “It was like I was just dropped off and like told to just figure it out.” The drastic differences between the university’s main campus and the Punxsutawney regional campus make the first to second year transition for students like Tina equally as disorienting as their initial transition into the university. In some cases, the transition proves *too* disorienting.

An employee in the university’s Office of Institutional Research, who provided me with the persistence and graduation rates included in Chapter 2, noted that the university is looking closely at the persistence rates of students who start at IUP-Punxsy from the second year to the third year. This is because these rates are lower than what the university “thinks they should be” for this group of students. It is possible that students who become accustomed to the smaller campus setting and personal attention that is available to them at IUP-Punxsy have a harder time transitioning into a university environment of 14,000+ other students than they would if they just started college there in the first place. Of course, even in my revised model of the campus there would still be students starting college at IUP-Punxsy, but I think it is also likely that students who are identified by the university as in need of additional support—students who are less

familiar with academic success and how to be students—could more easily become dependent on the support they get in this smaller environment than students who start college with a higher level of academic skill and an awareness of how to be successful students.

To conclude, I am realistic that for the most part, nothing at IUP-Punxsutawney will change, but my goal in this section was to more specifically describe some limitations of the program that, even if the placement of students onto the campus continues, could be implemented. For example, the university could still develop a peer mentoring program, and it could also provide students with more opportunities to participate in college life on the main university campus, thereby making the transition to the main campus less disorienting. However, in both of these instances, transportation, and subsequently, money, become obstacles in the way of any such progress. And in light of recent budget cuts, it is unlikely that university will part with money for programs that it deems nonessential.

In fact, the reader may recall that in Chapter 2, I noted that the first to second year persistence rate for students who started at IUP-Punxsy during the 2009-2010 academic year was higher than the rate had been in recent years, and for the first time since the inception of the first-year experience program, the persistence rate of the African-American students surpassed that of the white students. During this academic year, the first-year experience included immersion in a Developmental Studies curriculum. As part of this curriculum, the students took three courses: DVST 150, Intro to Higher Education, DVST 160, Learning Strategies and DVST 170, Critical Reading. Although I cannot attest to the effectiveness of the courses themselves on student learning, the

critical component of the program was the fact that the instructors of the courses were also responsible for advising all of the students. Between their contact with their students/advises in the classroom and their contact with them outside of the classroom, each faculty member saw his/her students an average of two to three times each week. The non-classroom contact with students was the essential part of this program, and from my observations, it seemed to be effective. Important announcements were passed along to students, from the Dean or from other faculty members, during these advising sessions, and these instructors also organized numerous study sessions for their students in courses such as psychology and geography. At the end of the spring semester last year, only 12 students were dismissed from the campus due to academic failure, and 25 students who were on academic probation because their fall GPAs fell below a 2.0, were off of probation by the end of the spring semester and eligible to transfer to the university's main campus.

This year, the grant was cut and with it, one of the DVST faculty members who also advised many students. In addition, funding at IUP-Punxsy has also been cut for peer tutors. Although I cannot draw a direct cause and effect relationship between this loss of support and increased academic failure, the differences between last year and this year are worth noting. At the end of this academic year (2010-2011), 47 students were dismissed from the university, and only 17 who were on academic probation managed to raise their grades high enough to come off of probation by the end of the spring semester. I understand that money is scarce, but if the university is going to admit students under the premise that they will be provided with additional support, it has an obligation to

provide it. This furthers my argument that maybe this particular group of students would be better off starting on the university's main campus.

### **Future Studies**

In many ways, this research covers a lot of ground—particularly an undefined space between retention and composition studies. In defining this space, I had to make decisions to limit the scope of this study so that I could pay sufficient attention to the complexity of the setting. This was, arguably, what made completing this research so difficult, and from here, there are many places that we can go.

When I set out to do this research, I had the intention of conducting student focus groups. However, student interest in focus groups was low from the beginning of this study, and I was not successful in generating sufficient interest to go through with them. Not only do I think focus groups could be useful to better understanding IUP-Punxsutawney, but I also think that they should be comprised of students, faculty and staff. Having a non-classroom setting in which students could talk about the issues of transition with faculty and staff could add another layer to the data presented in this study.

Additionally, I had also intended to gather the perspectives of people from the Punxsutawney community. With the exception of local students, I admit that the voices of community members are absent from this conversation and for the setting to be even better represented, community members certainly have a place in this discussion. In particular, I see the data for this research potentially useful to local business owners. Chances are, many of them are good, decent people who would welcome IUP students and who are not aware of the prejudice that many of the students experience. If they

knew they might do more to invite students into their businesses. Certainly this is economically viable for them, but more importantly, it could help improve the social integration of students into the community.

Lastly, because the first-year experience program at IUP-Punxsutawney is relatively new, there is more than can be done to track students to see how they do over time. Unfortunately, institutional persistence and graduation rates do not account for students who transfer to other schools. However, with less than 300 students in its average cohort, a longitudinal study that accounts for students who transfer to another school would be more manageable. It would also be worth gathering the perspectives of students to find out *why* they transfer. Students who transfer to other schools have managed successful academic integration into the university. Therefore, their decision to leave the university could likely be the result of failed social integration. If the university better understood the reasons for their departure, it could consider institutional changes to prevent transfers.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In *The Politics of Remediation*, Mary Soliday (2002) argues that while institutions of higher education most often discuss remediation in terms of what students “need” – what Crowley (1998) calls the “discourse of student need”—“remediation exists also to fulfill institutional needs” (p. 1). In this case, the institution has the need to offer open, more democratic access to increased numbers of at-risk, minority students. However, while it does this, it must also work to maintain its standards. And although we rarely ever question or define these *standards*, we all seem to agree that we should have them and that we should not lower them. By accepting students to IUP and remediating them

through placement on the Punxsutawney campus, the university manages to achieve this goal of increased access to this specific population, but it also secures selectivity, and, therefore, its standards by separating these students from its main campus first-year cohort. This separation is physical, with the regional campus located 27 miles north of the main university campus, but it is also political and cultural. For instance, as many students remarked in interviews, main campus is where the “activity” happens, where events are hosted and where students have a chance to encounter greater cultural diversity, living and working with students with a range of backgrounds, ages, and educational experiences.

In composition, we can confront the larger social and political forces that bring at-risk students into our classrooms, and we can also make room for the forces that continue to act on them as they transition into the first year. However, I am not entirely sure that, in this particular setting, faculty are equipped to deal with the cultural collisions and racial issues that so strongly define this context. Still, however messy and complicated, these issues need to be addressed in the classroom and also recognized by the institution.

I will not argue whether or not these students should be in college because I do support increased access to education for groups that have been historically denied such access. I will also not deny that to succeed, these students require additional support. However, if IUP continues to place at-risk students on the regional campus, it must do everything it can to provide this support and help these students succeed.

