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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Elizabeth L. Morley

The Graduate School  
University of Kentucky

2005

LIVES UNDER CONSTRUCTION:  
A STUDY OF COLLEGE SOPHOMORES

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Education  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Elizabeth L. Morley

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Jane M. Jensen, Professor of Educational Policy Studies

Lexington, Kentucky  
2005

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### LIVES UNDER CONSTRUCTION: A STUDY OF COLLEGE SOPHOMORES

As individuals, college students make choices that both reflect their past lives and constitute their futures. In this research I examine the ways five college sophomores built their lives in the complex world of a research university campus. Using case study analysis I look at how the students negotiated the considerable academic and social demands of their daily lives. College impact models and literature about theories of practice and decision making inform the analysis. Human agency and fields of practice help to explain the behaviors of these students. The research reveals that students take a myriad of paths to negotiate the intricacies of the college context and construct their lives, but that they are guided along those paths by their goals for the future.

I interviewed five sophomores at a Doctoral/Extensive university repeatedly over one semester. I discovered that their families and their pre-college academic experiences mattered throughout their first few semesters as they learned to play the college game. Survival depended on their backgrounds, their skills, and the strategies they used to adapt to their new environment. The extent and quality of their interaction with peers, faculty, and other adults on campus also reflected their instrumentalism and indicated their efforts to find a space within the larger campus. Their adjustment to the field of the academy showed a commitment to vocational goals in the long and short term. My analysis illuminates the idiosyncratic process of choosing a major and the nature of a student's commitment to a discipline. Taken together, these categories of student life show a complex building process with some similarities and many individual variations.

**KEYWORDS:** college students, college sophomores, social theories, occupational aspiration, postsecondary education as a field of study.

Elizabeth L. Morley

July 21, 2005

LIVES UNDER CONSTRUCTION:  
A STUDY OF COLLEGE SOPHOMORES

By

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Dr. Jane M. Jensen, Director of Dissertation

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July 21, 2005

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DISSERTATION

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The campus of a large university in our time seems a confusing place with priorities and attractions pulling the faculty, students, administration, and staff in hundreds of different directions. Often these competing purposes appear to have little to do with education. As early as 1909, Woodrow Wilson lamented the distractions from education: “The side shows are so numerous, so diverting,—so important, if you will—that they have swallowed up the circus, and those who perform in the main tent must often whistle for their audiences, discouraged and humiliated” (cited in Horowitz, 1987, p. 102). With their temporary status on campus students may struggle to fit in to either the side shows or the main tent. However, large numbers of students complete their degrees with satisfaction and happiness.

I became interested in the ways that individual students found space for themselves and constructed their lives in the midst of the circus that is the large campus. Researchers have studied college students extensively and learned much about them as a demographic group. One set of researchers has looked at the impact college makes on students and offered theories to explain college going and staying. These impact studies take the broad view that students need to integrate with the academic and social systems of their institutions to increase the likelihood that they will graduate. Tinto (1993) particularly suggests that a student’s pre-entry characteristics combine with her commitment and subsequent interactions with faculty and peers to lead, or not lead, to successful completion of a degree. Because of forces within the larger society and culture that affect the student, the college impact models may be in need of elaboration (Braxton, 2000, p. 4). Elaboration could add a social and cultural dimension to the interplay between the person and the institution.

To refine and supplement our knowledge of students, I conducted a case study of five sophomores at one research university. I was particularly curious about the ways they negotiated their large campus with its attractions and distractions while they constructed their lives. The decisions these students made both reflected and constituted the lives they were constructing while they were in college. As I examined their specific

decision-making strategies, I came to understand that students negotiate the terrain of their campus in varied ways that may be more complex than the integration models would predict.

In addition to the college impact literature, my analysis of their stories relied on research on student interaction with faculty and other ways students are affected by their professors. I also examined historical and current work on student subcultures, particularly by Horowitz (1987), student development, and student motivation, particularly the emphasis on vocationalism (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005). The literature on how people make decisions clarified my analysis of these students' behavior. I found that the process each student uses is not necessarily a rational one but reasonable for that student, bounded by individual background and context. To explain how particular students made decisions and integrated or resisted integration into the campus, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice with its emphasis on agency, individual habitus, and field proved to be a useful framework. Human behavior, according to Bourdieu, takes place within fields, areas of social activity. The college world is one such field, and its players act as agents who build and change the field at the same time that the field influences their behavior. His concept of habitus explains that individuals bring their past experiences and behaviors to the field where they alter and revise them strategically as they learn about the context and struggle to succeed there.

Bourdieu argues that the accumulation of capital (behavior of value in a field) and translation of capital in one field into capital in another field motivate much human activity. People within a field have differing levels of capital so some members function at a higher status in the field than others. Education is widely perceived to provide capital, and people with less capital often rely on education to raise their status. Education beyond high school confers academic capital on a graduate who can then convert it into economic capital by obtaining a well-paying job. However, the theory of social reproduction claims that those who enter the field with a higher level of capital will be in a better position to accumulate more, thus reinforcing their original status. Several researchers who also used the work of Pierre Bourdieu including Walpole (2003), Bouveresse (1999), Berger (2002), and McDonough (1997) have applied social reproduction to educational settings including college choice and success.

The stories of this research project derive from interviews with five undergraduate students over their third semester in college—the beginning of their sophomore year. Sophomores were chosen because of their perspective on the important first year and because they were immersed in the significant work of the sophomore year—choosing and committing to a major. Although the data represent only snapshots situated in a particular time and place, these interviews allow me to examine closely the ways these students made decisions about their lives at that time. The stories also reflect the individual context of their behavior and how it evolved over the four months of the study. My research site provided a fertile environment for study and these five students offered a rich array of answers to my questions about the lives they were constructing.

My curiosity led me to seek better understanding of how students experience college and actively practice the construction of their lives. Because of my belief in the agency of the individual and the value of looking at each student as a particular and unique unit, I wondered how each student made specific choices about schoolwork and friends. Their daily negotiation of academic and social demands seemed significant, and the idiosyncratic process of choosing a major and the nature of commitment to a discipline also interested me. I was also curious about the extent and the quality of their interaction with their peers, with faculty, and with other adults on campus. Hu & Kuh (2002) claim that various traits of students “interact in complex ways to influence” the effort students put forth and the experiences they have. My research asked how we can understand and begin to explain those individual complexities.

### **Literature on College Student Success**

My understanding of these five students reflects the models of student persistence that are called college impact models (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 50). These models attempt to discover whether and how colleges affect their students by looking at the experiences of students in the classroom and in residence halls including interaction with faculty and with peers. They ask questions about the campus environment in order to find the ways it affects students. College impact models differ from developmental models that look more at the psychological attributes and changes in the individual student during the college experience. Obviously personal psychological characteristics

matter to a student's success; however, broader sociological influences also exert considerable force on a student. It is these influences that the college impact models attempt to understand.

Vincent Tinto's impact model of the interaction between student and institution has become a classic in the field. Beginning with the article "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research" in 1975, he theorized that students who fit or integrated into their college stood a better chance of staying in college and graduating. Integration can be defined as:

the extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that community or in the subgroups of which the individual is a part (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 51-52).

An individual's background experiences within the family and within the educational system together with personal attributes influence whether or not the student will integrate with campus values. Further impact comes from commitment to a goal (such as a career) or commitment to the institution. However, the crucial element of Tinto's theory is integration. Tinto believes that integration results from "satisfying and rewarding encounters with the formal and informal academic and social systems of the institution" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 51).

Tinto (1975) measures academic integration in two ways: grades and intellectual development. Grades are a form of interaction between students and the faculty as representatives of the institution. Both the students and the institution value grades highly, and students can be expected to translate good grades into "tangible resources for future educational and career mobility" (p. 104). A high grade point average indicates that a student has successfully matched the institution's "preferences for particular styles of academic behavior" (p. 104). Intellectual development as a measure is more slippery but also important for persistence. Tinto (1975) emphasizes that the individual must feel that her or his own intellectual growth matches the intellectual climate of the campus in order to persist. He cites evidence that students who feel their own intellectual growth surpasses the climate of the campus are likely to withdraw voluntarily, possibly to transfer. Grades may or may not reflect intellectual development, but each measure should fit with the institution for a student to have academic integration.



To integrate into the social system of the campus, the student needs to have satisfactory interaction with both faculty and other students in formal settings like clubs and informal ones like friendship groups. Social integration is so important that students with low grade point averages—those who have not integrated successfully into the academic system—may persist in college anyway because of strong affiliation with friendship groups. Understandably, excessive social interaction can detract from grade performance to the point of academic dismissal, but for most students, interactions with peers “can be viewed as important social rewards” of attending college (Tinto, 1975, p. 107). In fact his model argues that membership in even one small subgroup of campus is a “minimum condition for continued persistence” (Tinto, 1993, p. 121).

While contact with peers ranks highest in aiding a student’s integration, Tinto (1975) considers interactions with faculty and administrators within the social system as significant too. He suggests that successful encounters with faculty, although social in nature, may help a student integrate into the academic system as well. Within specific departments and disciplines, faculty contact may increase commitment to the major and the subculture it represents. Tinto (1993) admits that student-faculty interaction will not guarantee integration into the values and norms of the campus, but it should increase the chances that the student will understand and accept them. In fact he argues that lack of interaction “almost always enhances the likelihood of departure” (p. 117). Astin (1993) also measured student satisfaction with college and found that interaction with faculty contributed highly to students’ persistence to graduation and had a positive effect on “every self-reported area of intellectual and personal growth” (p. 383). Astin used positive answers to questions about talking to faculty outside of class, visiting a professor’s home, and working on a professor’s research project as indicative of student-faculty interaction. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) reported that frequent out-of-class contact with faculty resulted in gains in both career commitment and cognitive growth. They also found that students who did not previously see themselves as “college material” benefited from identifying with a faculty member. This was particularly true of female students and female faculty (p. 396). Positive interaction between a student and faculty can also positively affect the way that student views her college’s commitment to students, thus increasing her own commitment to the institution. Out-of-class interaction

depends largely on in-class communication. A negative professor attitude within class can subtly prevent students from seeking further interaction, or a student culture can discourage students from initiating interaction with teachers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 393; Tinto, 1993, p. 119).

Tinto's apparent distinction between social and academic integration may prove problematic to readers. Emile Durkheim, whose theories about suicide Spady and Tinto adapted to college dropout, described the need for people to fit into the social and intellectual realms of their societies, and Tinto changed these terms to "social" and "academic" when describing college life. However, separating the two areas can distort the actual experience of students. In the individual lives of students as they progress through college, the focus of my study, the academic and the social seem to be intertwined. Tinto (1993) points out that "actions in one domain almost always have ramifications in other domains of activity" (p. 120). Braxton, Bray, and Berger (2000) suggest "that the student experience may be much more seamless than it is often conceptualized" (p. 224). Beekhoven, De Jong, and Van Hout (2002) found "that fuzziness in the two forms of integration makes distinguishing between them impracticable" and ultimately decided to treat them as a complex whole. Both academics and social life are vital to students' campus experience and their future goals, and the drive for success in both areas motivates students to continue in college. Tinto (1993) theorizes that involvement in any form actually enhances learning because it promotes an increased quality of effort which boosts academic performance.

College impact models have considerable value to explain the survival of most students, especially those in the first year. They are common sense descriptions of what works in most students' lives—finding a group of friends and feeling comfortable or appropriately challenged in the classroom. There are aspects of the lives of students that integration theory may not account for. What motivates students to put forth the effort to earn high grades? Is that effort the same as accepting the norms and values of the campus (integration)? Even if they integrate into the field, why and how do students choose their major disciplines within the field? Beekhoven, De Jong, and Van Hout (2002) claim that "the [integration] model pays little attention to the active role individual students play in decisions that have to be made during their study career" (p. 579). By

looking at students as active agents, albeit influenced by background and environment, I could acknowledge and examine their strategic decisions and choices.

### **Literature on Decision Making**

The broader literature on the ways people make decisions also helps interpret the behavior of my participants. Formal operational thought, as explained by Piaget, describes the process adults use to make decisions. As children—who tend to see choices concretely—reach adolescence, they are able to visualize possibilities more abstractly. They weigh those options rationally and logically in order to make decisions. In the Piagetian scheme, formal thought becomes formal logic. Human judgment psychologists suggest that decision making is not so tidy. This group posits that the complexity of social life overwhelms peoples' processing capacity; therefore, they must oversimplify their choices rather than consider each one logically. As Simon explains, a person “constructs a simplified model of the real world and behaves rationally with respect to it” (cited in Shaklee, 1979, p. 329). Simon calls this process “bounded rationality.” Bourdieu agrees that humans assess their options systematically but stops short of calling this rational thought:

[W]ithout being rational, social agents are *reasonable*—and this is what makes sociology possible. People are not fools; they are much less bizarre or deluded than we would spontaneously believe precisely because they have internalized, through a protracted and multisided process of conditioning, the objective chances they face. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 129)

The concept of habitus helps to explain individual orientation that informs the decision-making process. McDonough (1997) explains habitus as “a deeply internalized, permanent system of outlooks, experiences, and beliefs about the social world that an individual gets from his or her immediate environment” (p. 9). Calhoun (2000) suggests that Bourdieu's habitus “means basically the embodied sensibility that makes possible structured improvisation” (p. 13). Bourdieu's definition emphasizes this creative aspect of habitus as “the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations” (cited in Wacquant, 1992, p. 18). Thus habitus—for my study of college students—includes pre-college characteristics and commitment which give students an internalized structure for making decisions and choosing behaviors in

new situations. Importantly habitus evolves over time as a student meets new circumstances. The temporal dimension of habitus is especially crucial for the study of young adults for whom college is a fresh experience. The student brings attributes to the campus but constantly revises behavior and habitus in response to events, people, and assessments that he meets there. Speaking specifically of career choices, Hodkinson (1999) argues “[h]abitus constrains, enables and influences career development, but does not determine it” (p. 266). Instead he claims habitus and career development shape each other. Habitus limits career decisions but those choices also mold or shape habitus.

A quarrel some critics have with Bourdieu is that the concept of habitus is too deterministic and mechanistic. Hodkinson (1999) describes the assessment of several scholars that habitus puts a person on an inexorable course that dictates behavior (pp. 261-262). Certainly applying an idea of inevitability to the package of aptitudes that a young student brings to college is unfair. Bourdieu himself (1992) replies:

Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable but not eternal! (p. 133)

It is this idea that habitus evolves that makes Bourdieu’s theories so appealing for the study of college students and their choices. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus as generative or even creative puts a human face on the way students conduct their lives and make their decisions.

Reasonable decision making, circumscribed by past experience, self-concept, financial realities, or other constraints, seems to explain the way most adults act on their choices so decision making is an important unit of analysis for the study of students. For example, McDonough (1997) argues that no high school student considers all of the possible colleges when deciding where to enroll but restricts the list by geography, family finances, friends’ recommendations, evaluation of chances of success, or other idiosyncratic criteria. The ultimate decision may not be the most logical choice but it is reasonable. In another study, Walpole (2003) suggests that socio-economic class complicates the decisions of college students. She uses Bourdieu’s concept of habitus which incorporates certain attitudes and behaviors that are specific to the family social class of a student to explain why students tend not to move to a different social class than

their parents. In her study, students from lower class backgrounds met with faculty less outside of class, were less involved in student groups, spent less time studying, and had lower GPA's; therefore, Walpole argues they were accumulating less academic and social capital (pp. 53-55). Students of all socioeconomic classes on a campus share the space of that institution and would seem to have the same decision options; however, students from lower socio-economic class backgrounds may lack a broad perspective of the value of capital accumulation and thus use decision-making strategies that restrict their academic options. Shaklee (1979) describes the results of reasonable decision making: "The actor's goal seems to be to meet his/her own performance criteria, which may fall short of optimal judgment, but will be sufficient in most situations" (p. 330). My interviews helped me appreciate the criteria these students used to make choices. Once the criteria are understood, it is easy to see them as agents operating in a context or field and to see their decisions as active strategies.

### **Fields and Capital**

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice that acknowledges the cultural production of behavior provides a useful framework for understanding how students negotiate college. His concept of creative habitus in particular emphasizes both individual agency and the context of the social structure. The notion of capital and its acquisition explains an important component of higher education as a place where most students seek to improve or reinforce the advantages they had when they entered. These concepts come together to form an interpretive framework to analyze the practice of students like the ones I studied who are building their lives.

In several respects, elements of Bourdieu's theory explain the integration model although Bourdieu does not specifically study college students. The model claims that students' pre-college characteristics such as family background, academic experiences, and personal attributes have "direct and indirect impacts upon performance in college" (Tinto, 1975, p. 94). These characteristics influence the student's commitment both to individual goals and to the institution he attends. Bourdieu includes characteristics of early life and individual disposition in his concept *habitus*. The belief in the institution and its values Bourdieu calls *doxa*; a strong *doxa* motivates a student-agent to exert effort

to persist and succeed. The more the student believes in the purposes and values of her campus, the harder she will work academically and socially and the more likely she is to integrate and graduate. As an agent she will make decisions about the extent of her integration based on the strength of her *doxa*. She will also learn the regularities and norms of the game of college and the structure of the *field* as Bourdieu would label the college campus. The college impact research also emphasizes that interaction with faculty increases the student's chances of persisting to graduation. Such interaction builds the student's academic and cultural capital, facilitating high grades in college and opening avenues of opportunity on campus and after graduation. However, the complexity of the field of a campus means that the student is acted *upon* as well as acting. As in Bourdieu's definition of a field, students are affected by their time spent on campus in ways beyond their personal characteristics (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 100).

The students constitute their own context for making decisions. The student is an agent with a disposition toward certain behaviors derived from his background and experiences and he will bring that habitus with him to a particular setting. The institution where he enrolls will operate under both explicit and unwritten regulations, traditions, and conventions which will affect his behavior. When we look at a student's practice of his life in college, it is useful to see the institutional context as a field in Bourdieu's sense. Fields are areas of social activity which people have developed. Webb, Shirato, and Danaher (2002) define a field as "a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorize certain discourses and activities" (p. 43). Fields vary in size and overlap considerably so that one person belongs to many fields at any one time and can move between fields often. The limits of a field are hard to define because the boundaries themselves are at stake. People, or agents, who pass through a field are affected by it in ways that cannot be explained by their personal characteristics (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 100).

It is important to note that people in a field, although they all interact, may not share goals, resources, language, or power and their interactions may be characterized by struggle and domination (Moore, 1999, p. 305-306). Bourdieu (1992) cautions that "[t]he coherence that may be observed in a given state of the field, its apparent orientation

toward a common function . . . are born of conflict and competition, not of some kind of immanent self-development of the structure” (p. 104). Wacquant describes a field as “a critical mediation between the practices of those who partake of it and the surrounding social and economic conditions” (in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 105). We can see these elements at work in the field and subfields of a university as will be discussed below. The hierarchy of administration, faculty, and students generally defines the behavior of each group.

People within a field accumulate capital of various sorts. One kind of capital is economic capital or money. Another is social capital acquired in the form of a network of connections. A third is cultural capital which includes prestige and standing. Each of these forms may be converted to some other form of capital and to other fields. It is important to note that capital is a symbolic attribute that only has value among certain agents although the value may be so widespread as to seem universal. For instance, a confident attitude as seen in a handshake and a smile carries value both on campuses and across American society. However, in other cultures it may be construed as aggressive or impolite. So one way that a field is defined is by the capital that is valued by the people in it.

Grenfell and James (1998) define capital as the products and actions that have value in a social activity and therefore lead to power in that activity (p. 20). The concept of power is integral to Bourdieu’s use of capital. Capital will not accrue to everyone in the field equally, so a hierarchy emerges with those who have more capital positioned at higher levels than those with less capital. Although all the players in the field seek to maximize their capital, the ones who arrive with more are often able to accumulate more, and power distinctions are thus reproduced. Bourdieu concerned himself with the effect of this capital accumulation on those who lack it, the dominated group, especially their acceptance of their lower status. He argued that people who have little capital within a field perceive their status as the normal state of things; he called this structure “symbolic violence” (Postone, LiPuma, & Calhoun, 1993, p. 6).

## **The University as a Field of Practice**

Higher education is commonly seen as a path to greater capital in society especially for those whose family status does not confer cultural capital. Cultural capital for young adults in the context of our culture includes competence in a particular career skill, the ability to talk to and work with a variety of people, knowledge about how organizations work, and experience negotiating bureaucracies. These skills are measured by the sort of credentials that would be featured on a resume such as degrees earned, grade point average, honors conferred by prestigious organizations, and accomplishments in sports or employment. Most of these credentials are related to education because we consider school the training ground for adult citizens. Desmarchelier (1999) explains that “the acquisition of cultural capital through education enables the student to develop new facets of self, a new habitus” She compares these facets to the surfaces of a diamond “which allow the individual to sparkle more brilliantly and to reflect different ‘lights’ or aspects of themselves” (p. 282). Her analogy suggests that education can act as a catalyst to develop cultural capital through the evolution of habitus. DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) point out that cultural capital, and all forms of capital, are “cumulative . . .the greater the early endowment, the easier the further acquisition” (p. 1240). As examples, they offer specific ways that cultural capital increases the chances of college attendance for high school students: help from teachers is more likely, students are seen as “cultured persons,” and students gain access to environments that value education (p. 1240). DiMaggio and Mohr’s emphasis on interactions with adults as indications of cultural capital pertains especially to this study.

An institution of higher education can be called a social field according to the definition above because its members organize it by various conventions and rituals and value certain forms of capital. Colleges appear to be communities of scholars with a common, unified goal, but as Bourdieu (1992) describes above, “conflict and competition” mark the interaction of the players. Wacquant’s (1992) definition of a field emphasizes the role of “surrounding social and economic conditions” which press on the field. In the case of a university, funding and the job market for graduates are examples of forces beyond the field which contribute to conflicts for agents within the field. As the players negotiate the conflicts, they create a revitalized field. The dynamics of field



provide an element that seems missing from the college success literature where the campus appears fixed and students are expected to fit into the established hierarchy without having an effect on it.

While universities seem deliberate, immutable, and slow to respond to the concerns of students and the larger society, they are not static. The practice and conflict of their members determine changes over time which in turn affect that practice. Any particular cohort of students will probably consider the campus unmovable because the time necessary for a degree is only a few years. Yet universities do respond to the needs of their players over time as they mediate conflicts between and among various constituencies and forces. One example of this response is the vocationalism on campuses, a widespread acceptance of the college degree as a career credential instead of evidence of intellectual attainment.