## References

- 2010 Inspire Thru Attire T-shirt Design Contest. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.westwood.edu/locations/illinois/chicago-loop-campus/news-chicago-loop/?i=870>
- Abel, W.H. (1966). Attrition and the student who is certain. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 44(10), 1042-1045.
- Alfert, E. (1966). Housing and selection, need satisfaction and dropout from college. *Psychological Reports*, 19(1), 183-186.
- American College Testing. (2010). [Table on First- to second-year retention rates for four-year public institutions by level of selectivity and degrees offered]. *National collegiate retention and persistence to degree rates*. Retrieved from [http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/retain\\_2010.pdf](http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/retain_2010.pdf)
- Angers, W.P. (1961). Achievement motivation in college and prevention of dropouts. *Catholic Education Review*, 59, 34-39.
- Astin, A.W. (1964). Personal and environmental factors associated with college dropouts among high aptitude students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 55(4), 219-227.
- Astin, A.W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4), 297-308.
- Astin, A.W. (1991). *Assessment for excellence*. Old Tappan, NJ: Macmillan.
- Astin, A.W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, 40(5), 518-529.
- Banning, J.H., & Hughes, B.M. (1986). Designing the campus environment with

- commuter students. *NASPA Journal*, 24(1), 17-24.
- Barger, B., & Hall, E. (1965). Time of drop out as a variable in the study of college attrition. *College and University*, 41, 84-88.
- Bartholomae, D. (1985). Inventing the university. In M. Rose (Ed.), *When a writer can't write: Studies in writer's block and other composing process problems* (pp. 273-285). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Bartholomae, D. (2005). Writing on the margins: The concept of literacy in higher education. In D. Bartholomae, *Writing on the margins: Essays on composition and teaching* (pp. 111-127). New York, NY: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Bayer, A. (1968). The college dropout: factors affecting senior college completion. *Sociology of Education*, 41(3), 305-316.
- Bean, J.P. (1980). Dropouts and turnover: The synthesis and test of a causal model of student attrition. *Research in Higher Education*, 12(2), 155-187.
- Bean, J.P. (1981). *The synthesis of a theoretical model of student attrition*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association, Los Angeles, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED202444).
- Bean, J.P., & Bogdan Eaton, S. (2000). A psychological model of student retention. In J.M. Braxton (Ed.), *Reworking the student departure puzzle* (pp. 48-61). Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Beauvais, P.J. (1996). First contact: Composition students' close encounters with college culture. *The Journal of Teaching Writing*, 15(1), 25-49.

- Belcheir, M.J. (1997). *An evaluation of the early impacts of the cluster program and first year experience seminar on new freshmen*. Boise, ID: Boise State University. (ERIC Documentation Reproduction Service No. ED 409769).
- Bemis, J.F. (1962). *A study of undergraduate students who voluntarily withdrew from the University of Washington during 1959-1960*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.(AAT 6206581).
- Berger, J.B., & Lyon, S.C. (2005). A historical look at retention. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 1-29). Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Bertrand, J. R. (1955). Relation between high school average grade and academic achievement. *College and University*, 30, 166-181.
- Bizzell, P. (1992). *Academic discourse and critical consciousness*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Bizzell, P. (1994). Multiculturalism, contact zones, and the organization of English studies. *College English*, 56(2), 163-169.
- Bragg, E. W. (1956). A study of student withdrawal at "W.U.". *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 47(4), 199-202.
- Brandt, D. (1998). Sponsors of literacy. *College Composition and Communication*, 49(2), 165-185.
- Braxton, J.M., Hirschy, A.S., & McClendon, S.A. (2004). *Understanding and reducing college student departure* (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, Vol.30, No. 3). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Brofenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard

University Press.

Brown, F.G. (1960). Identifying college drop-outs with Minnesota Counseling Inventory.

*Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 39, 280-282.

Brown, W.F., Abeles, N., & Iscoe, I. (1954). Motivational differences between high and

low scholarship students. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 45, 215-223.

Carew, D.K. (1957). A comparison of activities, social acceptance, and scholastic

achievement of men students. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 36, 121-124.

Chickering, A.W., & Hannah, W. (1969). The process of withdrawal. *Liberal Education*,

15(4), 551-558.

Chiseri-Strater, E. (1991). *Academic literacies: The public and private discourse of*

*university students*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Congdon, W.L. (1964). Personality factors and capacity to meet curriculum demands.

*Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 42, 17-31.

Counihan, B. (1999). Freshgirls: Overwhelmed by discordant pedagogies and the anxiety

of leaving home. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 18(1), 91-105.

Crowley, S. (1998). *Composition in the university: Historical and polemical essays*.

Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Cushman, E. (1998). *The struggle and the tools: Oral and literate strategies in an inner*

*city community*. New York: State University of New York Press.

D'Abate, C. (2009). Defining mentoring in the first-year experience: One institution's

approach to clarifying the meaning of mentoring first-year students. *Journal of the*

*First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, 21(1), 65-91.

- Daniel, K.L.B. (1963). *A study of dropouts at the University of Alabama with respect to certain academic and personality variables*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (AAT 6409118).
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Demos, G.D. (1968). Analysis of college dropouts—some manifest and covert reasons. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 46, 681-684.
- Dixon Rayle, A., Robinson Kurpius, S.E., & Arredondo, P. (2007). Relationship of self-beliefs, social support and university comfort with the academic success of freshman college women. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(3), 325-343.
- Dole, A.A., & Weiss, D.J. (1968). Correlates of the reported determinants of college attendance. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 15, 451-458.
- Eckland, B.K. (1964). Social class and college graduation: Some misconceptions corrected. *American Journal of Sociology*, 70, 36-50.
- Editorial policies. (n.d.). In *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.cscsr.org/jcsr/index.php/jcsr/about/editorialPolicies#focusAndScope>
- Farnsworth, D.S. (1959). We're wasting brainpower. *National Education Association Journal*, 48, 42-44.
- Farnsworth, D.S., Funkenstein, D., & Wedge, B. (1955). *A study of the social and emotional adjustment of "early admission" college student*. Report for the Fund Advancement of Education.

- Feder, D. (1950). Student personnel work—I. Student population. In W. Monroe (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of educational research*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Ferreira, A., & Mendelowitz, B. (2009). Creating a dynamic contact zone: An undergraduate English course as a multilingual pedagogic space. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 8(2), 54-79.
- Fox, T. (1999). *Defending access: A critique of standards in higher education*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Freedman, M.B. (1956). The passage through college. *Journal of Social Issues*, 12, 13-28.
- Friedman, D.B., & Marsh, E.G. (2009). What type of first-year seminar is most effective? A comparison of thematic seminars and college transition/success seminars. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, 21(1), 29-42.
- Frost, W.L. (1999). It takes a community to retain a student: The Trinity Law School model. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 1(3), 203-223.
- Fullmer, D. W. (1956). Success and perseverance of university students. *Journal of Higher Education*, 27, 445-447.
- Geiger, R. (1999). The ten generations of American higher education. In P.G. Altbach, R.O. Berdahl, & P.J. Gumport (Eds.), *American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political and economic challenges* (pp. 38-65). Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Giaquinto, R. (2010). Instructional issues and retention of first-year students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 11(2), 267-285.

- Goble, R.I. (1957). A study of the student drop-out problem at Miami University. (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (AAT 0019272).
- Gottschalk, K.K. (2002). Contact zones: Composition's content in the university. In J. Wolff (Ed.), *Professing in the contact zone: Bringing theory and practice together* (pp. 58-78). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Grace, H.A. (1957). Personality factors and college attrition. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 35, 36-40.
- Graff, H.G. (1987). *The legacies of literacy: Continuities and contradictions in Western culture and society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Harris, B.A. (2007). The importance of creating a "sense of community". *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(1), 83-105.
- Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Heilbrun, A.B. (1964). Personality factors in college dropout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 49, 1-7.
- Heller, C.E. (1997). *Until we are strong together: Women writers in the Tenderloin*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Henry, J.B. (1967). Part-time employment and academic performance of college freshmen. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 8, 257-260.
- Hood, A.B. (1957). Certain non-intellectual factors related to attrition at Cornell University. (Doctoral Dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (AAT 0024765).