The field of a university contains many agents—faculty, administrators, legislators, donors among them—but here we will focus on the student-agents. Bourdieu (1992) explains the relationship between the agents and the field:

[People] exist as *agents*—not as biological individuals, actors, or subjects—which are socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration by the fact that they possess the necessary properties to be effective, to produce effects in this field. And it is knowledge of the field itself in which they evolve that allows us best to grasp the roots of their singularity, their *point of view* or position (in a field) from which their particular vision of the world (and of the field itself) is constructed. (emphasis his) (p. 107)

When new students enter the field of a particular college, they bring their habitus with them, but they begin to learn the new rules and rituals that are peculiar to that field. They may not choose to obey every convention of the college game, but they will probably not resist all the rules if they are to become successful student-agents. One set of rules, for instance, prescribes the hierarchy of faculty “over” students because of their knowledge and experience. Students privately complain about faculty, of course, and sometimes resist following their directions; however, as students they need to conform to the hierarchy to some extent in order to stay in school. Within the group of student-agents at a particular college the accumulation of capital creates levels of status. These distinctions

exist only because of the peculiarities of the field, but, when we look at the larger society, all college students have a higher status just by virtue of being in college.

### **The University As A Game**

When students enter college and begin to learn its rules, they can be said to be joining a complex and demanding game. Bourdieu compares all social life to a game in several different ways, and his metaphor helps to clarify my understanding of the behavior of the students I interviewed. First of all, the game is a serious one, not merely an entertainment. Instead he wishes to convey the idea of intense play and total commitment for the duration of play. Although it is essential to know the rules of the game, knowledge does not suffice because the player must constantly assess the situation and improvise actions. Habitus, in this metaphor, is “the capacity each player of a game has to improvise the next move, the next play, the next shot.” It begins with physical skill and knowledge of the rules but includes “a hard-to-pin-down mix of confidence, concentration, and ability to rise to the occasion” (Calhoun, 2000, p. 2). Practice at playing the game and repetition, both under pressure and not, improve improvisational skill. Similarly simple knowledge of the rules does not explain behavior when navigating a social field; time and personal agency play important roles (Calhoun, 2000, p. 8).

Fields can be compared to games although fields are usually not purposefully created with explicit rules the way most games are (Hodkinson, 1999, p. 263). Bourdieu (1992) explains that “[a] field is a game devoid of inventor and much more fluid and complex than any game that one might ever design” (p. 104). Another drawback of the analogy between a game and the field of the campus is the implication that competition and opposition with other players marks all play; if one is to win, another must lose.<sup>1</sup> Despite these shortcomings of the metaphor, moving into and through the field called the university has similarities to a game, especially for the student-agents. Bourdieu refers to the need for a beginner to develop a feel for the game or *le sens du jeu* which includes the

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<sup>1</sup> In some courses and some disciplines student grades are curved, meaning that only a few can achieve the highest grades. In most cases, however, the entire group of students who are aiming for a degree can achieve that goal without the necessity of “beating out” other students.

bodily or unconscious aspect of habitus (Bouveresse, 1999, p. 51). Newcomers to a field can experience a visceral reaction to the unfamiliar situation. Earle (1999) uses this illustration: “Novices (beginning students, for example) nervously, and generally awkwardly, think up their thoughts, betraying the effort one can also see on the faces, in the body language, and in the more-or-less inappropriate results, of *parvenus* to any social world” (p. 185). On college campuses these anxious faces can be seen at the beginning of every term, a physical reaction to the strangeness of the new field.

Students acquire *le sens du jeu* as they learn the regular patterns of the game.<sup>2</sup> As they figure out the patterns, agents begin to use strategies which correspond appropriately to the field. Bourdieu’s idea of strategy is crucial to both games and fields because it implies that the agent is making choices and decisions based on the observed or understood patterns. Human behavior is not simply governed by rules; instead people learn patterns and then decide to follow, resist, or adapt them according to their dispositions. An example in the world of college students is the cheating and plagiarism that concern faculty all over the country. The academy considers cheating a violation of the rules and most college students acknowledge that prohibition. Still in large numbers—from all reports—students resist that rule and choose cheating as a strategy to achieve their goal, maybe for a high grade or maybe for a minimum grade along with social gratification. This study will define “strategy” as a choice that consciously or unconsciously follows a “coherent and socially intelligible pattern” (Wacquant, 1992, p. 25) As an agent the student relies on his habitus when he strategically chooses a course of action.

Another element of Bourdieu’s metaphor which can help our understanding of college students is the *illusio* or investment the agent has in the game. The players in a game are taken in by it to the extent that they believe in it. If their belief in the game and its stakes (what Bourdieu (1992) calls their *doxa*) is strong, they will devote considerable energy to playing the game (p. 98). If they believe that the game of college is worth playing—in order to get a better job or have a good time, for example—then we will call them motivated to succeed. Conversely, if they are not convinced that college is worth

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<sup>2</sup> Bouveresse [1999] points out that Bourdieu prefers the term “regularity” rather than “rule” for social fields, especially since the rules of social life are usually obscure and unwritten.

the cost and struggle, they will not work as hard to play the game. College impact studies similarly emphasize the necessity for a student to share the values of the institution and abide by its rules in order to integrate and persist to graduation, but Bourdieu's concept of *doxa* explains degrees of student commitment and allows for the agent's acceptance of some rules and resistance of others while continuing to succeed at the college game.

Recent scholars have applied Bourdieu's theory to young adults. McDonough (1997) looks at the effect of social class on the college choice process. She claims that a student's cultural capital determines in part whether the student attends college and graduates and also affects the characteristics of the colleges the student considers. The decision to apply to a college will be one of rationality constrained by the student's habitus and by the "organizational habitus" of the high school. Berger (2002) uses concepts of capital and social reproduction to look at students and colleges. He contends that both students and institutions have cultural capital and that some students may have trouble integrating with the norms of the institution because the backgrounds they bring to college do not fit with the dominant culture. Walpole's work (2003) discussed above suggests that the cultural capital a student brings to the educational process affects decisions and choices and thereby determines the accumulation of further capital.

Thus Bourdieu's concept of practice, or the interplay between habitus, capital, agency, and field, provides a useful lens through which to view the larger context of student behavior. It supplements the college impact literature by helping to explain the behavior of individual college students as agents and shapers of their own experience. The process by which they make decisions is a reasonable one in the context of their habitus and field. We can understand the field of their particular institution by the cultural capital that is valued there. As they enter the field and begin to comprehend its conventions, Bourdieu claims they learn *le sens du jeu* and become more adept and active at playing the college game. Bourdieu's theory certainly is not the only way to look at these students, but as a conceptual framework for this study it offers a valuable scaffold for the interpretation of the practice of their lives.

## **A Map of the Study**

The following chapter explains the methodology of the study. Each of the next chapters looks at the way the participants negotiated a particular component of college life. The facets of the college game that each chapter covers are difficult to separate; they could be divided into other structures. Chapter 3 examines the pre-college background of the students, especially their academic and family experiences and how those experiences affected their choices in college. The data in this chapter supports my assertions that students draw on a variety of experiences to make further decisions and that their family backgrounds play a significant role. Chapter 4 uses the analogy of learning to play a game to understand the way these students survive college. Their negotiation of the bureaucracy, choices for help and support, and strategies for choosing courses and a major were skills they acquired and applied in idiosyncratic ways. The student-faculty relationship played a significant role in their understanding and satisfaction with academic life as their interactions with their employers would in their careers later. Their choices for participation on campus form the basis for Chapter 5. These students found a variety of ways to construct spaces for themselves on their campus. Even in the social field their choices were designed to give them experience or skills that could further their goals for the future. In Chapter 6 students describe their decision-making process as they chose a major and developed a disciplinary commitment to their major. Vocationalism provided the primary motivation for their decisions and behavior; they focused on their career goals in the long-term and high grades in the short-term while they built academic capital. Chapter 7 summarizes my research, explores its implications, and suggests areas for further study.

The students in this study focused on their future lives not only when deciding on a career path. While they attended college, they demonstrated their vocational drive by working toward a high grade point average and treating their relationships with faculty as they would a relationship with an employer. Even their more immediate choices of activities, study strategies, and friends reflected their emphasis on vocationalism. Each student brought a unique background to college so their versions of vocationalism varied somewhat. As they learned *le sens du jeu*, they adapted their experiences and

dispositions to meet the new challenges of the campus field. In this way they were constantly constructing their lives.

## Chapter 2 Methodology

### **Choosing Qualitative Research**

The goal of my research was to explore the everyday experiences of my participants as they constructed their academic lives. I wanted to know how they built a space for themselves on a large campus and managed the demands on their energies. I wondered how they viewed their classroom experiences and decided on a particular major. Each of my questions was a part of a complex process that began before our interviews and continued afterward. Because I wanted to understand the *quality* of this process, I chose qualitative or ethnographic research techniques which have their roots in Wilhelm Dilthey's efforts in the nineteenth century to find alternatives to traditional scientific research about humans. Instead of predicting and controlling human conduct, his plan strived for the understanding of it (*verstehen*), acknowledging the complexity of social and psychological behavior (Horn, 1998, pp. 2-3).

Qualitative research complements my assumptions of the complexity of human behavior. Its supposition that people construct individual realities by their choices and actions provides a guide for my data-collection and analysis (Horn, 1998, p. 5). This presumption of human agency underlies my research and determines an inductive and subjective approach to analysis. My unit of analysis is the individual participant, not the total of the behaviors of all participants. The specific sample of people cannot be generalized to the larger population or over time because other people or other times will not share the context. Although time and place may limit behavior, they are fluid and complex. Therefore, causes and effects of behavior and choices become blurred; it is often impossible to tell them apart (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 36-38). The data—my interview transcriptions and fieldnotes—generate the findings inductively. Categories of analysis are subjective because they come from the respondents' own words and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 333-335). The qualitative researcher welcomes complexity and what Horn (1998) calls "the intertwined nature of description and interpretation," using the data to attempt an understanding of the participants (p. 5).

Acknowledging the same complexity of social life, Pierre Bourdieu saw the need for a balance in scientific research between an emphasis on individual agency—as in

existentialism—and a stress on social rules—as in structuralism. Although he aligned himself with the structuralists, he “reject[ed] the tendency to describe social life in overly cognitive and static terms as a matter of following rules rather than engaging in strategic practice” (Calhoun, 2000, pp. 5-6). Following rules or resisting them rarely explains human behavior. Rather the rules are part of the social context in which people such as my participants operate, and as the researcher I need to understand their context along with each person’s behavior and choices. By examining the behavior of students as agents in context, I could better understand the dynamic structure of their practice.

### **Limestone University**

Limestone University lies in the center of a state with characteristics of both the South and the Midwest. Agriculture is still a notable part of the state’s economy although its strength declines every year and its significance has become largely nostalgic. Overall the state ranks low on measures of educational attainment compared to other states. The major population centers of the state grow rapidly, attracting people from rural areas, from other states, and from foreign countries. The counties outside these centers continue to provide a slower life to residents. As the flagship institution of the state’s universities, Limestone reflects this disparity in its student body. The clearest difference among Limestone students is their urban or rural roots while their racial composition is more homogeneous. As in the state as a whole, almost 90 percent of Limestone students are white.

Limestone has a selective but not exclusive admissions policy. Eighty-five percent are in-state students who rank at neither the top nor the bottom of their high school classes; their ACT scores are a little higher than the national average (Institutional Research, 2004). Students bring a wide range of high school experiences, from high schools whose graduating classes and course offerings number in the thousands to small graduating classes of people who have all been friends throughout their schooling. As a public land grant institution, it is committed to providing a college education to the citizens of the state in conjunction with the smaller regional universities and community colleges so most Limestone students have in-state status. Fewer than 20 percent of



Limestone's students qualify for Pell Grants, therefore, most students are from middle class families economically although they may have diverse economic needs.

As a public Doctoral/Research University-Extensive university with more than 18,000 undergraduates, Limestone offers an array of academic courses and choices. Eighty-eight programs lead to the bachelor's degree so the variety of possible courses is substantial. Students making choices about their time outside of class find 329 official student organizations and countless unofficial ones. Athletic teams are especially important to Limestone students; the men's basketball team consistently ranks high among teams nationally and inspires fanatic devotion. Approximately 85-90 percent of freshmen live in university residence halls, but most students move to apartments or houses in the neighborhoods around campus after their first or second year.

An important advantage of studying the students at a public research university lies in the loose structure of the campus experience for students. Such colleges offer many options for residential life, academic concentration, and social experiences. Often smaller schools can produce an almost seamless experience between the residence hall and classes. Teachers may interact more with students and advisors may monitor their progress closely. At a large research institution students have fewer mechanisms to bridge the different parts of their lives so they must learn, with little assistance or explicit direction, how to be college students and how to develop strategies to play the college game. The array of choices and distractions available to students together with the shortage of guidance creates a fertile field for study because they have so many opportunities to use their agency in the practice of their lives. Students at Limestone negotiate a vast smorgasbord of possibilities for learning, fun, and companionship.

### **The Participants**

Through interviews with five students over the first semester of their sophomore year, I could examine in depth the ways they negotiated their environments. I looked at each student as an individual placed in a context of social and cultural expectations. In addition to the interviews, I examined that context by observing the participants in meetings and residence halls. The Limestone students I interviewed included two from small cities out of state, one from the suburbs of a large city in the state, one from a small

city in the state, and one from a rural part of the state. As sophomores they lived in campus residence halls, a sorority house, and an off-campus apartment located across the street from campus. The introductions that follow illustrate the range of their interests. Information about them is also included in Table 1 at the end of this chapter.

Emily's father was in the military, and she graduated from high school out of state; the summer before she entered Limestone her parents retired and moved into the state just a few hours from campus. Neither of them holds a college degree so Emily was considered a first-generation college student. She was a serious student in the Honors Program, a self-proclaimed "dork" who read beyond her assignments. She lived in a campus residence hall near a group of men and women who had become friends during their first year. A shy girl, Emily's only formal extracurricular activity was residence hall council representative. She planned to study in France during her junior year and double-major in English and French. A potential career path she considered was becoming an English professor. To save money for her trip to France, she began working for ten hours a week in the library on campus during the study semester as a work-study student.

David, both of whose parents have college degrees, was also in the Honors Program and received the university's highest merit scholarship. He lived in the same residence hall as Emily. Because of the breadth of his interests he struggled with a major choice, finally deciding on economics in the Arts and Sciences College which offered more interdisciplinary options than the Business College. In the semester after my research he worked with the state legislature as an intern. He took Spanish classes and in the summer after his sophomore year planned to travel to South America to study development issues. While David took his academic work seriously, he devoted much of his time to organizations such as a student group that raised money for the university, a social fraternity, a committee that supports athletics, and a service fraternity.

Amy, also a first-generation student, decided on the Business College before she started her freshman year because of a successful part-time job with an accountant during high school, a job she kept once a week during college. She lived in a residence hall next to David's and Emily's, but her family home was less than an hour's drive from campus and she returned there every weekend. Her roommate and most of her friends graduated from her high school. She took her grades seriously and avoided elective courses that

might lower her average. She enjoyed occasional programs on campus including athletic events, but she had not joined any organized groups by her sophomore year.

Katie found satisfaction and fulfillment in her sorority work and in her friends there. As a sorority officer she had one of the scarce rooms in the sorority house. She followed in the steps of her older siblings who had graduated from Limestone. She decided her academic and career plans long before college: she wanted to be a veterinarian. With that goal in mind she was an animal science major and joined the equestrian team where she learned to ride and care for horses. Some of the required courses were a challenge for Katie, but she persevered by repeating courses and remained committed to her career path. She was another ardent athletic fan.

Todd came to Limestone from an adjoining state because he felt it offered him a better education and had less emphasis on partying than his home university. He mentioned often that the higher tuition his family paid inspired him to study harder. He lived in an off-campus apartment across the street from the residence halls. A football player and mediocre student in high school, Todd developed an impressive discipline in college, taking courses from the early morning, studying for a few hours, working out in the gym, then returning to his studies on weekdays. This schedule usually allowed him to relax and party on the weekends while maintaining a high grade point average. During the study semester he struggled with a decision about a major. His father had degrees in both engineering and business, but he rejected those choices. He finally declared physical therapy, but he still considered going to medical school instead.

All participants were in the first semester of their sophomore year during the research phase. When other studies focus on students at specific class levels, they are usually freshmen or seniors, so sophomores are an understudied group. A database search found 945 articles about sophomores and 7399 about first year students. This status was chosen purposefully to help understand my research questions. They had successfully survived the joys and struggles of the first year of college so their reflections could add to the research about the way students experience the freshman year. Students like these who return for a second year of college—about 77 percent of the 2002 freshman cohort on this campus—stand a much better chance of graduating than the average entering freshman (Institutional Research, 2004). At the same time most

students at the beginning of their second year at Limestone either have not yet declared a major or have not begun courses in their major departments so I could learn about that evolving process. During the interviews I conducted I heard about a vast array of approaches to the major decision, from consulting advisors to assessing the compatibility of classmates. Thus students in their second year offered my research an interesting perspective on the first year and on decision making.

The selected students had solid academic records despite a variety of pre-college backgrounds. Like most of their peers on their campus, the students in this study were white and of traditional college age. Of all the undergraduates at Limestone 88.7 percent are white and 88.3 percent are 24 years old or younger (Institutional Research, 2004). The group consisted of two men and three women which mirrors the gender makeup of the campus. Two belonged to Greek organizations as did 26 percent of their cohort group. Two of my students worked ten hours a week or less, one was on full scholarship, and the other two were supported entirely by their parents. In this respect my group excluded college students who find it necessary to work twenty hours a week or more, creating a college experience that differs significantly from my study group. While there is no *average* college student or average institution, these young men and women were part of the 51 percent of college students who attend large institutions and the majority of students as far as race and age. They also fell within the majority of students who do not receive special services from the university because of disability, race, athletic status, or poor academic performance. Thus the five participants in this study resembled students at Limestone and other schools in their academic decisions, struggles, and experiences.

To recruit these students I announced the project in my Spring 2003 classes asking for volunteers who would be sophomores and living on campus in the fall. Several students who met that criteria expressed an interest. An upperclass student who was not eligible herself recruited others from her sorority. One student heard about the project by word of mouth and contacted me asking to participate. Of the final group three lived in adjoining residence halls on the north side of the campus, one in a nearby sorority house, and one in an off-campus apartment across the street from the campus housing so the paths of their daily lives were similar.

Before I began my study, I tried to arrange for these students to receive academic credit for their participation to help insure that they would continue with their interviews during the entire semester especially as they became overwhelmed with course work. That procedure contradicted university policy so I relied on what I call a methodology of care for my participants that considered their obligations and took a genuine interest in listening to them. I scheduled meetings with them at convenient times and places and limited our talks to one hour. Occasionally I brought them homemade cookies or brownies. I provided an interested and sympathetic ear so they could talk about their lives. At all times I maintained an honest and respectful relationship with each student. As a result, and to my surprise, my concerns about their commitment were unfounded. Only once did a student miss a meeting with me, with sincere apologies. I am gratified by their cooperation and hope my project merits the sustained confidence they showed in it.

### **Data Collection**

In keeping with my belief in individual agency and determination to understand how particular students negotiate their environment, I chose interviews as my primary method of research. I knew that the interviews would illuminate the person's knowledge and experience. Because my questions reflected the complexity of their environment, I knew that their answers would be complex and could not be reduced to multiple-choice answers. Interview questions could acknowledge the multifaceted context of college life and their answers could reveal idiosyncratic ways of decision making and behavior (Mason, 1997, p. 35-42).

I recruited my participants and obtained human subjects approval during the spring of 2003. Over the summer I interviewed three of the participants who lived near the campus or came for summer school. The other two were initially interviewed as soon as they returned to campus in the fall. All participants signed consent forms at their first interviews. The interviews were loosely structured. At the first interviews I asked about their first year, beginning with the decision to come to Limestone and registration for the first semester's classes. I also learned about their high school experiences and family participation in their schooling and college decision making. In subsequent interviews—

six to eight with each student—I followed their progress in each course including questions about their study habits and choices, their relationships with faculty, their classmates, and the feedback they were receiving. Because their lives in and out of class were so closely intertwined, I asked about campus life, extracurricular activities, and weekend plans. I often asked them to reflect on their first year and compare it to the current semester. At the time for declaring a major and registering for spring courses, my research questions wondering how they approached that decision-making process guided our conversations.

All of these interviews were conducted in public eating areas of the campus except one in my office. All were tape recorded and later transcribed. The anonymity of the students was preserved at all times. I did not mention the name of any student while talking to another one. The tapes and transcripts are in my possession. Their names have been changed in my writing. To further protect their privacy, I did not seek any academic information about the students, such as their grades, beyond what they told me.

I accompanied four of the students to meetings with advisors, taking notes rather than making tape recordings. I attended a meeting with the study abroad advisor with Emily and spent a morning in the math tutoring lab with Todd. I attended a meeting of Alpha Zeta, the agricultural honor society, with Katie. I also took notes at those meetings. I shopped for books with Amy and Katie and visited sorority house and residence hall rooms with three participants. Emily took a class that culminated in an exhibit at the library; I attended the opening reception. All of these observations were in the company of one of the participants. Additional valuable information came from thirty-eight pages that Emily wrote about her freshman year over the summer before the study. Because she loved to write, had extra time, and understood the merit of self-reflection, she contributed greatly to my understanding of her experiences. With this combination of methods I could see my objective in various lights. Although a wealth of data does not guarantee more accurate findings, it helps to round out my understanding of this complex intellectual puzzle (Mason, 1997).

## **Analysis and Interpretation**

Since a naturalistic or qualitative project starts with curiosity rather than hypotheses, the researcher cannot predict what data will be collected. I started with general questions to encourage these students to tell their stories, but I could not foresee the tangents our conversations would take. Analysis became recursive with the data collection and organization, a process Strauss and Corbin (1990) call “progressive focusing.” When I interviewed my participants, I began to look for patterns of behavior and experience. Those patterns prompted further questions to ask when I met a participant again so scheduling multiple interviews proved valuable to the ongoing analysis. With this cyclical process, my understanding became clearer as I listened to the data and refined my thinking in subsequent interviews.

My goal was not to judge or rank the participants. Each student brought unique cultural experiences to college which influenced her or his decisions and behavior. Therefore, I resisted claiming that one student’s experiences or choices were *better* than another. I was seeking to understand their choices, not evaluate their chances for academic success. Even though these students lived in a social world that called for considerable interaction with other students and faculty, I looked at them as individual cases in order to understand how they built their lives. As a set of case studies of these five students, this research used the individual student, not the sum of the group, as the unit of analysis.

Although I did not start my research with hypotheses to be tested against the data, I did have categories or topics in mind derived from my questions. These topics derived from my acquaintance with the campus I was studying and with the higher education literature in general, and they changed as the research progressed. For example, I knew from the beginning that a student’s family affects his/her pre-college decisions and expectations. However, during the semester I became aware of the extent to which that family influence continues, especially in decision making and in times of stress. “Family as a source of help” became a category for analysis. The creation of categories, like the interpretation, was generative instead of verifactory (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 333) because I did not set out to prove that sophomores rely on their families for support but learned that from my data. Choosing categories is heuristic in that it provides order and

organization to the data; however, the categories are not static or simple and often overlap (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 29). One piece of data, Katie's story of calling her mother when she was upset about her difficult courses, applied to the influence of her family, but also to her commitment to her major and her strategies for survival.

Other research such as the institutional First-Year Survey results and the published literature informed my thinking, but always the categories and my interpretations were based on the words and behavior of my participants. In this way my findings were grounded in the actual data. I read through the transcripts of my interviews to observe patterns in the data, then arranged quotations from the students into categories. These quotations are used liberally in the following chapters. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) urge researchers to speculate about the data and look for ways to talk about it that have merit, but to avoid developing "elaborate theoretical edifices" unsupported by the actual data (p. 191). The data I gathered supported my belief explained above that students' lives are a complex network of relationships, choices, and possibilities.

The elements of time and timing affect my interpretation also. Although the process of negotiating continues throughout a person's life, I am looking at my participants only while they are in college. My study is further limited to one semester of their second college year. Therefore, although their descriptions of their backgrounds at home and high school give me a glimpse of their past, I cannot claim to predict what they will do in the future because I know the construction process is ongoing past the narrow timeframe of my project. To describe their academic lives with finality would be absurd and unfair. To avoid fixing these people in the time and place of our interviews, I will use the past tense as much as possible when reporting their lives as described to me.

### **Positioning the Researcher**

Another element of both the naturalistic framework and Bourdieu's concept of practice is the emphasis on researcher stance. Bourdieu found during his research in Algeria the necessity of being both an insider, who learned the language and participated with the people he studied, and an outsider who relied on informants to explain what was alien to him. He needed to "combine intimate knowledge of practical activity with more abstract knowledge of objective patterns, and . . . break with the familiar ways in which



people understand their own everyday actions” (Calhoun, 2000, p. 5). As Horn (1998) indicates, fundamental to constructivist methodology is the assumption that, rather than being value free, “every research act is an act of interpretation [and] every observation is made by an observer” (p. 5). Calhoun points out the need “for intellectuals to be clear about their own positions and motivations in order to be adequately self-analytic and self-critical in developing their accounts of the social worlds at large” (p. 17). As the interviewer, observer, analyst, and interpreter, I need to acknowledge the strengths and shortcomings of my position.

I came to this study from a position of interest and concern for college students. For more than a decade I taught composition courses on this campus. The emphasis in writing classes on personal skills, discussion, one-on-one and small group review, and teacher conferences creates a focus on the individual student more than the content, as might be found in large, introductory classes in other disciplines. So I found that I got to know students better than some instructors could and learned about the struggles and rewards of their college lives. During this same time my own children became college students giving me another perspective on young adults and their institutions.

Because my teaching experience was on the campus I studied, I brought the advantages of familiarity to my work. My knowledge of the requirements of the general education sequence, for instance, simplified my interviews because the students did not have to explain the terms they were using. I also knew places on campus well enough to choose a variety of interview settings for their convenience, close to their residence halls or classes. Even though the campus is large, confidentiality could have been lost. I have been careful during the interview phase and since to protect the identities of my participants in my conversations about my research and in my writings.

Another danger was my long-term status in a position of authority relative to undergraduate students. None was in a class I was teaching during the study although three of the participants were students in my classes when they agreed to join. I emphasized to them that signing up with me would in no way affect their course grade. The other two participants had never been in my class. My status could have caused students to feel compelled to join my study especially if they were in my class when I announced the opportunity. It also could have influenced them to continue with the study

even though they wanted to withdraw. A similar risk was that my position and my age could have affected the answers they gave to my questions, not because I could punish them in some way, but because I represent the standard values of the academy and professional authority. For example, as a faculty member I can be expected to believe that all college students should study hard and avoid parties and alcohol. Naturally stories about goofing off came up during my interviews; students usually prefaced these tales with “I hate to admit this, but . . .” or some other self-deprecating remark, but they still shared their adventures with me. To further alleviate the differences between us, our interviews took place in areas that did not accentuate the status of authority, places which could be described as neutral and not intimidating for students. Therefore, I believe that I developed a relationship and rapport with these students that transcended the disparity in our status.

I kept in mind that the relationship between the participants and me as a qualitative researcher is not a dualistic one, but symbiotic. Qualitative research can be quite intimate, and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the naturalistic researcher actually take advantage of the potential for the “investigator-respondent dyad” to produce profound and multi-layered data based on the give-and-take of a relationship (p. 100). My study acknowledges that understanding comes from interaction that is immediate and personal. I feel that my interaction with my participants was open, honest, and ultimately valuable to them and to me.

### **Determining Trustworthiness**

In “Lives Under Construction” my purposeful choice of participants and methods help to establish the credibility of my work. The repeated interviews, the rapport I established, and my immersion in the culture of the campus also help to establish credibility. They prove to the reader that I have data to support my assertions and that I obtained it in an open and honest way with broad knowledge of the context of the participants’ thoughts. Another source of credibility is my use of a variety of research methods—interviews, observations, participant writings, institutional texts, scholarly literature—to enhance my understanding of participants and their lives. Frequent

discussion of my project with classmates and professors and presentation of my work to professional gatherings refined and focused my assertions, further promoting credibility. Finally I have checked my assertions with the five participants regularly. During the interview phase and afterwards I either asked them to clarify statements they made previously or tested possible explanations for their behavior and choices. One example was my hunch that David's high level of affiliation mirrored his parents' pattern of involvement. When I asked him whether that was true, he laughed that he had always been frustrated with their *lack* of involvement, going back to his belief that his soccer coach would have given him more playing time if his parents had shown more interest in the team. Throughout this project I have verified my own thoughts against their interpretations.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) further recommend three techniques to prove that research is confirmable: reflection by the investigator, the use of various sources of data, and the audit (pp. 319-320). All three are part of my study although the audit was an informal one appropriate for the scope of the project. In addition, scrupulous attention to data protection and confidentiality helped guarantee that the results meet the criterion of trustworthiness. The tapes I recorded of my interviews have been in my possession except for the ones that were transcribed by professionals. I have all the tapes and copies of the transcripts now. I never revealed the names of my participants even to my professors or to other participants. I also never sought access to their academic records. These precautions insured that my dealings with them were honest and helped to secure their trust. Likewise the reader can trust that my data collection and analysis are reliable

The reader of my study will undoubtedly find in my description some similarities with college students in other contexts. Defending case studies as valid research—and speaking for other naturalistic research as well—Robert Stake predicted that “case studies will often be the preferred method of research because they may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience and thus to that person a natural basis for generalization” (cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 120). Readers will not see all students reflected here; significant groups of college students are not represented. However, in the same way that the data increases my understanding, I expect that the assertions and findings I provide will resonate with my audience and increase their understanding. In

the following chapters I look at the answers these students gave and explain my understanding of the ways they were constructing their lives beginning with their pre-college experiences.

Table 1

Participants

Name	Hometown	Campus residence	Major	Career Goal
Amy	Rural, in state	Residence hall	Accounting	Accountant
David	Small city, in state	Residence hall	Economics	International Development
Emily	Small city, out of state	Residence hall	English, Maybe French	Professor, Writer
Katie	Large city, in state	Sorority house	Animal Science	Veterinarian
Todd	Small city, out of state	Off campus apartment	Physical Therapy	Physical Therapy

## Chapter 3

### Laying the Foundation

“[W]e can and should analyze action in terms of the resources and interests that people bring to it, and the constraints and opportunities their situations and past histories give them” (Calhoun, 2000, p. 3).

Students enter college with important influences and experiences. Tinto (1993) calls these “pre-entry attributes” in his model of institutional departure (p. 114) and asserts that they “help establish the initial conditions for subsequent interactions between the individual and other members of the institution” (p. 115). He specifies the attributes as “family background,” skills and abilities,” and “prior schooling.” In his model students develop commitments to their own goals and to their college depending on the nature of those initial attributes, and these commitments influence their subsequent interactions with their campus. Successful interactions tend to lead a student to persist to graduation while the lack of positive interactions can lead to departure. Thus pre-college characteristics play a supporting role in a student’s education although they do not determine success or departure by themselves. A summary of the research on these three attributes follows.

#### **Influences of Family**

Families bestow on their children important attitudes and values that can enhance the children’s academic success or challenge it. One significant influence on a child is his parents’ level of education. First-generation students—those whose parents do not have degrees—come under the scrutiny of researchers because they often struggle in college. Even during early education the influence of a parent’s education can be seen. Hossler and Stage (1992) report that “students whose parents had a college education were more than twice as likely to apply for college” in the first place (p. 431). College-educated parents usually expect that their children will go to college and transmit that aspiration to the children from an early age. For these young people “college attendance is a normal rite of passage and a part of family tradition” according to Rendón et al.

(2000, p. 146). In addition, as Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) point out, parents with a college education “are better equipped to explain to their children how the college system is structured, how it works, and how the student can prepare for it” (p. 26). This parental assistance can make the transition to college smoother for their children and aid the student’s persistence.

Interestingly, Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) found that parental *encouragement*, not only education level, especially through the early high school years plays a significant role in a student’s plans to attend college. The role diminishes as the student becomes more independent in making decisions about her future, but the positive effect of early encouragement may be established by then. Encouragement can take different forms including verbal comments, participation in activities that promote learning, or saving for college. As the student makes higher grades in school, parents are likely to encourage college attendance even more, so the effect of encouragement and scholastic performance are intertwined.

The beneficial effect of parental encouragement of college attendance and academic success may be seen by parents and children as a means to counteract social reproduction. Parents with less education can be assumed to offer their children less social capital with which to enter the adult world, thus increasing the chances that their children will not achieve a higher status than their family. One of the reasons that Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) claim social capital is such a useful construct is that it “is available outside the home, whereas socioeconomic status is not; thus, students’ futures might not be based only on the status of their parents” (p. 152). By promoting college attendance, however, parents can push their children into situations like higher education where they will learn the behaviors, attitudes, and preferences that make up the cultural capital of more powerful people.

The effect of family influence on enrolled college students, especially for first-in-family students, is often seen as secondary or even negative in the literature, according to Rendón et al. (2000). Tinto (1993) argues that strong external (i.e. off-campus) commitments to work or family can diminish a student’s integration into the life of the campus. He cites commuter students as an example and implies that residential, younger students avoid those conflicts. Rendón et al. (2000) suggest that family may continue to

exert a strong influence on most college students well after their initial matriculation and propose further research to confirm that effect.

### **Influences of High School**

The accumulation of academic capital begins with the earliest school experiences. Along the way one of the most significant benefits of academic capital is that it increases the likelihood of help and support from teachers and other adults (Berger, 2000). Students with more academic and cultural capital are more likely to be chosen for enriching educational opportunities and honors than those students with less capital. McDonough (1997) claims that other attributes of a student's high school influence college choice. In elite schools college counseling may be available to all students from the early teen years with considerable assistance in test preparation, college choice and financial aid. Other schools may only target high-achieving students, and some schools may provide almost no assistance whatever. The organizational structure of the school may or may not emphasize college attendance through the support of teachers and "through curricular options" (p. 153).

The likelihood that a student would encounter encouraging and helpful adults and programs increases with the status of the school. And, in most cases, that status is influenced by parents' social and cultural capital. High status parents may seek out and pay for private high schools or move to an area with a high performing public school whereas low status parents may be unaware of those options or unable to afford them. According to McDonough (1997), schools have a habitus in the way individuals do, and that habitus both affects and reflects its students and parents:

Organizational habitus demonstrates how high schools' organizational cultures are linked to wider socioeconomic status cultures, how social class operates through high schools to shape students' perceptions of appropriate college choices, thereby affecting patterns of educational attainment, and how individuals and schools mutually shape and reshape each other. (p. 153)



## **Influences of Personal Attributes**

While family and prior schooling certainly influence each student, there are individual attributes which also form the package that a student brings to college. Two students from the same family and same high school will still exhibit different sets of skills and abilities. This package, along with family status and school backgrounds, is the habitus of the student at the time of college entry. Tinto (1993) includes the following characteristics under his heading of “skills and abilities”: sex, race, physical handicaps, academic and social skills, and dispositions such as motivation.

Berger (2000) cites several studies which point to the importance of congruence between student and campus for student success in college. Students who have backgrounds and goals similar to the majority of their peers will have an easier time integrating or fitting in to the institution. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus helps to explain this phenomena because both individuals and the primary peer group have habitus that shapes their motivation and behavior. Students who enter with an individual habitus closely in line with the group habitus will integrate more easily than those whose habitus does not match. Berger (2000) also suggests that this explanation of social integration can help explain why social reproduction takes place on campus, that is, why students who enter with more cultural and academic capital are likely to graduate with more, while students who enter with less capital, such as lower socioeconomic level students, may leave with less than their peers. “[T]hose students who lack the requisite cultural capital may have a hard time or be unable to fully integrate because their frame of reference is just too different from the . . . habitus of the dominant peer group on campus” (Berger, 2000, p. 108). In this respect, Berger claims, the ideas of social reproduction and habitus help to elaborate Tinto’s theory by acknowledging the interplay between larger societal concerns (class status) and the everyday practice of the individual.

Looking at my participants’ practice begins with the story of their lives before college. Their families bestowed on them a status in the community, a model of behavior and problem solving, and an understanding of education that played important roles in their adjustment to college classes and college life. Their high schools prepared them for college academic work, to varying degrees, and helped shaped their academic self-concepts. Less significant was the hometown community. Only one student, Todd,

discussed his community beyond the family. Ironically, although his comments about his hometown were usually negative, he was close to his high school friends during college. Family and high school backgrounds contributed to the habitus of each student, and that disposition was reflected in the decisions they made.

### **First in the Family**

These five students brought more than refrigerators and posters when they moved to campus. For most, their backgrounds in school and at home led them to expect success in their classes and in their social lives. Of particular interest are the students whose parents did not have college degrees. Both Amy and Emily were only children whose fathers had taken some college courses but whose mothers had not. The experience of moving into a residence hall to attend college was new to their families. Colleges label such students “first-generation” because their families cannot rely on past experience to help them maneuver the tricky terrain of the university (Shaw, 1990). On a survey of the 2002 first-year cohort entering Limestone, students indicated that 51% of their mothers and 45% of their fathers had less than a college degree so Emily and Amy were not unique (Institutional Research, 2003). Limestone and other institutions pay attention to that data because first-generation students often struggle to persist in college and have higher rates of attrition than their peers whose parents have a college education (Shaw, 1990). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) report that students whose parents held at least a bachelor’s degree “were nearly five times more likely” to graduate themselves four years after high school than students like Emily and Amy (p. 590).

Amy whose home is only thirty miles from Limestone never seriously considered other colleges. She could have attended one of the regional universities, but when she was accepted at Limestone, her decision was made. Her parents encouraged her enrollment and her decision to live in a residence hall. She continued to return home each weekend during her third semester and relied on her family for emotional, academic, and financial support. She struggled with a required math course in her first year and sought advice from her father and from her employer who is an accountant and recent graduate of the same program. “I think Dad was disappointed too that I wasn’t understanding it. I think he thought I should have had a tutor. My boss wanted me to

drop it after the first test so that I wouldn't ruin my GPA." Both her father and the accountant helped her with coursework. Amy remained close to her parents and her hometown friends, spending every weekend at home and rooming with a high school friend. Occasionally her parents visited her on campus or met her for lunch when they came to town for medical appointments. However, she felt that she grew through her college experience: "At least in college you hear different views about things." A high school friend who stayed home to work "doesn't really get to do anything. She just works and has her boyfriend." Amy dreamed about going to New York for graduate school for the experience of living there. Her description of her parents' reaction showed how close they are to her:

Dad thinks it would be too hard and that I wouldn't be able to live on my own. . . . I think if I went, I wouldn't come back. Mom said she'd come up there; Dad said he might. Mom said she'd go without him if he didn't come.

The other first-generation student Emily's parents were also involved in her college research and her decision to come to Limestone and apply for the Honors Program. Her mother accompanied her to the advising conference in the summer before her first year. "Pretty much she just leaves it up to me because I'm an only child so I'm pretty independent and make my own decisions." Despite that assurance, many of Emily's choices, particularly about her major, came under close scrutiny from her parents. Their questions about the value of an English major "made me doubt myself" so she enrolled as an undeclared student and declared English later.

My parents hate that I'm majoring in English. They don't see what I'm going to do with it. And they think my hopes of being an editor or whatever aren't going to work out. They aren't mean about it, they're just "Are you sure this is what you want to do?" They want me in a lab somewhere conducting experiments. . . . I also debated doing law for a while . . . I talked to my parents about it and it steered them back to English because they don't want me to do law either.

Later Emily's plans to study in France during her junior year caused friction with her parents. "They don't want me to go to France obviously, not just because of security but they don't understand why if I'm not going to do anything with French as a teacher." During the semester of our interviews Emily began researching graduate schools.

It's hard because my parents are not interested at all. They don't want me to major in English. God knows they don't want me to get my Ph.D. in English!

They think it's like unrealistic and they're like—what am I going to do with it? . . . I wish they would just be interested in it because I have no idea what I want to do, where I want to go. I guess it will take me saying “Will you sit down and look at this with me?” And they will.

Emily was clearly close to her parents but she moved into waters that were uncharted for them.

It sounds like I'm making them these bad horrible people, but they're not . . . [T]hey just don't understand why I'm doing English. . . . It's not that they don't support me; they don't support what I'm doing.

As parents of a first-generation college student, Emily's parents follow a pattern of preferring career fields or majors that lead to a productive vocation, especially one that will result in a stable salary. Shaw (1990) pointed out the difference between goals for college that first-generation and non first-generation students indicate when they enter college. Those whose parents do not have degrees tend to choose goals that lead clearly to a respectable career. Amy with her accounting major falls into that category. Although she considered attending graduate school for an additional business degree, she could use her bachelor's degree in accounting to obtain an immediate, secure, professional job. Emily, however, had chosen to major in English and become an academic eventually. Her goals were what Shaw (1990) calls “social or nondirected” and did not fit with her parents' idea of suitable aspirations for their daughter. Her plans to study abroad likewise conflicted with her parents' concern about expenses and opportunity cost; they failed to see the value of such an expensive trip if it did not lead to a vocation.

It is important to note that Emily and Amy and their families do not fall into many of the patterns of first-generation students and families. Neither young woman struggled academically or emotionally over the decision to attend a four-year university. They also had parental financial support to different degrees. In these areas of career choice and study abroad, however, their first-generation status did emerge. As students themselves, both Emily and Amy saw the value of learning new skills and ideas, which might indicate that they were moving away from the status of their parents. Stark et al. (1989) point out: “Insofar as college students have opportunities to experience new environments, philosophies and cultures, college may serve to minimize the boundaries imposed by

these external cultural aspects,” such as first-generation status (p. 29). Level of parental education probably carries less weight over a student’s experience as time goes by in the college career although parents themselves continue to affect their children.

### **Leaving Home**

The considerable influence that parents wield begins with the choice of Limestone University and the first courses of the first year. Katie described talking to her parents and her older siblings who are recent Limestone alumni about courses to take although “most of it was my decision.” Despite her advantage from the experiences of her family, when she arrived on campus herself, she found unfamiliar even frightening surroundings. Katie’s homesickness handicapped her academic success: “I was not used to not being with my family . . . I could have focused more on my school but I chose not to.”

She relied on her mother particularly when she needed support. During her first semester she failed a chemistry course required for her chosen career path of veterinary medicine. The experience was such a blow that she considered changing majors or even not returning to school for the second semester. Her mother encouraged her to “just be more focused this time.” Another chemistry course in her third semester almost caused the same results, and Katie once again turned to her mother and the telephone for comfort and support. She considered postponing veterinary school to work for her sorority for a year after she graduates, but she knew that “before I ever decide about anything, Mom and Dad will get the talk first and then I’ll ask my advisor and make sure that’s not a bad idea.” She assigned her parents an important role in her life and decisions even as she became more independent from them.

Not every student reflected nostalgically on the home and family they left behind. Todd described his eagerness to move away from home and out of state:

I kinda left. I was happy not being around them and not hearing about them. Mom and I had a falling out, a big argument before I came down here. I’m not really going to concern myself. They’re going to make their decisions about how they want to live their life and . . . it’s gonna be a way I don’t ever want to live my life.

Despite his account of relief at leaving his family, Todd maintained close ties to his hometown friends. He roomed with one, saw others on campus, and frequently drove the five hours back to his home state to see friends and his girlfriend. He talked often with

his father, an engineer with an MBA degree, who had remarried and lived in a different town, and, as we shall see, Todd framed his discussion of career opportunities in terms of his father's occupation. Leaving home for Todd was part of preparing to become an adult. He referred to people who had never left his hometown as "the type of people I'd never show any respect to. . . , [people] who've never done anything to better themselves and never left the area."

David's parents had college degrees and his mother had further graduate work as an elementary teacher. David described his parents as supportive of his decisions and plans. "No complaints about that." Even his choices of moving off campus and spending the summer in Mexico drew his parents' support. "They are probably not enthusiastic about it but they know I'm going." Their backing did not extend to interference. When David planned his internship with the state legislature, he was amazed to hear that other parents requested to have their children placed with certain legislators during their internship with the state legislature; he could not envision his parents doing that. His decisions and plans were primarily his own; his parents' role did not necessarily extend to guidance.

An interesting theme through these discussions was the value of new experiences. Going to college, particularly living away from home, is usually considered an important step in a child's journey from the family to independent adulthood. Todd articulated his need and determination to make that break, and David seemed confident in his new relationship with his family. Katie and her parents managed the balance between support and comfort, on the one hand, and independence, on the other. Their encouragement of her perseverance after failing a course reflects their confidence in her skills and their assumption that she would succeed. Amy and Emily, both first-generation students, had different experiences. Amy's parents doubted her ability to move to New York someday and live alone so far from home. Possibly that doubt reflected their own desire to have her stay close to them. They supported her career choice of accounting, a field which would use her degree in a concrete, productive way and always provide her with a job and income. Emily's resolve to become an English professor or editor baffled her parents because they expected her to have difficulty funding graduate school and finding employment later. Study abroad was another unfamiliar territory for them, especially

when they compared the expense to the rewards. Accordingly Emily searched for information and guidance primarily on her own through the Internet. She used campus resources for her study abroad plans, but considered the pursuit of graduate school a solitary project. She expressed her frustration with her parents' lack of understanding several times but continued to turn to them for support and assistance.