- Hull, et.al. (1991). Remediation as social construct: Perspectives from an analysis of classroom discourse. *College Composition and Communication*, 42, 299-329.
- Hull, G., & Schultz, K. (Eds.). (2002). *School's out: Bridging out-of-school literacies with classroom practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Iffert, R.E. (1957). *Retention and withdrawal of college students*. U.S. Office of Education, Bulletin 1957, no. 1. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Jacoby, B. (2000). Why Involve Commuter Students in Learning? In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Involving commuter students in learning. New Directions of Higher Education* (No. 109, pp. 3-12). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jaeger, A.J., & Hinz, D. (2009). The effects of part-time faculty on first semester freshmen retention: A predictive model using logistic regression. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 10(3), 265-286.
- Jex, F.B., & Merrill, R.M. (1962). A study in persistence. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 40, 762-769.
- Johnson, J., Duffet, A., & Ott, A. (2005). *Life after high school: Young people talk about their hopes and prospects*. New York, NY: Public Agenda. Retrieved from [http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/life\\_after\\_high\\_school.pdf](http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/life_after_high_school.pdf)
- Johnston, J.B. (1926). Predicting success in college at time of entrance. *School and Society*, 23, 82-88.
- Jones, E.S. (1955). The probation student: What he is like and what can be done about it. *Journal of Educational Research*, 49, 93-102.

- Kim, E. (2009). Navigating college life: The role of peer networks in first-year college adaptation experience of minority immigrant students. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, 21(2), 9-34.
- Kinloch, V. (2010). *Harlem on our minds: Place, race and the literacies of urban youth*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Knoell, D.M. (1966). A critical review of research on the college dropout. In L.A. Pervin, L.E. Reik, & W. Dalrymple (Eds.), *The college dropout and the utilization of talent* (pp. 37-62). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Koelsche, C.L. (1956). A study of the student dropout problem at Indiana University. *Journal of Educational Research*, 49, 357-364.
- Kuh, G., Palmer, M., & Kish, K. (2003). The value of educationally purposeful out-of-class experiences. In T.L. Skipper & R. Argo, (Eds.) *Involvement in campus activities and the retention of first-year college students* (pp. 19-34). Columbia, SC: National Resource Center on the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
- Kuh, G.D., Hu, S., & Vesper, N. (2000). "They shall be known by what they do": An activities-based typology of college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 41, 228-244.
- Landrum, E.R. (2002). The responsibility for retention: Perceptions of students and university personnel. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 3(2), 195-212.
- Lang, D.J. (2007). The impact of a first-year experience course on the academic performance, persistence, and graduation rates of first-semester college students at a public research university. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students*

*in Transition*, 19(1), 9-25.

Lins, L.J. (1954). Pre-university background and effect of various factors upon university success. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 33, 157-158.

Little, J.K. (1959). The persistence of academically talented youth in university studies. *Educational Record*, 40, 237-241.

Longwell-Grice, R. & Longwell-Grice, H. (2007-2008). Testing Tinto: How do retention theories work for first-generation, working-class students? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 9(4), 407-420.

Mackintosh, A. (1948). *Behind the academic curtain*. New York, NY: Harper Bros.

Marklein, M.B. (2010, March 16). What if a college education just isn't for everyone? *USA Today*. Retrieved from: [http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2010-03-16-1Acollegeforall16\\_CV\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2010-03-16-1Acollegeforall16_CV_N.htm)

Marks, E. (1967). Student perceptions of college persistence, and their intellectual, personality, and performance correlates. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 58, 210-221.

Marsh, L.M. (1966). College dropouts—a review. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 44, 475-481.

Maxon, J. (2005). “Government of da peeps, for da peeps, and by da peeps”: Revisiting the contact zone. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 24(1),24-47.

McNeely, J.H. (1937). *College student mortality*. U.S. Office of Education, Bulletin 1937, no. 11. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Miller, R. (1994). Fault lines in the contact zone. *College English*, 56(4), 389-409.

- Morris, J., Reese, J., Beck, R., & Mattis, C. (2010). Facebook usage as a predictor of retention at a private 4-year institution. *Journal of College Student Retention, 11*(3), 311-322.
- Mortenson, T. G. (2005). Measurements of persistence. In A. Seidman (Ed.), *College student retention: Formula for student success* (pp. 31-60). Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Mutnick, D. (1996). *Writing in an alien world: Basic writing and the struggle for equality in higher education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Nathan, R. (2005). *My freshman year: What a professor learned by becoming a student*. Ithaca, New York, NY: Cornell University Press.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). [Table on graduation rates of first-time postsecondary students who started as full-time degree-seeking students, by sex, race/ethnicity, time between starting and graduating, and level and control of institution where student started: Selected cohort entry years, 1996 through 2004]. *Digest of Education Statistics*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09\\_331.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_331.asp)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2010a). [Table on percentage of first-year undergraduate students who took remedial education courses, by selected characteristics: 2003-04 and 2007-08]. *Digest of Education Statistics*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_241.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_241.asp)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2010b). [Table on total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by race/ethnicity of student and type and control of

- institution: selected years, 1976 through 2009]. *Digest of Education Statistics*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_236.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_236.asp)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2010c). [Table on total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by sex, age, and attendance status: Selected years, 1970 through 2019]. *Digest of Education Statistics*. Retrieved from [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10\\_199.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d10/tables/dt10_199.asp)
- NCHEMS Information Center. (2009a). [Map illustrating six-year graduation rates of bachelor degree students in 2005 and 2008]. *Progress and completion: Graduation rates*. Retrieved from <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/?level=nation&mode=map&state=0&submeasure=27>
- NCHEMS Information Center. (2009b). [Map illustrating retention rates among first-time college freshmen returning their second year, four year total 2008]. *Progress and completion: Retention rates – First-time college freshmen returning their second year*. Retrieved from <http://www.higheredinfo.org/dbrowser/index.php?measure=92>
- Nelson, A.G. (1966). College characteristics associated with freshmen attrition rates. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 44, 1046-1051.
- Newcomb, T.M. (1962). Student peer-group influence. In N. Sanford (Ed.), *The American college* (pp. 469-488). New York: Wiley.
- Newcomb, T.M., & Flacks, R. (1964). *Deviant subcultures on a college campus*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Nipcon, M.F., Huser, L., Blanks, E.H., Sollenberger, S., Befort, C., & Kurpius, S.E. (2007). The relationship of loneliness and social support with college freshmen's

- academic performance and persistence. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(3), 345-358.
- Panos, R.J., & Astin, A.W. (1968). Attrition among college students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 5, 57-72.
- Pantages, T.J., & Creedon, C.F. (1978). Studies of college attrition: 1950-1975. *Review of Educational Research*, 48(1), 49-101.
- Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T. (1980). Predicting freshmen persistence and voluntary dropout decisions from a theoretical model. *Journal of Higher Education*, 51, 60-75.
- Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T. (2005). *How college affects students, Volume 2: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Pervin, L.A. (1966). The later academic, vocational, and personal success of college dropouts. In L.A. Pervin, L.E. Reik, & W. Dalrymple (Eds.), *The college dropout and the utilization of talent* (pp. 37-62). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Philon, T. (2002). Frontiers of the contact zone. In J. Wolff (Ed.), *Professing in the contact zone: Bringing theory and practice together* (pp. 79-101). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Pope, R.V. (1972). *Factors affecting the elimination of female students from selected coeducational colleges of liberal arts*. New York, NY: AMS Press.
- Pratt, M.L. (1991). Arts of the contact zone. *Profession*, 91, 33-40.