The men in this study appeared to have more independence from their parents than the young women. This observation corresponds with the conclusions of Kenny and Donaldson (1991) who found that “the women particularly described the affective quality of their parental attachments as more positive and viewed their parents as having a greater role in providing emotional support, in comparison with their male classmates” (p. 484). David and Todd certainly still involved their parents in their lives, but they did not seek emotional support from them as often as Katie, Emily, and Amy. Kenny and Donaldson (1991) also suggest that attachment to parents matters more to “the social competence and psychological well-being of college women” than it matters to college men (p. 484). The frequency with which the women in my study turned to their parents and their usually robust confidence and coping skills certainly support that conclusion. Rather than signaling weakness and immaturity, involving their parents in their decisions and lives seemed to indicate strength and motivation.

### **Academic Background**

Part of the package of attributes that students bring to college besides their family influences is their academic experience. These students learned the academic content and skills necessary for college survival in their high schools. In most cases their schools also affected them by providing a comfortable, supportive atmosphere. Their teachers nurtured their learning and gave them confidence. Still, college was unfamiliar and students felt anxious about their new experiences and about their chances for success. Emily wrote about her preconceptions of college classes:

There were all these rumors enforced by the media and my peers about what a college classroom would be like, but I really didn't know who to believe. I had heard of the stereotypical professor who was extremely intelligent and ruled the classroom like a tyrant. I was afraid of this type of person, who would demand ridiculous amounts of work and make his or her students feel stupid. I also had no clue about how much work would be expected of me—I had heard many

rumors of work being extremely easy, and yet others had said it was fairly difficult.

To compound Emily's apprehension, she qualified to enroll in 200-level courses where she feared she would feel inadequate. "I thought 'oh, these people are so much more mature, more intellectual and philosophical and I'll just be there feeling dumb.'" Despite these fears Emily expected to do well:

Realistically I knew I would do OK. I knew how I study and how I read. I'm very self-motivated; like I don't need my mom telling me to do my homework. I put a lot of importance on my studies so I'm not going to be distracted by people who say I should go out and party.

Emily excelled in chemistry in high school and had encouragement from adults to pursue that path, but when she considered majors, she realized that she didn't enjoy lab work and turned to English as a major. She reported that her teachers learned of her course choices after registration and assured her that she would do well with her selections. Because of her strong preparation in English, she felt that her college English classes were "just way too easy, especially with my interest in reading." She continued to talk to her previous English teachers "every now and then." However, her high school background in French helped her less in college classes than her own motivation and determination to learn French.

David described caring teachers who helped students succeed. He recalled struggling with Spanish in high school. His teacher "took care of me like I was her own. . . . I squeaked out an A but it was incredibly trying." Apparently her attention helped David understand the basics of Spanish because at Limestone "I'm learning it so much better now." In college his quest for a major forced him to account for his myriad interests but focus on one direction. When he reflected on his high school classroom successes and future intentions—his academic disposition—he began to see patterns that led him to an interdisciplinary program that would allow more discussion and seminar experiences than lectures. Along the way, the goal of majoring in business and becoming a millionaire gave way to his fascination with international development.

The adults at Todd's high school made clear to him that they did not believe in his ability to succeed in college. His counselor warned him against rooming with his friend because he predicted they would distract each other and never study. "He said it would



be one of the worst choices you could make. . . . No one ever expected us to do anything.” Todd’s teachers had reason to doubt his future achievement. His high school average was below a 3.0. He reported that he “never paid attention” in math or science classes “so I never knew what was going on. Then when I did pay attention, it was pointless.” In chemistry “I think I talked my way into C’s. . . . Like I couldn’t even name the elements.” After Todd made Dean’s List at Limestone and his roommate made a 4.0 average their first semester, “we walked into the school and took our report cards and kind of showed them around to everyone.” Since he excelled in pre-calculus in his first semester at Limestone, he was allowed to review a Calculus I book over the winter break and register for Calculus II the second semester. His high school academic performance could not have predicted that Todd would find that level of dedication and drive when he came to college.

Amy attended the county high school in her hometown, an area that could be described as rural but not isolated. She felt that her preparation for college lagged behind students from bigger cities in the state, especially in science and political science. “We had the easiest high school and I still don’t think I study like I should. . . . I had a US History class but our teacher just told jokes. We never did any work in there.” At Limestone she and her roommate studied over a whole weekend for one economics test. “I hadn’t studied that much in four years of high school put together.” Perhaps because of her concern about her preparation, Amy often worried about her ability to succeed in courses that would present material in new ways, such as statistics. During her senior year of high school Amy took English 101 for college credit at a nearby town. Even that course she considered inadequate. “I didn’t think I learned enough because it was so easy. . . . [However] every paper I’ve written so far I’ve gotten a good grade on so I guess it really did help us.” During her first year at Limestone, Amy balanced her insecurity with familiar friends and family from her pre-college life. As time went by, she began to see areas of success that increased her confidence, such as her experience with writing papers.

Experiences in high school and evaluation of teachers naturally lead students to form opinions of themselves and their abilities to survive academically in college (McDonough, 1997, pp. 90-91). High schools affect students as much by their

atmosphere or climate as by the classes taught (McDonough, 1997). Students may have been encouraged as David and Katie were by a student-centered approach in a small high school where every teacher knew every student and helped students to overcome shortcomings and nurture strengths. Katie said of her small Catholic girls' high school: "I never struggled with school at that school. . . . I guess some people could look at it as babying, but I felt like it was a much more positive atmosphere for me to learn in." Although most of these students had success in high school, they still arrived with apprehensions about college similar to Emily's above. One reason for their fear was that college was an unknown while high school was familiar.

A major part of a student's self-perception comes from the evaluations of his/her high school teachers and counselors. But students take that information and adjust it as new experiences bring new evaluations. Each of these students could be seen altering the self-image they brought from high school as college progressed. High school teachers and counselors played a supporting role in students' early college decisions, but most often to encourage and affirm. In Todd's case teachers made their negative opinions of his abilities clear. Other students did not involve their high school teachers in their college choices once they arrived at Limestone.

### **Academic Capital**

These students brought with them varying amounts of academic capital, the cultural capital specific to the field of a university. Academic capital is most easily measured by grade point average, an apparent gauge of a student's ability, motivation, and knowledge. However, assuming that academic capital and grades are equivalent is dangerous. GPA is affected by a myriad of influences both by the student's disposition for academic work—such as her choice of a challenging curriculum over an easier one—and external influences—such as variations in the ways faculty evaluate students. Other components of academic capital reach beyond grades. For instance, a student's willingness to seek out adult advice and her ability to present herself as a colleague increase her academic capital. In the case of talking to an instructor, those traits may also increase her grade, but in other cases they may enhance her chances to "gain access to environments that value education" (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985, p. 1240). An example

would be Emily's decision to discuss her plans with the study abroad advisor more than a year before her trip. That initial meeting set in motion a chain of events that would quite likely result in financial support and a specific program to make her plans a reality. By contrast Amy's roommate found a program on her own and planned to spend a semester in the Virgin Islands only to discover at the last moment that the school was unaccredited and unsafe. She cancelled her trip and lost that education-enhancing experience.

Bourdieu's concept of capital as a source of power can explain how Emily used the academic capital she brought with her, namely her willingness to consult with adults. She was more likely to find opportunities that would increase that academic capital (DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985, 1240). She could use it to "buy" herself an educational experience—study abroad—that would further increase her capital and her status within the academic world while Amy's roommate, because of a lack of capital, might not build her status the same way. We can also see Bourdieu's parallel notion that the strategies for accumulating or not accumulating capital reproduce existing status categories at work here; students with capital tend to accrue more (Wacquant, 1992a, pp. 239-240).

Some of these students found that their high schools prepared them for college with specific skills that other first-year students lacked, thus increasing the academic capital they brought with them. In her junior year of high school Katie took AP English:

Our teacher drilled us on MLA format and that was what [my college writing instructor] was a stickler about. I knew it like the back of my hand and other people struggled with that and got docked for it. I definitely had the upper hand in that class.

Another concrete example of entering academic capital is the advanced credit option. Three of these students entered college with course credits based on high school achievement or previous college level courses. In each case they expected those credits to shorten their time to graduation and allow them to avoid large introductory classes. Katie also demonstrated her academic capital in explaining the way her high school teachers emphasized learning beyond the test. "I feel like I learned everything I needed to and I could use it in the future." She also found that she could take more control over her schooling—increase her academic capital—by understanding that she is a hands-on learner which an assessment in high school showed her. Despite all her academic competence, however, Katie failed a course in her first semester because she did not

understand that she should have withdrawn from it at midterm. She perceived a dropped course as an unacceptable academic breakdown. “I didn’t know and I never had to do anything like that before, so I was like ‘I don’t want to drop a class.’” The reality of a failed course later taught her that a W on her transcript was better than a failing grade, a lesson that shaped her disposition and increased her academic capital.

### **Effect on Habitus**

A student’s disposition when she enters college reflects the effects of academic experience as well as family. “When people enter ‘new’ fields, they inevitably carry with them sets of dispositions or inclinations brought from more familiar fields which may to a greater or lesser extent sit comfortably or uncomfortably within the new field” As they spend time in the field, their “habitus adjusts itself to the constraints and regulations of the field” (Moore, 1999, p. 306). For these students, concepts of ability and talent from their family and high school experiences affected their optimism about college and their subsequent decisions about majors and careers. These factors were part of each student’s disposition, but they were not fixed. The changes to their habitus illustrate Desmarchelier’s claim (1999) that “education enables the student to develop new facets of self, a new habitus” (p. 282).

Both Emily and David regretted their decisions to take elective calculus courses their first semesters; they earned rare B’s in calculus which surprised and disappointed them. David explained his choice: “I was a heady freshman coming in and thought I could do it.” Emily laughed at herself: “I had this notion that I liked math.” Amy was also surprised at the difficulty of calculus especially since she had covered the same concepts in AP calculus in high school, but “seeing how hard it was, I was happy to get a B.” As an accounting major she had to take more math and withdrew from the required Finite Math course her second semester because she couldn’t understand the professor. Her struggles disappointed her because she had always liked math classes in high school. Each of these students was disposed to enjoy math courses and confident of skill in math when they entered Limestone. Their first experiences in college math crushed that confidence. Their commitment to earn top grades led them to reject further math courses in college because more difficult courses endangered their grade point averages. Amy

planned to take the required course later, but she would ensure that she had a professor who was easier to understand. Neither David nor Emily chose a math course again. Their self-perceptions of their skills were shaped by this experience. As agents they strategically and reasonably chose or avoided certain courses in subsequent semesters. They were probably still capable of passing math courses, but their decisions were bounded or limited by their revised habitus. This bounded rationality worked perfectly well for these students as they set themselves on academic courses that eliminated the need for more math.

Todd had a mediocre high school performance but found new discipline and focus in college and earned excellent grades at Limestone. At his high school he paid more attention to football than schoolwork and claimed he talked his way to C's in chemistry. His high school counselors predicted that his lack of discipline would handicap his college success. Despite his unpromising performance, he excelled at Limestone with near perfect attendance and a strict approach to studying. Todd's explanation of the source of his new motivation was his out-of-state status; because his family paid more tuition for him to attend Limestone, he worked harder than he had in high school.

These examples show how students refined their concepts of themselves as they became more familiar with the field. They tried out strategies from the package they learned in high school and gradually figured out which strategies to adopt and which to reject. Their behavior showed the "active deployment of objectively oriented 'lines of action' that obey regularities and form coherent and socially intelligible patterns" that Wacquant (1992) describes as Bourdieu's definition of strategy (p. 25). Their reasonable decisions made up their practice and shaped their self-assessments for future decisions.

The backgrounds of these students, their family influences, and their academic experiences, provided a platform for their later practice. Todd brought more academic or cultural capital to Limestone than others could see. His level of motivation and stress during his first semester—as shown by his enrolling in a study skills class—contrasted with his careless approach to high school studies. His drive to succeed at an out-of-state school was part of the cultural capital that would pay off in the field of the academy. Emily, David, Amy, and Katie entered Limestone with strong academic capital although they had reasonable anxiety about college courses and life. It is interesting to see how

the habitus all these young people brought with them evolved into new self-perceptions as they chose strategies during their college lives. Their choices of courses to take and their perceptions of their own strengths were bounded by the dispositions they brought to campus and shaped further by their college experiences. As they progressed in their college journeys and we follow them in the next chapter, they built onto these dispositions to negotiate and survive the college game.

## Chapter 4

### Navigating the University

“Going to college and finally getting it together was different”

#### **Integration**

Tinto (1975) considers academic integration into the campus as crucial to a student's persistence. By academic integration he means fitting in to the prevailing norms of the academic system, usually measured by grade point average and by intellectual growth. On most campuses a minimum grade point average is necessary for a student to remain enrolled, and a student with a lower average would have to leave the school. High grades may indicate that a student had successfully integrated into the academic system even more than the student with mediocre grades. Social integration may be more significant to a student's determination to graduate than academic integration, but certainly a minimum of academic success is required for a student to stay in school. According to Tinto (1993), the student's involvement is both a cause and an effect of her/his effort. “The more students are involved academically and socially, the more likely are they to become more involved in their own learning and invest time and energy to learn” (p. 131).

Besides the formal requirements of class attendance and homework, academic integration as more informal interaction with faculty also positively affects students. Tinto (1993) calls interaction with faculty outside of class “a critical component in student persistence generally and student intellectual development in particular” (p. 108). But he goes on to explain that what happens in the classroom may determine what happens between students and faculty more informally. Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) agree that informal contact with faculty can lead to individual growth and commitment to the institution. They cite several studies that link student-faculty interaction with high educational aspirations, with decisions to attend graduate school, and with increased academic skills although they point out that the causal direction of these links is debatable.

Braxton and Lien (2000) suggest additional ways that students may feel that they cannot integrate with the academic system of their school beyond earning good grades and interacting with faculty. They may disagree with or not understand the “prevailing academic attitudes, values, and beliefs” such as the general education curriculum or the structure of their majors. Their personalities or interests may not be matched with the courses or majors offered by the college. The instructional goals of the faculty may be more “cognitively oriented” while the student may desire job preparation or workforce skills (pp. 24-25). Student vocationalism may indeed conflict with faculty goals of intellectual growth, yet it could prove strong enough motivation to overcome the other incongruencies above.

Student motivation and effort in the classroom may not lead to student-faculty contact. Some students—even those with high grades—will simply not take advantage of interaction with a professor outside of the classroom. We can explain that reluctance with the literature about developmental stages and with the concept of variable social capital.

### **Developmental Stages and Academic Integration**

Scholars who have studied the development of college students have built theories that can help explain their behavior and reactions. Chickering focused on the dynamic process of creating an identity which then provides a base for addressing future decisions and conflicts. He saw seven “vectors” or aspects of development which interact during the early adult years including personal, interpersonal, and career facets of identity. A student’s academic environment promotes this development when faculty are accessible, the curriculum expects high student achievement, and pedagogy allows for active learning (Evans et al., 1998, p. 41). Chickering’s evolving identity compares in an interesting way to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus because both imply an active process which includes the building of strategies for decision making and behavior in the future.

Lemons and Richmond (1987) claim that several of Chickering’s vectors present particular difficulties for sophomores. Students in their second year have made some progress toward autonomy and personal success. However, they may be faced with new and unfamiliar criteria for competence and feel that they cannot measure up. They may



become frustrated with their continued financial dependence on their parents or feel guilty for the financial burden their education is placing on the family. They may struggle with forming an durable identity which Lemons and Richmond call “the most central development issue during the college years” (p. 16). Finally students in their second year are working on finding a major and career path, a purpose to their lives. “Sophomores are expected to have the foresight to declare a major area of study and a future vocation and to have a healthy balance of avocational plans” (p. 17). Given these developmental requirements, it is understandable that they struggle with their second year.

Cognitive-structural theories such as Perry’s theory (1981) of intellectual and ethical development also help to explain student practice. The positions of Perry’s scheme begin with dualism which is characterized by certainty that things are good or bad, right or wrong. Authority and agency exist outside the person and the task is to find out the right answers. A college student at this position will look to his professor for answers and clues to a good grade. At the next position—multiplicity—the student will accept multiple views as equally valid in areas where there are no right answers because they are just opinions. This student is beginning to think independently and consider peers’ knowledge as valuable but may still fear being “graded on my opinion.” The position of relativism reflects understanding that a variety of opinions exists, some to be respected and others to be rejected. Independent thought and reflection or “meta-thinking” characterize the relativistic student although the realization that the answers will always take hard work may overwhelm the young adult reaching that position (pp. 80-90).

Baxter Magolda developed a model of student knowing which elaborates on Perry’s work and on the theories of women’s development from Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule. She identified four stages that young people may exhibit and within those she saw “patterns” of gender specific thinking. The first stage—absolute knowing—relates to Perry’s dualism where the instructor has the knowledge that students must reproduce in examination. Women may follow a pattern of “receiving knowledge” at this stage where they emphasize collaboration with classmates and the classroom environment and may remain largely silent themselves. Mastery pattern knowers may

identify more with instructors, compete with classmates, and expect both teachers and peers to help them master material. Transitional knowers realize that some knowledge is uncertain and expect their teachers to help them understand material. Women may have a more interpersonal pattern of knowing than men at this stage, but for both genders “a utilitarian perspective motivates students, with investment in learning determined by perceived future usefulness” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 155). Students at the third stage are independent knowers, who value class discussions and expect to be rewarded for creative thought rather than right answers. Baxter Magolda claims that few undergraduates reach the fourth stage of knowing which depends on context for validity. Looking at all the stages, she sees themes of voice, relationship with authority, and relationships with peers. She also considers dominance-subordination as affecting these themes. The unequal relations of student and teacher in the classroom can suppress or promote the development of a student’s voice and the relationship between the student and authority. Women students may experience suppression of voice and independence even more than their male classmates.

### **Academic Integration and Support Staff**

Part of a student’s adjustment to academic life on campus lies in the bureaucracy surrounding advising, course registration, and tutorial services. Most colleges offer these services to some degree ranging from mandatory participation to mere encouragement. Various researchers acknowledge the importance of non-academic staff and services. Tinto’s discussion (1993) of academic advising emphasizes that it should be “an integral and positive part of the educational process which all students are expected to experience” (p. 172). He gives examples of the ways different institutions have implemented advising services.

Berger (2000) goes a step further in adding “organizational” to Tinto’s list of academic and social subsystems on campus. He posits that the interaction between the student and the organizational subsystem, beginning with admissions and including student services, residence life, and financial aid, can have a strong effect on the student’s persistence along with classroom experience and peers. He cites several studies that

examine the relationship between persistence and student perception about the administration.

The people who deal with students out of class in terms of determining what is and is not appropriate behavior and/or types of activities, formal and informal, that students can or cannot be involved in, have an important influence on the type of collegiate experience students encounter on campus. (p. 110)

The social capital which a student brings or acquires during college will influence her dealings with adults on campus, both in the classroom and outside. Berger (2000) claims that, since we can see students with more capital being given more opportunities during their early schooling, we can assume that the adults on campus would treat students with different levels of status differently. He cites Astin's findings that faculty held higher expectations on campuses where high status students predominated. Berger (2000) speculates that "administrative institutional agents are prone to the same patterns of interaction with students from different backgrounds as are faculty members" (p. 110).

These researchers have provided valuable rationale for administrators and policy makers who want to offer services to encourage student persistence and success. In some schools where students can be required to see advisors or seek other help, these resources will probably reap rewards. However, in schools where mandatory participation is impossible, administrators need to look at the reasons students do or do not avail themselves of the services. The theories above which look at developmental stages may inform decisions about ways to promote use of academic support.

### **Negotiating the Institution**

Although each of these students brought an individual disposition to college, they shared a determination to learn behaviors that would help them survive and eventually lead them beyond survival to success. All of these students felt invested in the field of their campus; their *doxa* or belief in the values of the field was strong. If they had not been so invested, the process of learning to negotiate such a large campus could have overwhelmed them. Because of their robust *doxa*, they spent substantial energy figuring out the rules at Limestone University. And they were not always happy with their discoveries. As we might expect, the size of Limestone created a bureaucracy that could

overwhelm a new student. Todd narrowly avoided registration trouble because of miscommunication with the Financial Aid office:

Going to college and finally getting it together was different. Because down here you're just a number. . . . I was within a day of having all my classes erased last fall because I hadn't gone to a meeting that they didn't even tell me about. One of my grants wouldn't have been paid and my tuition wouldn't have been accounted for. I just happened to walk in to financial aid one day just to see if I could talk to my advisor.

As early as summer advising conferences before their first year, students learned the formidable task ahead of them. Amy discovered that not even the orientation for freshmen in the summer cleared up her confusion.

They talked about the requirements but it wasn't really helpful. That night we had to do our schedules and we were lost. Dad had to help me figure it out. . . . [The talk to accounting majors] wasn't a lot of help and we were all nervous. . . . I talked to my friends afterwards and we were all ready to not even go [to college] after that.

Amy had no information about the general education requirements or the major requirements for Accounting before that day. Just before scheduling she met with an advisor for a few minutes, but the burden of the decision was on her. "Just my Daddy and me. . . . It was [scary] because some of the classes I'd never even heard of." Even within the Honors Program which is known for its small size and personal attention, Emily described an elaborate process:

You go in to register and they sit you down for an hour and they give you the map of the campus and they give you your schedule book and they give you this big sheet that says how many people are allowed in each class. So it's like "Here, look at this map and be sure your classes aren't too far away from each other and that you can make it if you schedule them close. And if you don't want 400 people in your class, look at this sheet to see the class size. And then look at this book." It was very, very complicated and we're like OK, we'll just write something down and if it's awful we can change it.

Still Emily's determination to see her college experience in a positive light led her to admit that the university managed the bewildering process as efficiently as possible given the size of the task.

It is no wonder that new first-year students are often depicted as fish out of water or deer in the headlights, descriptions that illustrate the physical or bodily aspect of

habitus that Bourdieu emphasized. Their disposition and prior experiences run up against the reality of the new situation. Later they will learn the rules and acquire *le sens du jeu*, but until then their confusion is palpable.

Registration for subsequent semesters continued to pose problems for students in their first years because they registered later than upperclass students and often found their chosen classes full. Emily pre-registered for an advanced writing class that she particularly wanted and discovered by checking on-line a week later that it had been cancelled. “They don’t even tell you. When was I supposed to find out? Why did they put it up there if they were going to cancel it so soon. Now all the other classes are closed.” She also became squeezed between new and old versions of the English major requirements. By choosing to follow the old sequence, she found fewer and fewer courses available.