- Priya, D. (2009, April 18). College graduates tackle dismal job market. *CBS Evening News*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/04/18/eveningnews/main4954222.shtml>
- Punxsutawney Living. (n.d.) Retrieved from: <http://www.punxsutawney.com/living/>
- Rose, H.A., & Elton, C.F. (1966). Another look at the college dropout. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 13*, 242-245.
- Rose, M. (1985). The language of exclusion: Writing instruction at the university. *College English, 47*, 341-360.
- Rose, M. (1989). *Lives on the boundary: A moving account of the struggles and achievements of America's educationally underprepared*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Rose, M. (1995). *Possible lives: The promise of education in America*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Rose, M. (2009). *Why school? Reclaiming education for all of us*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Sanford, N. (1956). Personality development during the college years. *Journal of Sociological Issues, 12*(4), 3-70.
- Santos, S.J., & Reigadas, E.T. (2005). Understanding the student-faculty mentoring process: Its effects on at-risk university students. *Journal of College Student Retention, 6*(3), 337-357.
- Sewell, W.H., & Shah, V.P. (1967). Socioeconomic status, intelligence, and the attainment of higher education. *Sociology of Education, 40*, 1-23.
- Shaughnessy, M. (1977). *Errors and expectations: A guide for the teacher of basic*

- writing. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Silverman, S.C., Aliabadi, S., & Stiles, M.R. (2009). Meeting the needs of commuter, part-time, transfer and returning students. In S.R. Harper and S.J. Quaye (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practical approaches for diverse populations* (pp. 223-241). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Skahill, M. (2003). The role of social support network in college persistence among freshman students. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 4(1), 39-52.
- Skipper, T.L. (2002). Survey results and analyses. In *The 2000 national survey of first-year programs: Continuing innovations in the collegiate curriculum. The first year experience monograph series* (pp. 11-76). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED471258).
- Slocum, W.L. (1956). Social factors involved in academic mortality. *College and University*, 32, 53-64.
- Smith, D.N., Goldfine, R. & Windham, M. (2009). Comparing student learning outcomes in an independent section of a first-year seminar to a first-year seminar embedded in a learning community. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, 21(2), 47-63.
- Soliday, M. (2002). *The politics of remediation: Institutional and student needs in higher education*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Sorrentino, D.M. (2007). The SEEK mentoring program: An application of the goal-setting theory. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(2), 241-250.
- Spady, W. (1971). Dropouts from higher education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis. *Interchange*, 1, 64-85.

- Steinberg, J. (2010, June 15). Employers increasingly expect some education after high school. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/06/15/job-requirement/>
- Sternglass, M. (1997). *Time to know them: A longitudinal study of writing and learning at the college level*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Stone, D.B. (1965). *Predicting student retention and withdrawal in a selected state university college of New York*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (AAT 6600051).
- Stone, L.A., & Ryan, G.E. (1964). High school study habits and college freshman attrition. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 43, 188-189.
- Strayhorn, T. (2009). An examination of the impact of first-year seminars on correlates of college student retention. *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*, 21(1), 9-27.
- Student profile information. (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.iup.edu/upper.aspx?id=12201>
- Summerskill, J. (1962). Dropouts from college. In N. Sanford (Ed.), *The American college* (pp. 627-657). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Swail, W.K., Redd, K.E., & Perna, L.W. (2003). *Retaining minority students in higher education: A framework for success*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED483024).
- Swenson Goguen, L., Hiester, M., & Nordstrom, A. (2011). Associations among peer relationships, academic achievement, and persistence in college. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 12(3), 319-337.

- Taylor, D., & Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). *Growing up literate: Learning from inner-city families*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- The White House, Office of the Press Secretary. (2009, March 10). Remarks by the President to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on a complete and competitive American education. Retrieved from [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Remarks-of-the-President-to-the-United-States-Hispanic-Chamber-of-Commerce/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-of-the-President-to-the-United-States-Hispanic-Chamber-of-Commerce/)
- Tieu, T., & Pancer, S. (2009). Cocurricular involvement and first-year students' transition to university: Quality vs. quantity of involvement. *Journal of the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 21(1), 43-64.
- Tinto, V. (1975). Dropouts from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 45, 89-125.
- Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention*, 8(1), 1-19.
- Trent, J., & Ruyle, J. (1965). Variations, flow and patterns of college attendance. *College and University*, 41, 61-76.
- Trent, J.W., & Medsker, L.L. (1968). *Beyond high school: A psychosociological study of 10,000 high school graduates*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2011, April 8). College enrollment and work activity of 2010 high school graduates. Retrieved from: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.nr0.htm>
- United States Department of Labor. (2011). [Table]. *Employment status of the civilian population 25 years and over by educational attainment*. Retrieved from

<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t04.htm>

University of South Carolina's National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience

and Students in Transition. (n.d.) Mission statement. Retrieved from

<http://www.sc.edu/fye/center/index.html>

Upcraft, M.L. (1985). Residence halls and student activities. In L. Noel, R. Levitz, D.

Saluri, & Associates (Eds.), *Increasing student retention: Effective programs and practices for reducing the dropout rates* (pp. 319-344). San Francisco, CA:

Jossey-Bass.

Upcraft, M.L., Finney, J. E., & Garland, P. (1984). Orientation: A context. *New*

*Directions for Student Services*, 25, 5-25.

Upcraft, M.L., & Gardner, J.N. (Eds.). (1989). *The freshman year experience: Helping*

*students survive and succeed in college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action*

*sensitive pedagogy*. New York: The State University of New York Press.

Waller, C. (1964). Research related to college persistence. *College and University*, 40,

281-294.

Weigand, G. (1957). Adaptiveness and the role of parents in academic success. *Personnel*

*and Guidance Journal*, 35, 518-522.

Yoshino, R.I. (1958). College dropouts at the end of the freshman year. *Journal of*

*Educational Sociology*, 32, 42-48.

Ziskin, M., Hossler, D., & Kim, S. (2010). The study of institutional practices related to

student persistence. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 11(1), 101-121.

## Appendix A: Admissions letter – IUP Punxsutawney

**Office of Admissions**  
Sutton Hall, Suite 117  
1011 South Drive  
Indiana, Pennsylvania 15705-1046

**P** 724-357-2230 or 1-800-442-6830  
**F** 724-357-6281  
Admissions-inquiry@iup.edu  
www.iup.edu/admissions

Dear

Congratulations! You have been admitted to Indiana University of Pennsylvania's (IUP) **Punxsutawney Campus** located in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Your name has been entered on the freshman class roster in the **College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics with the intended major of Chemistry, BS** for the **Fall 2011** term.

After careful review of your academic record, the Admissions Committee believes that the academic environment and personal attention that you will receive is crucial to your continued academic success. Our review of your credentials has convinced us that you have the ability to meet the educational challenges at the IUP at **Punxsutawney Campus**, for your first year before completing your IUP education at the Indiana Campus.

In addition, IUP at Punxsutawney offers an exciting program called **Punxsutawney Summer Opportunity Program (PSOP)**. The program allows students to enroll in their first series of classes beginning in July and runs for 5 weeks. Details about this program can be obtained by contacting the IUP at Punxsutawney Campus at 814-938-6711 or by visiting [www.iup.edu/punxsutawney](http://www.iup.edu/punxsutawney).

Your acceptance at this time is provisional pending receipt of your official final high school transcript — as long as you at least maintain your current level of achievement and graduate from high school, we look forward to you attending IUP at the **Punxsutawney Campus**.

To reserve your place in class, we ask for you to submit the enclosed deposit form and follow the instructions for payment of the **nonrefundable tuition deposit of \$150**. (If using a check or money order, please make it payable to IUP). This deposit indicates your commitment to attend IUP and will generate information for you regarding housing, and dining, once received. Information regarding orientation/course registration will be sent starting mid-January to deposited students. **Please submit your tuition deposit by one of these deadline dates:**

**PSOP Summer Program - April 1**  
**Fall Only - May 1**

On campus housing is limited and given on a **first-come, first-served basis**. **However, students enrolling in the PSOP program are guaranteed on campus housing for the Summer/Fall 2011 terms.**

We want you to know that our staff is available to help you pursue answers to questions and concerns that arise. We welcome you to make a first or follow-up visit to our IUP at Punxsutawney Campus and our Indiana Campus to speak with staff and faculty members so you can learn how IUP will help you achieve your goals and prepare you to excel *Beyond Expectations!* Please feel free to contact us by phone, for the Indiana Campus at 724-357-2230 or 1-800-442-6830, or the Punxsutawney Campus at (814) 938-6711.

Kind regards,

Michael H. Husenits, Director of Admissions

Appendix B: Additional photographs of IUP-Punxsutawney campus



*Figure B1.* Staircase leading to second floor in the Learning Center.



*Figure B2.* Recreation Room in the Learning Center.



*Figure B3.* PossiPHILity outside the Learning Center.

Appendix C: Additional student maps

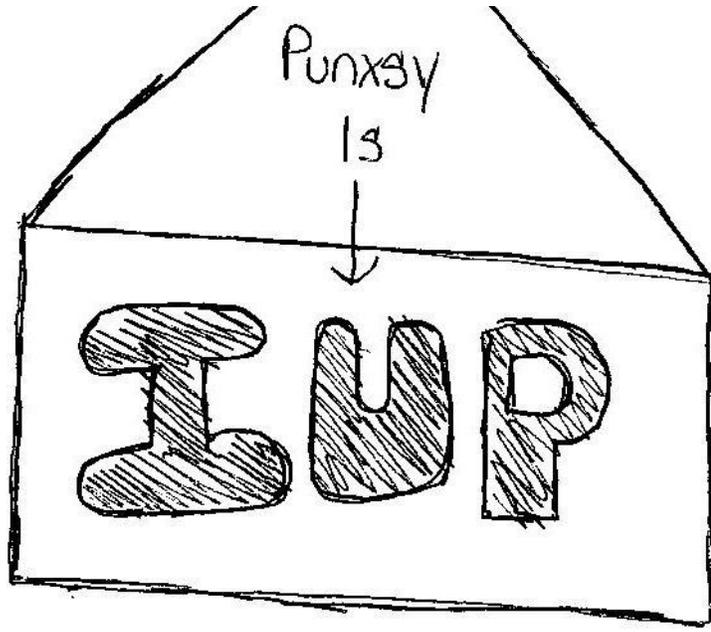


Figure C1. "Punxsy is IUP".

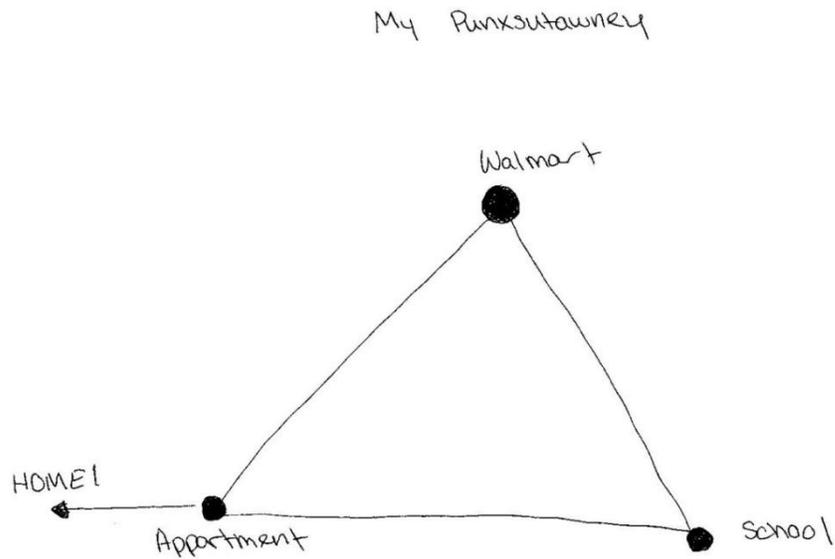


Figure C2. Three points.



Figure C3. Neighborhood sketch.

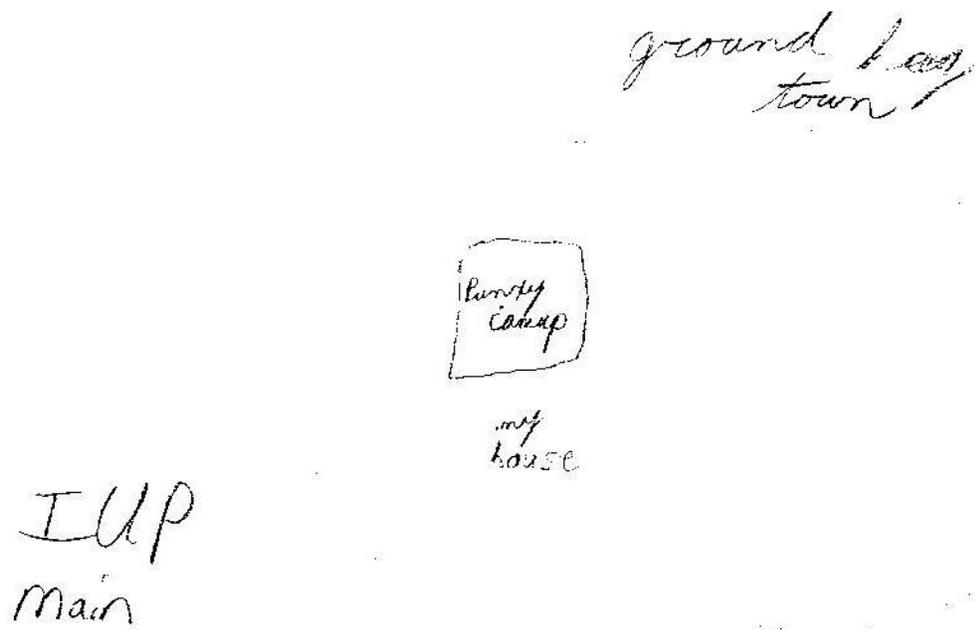


Figure C4. Groundhog town.