Emily blamed lack of funding as the reason courses were sparse. Limestone, especially the English Department, had been hit at that time with funding cuts and departures of several tenured professors so her perceptions were valid. Several times students mentioned frustration with the university’s spending priorities, particularly with building a new practice facility for athletes while academic department budgets lagged behind. Katie complained, “The chem lab looks the same that it did when they built it in like 1960. Not that this is a huge deal but like our ring stands are all rusted.” She and other students said: “I love basketball, but . . .”

Manipulating the rules in a strategic way takes all students a while to master even those who enter with cultural capital. Katie failed her first chemistry course because she did not understand that she could withdraw mid-semester when she was having trouble and avoid a failing grade. In order to achieve her goal of acceptance to veterinary school, Katie needed to maintain a high grade point average and thoroughly understand introductory science concepts. She was able to erase the failing grade from her transcript by repeating the course at Limestone during the next summer. This experience involved negotiation of a myriad of university regulations. For instance, if she had taken the replacement course at another university during the summer, the new grade would not have replaced her failing grade and her prospective graduate school would not have known her actual grade in an important science course. Katie put her new knowledge to

use the following year when she withdrew from another chemistry class at midterm to avoid a failing grade. Learning about the rules and strategically putting them to use are examples of Katie's evolving *sens du jeu*. When Bourdieu described habitus as "the strategy-generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations," he explained the way Katie's habitus and practice were developing (cited in Wacquant, 1992, p. 18).

Katie's agency reflected her acquisition of academic capital. Students with strong academic capital are able to navigate university resources in a variety of ways. Capital only has symbolic value within a field, but if that value can be cashed in later, it leads to power for an agent as Katie would find as she moved into other arenas, such as graduate school and professional life. Emily demonstrated her building capital when she used e-mail to explain her frustration to several people in the English Department after the course she wanted was cancelled. Although she was unable to change her current predicament, she learned the power of speaking up. Her messages were circulated around the department and several professors answered her sympathetically. She also felt confident enough of her academic abilities to request permission to take a senior level course from a professor she knew. In the future she could use this experience as part of her strategy to negotiate a program that leads to her goals. Reay (1999) looks at the way middle class mothers interact with their children's teachers, and similarities can be seen with college students and their institutions. "Cultural capital was key to all dimensions of the process of contacting and communicating with teachers. . . . [K]nowing how to approach, present, mount a case, maintain pressure and make an impact counted" (p. 273). Her research shows "the complex interplay between confidence and self-assurance in interaction with teachers and the receptivity of teachers to parental requests" (p. 274). Similarly, Emily who was usually shy realized the importance of explaining to the people who mattered, the injustice she felt when courses were not offered. This skill of negotiation with people and regulations on campus would prove useful in future areas of her life as an adult.

### **Acquiring *le Sens du Jeu* by Seeking Help**

Beyond personal negotiation of the academic bureaucracy, students learned other ways to utilize their environment to meet their goals for high grades. One of the most obvious sources of help was tutoring, and Limestone offered a myriad of options for writing, math, business, and science courses. During summer registration students and parents attended seminars on various services, and teachers reminded students during introductory class sessions. Amy's economics professor required each student to find the business tutoring center and bring back a signed paper. Despite this encouragement students must independently seek out the help they need during the semester, and many students ignore the available help or give up after one negative experience with tutoring. Finding help when necessary shows that a student-agent is constructing capital by strategically using available resources.

David's confidence in his first-year math class carried him through most of the semester, but before finals he realized that he might get a C in the course and went to the math tutoring center. He was disappointed in the help he got there, but he admits that people who had gone all semester had the advantage of knowing which staff person to work with. Todd was one of those regulars at the tutoring center. During the semester of our interviews he had a calculus quiz every Thursday so he spent about two hours in the center on Thursday mornings. At this center students can work alone or in groups and ask for help when they need to. Todd used the chalkboard there to see problems differently and test himself after he worked them out on paper. He also found a tutor who helped him regularly.

There's this one guy who's in there for an hour and I know when he's gonna be there and I usually talk to him. This guy is a professor and he hasn't taught it in a while, but he has fun looking at it.

Amy used the same center "a couple of times a week" for help with her math class. Because students can work in groups, she "met a lot of people down there." As she moved into Business Math, she anticipated hiring a tutor for more personal help.

In addition to the official sources of help such as professors and tutoring programs, students often relied on informal networks of help. Amy worked for an accountant so she frequently took confusing homework to her employer who explained

concepts to her and gave her examples of accounting forms. One afternoon her employer stayed after work for an hour to help her. She turned to parents for help too. “[My father] explained to me what intangible assets were. My professor kept talking about it but he never would tell us what it was.” Emily also enlisted her parents for her Charles Dickens project; her mother typed and her father built an interactive light board.

By far the most frequent source of help was other students. All but one student in this research studied with peers regularly to some extent and provided help to others occasionally. The exception to this tendency was Emily. She had studied with a friend who shared her honors class during her first year, but since none of her close friends were in her sophomore classes, she did not study with anyone. Another reason she studied alone was that her courses require considerable reading and few tests, so she assumed studying with others was not as useful as in courses with exams. Emily felt uncomfortable reaching out to strangers—and usually earned high grades anyway—so studying with other students seemed unnecessary.

Amy, who most often studied with hometown friends, demonstrated that people whom students know from outside the class were usually the chosen study partners. Although she was committed to her accounting major which none of her friends had chosen, Amy took several of her general education courses with high school classmates. Two such young women were in her mythology class, and she considered studying with them, but rejected the idea: “We wouldn’t get anything done because they are not much for studying.” She chose to study for the test alone rather than find strangers to work with. Occasionally Amy studied for a test with her classmates. Then she was careful to choose study partners who grasped the material and earned high grades in the class. Once she met a classmate before a statistics test which helped “because she explained something that I didn’t know.” As she gained *le sens du jeu*, Amy seemed to have more success with study partners who were not old friends. However, reaching out to strangers was as difficult for Amy as it was for Emily so both of them usually chose to study alone.

Katie’s strategy of using study groups was more typical. During our interviews she was taking the introductory biology and chemistry courses required of all pre-medicine, pre-dental, pre-veterinary, and pre-pharmacy students so her classmates were generally highly motivated. One of their techniques was to gather to work the problems



in the back of the chapters before the tests. She explained that she was more successful when she studied with others “especially when my friends completely understand what’s going on so if they can explain it to me in other words than what [the professor] is doing, it might help out.” Generally the students Katie chose to work with were also members of Greek organizations. She found one student whose class schedule was similar to hers “so we always tend to study together just because we kind of know what one another is dealing with.” She used her network of friends to find out about past tests in her courses, another strategy which bridges academic goals and social networks.

Part of David’s evolving *sens du jeu* as he moved through his first year was learning the value of studying with his peers:

Now I try to get a group in every class because even if we’re not on task all the time, we’re there to work. Studying alone I get distracted; it’s hard to stay focused. In groups somebody wants to get it done.

This ideal, productive situation did not always work out as intended, as David reported on occasion. David described his first semester math class where no one seemed interested in working together: “everyone was very serious and businesslike; they just made small talk before tests.” David was such a gregarious student that the “serious and businesslike” atmosphere in that class deterred him from taking other math classes. He preferred classes based on discussion and collaboration. He exemplified what Bourdieu means by the effect of disposition on practice. David understood that classes which emphasized collaboration suited him better, and, as he moved past the required general education courses, he strategically chose classes and study techniques which matched his disposition. Amy and Emily, on the other hand, only rarely studied with others and felt comfortable in classes where they could be anonymous. A possible explanation for their reluctance to reach out to other students could be their lower stock of social capital which left them feeling less confident about networking.

Todd found an different way to collaborate—by tutoring others. In his first calculus course he sat in the front of the room by himself at first.

That’s how I met one of my best friends here. About a week into the class he came up and said “You know I always see you writing something down. I’m going to learn something. I’m going to come and sit with you.” And I ended up tutoring him all semester.

His roommates asked for help too which he was usually willing to give even though they were not in the same class. “Sometimes when I can’t figure it out, it frustrates me. I won’t let them have their books back.” In one class, Introduction to Civil Engineering, Todd’s professor assigned teams to work together. The pass/fail class was large and Todd had already decided against an engineering major so he and his teammates agreed on a plan to take turns completing the small assignments and attending the class. This strategy, which most academicians would frown upon, is a strategy nevertheless. Todd and his classmates purposefully chose to bend the rules in order to devote their time to other courses they considered more critical. It is important to note that their decision stemmed from feeling that “it’s just a waste of time,” not merely from realizing they could get away with it. If they had thought they were learning valuable information or skills in the course, they would have completed all the assignments and attended class regularly.

Todd and all these students were acquiring *le sens du jeu*, learning how to play the college game. The patterns of social life in any field usually remain obscure to newcomers for a time, and these students were still becoming initiated into the field of college. Their practice as agents began to reflect their growing mastery of the field of Limestone University. But that does not imply that they were simply learning and following the rules in a robotic fashion. Instead they were strategically incorporating the regulations into their practice to accomplish their goals—earning high grades, succeeding in an academic discipline, and moving toward a dream career.

### **Interacting with Faculty**

Another facet of college life with crucial implications for these students was their interaction with the professors who managed the classrooms, the course content, and the grades. All these students believed that class attendance was an essential strategy for success in a course whether the professor penalized absences or not. One of the advantages of attendance was to keep up with the course content, but equally important was establishing an impression with the teacher as a serious student. A corollary to attending every class was sitting near the front of the room. Each of these students followed that rule except for rare cases when they chose to blend in and hide from the

professor. This concern about the impression on the professor was true even for students such as Amy who did not seek a personal relationship with her professors by visiting their offices. Every student wanted the professor to think of her/him as a good student. Each was aware of the need for social integration into the academic life of campus which started with simply showing up.

David went beyond mere attendance and developed a strategy of always getting to know his professors. His acquisition of capital was most obvious in the relations he established with faculty. When he worked as a peer instructor for the orientation course for first-year students during his sophomore year, he said, “I want to tell these freshmen: go meet your profs, make sure they know who you are.” He was frustrated that they did not seem to listen. “And then I realized people tell me stuff like that everyday and I think ‘that’s a joke—you don’t have to do that. You just have to do well in class.’ I guess you just have to learn some things for yourself.” David associated his professors with their courses closely; his opinion of one affected his view of the other—and his motivation in the class. David did not like the accounting class he was taking during our interviews which deterred him from meeting the professor because “I kinda blame him and I don’t want to get to know him. I’m going to work on it. I’m going to talk to him. All my other profs know me now and I’m never afraid to contribute to a class discussion.”

Despite campus legends that professors are never available, these students usually found teachers to be accessible. Todd made good use of his history teaching assistant, taking answers to potential essay questions to the office before exams for the TA to review. Todd’s computer graphics class met in a computer lab for two hours so most of the work was done there with the professor available for consultation. Another lab was open for use by these students for their homework at the same time the professor had office hours nearby. “I’m in there pretty much Monday to Thursday from 2:00 to 3:00. So I have to get on his nerves so bad, but I’m paying to come here so I’m going to take advantage of everything I can.”

Amy had sought out her professors occasionally in the past, but our interviews are marked with her hesitation during the semester we talked. She said she “probably would go talk to” her statistics, accounting, and political science professors at different times. However, she never actually went. In the political science class she was assigned a

journal of current event articles to write about. She and I discussed whether the professor wanted a report on the article or a connection between it and the course work. She intended for several weeks to ask him but finally overheard another student reporting that she had asked the same question. So Amy accepted her classmate's answer and received an A on her journal. Part of Amy's hesitation to talk to these professors could come from her perception that she could avoid them and still find answers to her questions. Another explanation is that these classes were fairly large lecture courses where the professor did not see the need for creating a personal connection to students so students may not have felt welcome at office hours. To adapt the quote above from Reay (1999) "confidence and self-assurance in interaction with teachers" which would demonstrate cultural capital in a student, must be matched with "receptivity of teachers to . . . requests" (p. 274).

The value of student-faculty interaction for student integration comes up often in the literature about college success (Tinto, 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Astin, 1993) and these students agreed on its importance. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) connect interaction with faculty to high career interest and gains in critical thinking skills (p. 478, p. 102) although they admit that the results may be affected by self-selection. Nevertheless, when a student communicates directly with faculty, his academic capital increases because he is forced to overcome, and reduce, the disparity between his status and the professor's and because he becomes more familiar with the world of academics.

### **Crucial Role of Faculty**

The importance of faculty to these students' experience and behavior went beyond respect and a desire to please. It was closely tied to the vocationalism that drove most student decisions. The classroom—organized and managed by a teacher—was the seat of the practice of their vocationalism. These students encountered a wide variety of classroom experiences from lecture halls of more than 200 students to small seminars, from semester-long research projects to multiple choice exams. Some of the variety can be accounted for by their choice of majors; science and business courses typically had more students and emphasized tests over writing or discussion. In their eyes, however, the critical factor to their satisfaction was always the teacher. Faculty members influenced them in a variety of ways: by their choice of texts and assignments, by their

evaluation techniques, by their teaching style, and even by their personal appearance. Student motivation for hard work in a course depended to a large extent on the teacher, in addition to the determination for a good grade that these students brought to all academic work. Faculty in introductory courses played a role in a student's choice of majors; an unsatisfactory experience in a lower level course discouraged a student from further courses in that department.

Amy was often baffled by her teachers. Developmentally she arrived at college unprepared for ambiguity and anticipating that the teacher would divulge the right answers. In her first English literature course she earned a B. "I liked everything we read. I was just disappointed in the grade. I don't think I understood what she wanted in the papers." She was often concerned about her teacher's expectations, especially at the beginning of the semester. During political science discussions on topics such as the definition of government, Amy was frustrated that she could not discern the professor's definition from the talk. The concept that many definitions of government may exist and that discussing them could be instructive eluded Amy; she considered the professor's definition the only important one because it might be on the exam. She regretted taking political science for a grade instead of pass/fail because she never mastered those tests. "What's on the exam is not what's in the book and it's not what's in his lecture. I don't know where he gets this stuff." Her mythology class started out the same way with emphasis on stories which Amy enjoyed, but she constantly wondered how the stories would fit into an exam.

These reported experiences of Amy's match closely with Perry's description of the dualist position, especially in her relation to the authority of the instructor. She believed that since knowledge was fixed, the instructor was responsible for distributing it to her. She expected to work hard to remember the correct information, but she also expected the teacher to explain it (Evans et al., 1998, p. 131). Her close attention to the details of grading systems also indicated her developmental stage or position. She appreciated classes with homework that counted for a high percentage because she knew she could master all her homework and thus raise her course grade if her test grades were low. Another source of anxiety was waiting for tests to be returned. Amy reflected on her answers after the test, speculated on partial credit, and calculated carefully what her

grade should be, so waiting to see her score was distressing. She also monitored her grades with an eye to withdrawing before the midterm deadline if she might fail or have a low grade. Grades and knowledge came from the professor in his or her superior position.

Todd had a similar reaction to his History of Science and Technology class. He could not figure out how to effectively take notes “because it’s hard to know what he wants.” Because the study of early science closely parallels philosophy, Todd could not rely on memorizing facts as he had in past History classes. “It pretty much seems like it’s based on the teacher’s opinion; it depends on how you interpret it.” Todd was facing the conflicts that Amy faced in her Political Science class when he struggled to discern the answers that the professor wanted, the “right” answers. Certainly not all students share the frustration of Amy and Todd when course concepts are opaque, but those who are just accepting the conflict of ideas and just beginning to take responsibility for their own learning would be well served by instructors who acknowledge the power of the assessment system and who aid students in their developmental journey.

Sometimes students mentioned their desire to impress a teacher, not just for a better grade but because they greatly respected that person. David’s political science professor had spent time in Africa and brought that experience to his class about the Third World. David said from the beginning, “he’s got me interested in it.” Amy praised the knowledge of human behavior that her sociology professor shared because of his time as a prison guard. David said of his Spanish teacher: “she is one we work hard for because she just has a good time with that class.” He looked forward to his internship with the legislature and the courses that went with it because both professors were passionate about that opportunity for students. Both “are excited about teaching and I’m excited about learning.”

David had more close relationships with professors than most students. From his first semester freshman seminar with an agriculture professor to his journaling project with a geography professor to his peer mentor experience in an orientation course with a finance professor, an unusually large number of faculty knew him and advised him. Still at Limestone, David said,

It's so easy to find professors who try to be indifferent. I tried to go see [one teacher] and express my interest and tell him what was going on with my situation and tell him I'm really trying. And he couldn't have cared less.

David claimed to have met three professors who were indifferent, but he admitted that by strategically choosing "small classes where teachers really engage you," he probably guaranteed that he would have the professors he enjoyed. He also acknowledged that "it takes some effort too on the student's part to understand that the professor cares." David chose courses which encouraged discussion and dissent and enjoyed the way they forced him to think about new and fascinating ideas. In this respect he was located at a different developmental stage than Amy. Still as a student, he required his professors to pull him in to the learning process and care about him as an individual. Even though he began every class determined to enjoy it, his continued motivation was greatly influenced by the professor's efforts. In this way he still accepted the hierarchy that elevated the status of faculty above him as a student.

Often in classes where a graduate teaching assistant worked with the professor, students developed a closer relationship with the TA and "liked" the TA better. Occasionally TA's had little interaction with students, but generally they provided students with a friendlier and more accessible source of help. Todd claimed that his first semester calculus TA was the reason he learned calculus; when he looked at other teachers, he felt lucky to be in his section. A year later he still sought out that TA in the math tutoring center. In Todd's history class the TA became his source for information and help because he felt the professor discouraged visits during office hours. The TA offered him lecture notes after an absence. The TA who taught his first English class was a different story:

He liked profanity a lot. He was like the most disgusting human being I've ever seen in my life. He didn't take care of himself. He would walk in with stains every day. We never knew where [our grades] were sitting in that class. I know at the end of the semester he was just writing a grade down on the paper.

Teachers who showed passion for their subject also impressed their students. In Emily's class on Dickens which mounted a large library exhibit at the end of the semester, the professor needed to generate enthusiasm for this unusual and time-consuming project. Emily described her on the first day of class: "She's like hippy

excited, almost a cheerleader. Her eyes get big.” Emily’s French professor was young and “cute so all the girls are enamored.” Minor gestures like bringing donuts to an 8:00 class impressed students too; they appreciated the thoughtfulness of their professors. Todd’s geography professor gave interesting lectures and his TA told good stories about his travels. Todd wished he could attend the class without taking notes because he enjoyed listening to them. One professor who taught about 400 students in an economics class got high marks from Amy for her energetic lectures. She carried a microphone around the hall and involved students which was rare for large lecture classes. At exam time this professor gave students a study packet and sample tests and held a review session to help them study. These professors elicited praise because students realized that they cared about student success with course requirements and about the subjects they were teaching.

Students reacted to teachers who were difficult in ways that mirrored their developmental stages and their motivation. Emily welcomed the promise of her Honors professor that “you might get a 98 but it will still be filled with red marks.” She was delighted that he described himself as “a tyrant on writing. It scares a lot of people but I think I’m finally going to get somewhere.” Even later in the semester when she had spent hours with each paper looking for his list of forbidden constructions, Emily still appreciated his emphasis on precision. Her French professor “talks entirely in French and fast which I like. I’m tired of being babied.” Katie, on the other hand, felt overwhelmed in her biology class because the professor covered introductory concepts in too much detail; information that will be covered again in higher level courses should have been more carefully introduced. “He is genuinely wanting to help us out but he just doesn’t know how to yet.” Todd had professors in chemistry and history who also talked over his head: “The way he’s teaching, he should only be teaching 400-level classes. He’s impossible. Everyone says they don’t even know what to write down when he’s giving lectures.” These professors asked for comprehension that some students were unprepared to give, and even these motivated students found their lectures a challenge.

Given the strong effect that faculty have on the student experience, perhaps Bourdieu’s idea of symbolic violence can help us explain the phenomenon that students accept their low status in the academic world. Symbolic violence can result from



interaction between people who possess unequal power. “Every linguistic exchange contains the *potentiality* of an act of power, and all the more so when it involves agents who occupy asymmetric positions in the distribution of the relevant capital” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 145). A key element of Bourdieu’s definition is that the oppressed agent supports and perpetuates the inequity because she does not recognize her oppression. “Symbolic violence, to put it as tersely and simply as possible, is the *violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity*” (p. 167). Moore (1999) explains that, according to Bourdieu, those who are dominated continue to participate in their domination because they believe that it is “the natural, immutable order of things” (p. 306). The powerful agent does not have to convince the dominated that the uneven structure is good because everyone involved accepts it as inevitable.

In the case of academic relationships we can see elements of the same unequal power. The practices of faculty in evaluating student performance and thus determining future possibilities can be construed as perpetuating their dominant position. For these students we could see conflict in their frustration when a professor’s directions and expectations were unclear. They felt pressure to perform at high levels but sometimes could not figure out how. Most college students, and everyone in their peer reference group, have spent more than half their lives in the subordinate position of student so continuing that status is instinctive. They are thoroughly socialized into the asymmetric relationship with their teachers (Bohman, 1999). This mirrors Bourdieu’s idea that unequal social practices can be so entrenched that the agents consider them natural. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 168; Bohman, 1999, p. 131; Moore, 1999, p. 306)

Symbolic violence may have been at work here, but we would be wrong to call these students victims in every sense of the word. “Violence” is too strong a word to describe the behavior of faculty because teachers rarely act out of cruelty or from a desire to keep students in a subservient place. In fact, some students will assume positions of power in the academy as teachers themselves someday, so the boundary between student and teacher is fluid. At the same time that students as a group are dominated, they also act as individual agents in making choices for survival and success. These students acted as though their student status was assumed, and within its parameters their goal was to increase their chances of success at the academic game. Their choices of learning

environments and their behavior within those environments reflected their individual commitments to academic challenge, high grades, and chosen disciplines.

Some teachers inspired students to further work beyond the class. Emily considered planning an independent study project during a future semester with the professor of her Dickens course because she knew that this teacher respected her work and would be interested in the same areas of literature as Emily was. Contemplating such a research project set Emily apart from most other students. However, her affiliation with the Honors Program probably explained her interest in such an endeavor as much as her attachment to this professor because the competitive students in the program pushed each other to branch out from traditional patterns of coursework.