Punxsutawney Pa.

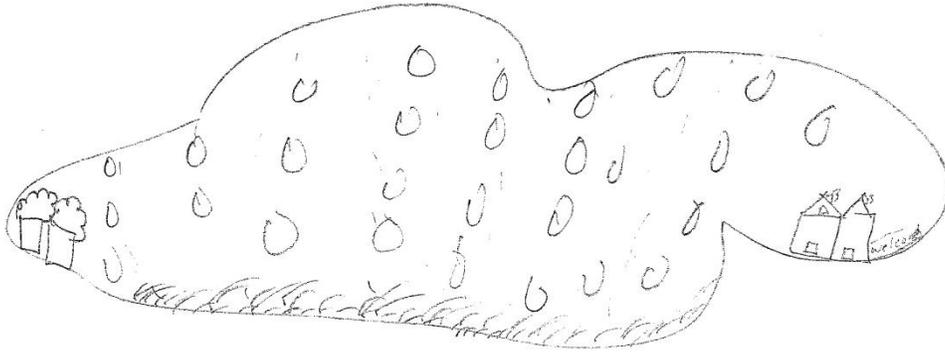


Figure C5. Rain or snow?

# My Runxstoney

Campus - very small  
PPI are friendly  
Classes are nice + small  
Food is okay at times  
Not a lot of activities to do  
Suites are really nice

Town - ~~B~~ Groundhogs EVERYWHERE!  
Also very small  
A lot of Caucasians (haven't seen an A.A.  
yet)  
Not a lot of businesses or urban stores  
↓  
food !!  
Some of the people are nice I have run into a  
few rude people

Figure C6. Groundhogs everywhere!

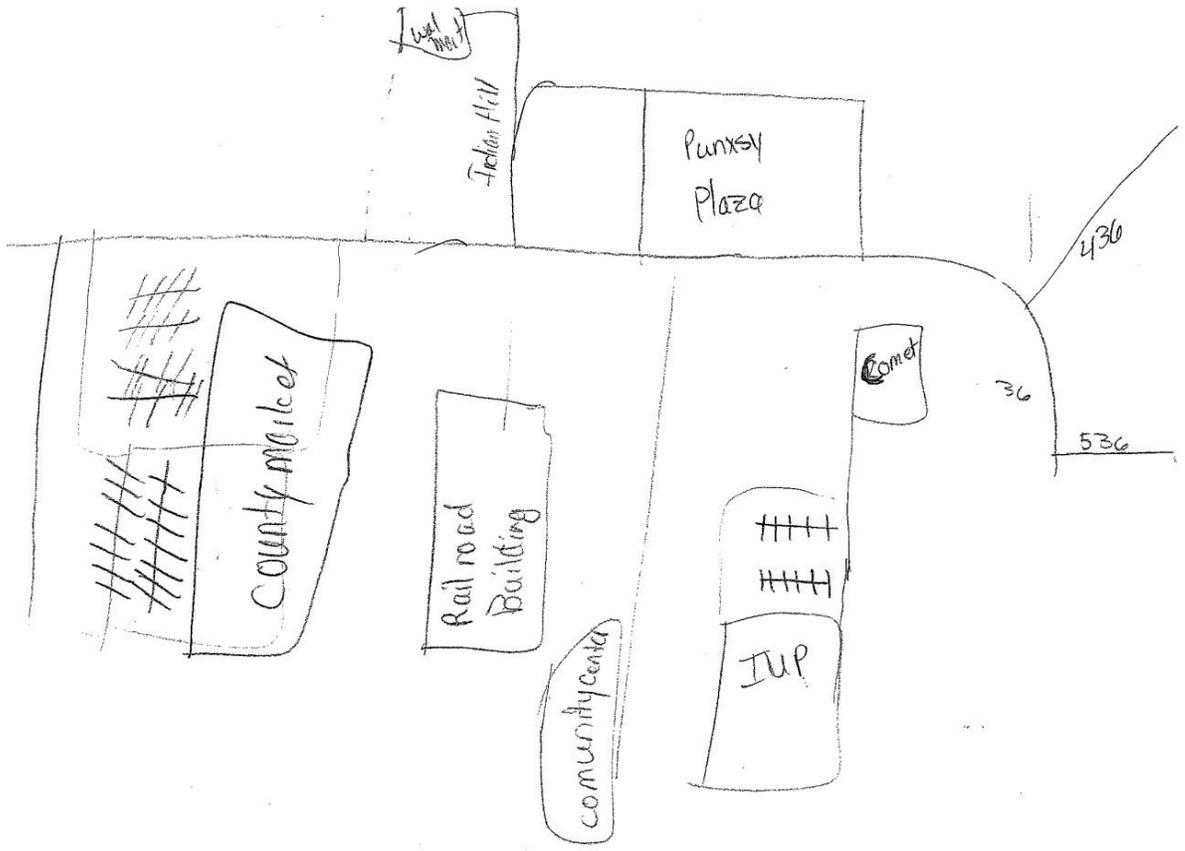


Figure C7. Railroad building.

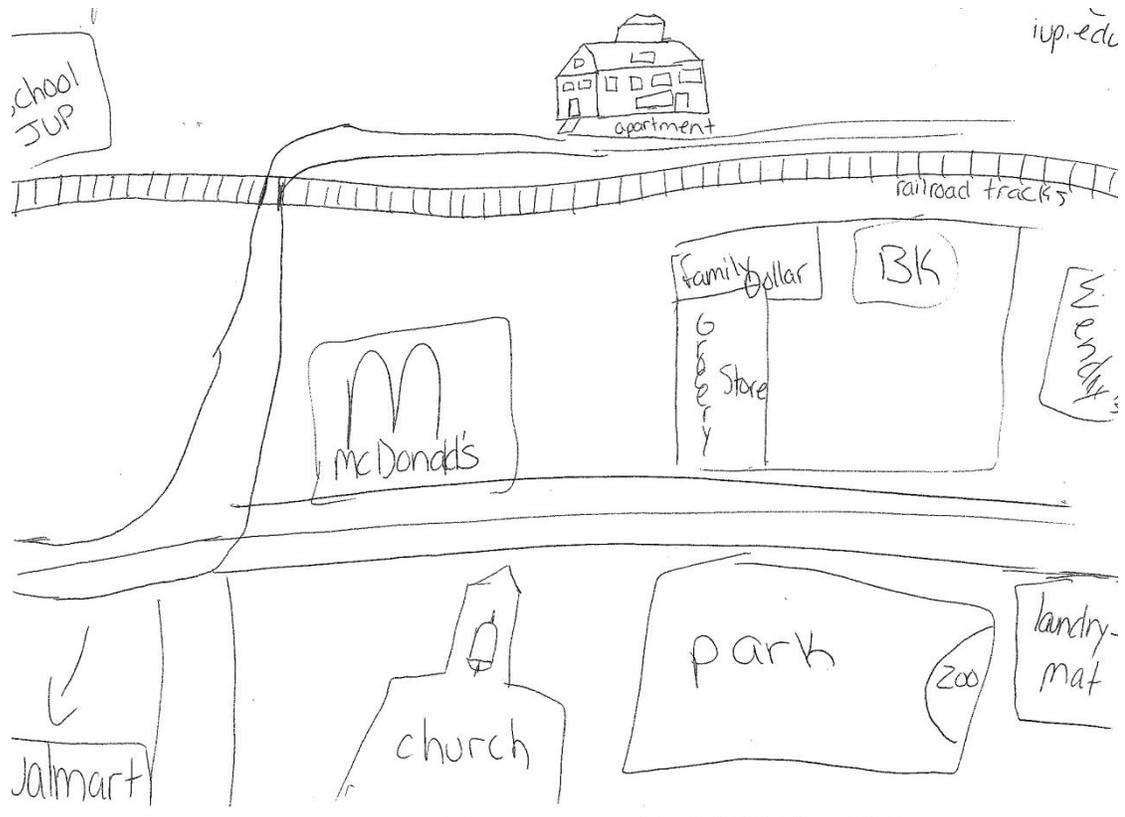


Figure C8. Railroad tracks.