Occasionally Emily had a professor whose comments meant as much to her as her grade. Because she wanted to publish her work someday, she valued the lengthy comments her Honors professor wrote on those papers because they would help her improve her writing. Despite some ways that professor annoyed her, her impression of him was heightened by her good grades. High grades also affected her sense of an assignment and herself as a student. One of her papers in that class was a fiction piece which Emily dreaded writing, but her almost perfect grade on it inspired her to think about writing fiction more in the future. James (1999) claims that grades, rather than reflecting “specific and technical judgements [sic] about academic performance” seem to “expand to fill out much of the perception of self, contesting even the most important and known of other successes and achievements” (p. 253). Emily was growing and learning about herself and was challenged to reconsider her abilities because of his remarks on her papers. She developed a mentoring relationship with this professor through his comments on her papers similar to David’s interaction with many of his professors. David was more likely than Emily to meet with professors in person, but Emily delighted in the encouraging and challenging written remarks on her work.

Several of these students mentioned the advantage of professors caring about their students. It is important to note, however, that they did not equate “caring” with “easy.” They expected and even demanded high standards from their teachers accompanied by techniques that promoted learning and high grades, such as study guides and clear lectures. Such helpful pedagogical practices led to understanding and mastery of course

material which these students genuinely desired. Their appreciation of caring teachers still derived from an acceptance of the student-faculty relationship which gave the teacher power over the student. It also depended on past encounters with un-caring teachers; otherwise caring would not be noted. Teachers held the key to successful academic experience and high grades for students so anything a particular teacher did to facilitate success garnered praise.

James (1999) offers several reasons why instructors may appear indifferent or obstructive to their students. They may have a low opinion of student ability, a large number of students to teach, or other pressing responsibilities. Or they might believe that the class is an initiation into the discipline and, therefore, as gatekeepers, they must eliminate with low grades those probationers who cannot measure up to disciplinary standards. Students see that their task is to “maximize their chances of success” by making choices about the completion of an assignment (p. 255). They perceive the teacher’s responsibility as providing information or markers so that they can strategize intelligently. James (1999) reminds us that assessment is a social practice marked by interaction and unequal position (p. 256). When students and teachers view assessment differently, both groups are likely to be disappointed in the results. Frustration can be compounded by the student’s vocationalism which drives her intense desire for a high grade and by the hierarchy of power in the classroom so that the student feels helpless to succeed, no matter how well she strategizes. On the other hand, the participants in this study—especially those in the Honors Program—had many contacts with faculty that were rewarding and successful from any perspective.

The Honors Program deserves specific mention. Honors students such as David and Emily are “outstanding, highly motivated students drawn from around the state and throughout the region and country.” The program offers a “special multi-disciplinary curriculum and emphasis on active, small-group learning, as well as . . . related extra curricular and support activities” (Honors, 2005). From the first course for incoming freshmen, students are expected to read and write extensively and to contribute to discussion. Each semester in the four-course humanities sequence centers on a time period, but the professors choose the readings and usually emphasize their own disciplinary approaches. During the semester I interviewed them, David had a professor

from the German department and read Martin Luther, *King Lear*, Karl Marx, and *Frankenstein*. Emily read Berkeley, Poe, and Sarah Orne Jewett and analyzed a painting by Munch for a Philosophy professor. Excursions outside of class such as David's visit to a Mozart opera were arranged occasionally. These small classes taught to a selected group offered an educational experience that the other Limestone students did not share. Not only did very few lower-level courses ask students to think, discuss, and write to that extent, but students who were not in the Honors Program did not tend to choose courses with such requirements. In fact during the semester of our interviews Amy's courses required no writing and included no class discussions. Todd wrote papers for his History course only and Katie wrote assignments for Business Writing and lab reports only. None of these three students experienced a class format much beyond lectures and laboratories and few test questions beyond multiple choice. The Honors Program also offered more direct support and advising than other students enjoyed, particularly emphasizing opportunities for scholarships, study abroad, and research. David's choice of an interdisciplinary major was encouraged by his Honors advisor; most other Limestone students were unaware of that option.

### **The Effect of Pedagogical Choices**

A significant aspect of the faculty role was the choice of pedagogical methods. The way a class was structured affected student response similar to the way managers create a climate in an workplace. Many classes asked students to take lecture notes, read corresponding pages in the text, and take two or three exams. Others relied more on student input both during class and in writing assignments. Classes that encouraged discussion among students earn high marks, but they were rare in the schedules of these students. Emily took a women's studies class her first semester:

At first I didn't know if I would like all the group conversation, but I loved that class. She just let us talk. We drew our chairs in a circle. We'd start off with the book and then issues—women's rights, race, class. I've never had a class like that and I don't anticipate that I will have many like that where you just talk.

She acknowledged that "the teacher's teaching style really depends on whether people like the class or not." In his political science class David enjoyed the discussions because the professor steered them away from always considering other countries in light of the

United States; thus the conversation expanded his knowledge beyond old ways of thinking. Classes without interaction tempted David to let his mind wander, especially when the material bored him too. This was what happened with his accounting class. Amy, on the other hand, who was determined to major in accounting had no such complaints about the same class. Their differing goals were part of the unique background and disposition they each brought to the learning situation of the introductory accounting class, and the quality of their experiences differed as a result.

When students perceived that class presentations were boring, attendance lagged and students lacked motivation to work hard. Power Point lectures, as useful as they may be for large classes, came in for some harsh criticism from students. One professor simply read from his slides at each class. In Emily's large psychology class the students were excited one day when the computer failed and the professor had to write on the board because that was a variation. "It's bearable, but it's not exciting or fun by any means." She felt the course could have been available on the internet as easily as a classroom. Professors often put their lecture notes on the internet before or after the class period. While some students probably took advantage of these notes to skip class, others appreciated the way the notes could make a fast-paced lecture more comprehensible. Because students considered their class time valuable, they found irrelevant talk or extraneous detail by the professor to be annoying. When the lecture led to a test, they wanted it to help them do well on the test.

Professors used textbooks and readings in a variety of ways. Students appreciated lectures that mirrored the textbook so that the readings could prepare them for a lecture or explain confusing concepts outside of class. Amy speculated that not having a book in her Biology course forced the professor to explain more carefully during the lectures which helped her learn more, but other students preferred a textbook to clarify important ideas. When the textbook was peripheral to the course, students resented being required to buy it. Faculty choices in all these areas—textbooks, pedagogical style, evaluation—affected the experience that students reported. Even at their best, these choices still emphasized the dominant position of professors.

The ways teachers organized their classes could facilitate learning or frustrate students. As mentioned above, teachers whose expectations were not clear frightened

conscientious students, especially at the beginning of the semester. Another concern was teachers who changed assignments after some students had already worked on them. Emily spent about six hours on a difficult Honors assignment to closely analyze a piece of writing only to have the professor offer an alternative project that would have been easier. She was particularly annoyed that the announcement came in the class period before the due date, indicating that the professor assumed that most students had not started working on the project at that late date. Students often did not understand the rationale for small writing assignments which led up to larger ones, perceiving them as “busy work” as Katie felt about her Business Writing papers. Students valued faculty whose plans and methods were more transparent and demonstrated both challenge and caring.

While we must remember that these young adults were at various developmental stages that would change over time and that influenced their reactions, they had considerable responsibility for their decisions and choices. Students acted as agents by strategically choosing behaviors that seemed reasonable in light of their past experiences and future goals. But professors had a large effect on those choices and behaviors. Faculty affected students in the organization of the course, the way they presented material and the way they evaluated students. Occasionally these students had collegial relationships with faculty, but as vocationally minded students, they always remembered the teacher’s power to evaluate, and thus affect their grade point averages.

## Chapter 5

### Constructing Space in the Field

Students who find satisfaction in the social and academic worlds of college have a high chance of graduating. That is the conclusion of the college impact literature such as Tinto's model (1993) of institutional departure. Tinto separates academic and social integration in his model and further distinguishes between formal structures (the classroom or organized groups) and informal (casual contact with faculty and peers). The key to persistence Tinto labels "competent membership" which promotes a commitment to the institution (p. 208). The previous chapter looked at the adjustment to the academic system of college. This chapter examines the social aspect of student practice and experience.

#### **Student Culture**

Scholars of student culture on campuses have observed student behavior and proposed categories of students whose relationship to the college differs according to their goals. Clark & Trow in 1966 suggested that students represent four subcultures depending on the priority they assign to intellectual life and social interests. Academic students desire knowledge and the world of ideas above career goals and social concerns. Vocational students are also successful students but aim for career training and discount the value of social life. Another group, the collegiate students, emphasizes social life and only attend to academics as necessary to stay in school. Nonconformist students may have a strong interest in ideas but reject the formal academic and social systems of the campus (cited in Wilder et al., 1997, p. 169). Miller and Nelson (1997) sought to update those categories and found that concerns about diversity and finances need to be included in defining the subcultures of current campuses.

Horowitz (1987) took an historical approach to investigating student culture. A peer culture grew in the late 1800's on American campuses as students began to protest and separate from the restrictive expectations of faculty. The college man, and later woman, intended to enjoy a world of "youthful high spirits, insubordination, and sexuality" before the responsibilities of adulthood (p. 12). With their eyes to the future,

they assumed the social experiences and skills of their college years would pay off in the working world and, since most of them came from families with status, they were right. Academic diligence was out of favor with college men who looked down on their hard-working classmates.

Another subculture, the outsiders, saw academic success as the reason for college attendance or valued learning in their classes for itself. Clark and Trow's academic and vocational categories are reflected in Horowitz's outsiders. High grades and faculty approval mattered to these students. This group which grew in size during the first part of the twentieth century often counted on college success to rise in status beyond their parents or to succeed in the professions. College rebels form the third group for Horowitz. In the early twentieth century they fought against the conformity and discrimination of their campuses, especially as represented by the college men. While they may have shared a love of ideas with the outsiders, they often rejected the demands of the academic system.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century Horowitz saw the rise of the New Outsider. This student may have been a collegiate in the past but began to realize the value of a college degree and high grades to his/her future and the need for college life to be more disciplined. The radical protester of the 1960's, according to Horowitz (1987), had been frightened by the killings at Kent State and Jackson State and turned to quieter, more academic pursuits. Instead almost all students began to strive for the grades that will ensure a secure future a trend that continues into the early twentieth-first century.

Horowitz (1987) sees less variation among students than in the past; they "are more alike today than different" (p. 263). Grades are of primary importance, but, instead of indicating individual abilities, they "result from figuring out what their professors want, spending long hours in study, and currying favor with their instructors," exactly what the college men of the nineteenth century derided as "grade-grubbing" (p. 269). Rebellion against any facet of the academic system represents danger to the New Outsider. Part of their motivation stems from "[t]he fear of economic and social erosion, of not being able to reproduce the comfortable world of one's parents (p. 21).

Where does the New Outsider find a social life if the collegiate subculture has eroded? Students are still choosing to join fraternities and sororities, but the traditional



reasons for doing so, hedonism and elitism according to Horowitz (1987), are available to all students now. “Few undergraduates need confirmation . . . in a club structure” (p. 275). She points out that although large crowds of students attend athletic games, they only join organizations “because they perceive a particular activity as potentially useful in their future lives or because it offers personal help” (p. 275). The trends away from traditional collegiate life and emphasis on grades sound like the end of the social system which Tinto (1993) counted as vital to student satisfaction and persistence. However, if most current college students share a dedication to academic success and high grades, then that vocationalism is a social force in itself. Tinto (2000) argues that “social communities *emerge* out of academic activities that take place within the more limited academic sphere of the classroom, a sphere of activities that is necessarily also social in character” (p. 91). Perhaps the way students come together in the twenty-first century will be around academic endeavors in study groups and the classroom. Students, however, still look for friends and diversion on campus, especially when their academic obligations are fulfilled.

### **The Field of the Campus**

The concept of “field” can help explain students’ practice and decisions because the terrain of the field circumscribes the behavior of participants and gives it context. Limestone University is a field in Bourdieu’s sense which Webb, Shirato, and Danaher (2002) describe as “a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which constitute an objective hierarchy, and which produce and authorize certain discourses and activities” (p. 43). Thus the practices of the daily lives of all the people in the field of Limestone are loosely bounded by local conventions and rituals while they also create or perpetuate the rules. However, within the field of Limestone where students play, lie two other fields or sub-fields—the academic world and the social world. Emily liked to keep the parts of her life separated: “My family is in one cup, my friends are in one cup, and my school is in one cup. They are not all mixed together. So one doesn’t really affect the other.” Todd believed that his grades would have suffered if he had stayed at his home state university because of the

more active social scene there so he and Emily were making a distinction between the two fields.

Most students would agree that their academic and social lives constitute separate fields. The academic realm includes behavior related to classes, such as attendance and study habits, and interest in intellectual extracurricular events, such as lectures and discussions with peers and faculty outside of class. It comes closest to the stated mission of the university to “facilitate learning” and “expand knowledge” (Institutional Strategic, 2004). The social field revolves around students’ peers and their activities. David and Katie, and Todd to a lesser extent, certainly included the world of collegiate parties. Everyone except Emily enjoyed Limestone’s athletic teams. Emily and Amy exemplified a trend that Levine and Cureton (1998) discuss: “collegiate social life occupies a smaller part of their lives” (p. 3). They found in their research that students prefer to gather in dorm rooms to watch TV or to leave campus all together for their peer interaction. Antonio (2004) found that friendship groups (a student’s best friends on campus) may mediate the effects of the larger campus peer group or even “isolate members from more distal institutional influences” (p. 464). Whatever definition of the social field these students seemed to adopt, they continued to see it as separate from academics.

Nevertheless, these students present much evidence that the fields overlap in actual practice or possibly that students position academics above the social field. Todd valued his academic success over the fun he could have had going to college at home and managed to find time to return home occasionally, especially for football weekends. Even on those trips he took his books with him. Katie loved her sorority and her friends, but she frequently rejected opportunities to socialize in order to study. In spite of Emily’s analogy of the separate fields of her life, her friends were students who shared her educational values. They were all hard-working students with challenging schedules and little interest in parties. It is hard to imagine Emily choosing friends who neglected their coursework.

### **Connecting to the Field**

When we look at how students elected to spend their time—a valuable commodity—we can see that friends and other extracurricular activities figured

prominently. In this respect they followed the findings of Tinto (1975) and others that integration into the social life of the campus promotes student success. However, even in this small group of students we can see variety in the ways they chose to situate themselves in campus life. Each student presented a unique case study, a distinctive package of strategies for making a space on campus. A common thread was the same emphasis on vocationalism that we saw in their academic lives and a movement away from the collegiate life that dominated American campuses until the late twentieth century.

Katie, for example, joined Limestone's equestrian team to help with admission to veterinary school:

Hopefully with the Equestrian Team, that will show that I have at least handled horses before because I have to do it every time I go to my lesson and every time I ride. So without getting a job that is how I can kind of start my experience and I will look like a well-rounded student.

Katie soon realized that riding horses provided more than a line on her resume: "It might be the most stressful day of my life but I don't think about anything else (during a lesson). Nobody is there to bug me or remind me of stuff I need to do." Katie also joined the Pre-Vet Club where she heard advice about her career options and about graduate school. As valuable as that information was to her, she often skipped meetings if she needed to study for a test.

Sorority activities played a large role in Katie's life. Although she pledged before her first semester on campus, she still relied on her hometown friends for support at first instead of her new sisters "because it was so new; we had just met each other. You're still easing into it and don't talk to them that much." Afterwards, her commitment and involvement took off. She held an elected office after her first semester and later served as representative to the Panhellenic Council which widened her circle of involvement to the entire campus. Because of her responsibilities she was able to live in the sorority house which increased her attachment to her sorority sisters. In fact she said, "I've just discovered I'm a big sorority dork. I think I might try to be a traveling consultant [after graduation]." That job lasts for only a year after graduation and includes a scholarship Katie could use for graduate school. She felt that her sorority provided a niche for her on the large campus. "It has definitely helped knowing 144 people when you walk around

campus. I think it is probably easier to have a good time if you are involved [in campus groups]. My problem is that I am involved in everything.” Katie found opportunities for leadership beyond her sorority; in her Business Writing class she became a group leader because their chosen topic was agribusiness and she had the only experience in the group:

In my group I will just handle it because then I know that it is good and then I know what I want. If I had to rely on someone else to get that, I would be going crazy right now.

David was another student whose participation on campus consumed his time. When he first arrived he knew a handful of Honors Program students from orientation weekend and lived in a dorm with them. David pledged a fraternity his sophomore year. One reason he waited was that this group was just reorganizing on campus and he was in the first pledge class. He enjoyed having lunch with the brothers and keeping up with them although he was sometimes annoyed that the other freshman pledges seem to “sit in their rooms all day and send emails.” He was proud that his group had the second highest grade average of all pledge classes on campus. Like Katie he expected to hold fraternity offices and become even further involved in the organization. Despite his allegiance to his fraternity David had cultivated a wider, more diverse circle of friends because he waited a year before pledging, than if he had focused on the fraternity from the beginning. Interestingly David suspected that his full-ride scholarship, the most coveted at Limestone, separated him from his classmates. “I feel disconnected from the school because of not having to pay for it like most students.” Of course, he appreciated his opportunity to avoid a part-time job during college, but his friends had financial concerns that he could not empathize with.

Contrary to that statement, David appeared to be quite connected to Limestone and its students and faculty. Since his first days on campus he had met a variety of students and joined several active groups. His list of organizations included a service fraternity and the Student Development Council which raised money for the university, affiliations which showed David’s loyalty to his school: “I want to make the biggest difference. I love [Limestone] and want to make it a better place and make sure it has a good reputation.” During the semester of our interviews he took a leadership course for sophomores which “has made me much more of a genuine leader and participant.”

Additionally he served as a peer instructor for a freshman orientation class, a responsibility he took seriously. Besides meeting before each session with the professor, David taught some classes himself.

Maybe it's the one on one, that we're partners in teaching it. Or maybe it's that I'm leading the class. If I'm not there, what's going to happen? But I feel this intense commitment that you don't have in a large lecture hall. It's not fear, just that I want to do a good job.

David's activities offered him opportunities that most students never have. The president of the university spoke to his leadership class and impressed David with his answers to a delicate question about a controversy in the Athletics Department. "It inspired me; I'm ready to take on the world now." When F.W. DeKlerk, the former president of South Africa, spoke on campus, David's leadership class was invited to a reception for him. David asked him how he made the hard decisions to end the rule of his own party. "It was a good question and a good answer. It showed me I need to meet more people like that."

The other students in my group spent less of their time in organized activities. Nevertheless, they created niches on campus unique to themselves. Emily's love of learning and reading, for instance, led her to look forward to her classes and getting to know her classmates, especially as she moved into upper level English classes. She also met other students who worked in the library where she did. However, her primary social group was a set of eight friends who lived near each other. Though they had different interests and a variety of academic goals, they were all serious students. "We're not partiers, nothing like that. Nobody drinks really or gets drunk. That's a big factor; a lot of people are partiers." They gathered every night after studying for about three hours as they did during their first year. She described the importance of this group:

When everybody's busy and you don't hang out a lot, it's kinda depressing because you just sit around and do homework a lot. You don't feel like you're doing anything with people. . . . It's kinda like a team that they will be there for you.

She had a romantic relationship with one of the group which caused some tension during the semester. Emily described above how she compartmentalized her life into "cups" for family, schoolwork, and friends and that "one doesn't really affect the other." Still the

hurt she felt after a fight with her boyfriend took an emotional toll even though her motivation kept her going to class and studying as usual.

Todd's social group on campus began with hometown friends but enlarged to include others he met in classes. One was a young man who approached Todd in calculus class saying: "I'm going to learn something. I'm going to come and sit with you." His roommates included friends from home and from campus, and their apartment across the street from campus served as a gathering place for other students most nights. He dated a girl who attended school in his home state and visited her as often as possible, usually once or twice a month. Almost every day Todd spent an hour or more at the campus gym with another friend from home. Beyond these friends Todd spent little time with other students. "I don't think I've walked to class with somebody this whole semester. Well, I got class at 8:00 in the morning and most of my classes are over before anyone else has them." He had not joined any organized groups on campus. He felt that the party scene at Limestone lacked the excitement of his home state university. "There's no doubt in my mind that I would enjoy going there way more than here, but I wouldn't have the same accolades that I do now. I wouldn't have the same achievements at all." Todd may have seemed like an ideal candidate for fraternity membership, but he rejected that affiliation at Limestone. Because the campus banned alcohol, most fraternity activity was off campus, and Todd believed that students joined only because "they want to find somewhere to have fun."

Amy presented an interesting case of student involvement. Her roommate Becky graduated from her small rural high school with her. They roomed together in their first year too, along with a third young woman from their hometown. Although their majors were different, they had taken several general education courses together. They usually ate meals together; if one was unavailable, the other one took food back to the room. The third young woman moved back home, but she hung out on campus with her friends often. Another two friends lived in an apartment. These five women formed Amy's friendship group. Virtually all of her social activity happened in the company of one or more of them; in fact she usually studied with Becky so her academic interactions centered on that relationship also. These friends provided a cushion of comfort in the first year especially when she shared large classes with at least one familiar face. Amy

only counted a couple of friends from the dorm beyond the hometown group and shared those with Becky. “We don’t really know anybody else in the dorm.” The two of them returned home every weekend. In her first three semesters at Limestone, Amy stayed in the dorm only one weekend night “because I don’t have anything to do so we go home and see our friends at home.” When Amy described the interactions she had during one day, she included people watching which she enjoyed on her large campus and talking to Becky and a couple of other friends and to three classmates she found entertaining. Sometimes she and her friends simply drove around town.

One weekend in October was different. “I think this last week was the most fun we’ve had in two years [here] . . . cause we were just so busy.” Friday night they attended a concert on campus followed by the midnight opening of the basketball season. Then on Saturday they attended a Step Show. An African-American fellow student in Amy’s statistics class had given her a flyer about it; otherwise she would not have known about the show. Amy recalls:

It was really, really fun. We had to leave early because we had to come back and get ready for the football game cause we made shirts and stuff that spelled out CATS so we wanted to be on the front row so we could get on the camera. But it lasted, like we stayed three hours and it was still going on, but I mean it was awesome to sit there and watch them.

After the football game Amy went home for Saturday and Sunday nights, but she participated in more campus activities than she had on any weekend before. Another night Amy and Becky met downtown to study at Starbucks and eat dinner, an experience which she compared to being in New York. “Becky says we would die if we were really in New York!”

Amy chose not to join any organized groups on campus. She attended a rally for Campus Crusade, but she never followed that with other programs or formally joined the group. She knew that joining the Accounting Club would be useful for professional affiliation, but she decided to save that for her junior year “because I don’t know if I will have time to go to every meeting. I think I may wait until next year for that stuff.”