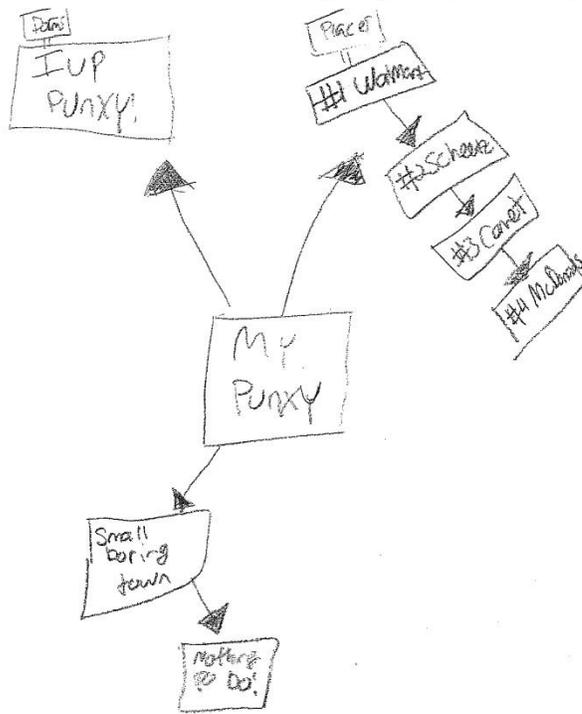


Figure C9. Small boring town.

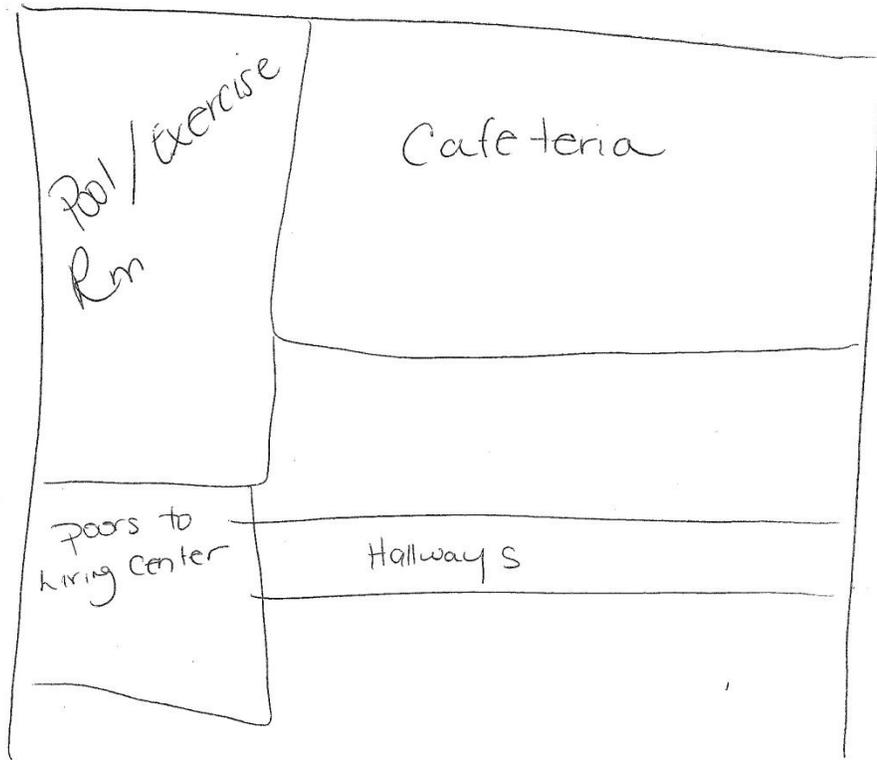


Figure C10. Learning Center sketch.

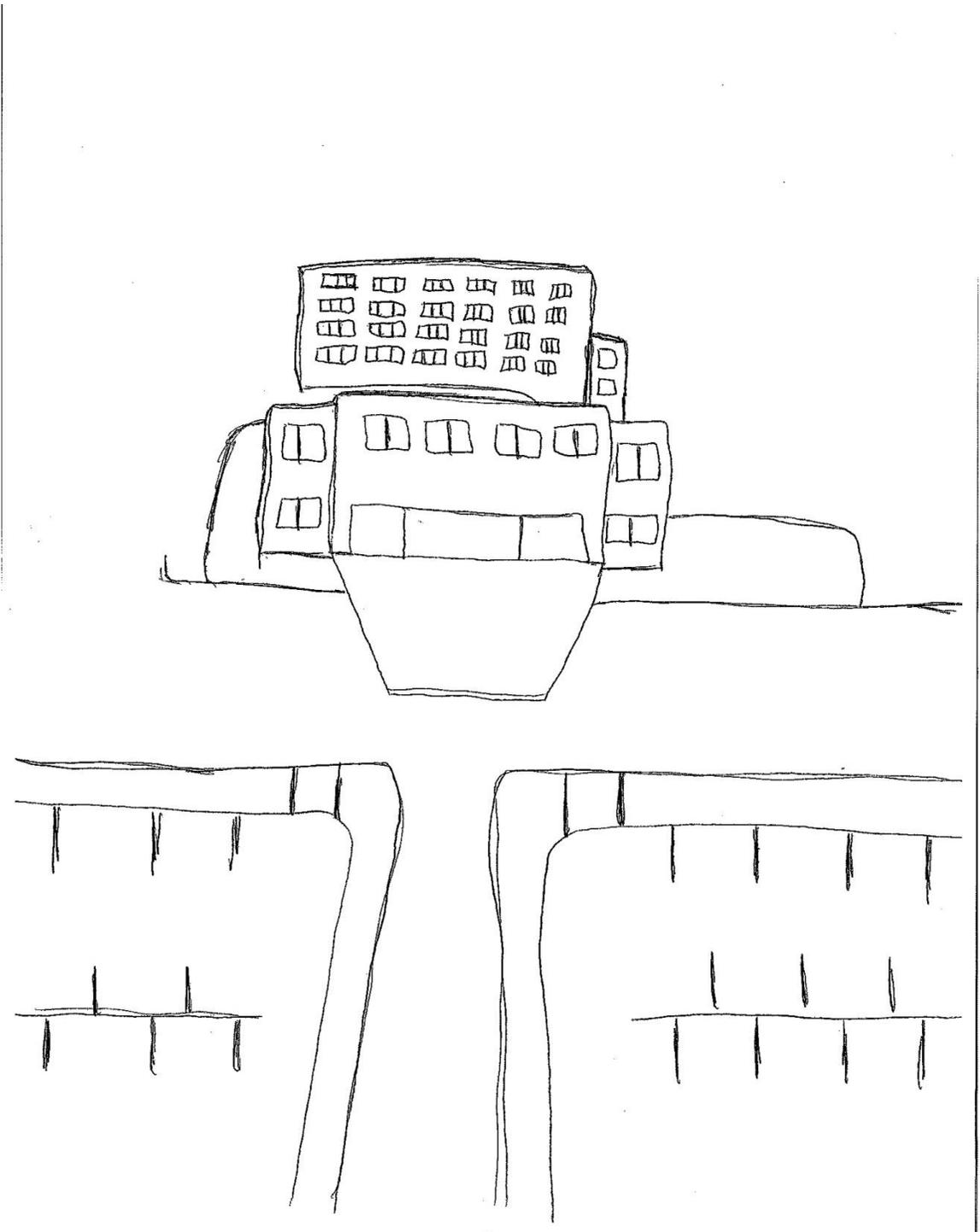
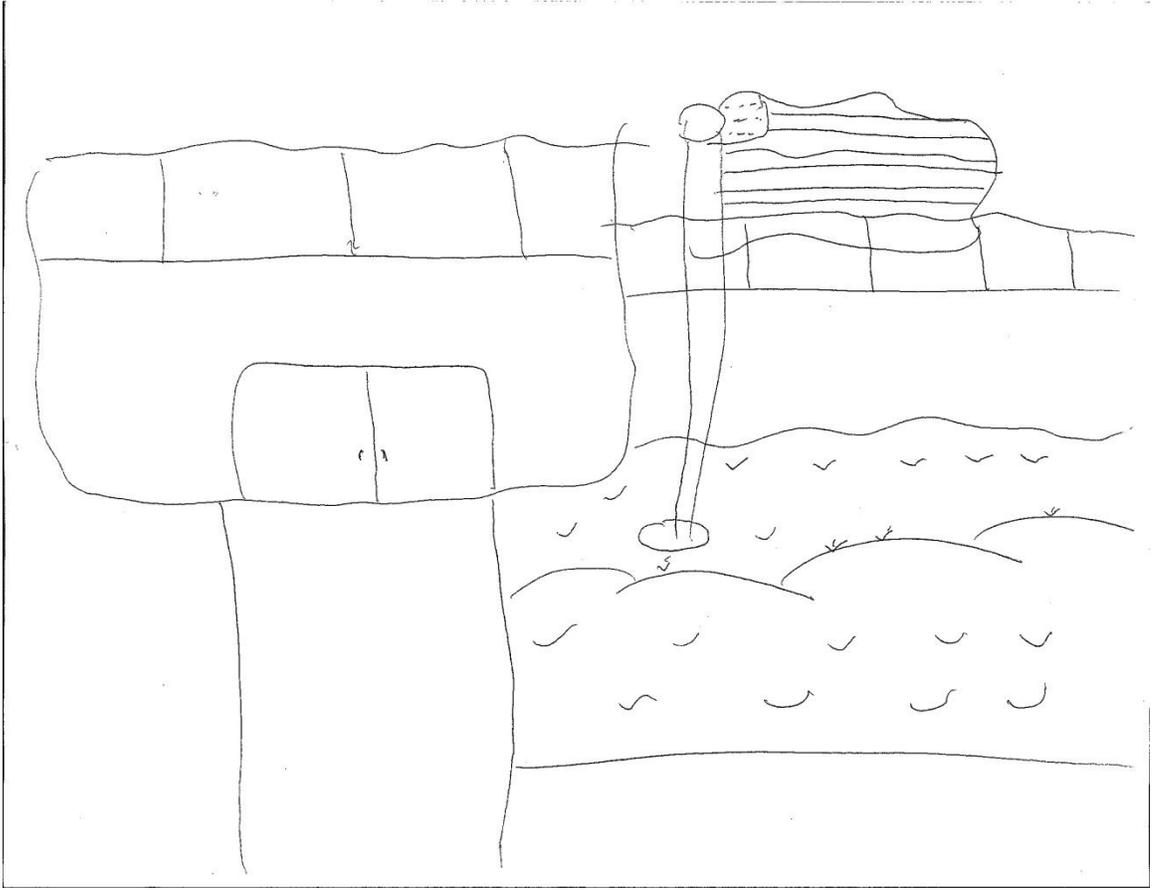
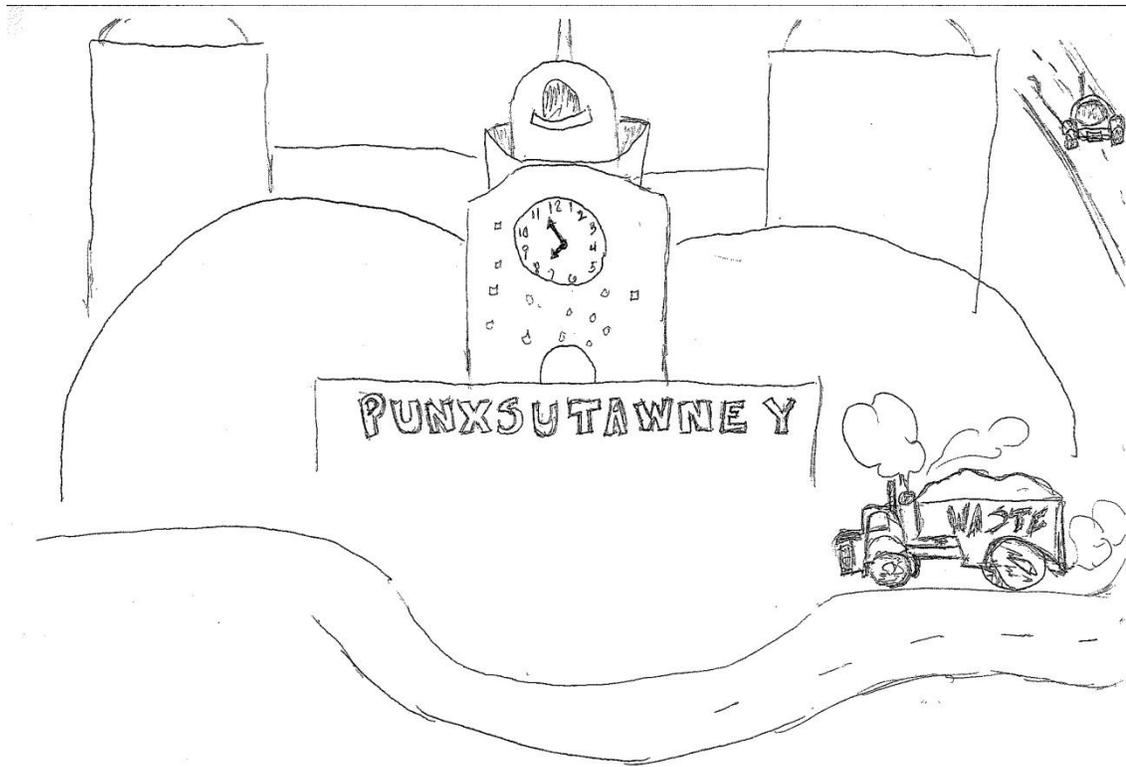


Figure C11. Parking lot sketch.



*Figure C12.* Campus sketch with flag.



*Figure C13. Waste in Punxsutawney.*