## **Fitting Everything In**

“Having time” was a recurring theme of our conversations. Their strategies for managing time evolved because fitting in everything they wanted to do presented a constant challenge. Primarily they needed to find time to study. Their strategies included methods for studying that they learned in high school and techniques they discovered by trial and error in the more intense atmosphere of college. In this way their habitus began with the background they brought from high school but incorporated new strategies as time went by. Because all these students moved away from home to the campus, they additionally needed to learn to manage their diets, sleep, and exercise. The burden on first-year students to handle their classes and friends can overwhelm them, and their biggest stumbling block is often time management. By the time of our interviews at the beginning of their second years, these students had mastered strategies to manage their time fairly successfully. They spent time with their friends, but they rarely complained that social time was “wasted” time. Their strong belief in the value of their college experience, their *doxa*, led them to invest considerable energy in their academic and social success. With the short-term perspective of youth, they considered stress and fatigue as the inevitable costs of a successful college experience.

Todd established a schedule that allowed him to work out at the gym on campus for at least an hour most weekdays. His early morning classes left him time to study in the afternoon and, after the gym and dinner, at night during the week. On the weekends he could usually watch sports and hang out with his friends or travel back home to see his girlfriend without worrying too much about coursework—“Friday night I’m done til Sunday.” He admitted that if his girlfriend had attended the same school, “I’d have a more hectic schedule and spend a lot more money.” His first semester on campus the year before was not as methodical. “Living on campus was horrible. I lost weight. I was so stressed that my dad couldn’t even talk to me.” His courses demanded more than he expected. “I was freaking out first semester because I never studied much in high school.” He took a course in study skills which:

kind of settled me down. It was good just sitting in there with all those people. I actually tried those things [study strategies]. Sometimes they didn’t work. Sometimes you needed to practice them and I definitely didn’t have time to take a break and practice them.



Todd considered the course a good investment for feeling that he was in control of his studies and his time. For that reason his second year clearly got off to a smoother start. Todd brought a disposition for discipline and order to college that was not obvious to his high school teachers. After he arrived at Limestone, he strategically chose to organize his life and studies in a way that suited him and that achieved the results (grades) he wanted. His habitus was evolving to incorporate the requirements of his education into the disposition he brought with him.

Katie's responsibilities to her sorority along with her studies added up to a hectic schedule. She found that being busy helped her stay more organized, especially by keeping her away from the television. Still, "it seems like every time I start studying I'll turn around and I have a meeting for this or a meeting for that. It seems like every day I say, 'why did I sign up for that?'" She added sarcastically, "I need one more activity just for fun, cause I have way too much time for sleep right now so I think I need to stay busy during that five hours." Her schedule of science classes demanded constant effort to keep up. "My stress level doesn't go down. I just feel like I'm 'on' all the time." Her science lab reports in particular require many hours. One was for biology lab "which took me forever. Like I worked six hours one night till 4:30 in the morning, got up at 8:30 and worked till 12:30." Sometimes she envied her housemates who seemed to have easier classes.

One of the girls was planning on cramming [for a test] for two hours and that was all she needed. I was like, 'I'm cramming for three days!' I was so burnt out at that point that I just wanted to quit school and marry rich.

Katie's weekends were for sleeping and catching up on her schoolwork before the week ahead. Her busy schedule notwithstanding, Katie enjoyed Limestone, her friends, and her classes. Her determination to finish the pre-vet program and her commitment to her sorority, along with her sense of humor, carried her through those frantic days.

Amy was less involved with campus activities, but, like Todd, she preferred to leave her weekends free when she could. That was easier during her first year, but over the first weekend of her sophomore year she took three books home to study. The exams in her classes fell in the same weeks almost every time. In fact each of her economics tests was on the same day as another test all semester. "We have decided that this

semester has been the worst semester yet. Just for me everything falls wrong.” Amy was one of the students with a part-time job. She only worked on Friday afternoons during the semester before she went home for the weekend so the impact on her schedule was minimal, except that she had to register for courses that left Friday afternoons free. Additionally the accountant she worked for helped her with her classwork so the job kept her focused on her career goals and provided specific course assistance. Her employer graduated from the same program so she understood the demands on Amy’s time and allowed a flexible schedule. Amy looked forward to assuming more responsibility at work as she completed future accounting classes so she felt her time at the job was well spent. Because Amy lived so close to home, she blended school work with her family and hometown friends more than students who had traveled farther. In our last interview before exams, Amy explained that her motivation lagged at the end of the semester. As she waited for a friend to get out of class, she predicted: “I think we’re going to go to Walmart and decorate our room for Christmas. I don’t think we’re going to get any work done tonight.” She strategically chose to incorporate her family into her life more than other students which forced her to negotiate her study time during the week so she could return home on the weekends. Amy still had to manage various demands on her time even though she did not join organizations or cultivate a large circle of new friends.

When students are as busy as David was, each class and activity is evaluated for its importance. He complained about one class because “it takes up so much time and I feel like it’s wasted time. I’m so busy that I want every minute to be useful.” His sophomore year became especially hectic with the outside demands of a fraternity; “I look back at last year and think I had all this free time!” To squeeze extra time out of the day David occasionally woke up early and worked on his computer while his roommate slept. He expected a tight schedule to be part of his life so slow times were uncomfortable. For a while after his midterm tests, David had a lull in activity. “I’m trying to use it wisely, but I find myself sleeping a lot. I feel like I’m wasting time, but that’s OK. It’s really nice to be able to watch TV for a little while or do something fun.”

From Emily’s description of herself as a “dork,” one might expect her to spend most of her time reading, and that would be correct. Her tremendous reading and writing load for English and Honors classes kept her busy. One weekend she was invited on a

trip but declined because “that would be like three days of not doing homework.” She admitted that she managed her health poorly: not eating well, avoiding exercise, and rarely sleeping more than five or six hours. Her close group of friends, all serious students, stayed up together after study time until at least 1:00 a.m. most nights. All of them felt the stress of the sophomore year.

Last year our group wanted to do stuff all the time. We would watch movies and play games every night. We don’t have time anymore. We meet when everyone finishes their homework and we all just kind of get in the same room and stare at each other, talk, and sit around.

Emily started a job at the library on campus her sophomore year. She found that working ten hours a week in the mornings suited her schedule well; she never mentioned the work as interfering with her time.

Like all these students Emily believed that college was a time to compress as much studying and fun into 24 hours as possible. Because of their strong *doxa* or belief in the value of their college experience, they understood stress as the price they must pay for good grades, career success, and a happy social life. As agents, they made choices that respected those values above other possible values, and their choices might have endangered their health in the long run. All of these students complained of exhaustion that interfered with their lives many times during the semester—classes missed, alarm clocks slept through, even classes slept through. Clearly if these motivated students battle fatigue so regularly, their sleep patterns and their management of their health merit further investigation by researchers.

### **Constructing Capital**

Looking at the ways these students are finding or creating a space for themselves in these fields makes an interesting counterpoint to the literature on student success. College impact models, particularly Tinto’s integration model, provide a framework for understanding the ways these students are fitting in or not and a prediction of whether they will persist to graduation. Pascarella & Terenzini (1991) define integration as

the extent to which the individual shares the normative attitudes and values of peers and faculty in the institution and abides by the formal and informal structural requirements for membership in that community or in the subgroups of which the individual is a part. (p. 51-52)

They measure successful integration by “satisfying and rewarding encounters with the formal and informal academic and social systems of the institution” (p. 51). Using their definition, we can see that not everyone was a tight fit. For instance, Amy lived on campus but did not find the social atmosphere there compelling enough to stay over the weekend while others living in the same atmosphere almost never went home. Todd who enjoyed parties and friends rejected the idea of joining a fraternity or, indeed, of joining anything. Both of these students belonged to the larger community of students and followed the requirements of academic behavior enough to earn good grades, but they did not consider themselves intellectuals or even aspire to that status. Thus we could say they fell short of the “normative attitudes and values” of the faculty of Limestone although they may have been abiding by the rules. Emily wholeheartedly embraced an academic path so her integration with faculty values seemed complete. But she did not enjoy or devote time to the stereotypical activities of college such as athletics, clubs, and parties which might be considered the “normative attitudes and values” of her peers. The practice of Emily, Todd, and Amy fell short of that ideal. Katie and David seemed to share both the academic and social values of the faculty and students, and the integration model would predict their success. Coincidentally they were also part of the Greek system which had a reputation on campus for “running everything.”

The concept of social capital may be a more useful framework for understanding the way these students were making a space for themselves in the field of campus. Grenfell and James (1998) define capital as the products and actions that have value in a social activity and lead to power in that activity. Achievement in both academics and social life counts as capital building for college students because students accumulate skills that they can “cash in” later as they enter the adult world.. We can see that David and Katie were building capital as college students by assuming extracurricular leadership roles along with their academic success. However, does that mean that the other students in this study were not building capital or would have less successful college experiences? Their credentials as measured by grade point averages would be satisfactory when they graduated. They succeeded to varying degrees at negotiating the treacherous waters of university bureaucracy. Despite entering with less social capital,

Todd, Amy, and Emily became increasingly comfortable in their interactions with adults on campus. They were generally happy with their college years so far. So even though we might doubt the extent of their integration into the campus, we can still claim that they were building capital which they could parlay into graduate school admission, career goals, and entrance into the world of educated adults.

The techniques for building capital were their strategic choices during college, the practice of their lives. These strategies were not simple conformity to rules; instead each student-agent used her/his disposition subconsciously to choose an action from several possible actions. One commonality in this group of students was a goal of attaining high grade point averages. Therefore, we see Todd choosing to take 8:00 a.m. classes and making sure he attended each one and Katie returning to campus in the summer to repeat a failed course and erase the low grade. This kind of hard work and determination to succeed academically was embedded in the habitus of each of these students. They hardly considered any alternative which might result in a lower grade point average.

Even beyond the pursuit of good grades, their individual dispositions affected other choices they made and ensured that we would see a variety of ways they chose to make a space for themselves on campus. Todd said of the students in his engineering class: “there’s a level of intellectualism that I’m not interested in. There’s no way I could have it because I’m not interested.” Although his skills and determination could have led him to consider engineering as a major, his disposition made him look around and reject the identity of the engineer. He could not see himself in that position. His choice of physical therapy gave him a chance to work with people and still use his affinity for science. Emily reached beyond the requirements of good grades for intellectual challenge in her courses. She was the rare student who read all the recommended texts. The fun of the stereotyped college life held no appeal for her. She preferred her small group of like-minded friends to large sports events or parties. Reading and learning had always been Emily’s passions and, for her, college was where those interests could expand and grow. Like Todd, she used her disposition when she rejected a major in chemistry, even though she could have succeeded there, because she knew it was not a fit for her.

The path that Katie and David chose to campus involvement was a more traditional one and followed the integration model. Both were active in Greek organizations and assumed leadership roles there. Katie filled the rest of her time with activities that related to her career field such as the Equestrian Team, Pre-Vet Club, and Agriculture Honorary while David belonged to service and fund-raising groups. Additionally David cultivated several faculty relationships that promoted his intellectual development and combined the academic and social fields.

### **The Campus Community**

If we search for community among these students, we might find it in their loyalty to athletic teams. Like all these students except Emily, Amy has attended almost all home football and basketball games. Katie had been a football fan all her life and missed only her second home game in seven years during our interviews. “I tell everybody I will take down the goal post one year even if we just lost the last game of my senior year and I’m out there by myself being arrested.” The university had a student group to support athletics which gave away tickets to students who “do the pep and stuff on the court.” Predictably considering his level of involvement, David belonged to this group. Todd enjoyed almost every game also and reported that everyone he knew either attended games or watched them on television. It is interesting that athletics seems to be the common bond among these students. Official goals, from accrediting agencies or the university’s mission for instance, do not include excellence in athletics among the primary objectives. Yet, these students would list sports as the one area they shared with most other students, the place where community was built on their campus.

In its mission statement, Limestone claims that it “facilitates learning, informed by scholarship and research, expands knowledge through research, scholarship and creative activity and serves a global community by disseminating, sharing and applying knowledge.” In addition “the University models a diverse community characterized by fairness and social justice.” These words describe the intended center of campus focus as knowledge and scholarship. If these are the “normative attitudes and values” of the institution, and they represent many colleges’ values, had these students bought into them? Did their daily choices reflect that these values were part of their habitus? Of

course these students were just beginning their college careers, and they were obviously following the conventions and regulations of the university to receive good grades. But in only two of them did we see the commitment to learning and knowledge that the university seemed to respect so highly. David and Emily sought out intellectual challenges in their choice of classes and major disciplines. They valued scholarly discussion with faculty and peers. Their interest in academics reached beyond their concern for grades. The other students here certainly learned the rules and strategies for high grade point averages, but they did not seek out intellectual coursework especially when their grades might suffer. The discrepancy between the university's mission and the lives of its students presents some interesting challenges to the integration model. Can students become integrated to a campus where almost no one shares the stated goals? The question needs further examination by scholars and students themselves.

For this study, the unique way each student was building capital shows us that they were creating spaces for themselves by their daily choices and practices. Their choices were guided in large part by their vocationalism (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005) which is one way of describing the process of "cashing in" capital later on. As examples of Horowitz's *New Outsiders* (1987) they worked to be sure their behavior within the academic field would guarantee them the specific skills and credentials for a career. Likewise many of their choices within the social field reflected their concern for the future, especially when they chose friends who would not distract them from the goal of good grades and chose activities related to career goals. This focus on vocation influences both the academic and social lives of students in significant ways. It is also primarily an individual goal, interpreted by each student in an idiosyncratic way. For some students vocationalism might have included meeting new friends and taking leadership roles, but always they looked ahead to their unique future.

## Chapter 6

### Eyes on the Future

“I don’t want to pay the money I pay to come here without getting a good education.”

#### **Practicing Vocationalism**

The term “vocationalism” applies to today’s college students for a variety of reasons. In Clark and Trow’s categories Vocational students came to college to train for specific careers, such as engineering or medicine, and social and intellectual pursuits held little interest for them. Horowitz (1987) calls them Outsiders because their goals differed from the College Men and Women who utilized college for fun and personal contacts instead of career preparation. These students became more numerous on American campuses during the middle of the twentieth century. Now the New Outsiders, as Horowitz (1987) labels them, encompass almost all students. While they are not socially isolated, they devote their time primarily to the quest for a high grade point average because of its value in the marketplace or professional school admissions office after graduation. “Vocational” is also used to describe programs that lead to certification without a degree, in fields such as dental hygiene or graphic design at the high school or community college level. Most college students would consider their degree programs superior to certification programs because they intend to enter professional fields that will elevate them to a higher social status or maintain the high status of their parents. However, they are still driven by the goal of the certificate, the degree that they hope will insure their future security. Thus the New Outsiders can be characterized as vocational.

Grubb and Lazerson (2005) consider this move toward vocationalism a powerful force in higher education and in society. Campuses have had to respond to the goals of students by expanding course offerings in business and health sciences while shrinking the liberal arts departments which lead less directly to the professions. At the same time a college education has become a social mandate, almost universally accepted as available and required for every young person in America. In the past any college degree led to status for the graduate. Now, when almost everyone is going to college, the status



of the institution and the individual grade point average take on greater significance for the young person who wants to stand out among college graduates. So educational opportunity—universal access to higher education—has become a social ultimatum. This larger social issue plays out on campuses in the everyday practice of college students who devote most of their energy to future security and success when they choose to attend class, study for exams, and write papers before they indulge in the traditional college pleasures of drinking, parties, and athletics.

Other than the decrease in liberal arts majors, how has vocationalism affected the curriculum and faculty? Issues of affirmative action and financial aid, which are fundamental to the “college for all” dream, influence the composition of the student body. Another important consequence Grubb and Lazerson (2005) label “the fragility of liberal education.” Those who lament the demise of the liberal arts, however, disregard “[t]he plain fact . . . that civic, intellectual, and moral purposes are not what most students think higher education is about” (p. 9). Therefore, there may be a divergence in the goals of professors and their students. Braxton and Lien (2000) list a discrepancy in faculty goals, often more “cognitively oriented” than student goals, as a reason some students leave college (p. 24-25). Students may also consider the general education sequence irritating, merely a hurdle in their path, because they do not see the value in courses which lie outside their chosen area. For the determined vocational student, however, these obstacles will not affect progress toward a degree. Acceptance of incongruent faculty goals, like the acceptance of faculty power and status, are small prices to pay for the coveted degree and high grades. Ultimately they retain the agency that empowers their choices of classes and major fields.

Their agreement with the structure of academic life in the institution despite its incongruence with their goals may come from their assumption that school mimics the environment they can expect in the working world. Bowles and Gintis (2002) call this the “correspondence principle” whereby schools “structur[e] social interactions and individual rewards to replicate the environment of the workplace” (p. 1). In this way schools serve an important capitalistic function by training socialized, compliant workers. They further argue that neither intellectual ability nor the acquisition of knowledge in school determines an individual’s adult status to any extent. Rather for most children

schools reproduce the status of their parents regardless of IQ or cognitive aptitude. “[S]chools *socialize* students to accept beliefs, values, and forms of behavior on the basis of authority, rather than the students’ own critical judgments of their interests” (p. 12). But this theory of socialization seems to remove the student’s agency from the equation. Bowles and Gintis (2002) suggest that the actual process of transmission of values uses cultural models in the form of teachers and surrounds children with system of incentives and punishments. They claim that there is a “close association . . . between the personality and behavioral traits associated with getting good grades in school and the traits associated with garnering high supervisor rankings at work” (p. 13). Because of this correspondence principle, “schools express the conflicts and limitations, as well as the hopes, of a heterogeneous and unequal society” (p. 15).

Today’s largely vocationally minded college students have spent more than half their lives in a system that makes them inferior in authority but promises the rewards of financial success in the future. While they remain autonomous to an extent, choosing courses and a major area, their acquiescence to the system which offers them few genuine alternatives looks reasonable.

The participants in my study had moments of excitement about their learning. They expended most of their time and energy, however, in pursuit of a high grade point average. Good grades, defined for these students as predominately A’s, guaranteed admission to good graduate schools or high-paying jobs upon graduation. So, while they were not yet taking courses that provided technical skills, their vocationalism revealed itself in their pursuit of the commodity of a high GPA. My research shows some variation in student practice in the academic arena which can be explained by developmental differences or possibly by varying levels of academic capital. However, an attitude of vocationalism prevailed in each case.

Another sign of their focus on vocation was their relationship with faculty. While the relationship was seldom adversarial, it was still marked by differential power. Faculty and administration control student access to courses and evaluate students for the all-important grades. Student choices over time do affect the academy as Grubb and Lazerson (2005) point out when discussing the rise of vocationalism in response to student demand, but these effects are gradual. In a student’s short college career he is not

likely to perceive his effect on the uneven power structure. He is more apt to consider his professors as he would an employer, another indication of the importance of vocationalism in his thinking. Part of the influence of faculty comes from their choice of pedagogical methods. All of these students had occasional excellent classroom experiences, but time and again they described to me classroom environments that failed to inspire and excite students. Despite these complaints, they believed strongly in the value of their educations and in the validity of the hierarchical structure of the field.

### **Vocationalism**

That the prospect of a satisfying and successful career drives the choice of a major is clear from the stories of these students. They wanted to be able to find work and a decent salary easily; for Katie and Todd that meant not following their interests in history. But more importantly they all intended to be fulfilled in their chosen careers. Amy based her choice of accounting on her part-time job where she discovered the field and her aptitude for it. Katie followed a childhood dream to become a veterinarian. Emily's choice of an English major leading to an academic career meant she could foresee spending the rest of her life doing what she loved: reading and writing. Todd and David struggled over their choices because of the breadth of their interests. Todd based his decision on his perceptions of himself, and David expanded his options with an interdisciplinary major. Although they were not primarily motivated by dreams of large salaries or financial security, all these students were driven by the vision of life on the other side of college. In this respect their major choices were vocational decisions.

The students' family background influenced their choices in both predictable and surprising ways. Katie and Todd planned to enter professional schools as other members of their families had. David's choice of an interdisciplinary major leading to a career in international development seemed logical in light of his family's long support of his far-reaching academic interests. Amy's decision to become an accountant fit with her family's expectations that her degree should result in a secure occupation. As a first-generation college student she, and her parents, saw the primary value of her education to be a secure, respected career, and accounting corresponded to those criteria. Emily was also a first-generation student so her choice of a career as an English professor confused

her parents. They encouraged her interest in chemistry because the work of a chemist looked tangible, secure, and financially rewarding while an English professor's work seemed abstract and ill-paid. She described a battle with her parents over her choice, but in the end they supported her and trusted she would succeed in her chosen field.

Their major choices were certainly vocational in nature, but in the more immediate realm of their everyday lives, vocationalism was apparent in their commitment to high grades. A high GPA was a commodity which demanded hard work but could be exchanged for important rewards both in college and later. This commitment did not exclude an excitement about learning. However, even when students were inspired by a class, they interpreted their interest to be a vindication or confirmation of a wise career choice. In that respect their eyes were on the end goal of a career and not solely on the abstract joy of learning implied by liberal arts. Katie who planned to become a veterinarian was a good example as she found her niche in her first agriculture class:

I felt like a big sponge just soaking up all this knowledge. I just wanted to know more. If there was something they told me that I didn't have any idea about, I wanted them to explain because I wanted to know what was going on. I just loved it.

In fact, Katie found a variety of classes interesting. "I can say that I've never ever hated school. I always enjoyed going and learning new things and succeeding." However, high grades mattered to her as much as delight in the subject matter. She knew that her admission to veterinary school depended on good grades in all her courses and especially in science classes. Because of the demand for high grades and the regimented pre-vet program, she did not experiment with courses all over the university. Also when she felt she was over her head in her chemistry course, she decided to withdraw because "it wasn't worth it for me to let [grades in] these three other classes drop that I know I could do pretty well in because I'm trying to study twice as much for this class." She realized that future required chemistry courses would depend on knowledge from this one so she needed a solid background in the basics; repeating the course later made more sense.

Emily regretted taking calculus her first semester. The course was not required for her, but "I had this notion I liked math." She earned a B in the course and

it really ruined my GPA forever. It was a big shock that semester because I'd always gotten a 4.0 my entire life and to get a B the very first semester in a class I didn't need to take was rough.

Her grade point average mattered more to Emily than the knowledge of calculus, but she had a genuine desire in other subjects to learn and especially to read. Of her decision to enter the Honors Program with its humanities courses, she said: "I get to read more books! I get to learn more stuff!" She rejected a chemistry major and chose English because chemistry would not challenge her to use her brain "the way I like to use it." Together with this love of learning, her stress on grades prompted her to work hard at every subject all during the semester, not to cram for a final exam or paper. Either Emily's love of learning reflected her career goals or vice versa. Her plans to become an English professor could result from the realization that she could turn her passion for reading and writing into a career—a vocational choice—or from a preference for humanities classes—a more immediate factor, or both short-term satisfaction and longer-term vision could have led to her choice.

Emphasis on grade point average was accentuated by the requirements each student faced for admission to upper level courses and graduate school. Amy, for instance, would need to apply to the business college after taking general education and introductory business courses with at least a 3.0 average. Katie knew that veterinary schools would look specifically at her grades in science courses in addition to her overall average. Todd would apply to the physical therapy dual degree program after he completed his pre-requirements in his junior year; another application would admit him to the graduate part of the program two years later. At each step a high grade point average would make him more competitive for one of the scarce spots in the program. In fact he planned to delay his application to the physical therapy program rather than take several science courses at once "because if I get too overloaded, my GPA can come down too much to get in there." During the semester of our interviews Todd lost interest and motivation because none of his classes would count toward his new major, "but I really care about the grades. I just need to keep going." In his case a high GPA served as the primary motivation for him in every class that semester. Additional motivation for Todd came from his out-of-state status and the higher tuition his father paid. "If I just want to

drink and party and get bad grades, I could just stay home. I don't want to pay the money I pay to come here without getting a good education." Apparently high grades and a good education were equivalent in Todd's mind and depended on his own discipline.

David shared a reluctance to enroll in challenging classes which might lower his grade point average. When he entered Limestone he knew that his writing needed work, but "I don't want to ruin my grades by taking a challenging writing class." Fortunately his Honors classes demanded excellent writing skills and the teachers provided useful comments and direction. Otherwise he acknowledged the need for hard work; "that's what I'm here for." Though he wanted a high GPA, David stood out in this largely vocational group for his passion to learn. His choice of the economics major in Arts & Sciences instead of the Business College indicated his determination to take a wide variety of classes with an emphasis on the humanities rather than the more restrictive requirements of a business degree. Sometimes he found his coursework exciting and became immersed in a particular assignment. Several readings in the Honors class caused this reaction. He found a new appreciation for Shakespeare after reading *King Lear* and spent hours writing and revising his paper about points of view in *Frankenstein*. His course in political science about Third World countries elicited the same responses. Interestingly David enjoyed the course because he knew so little about the content beforehand, in contrast to other students who felt insecure in classes where they were unprepared. He also found the connections between classes exciting, specifically when he read Marx in Honors class and discussed economic reforms of Third World countries in political science class. In spite of his diligence David resisted homework that he felt was "silly" or that the professor did not collect. This problem was pronounced in his accounting class. By contrast, in his political science class he enjoyed the readings so much that he planned to ask a classmate to discuss the articles with him beyond the requirements of the syllabus.

David and all these students looked to the future when they made course and major choices. In the more immediate sense, they demonstrated their desire for vocation in their determination to earn high grades, a commodity to trade for admission to upper-level courses or graduate school. Finding courses stimulating and exciting confirmed

they had made the right vocational choices, not necessarily that they had found joy in knowledge as traditional liberal arts would encourage.

### **Choosing a Path**

The most far-reaching academic decision students make once they are in college is the choice of a major. They look at a surprising multitude of factors, including the campus resources of career counselors and tests, but ranging far beyond such official means. Factors external to the student such as market forces and the campus reputation of the department compete with more personal assessments of suitability and potential. For all these students the decision to major in a subject reached beyond the four years of college to the career world. Everyone asked “what will I do with it?” when they considered a major. In some cases, Katie’s for example, the career decision came first. In order to become a veterinarian, she could major in animal science or biology but she felt that animal science would be more interesting and help her gain admission to graduate school. Her choice reflected both her understanding of the academic field by her emphasis on getting into veterinary school and her appreciation of her own learning patterns, her preference for hands-on courses. While everyone wanted to take major courses that interested them, interest was only one criteria. Both Katie and Todd, for instance, had a love for history but neither considered history as a major because of the lack of career options.

About two-thirds of first-year students who matriculated at Limestone in 2002 (the cohort group of these students) chose a major and entered one of Limestone’s twelve colleges. They were not officially admitted to the programs in those colleges until they qualified for upper division courses with a satisfactory grade point average, but they received an advisor in that college right away. Students who did not declare a major were assigned advisors who helped them decide on a major and choose relevant courses until then. All students visited an advisor to pre-register for classes, but many scheduling decisions were made alone based on personal interest, requirements, input from peers, and convenience. In this way the decision to declare a major proceeded in the same manner as the decision to schedule a set of courses for a certain semester; personal

interest, input from peers, and convenience played influential roles along with a vision of a particular career.

Hodkinson (1999) calls the career decision-making process “pragmatically rational” (p. 261). Simon’s concept of bounded rationality likewise accounts for the restraints that our complex world places on rational decision making. That is, students use experiences of their own or of others they know in a reasonable way but not necessarily in a rational way. Instead their choices reflect known opportunities and “often [involve] accepting (or rejecting) one option rather than choosing among many” (p. 261). These perceived opportunities or constraints emerge from the field of the campus—in terms of availability and local perception of the department—or the field of the larger society—in terms of job demand. Thus the process is closely tied to the student’s disposition and may not rely on official sources of advice or the results of aptitude tests. We can see this process in action in the stories of these students whether they came to college committed to a major field or decided after they arrived.

Amy picked accounting as a career after working during high school for a woman who owned a small accounting practice. Although she had considered an accounting major before, personal experience with this employer and her business reinforced her interest. As an accounting major Amy could choose from a wide array of general education courses and electives, but her commitment to her major determined that she would choose courses that would not interfere with the time she needed to do well in accounting classes. Because so many students come to Limestone as declared accounting majors, an orientation session is held specifically for them; Amy followed with a semester-long orientation course that was offered only to accounting majors. While that course covered the resources of the entire university, Amy learned more about her major department and met the cohort of students that would move through the program with her. Thus her commitment to the discipline, its language, and its culture was strengthened in ways that Tinto (1993) claimed could improve persistence and the chances of graduation.

Katie aspired to become a veterinarian “ever since I was little.” Although she made her career plans early, she discovered that pre-vet courses suited her talents and abilities so her interests matched her identification of herself as a student. As with Amy’s



orientation to her academic discipline, Katie found a comfortable “fit” in the animal science major. For example, she found the biology course “easier for me because I’m much more into facts and not theories and relative stuff.” The chemistry and biology labs also appealed to her affinity for hands-on learning. When she took her first agriculture class, the professor asked who had a tractor and Katie, who grew up in the suburbs of a large city, “was one of the only ones who didn’t raise my hand.” Despite that surprise, Katie was happy to be in the Agriculture College; her courses and professors there, her advisor, and the clubs she joined convinced her that she made the right choice to declare animal science as a major. Other colleges require students to finish general education courses before sampling major courses, but by taking agriculture courses early in her career, Katie’s major decision was reinforced. The classes and the extracurricular activities she chose integrated her into the college and the discipline.

Emily was less certain about her major choice when she entered Limestone, but she declared English soon thereafter, despite her parents’ objections, and intended to complete a Ph.D. Program and follow an academic career. She felt confident about her abilities because of her interest in learning, her skill at reading, and the affirmations of adults in high school. In fact her confidence prompted her to ask a favorite professor for permission to join a senior level class during her sophomore year, and she continued to choose classes according to the challenge they would offer. Emily genuinely cared about academic work, not only as a means to graduation, but as a career in itself. Her identification of herself as a good student led her to apologize to me when her actions in class contradicted that image. Twice during our interviews Emily explained uncharacteristic behavior. In her large introductory Psychology class

I started off sitting in the front. But I didn’t want to be completely disrespectful and sleep right in front of his face. . . . [Now] I hear people shuffling papers and writing and I wake up and take notes and put my head back down.

Another time she asked a professor to postpone her scheduled presentation because she did not feel well. “I’ve never done this before in my entire life. I didn’t even want to tell you because I feel so bad. I don’t do this, but I’m so stressed out and I have so many other things to do.” Emily’s obvious commitment to the game of academics made her decision to become a professor quite rational, as Hodkinson (1999) claims. It extended

beyond the expectations of her parents who do not hold college degrees themselves and who preferred that she choose a more secure career. But her abilities and past academic performance led her to believe that becoming a professor was an attainable goal.

These young women seemed certain of their decisions to major in animal science, accounting, and English. Todd and David were less sure and declared their majors during our interviews. Both of them admitted that they were at a disadvantage when registering for classes, particularly in their first year, because they had not decided on a major. The processes they used to choose a major field illustrated the variety of ways students decide on an academic discipline. Todd's route to a physical therapy major involved assessments of his own abilities, his fellow students, and the job market, in addition to observation of his father, an engineer who earned an MBA degree after college and started his own engineering firm. Todd earlier considered an engineering career, but "my dad's an engineer and he wasn't even crazy about the idea that I was considering it because for the amount of work they do, they don't get paid enough." His perceptions of engineering students played an equally large role in his rejection of the field. During our interviews he enrolled in an Introduction to Civil Engineering course and realized "I just really don't see myself wanting to do that for the rest of my life." This was his assessment of his classmates:

Engineers are a different type of breed. They have real deep philosophical conversations; I could never go up to one and talk about the football game. That's too superficial for them. There's a level of intellectualism that I'm not interested in. There's no way I could have it because I'm not interested. . . . There's probably other people like me in my classes, sitting in opposite corners of the classroom and thinking we can't stand this.

He found one such student, a young woman majoring in materials engineering who told Todd: "I was going to ask the kid that was sitting next to me in class to smile at me because I've never seen him smile." Todd was learning that his own disposition did not match the aspiring engineers in his class. While career counselors may not encourage such comparison as a way to choose a career, Todd used that strategy rationally to eliminate engineering as a major.

Although Todd succeeded in his History classes and others that required reading, he reflected, "I need to pick a major where I can work with something." He also rejected

a business degree from Limestone—another option he had considered—as a waste of his out-of-state tuition. He thought he could work toward a business degree closer to home for less money. He wanted a challenging major: “I don’t want to have a major that’s too easy to get and get out of college and turn around and wonder if I could’ve done something harder.” He abandoned the idea of law after working with a law firm during high school and finding that he “didn’t really like some of the things they had to do. I have a conscience, you know.” To help in his decision Todd took a career interest test at the counseling center on campus, but he found the results to be foolish because it compared the students’ interests to those in career fields: “Chiropractors like weeding the garden so if you like that, you should be a chiropractor.” He also found that picking a major consumed time and energy, and he was thankful that his course load was lighter so he could research majors this semester.

He had thought about a medical career but did not want to become a doctor. He described the process of deciding on physical therapy this way:

I like solving problems. That’s kinda what you do in calculus. They give you a problem and you fix it, solve it. So with physical therapy they’re coming to me with the problem. All I gotta do is fix it, solve it. [Another] reason I’m considering physical therapy is it’s close to things I’ve been doing. I like to exercise and I like to be around sports and such.

As a physical therapy major, Todd would have to succeed in a set of courses before he could apply to enter the program. Therefore, he made an appointment with the Pharmacy College director of admissions and, armed with the list of the requirements, discussed declaring this major. While this professor advised him about the program ahead of him if he chose physical therapy, no one led Todd through the decision-making process. Instead he used his experiences and his own assessments of his talents and abilities to reject several options until he decided that physical therapy fit his criteria. His “pragmatically rational” decision began with what he already knew about the world and himself. From there he considered an array of options both from a local campus perspective and from a wider appraisal. He rejected most of those choices according to his idiosyncratic criteria. As an agent his choices were made strategically within the framework of his habitus and values. His use of campus resources—the career test and the visit with an advisor—

demonstrated his growing ability to put his social capital to use, but much of his process showed his determination to avoid merely taking the advice of others.

David also followed an interesting path to a major decision. When he arrived at Limestone, “I thought I knew exactly what I wanted. I was going to go into business and be a successful millionaire.” So he entered as a business major and was assigned to an advisor in that college. Because he was also in the Honors Program, however, he consulted the advisor there who knew about a variety of options for majors across the campus. He made an effort to develop a relationship with her which he used to his advantage during the semester he decided on a major. Another helpful adult was the professor he assisted in teaching the orientation course for freshmen. That professor taught in the finance department and “is trying to make a business major out of me.” These adults knew David and his talents well so their advice went beyond simply scheduling classes to include internships, study abroad, and other opportunities. As noted above, David valued and excelled at networking with adults on campus and that interest would pay off in his introduction to educational opportunities later (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985). His social capital provided chances for advice and further learning that other students missed out on.

David struggled with his major choice because of the extent of his interests. In political science class he enjoyed the readings about third-world countries and became interested in international development. The Honors advisor suggested he talk to a professor about a topical major in economic geography<sup>3</sup>. “If I declare a topical major I escape the prerequisites and go on into what I want to study so that’s really attractive. I won’t be bored anymore.” Two of David’s friends decided on that route at the same time. “So I asked ‘Am I being part of a fad here?’ I’m trying to keep their ideas about it out and find my own path. If I can do that, I’ll be happy.” David was able to reflect on his own decision-making process so he could avoid simply following the crowd. Like Todd he was determined to make a unique, individual decision. Eventually David declared a major in economics in the Arts and Sciences College. With this program he could take several political science and geography courses without the more structured

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<sup>3</sup> A topical major is designed by the student to include courses across disciplines. The program is supervised by a faculty member and requires a substantial research project before graduation.

requirements of the Business College. Being able to follow the wide range of his interests, especially with study abroad and internships, motivated David in the direction of liberal arts. “I wasn’t getting the education I wanted to get in the [Business College.]” Cultivating useful relationships and thoughtfully putting the advice he received to work were parts of David’s strategy for playing the college game. He did not desire the integration into a discipline that Amy and Katie received with their majors in accounting and animal science. Rather his perception of a good education extended beyond any particular department and even beyond the campus. In this way he desired integration more with the broad concept of a liberal education than with a specific major although his goals still looked to his future and the kind of adult he would become.

From the vantage point of their third semester in college we can see the tremendous effort these students put into learning the rules—explicit and unspoken—of the field of college. They firmly believed that they should be in college and succeed there by earning good grades and moving into their chosen careers. So their habitus evolved until following certain strategies became second nature. We can see the advantages of the cultural capital students brought with them in David’s emphasis on establishing relationships with adults. However, the other students who seemed less assertive in faculty interactions were nevertheless successfully dealing with the their field. Thus it is important to notice the variety of strategies student use. Administrators and policy makers cannot assume that students will choose the paths laid out for them officially as they build their academic lives.

### **Disciplinary Commitment**

As students take more courses in their major area, they become further committed to their chosen path. As in the larger field of college, they learn *le sens du jeu* in the sub-field of their major department. They perceive different patterns of pedagogy in different departments and begin to feel comfortable in their chosen area. Their integration into the disciplinary community began early for Katie and Amy. Katie found the faculty in the Agriculture College to be surprisingly inviting and caring. “They really want you to do well and not get all stressed about it. They all love what they do and they want to teach what they’re teaching.” As she took her required science courses, she perceived a large

difference among various departments, especially chemistry and biology. In her biology class the TA's sent work sheets out electronically to help students prepare for an exam. She also found that the biology labs closely mirrored the courses so that the hands-on experiments reinforced her learning in the courses. In the chemistry department, however, Katie complained:

Nobody cares over there. You are just number 3400; too bad if you got a bad grade on your exam or you are having trouble with it. If you get to know your professor, it can be better but still I remember my professor from the first semester. I went to ask him for help with homework and he ended up telling me for thirty minutes why he should have had the Nobel Prize. So, I was like "okay, I guess I will just figure it out on my own because you are really not helping me right now." You couldn't pay me to be a chemistry major at this point.

As students settle into a chosen major with general education requirements behind them, classroom satisfaction and engagement come more easily. One advantage of studying sophomores was that students were taking both courses in their majors and an array of general education and elective courses. I could look at their strategies and attitudes toward a variety of teaching practices. By and large they felt comfortable and appropriately challenged in the atmosphere of the classes that would count toward the major; conversely they probably chose the major because of their comfort with the required classes. A third possibility is that, once the major was chosen, students felt a responsibility to enjoy the classes in order to justify the choice. It is impossible to disentangle the origins of their satisfaction. From the students' perspective the major courses set them on a path toward a career that suited the goals they had. To take a larger view, they were initiates entering a discipline, established beyond the borders of Limestone's campus, which existed long before them and will continue long after they graduate.

Each discipline on the Limestone campus, generally defined as a department within a college, represents a field within the larger field of the entire campus, and each discipline on campus belongs to an international sphere. Its members share a disciplinary language and tradition which may be unique from any other discipline. Within most disciplines there are divisions in perspective and emphasis, such as the difference between literature and composition focus in English, but there remains a mutual respect among the players. Each discipline also has a hierarchy of novices beginning with the

undergraduates in general education courses and the apprentices who actually pursue the major. Graduate students occupy a higher level of apprentice, new professors and established professors an even higher level. Conflict within the field can arise about the boundaries of the field: standards for admission, criteria for progress, or whether certain research fits the disciplinary definition. The participants in my study were concerned primarily with the standards for admission. At Limestone many programs require a high grade point average and a sequence of preliminary courses for admission to upper level classes. Sometimes these courses seem logical, like Business Writing for Amy's accounting major. Other times the logic eluded them, like Amy's calculus requirement "because I've seen so much accounting and it's not really calculus." Student vocationalism drove them to meet the preliminary requirements whether they agreed or not. Undergraduate students often are unaware of disciplinary conflicts, but they do learn the ways of their field when they choose a major. The process is similar to learning *le sens du jeu* that occupied their first months in college.

Nespor (1995) argues that the way the curriculum is organized and students' path through the courses structure their experience in a department. Pedagogical choices affect students also and tend to become standardized within some departments. In his study the physics and management departments exhibited different levels of connectedness in their curricula and gave students different learning experiences. In physics the early classes in the tightly connected curriculum served to give students an "intuitive grasp" of the field and an expectation for a high volume of work in addition to "weeding out" those who were not prepared (p. 507). The faculty encouraged the formation of academic friendships by rewarding explanations of *how* a problem was solved as much as the correct answer, a process reinforced by study groups. Because the faculty valued the learning strategy of the groups, students—often working class—who studied alone had lower grades. Thus the students with higher initial cultural capital, who valued and had time for group study and who appreciated the process as much as the correct answer, accumulated more academic capital in terms of higher grades and better chances at graduate school admission.

The management department likewise used its introductory courses to "weed out" students but not so much to create a close-knit cohort as to reduce numbers. Since

students did not take required courses together, their friendships were not formed in their classes. The social network that did exist served to help students choose professors, share notes and tests for studying, and make business contacts. The system in the management department privileged social capital instead of academic capital, but both physics and management were “structured so as to produce cohorts of graduates with shared outlooks, ambitions, definitions of reality, and strategies of acquiring and using knowledge” (Nespor, 1995, p. 517). In my study Katie and Amy experienced early efforts by their departments to socialize them into the discipline. Emily felt less connection with the English Department. David and Todd had not settled into a major department yet.

Amy seemed well suited to the accounting major she chose. She felt comfortable in large classes where she was not expected to speak up. (And she actively avoided the professor with the microphone!) She was accustomed to the lecture-exam sequence of most business courses. Because she worked with an accountant, she was not discouraged by having to withdraw from a required calculus course when she did not understand the material. She knew she could complete it later and that her confusion in that class would not endanger her career. Declaring a major early helped her stay on track to graduate, she believed, because she chose her course schedules with an eye to the major requirements so that every class counted. The accounting department offered orientation sessions for prospective majors during the summer before their first semesters because of the large number of first-year students who declare the major. Also one of Limestone’s freshman orientation courses was devoted exclusively to accounting majors. These classes were efforts to socialize novices into the discipline, and Amy took advantage of both. Although she made few friends among her fellow majors in these classes, she began her initiation into the field. Her advisor was familiar with all the requirements of the accounting major but provided little assistance beyond course scheduling, such as arranging internships. She was also unprepared to discuss alternatives to the accounting major with Amy; that decision was presumed to be final.

The student whose commitment to her career and major decision faced the most challenge was Katie. From the first day of her first agriculture class when the professor asked who owned a tractor, this young woman from the suburbs could have felt out of place. Her brother teased her and her friends failed to understand her excitement about



going to the farm for a class. In addition she failed a required chemistry course her first semester. Even after repeating that class in the summer, Katie had to drop the next course in the sequence during our interviews to avoid failing it. All these forces could have discouraged Katie, but she remained determined to succeed in her field. She found a welcoming home in the Agriculture College. There, several required courses for majors from their first semesters on campus introduced students to the field, while other departments and colleges required students to take courses all over the university first. The Agriculture College was more than a mile from some parts of campus, giving its students a common complaint about the long walk they shared. So even its physical location tended to help students bond together. As a result novice students began to learn the discipline of the study of agriculture and the culture of the particular department. “You get to know what’s going on. You start to learn the language,” Katie explained. Because of these classes Katie made several good friends who were also agriculture students. During our interviews she was taking other required classes but no agriculture classes and that affected her motivation.

Last semester when I had my animal science classes, I loved it so much that it didn’t matter too much what I had to do to get there. Now when I have to get to class, I’m like “this isn’t really worth it.”

Katie’s personal determination was tested during her first semester but recovered strongly by her third semester. A speaker at the Pre-Vet Club inspired Katie with his story of failing courses but still being successful at veterinary school. Even in her Business Writing class Katie chose topics related to agriculture when she could. In fact Katie’s decision to drop her second chemistry class mid-semester came primarily from her commitment to succeed. First of all, she knew that catching up in that class would take valuable time away from her other courses and lower her grade average. Also she realized that the concepts in this chemistry class would form the basis for Organic Chemistry and other courses she needed later, so understanding them would be vital to her future success. Stark et al. (1989) suggest that students should “create a hierarchy of goals with short-term goals taking on added importance, but with long-term goals kept clearly in view” (p. 39). Katie seemed to be following that advice as she negotiated the

withdrawal system. In that light her decision to withdraw from the class can be seen as part of her strong commitment.

There's nothing—I mean there would have to be something really huge that would make me stop this major because I just know how much fun I had in my animal science classes. . . . Everything right now that I'm doing, besides my sorority, is kind of focusing towards that. It's going, you know, towards getting into vet school and learning all the things I need to know. So at this point it would be a real pain in the butt to have to go back and take all the intro. classes for another major. And, I just want it—want it too bad to let some class get in my way. Even if I have to take an extra semester or I have to do whatever I have to do. This is definitely what I want to do.

Katie's strong dedication and loyalty were not only directed at her major; she felt the same about her sorority and her friendships. She did not come to college to try out different academic or social options. She started immediately on an academic path to veterinary school and pledged the same sorority her older sister joined. Her disposition encompassed a determination to work hard at all these elements in her life: veterinary school, sorority, and friends. Her college experience may have tested these allegiances, but despite feeling at times that "I just want to quit school and marry rich," Katie persevered.

Emily was not tested in her decision to major in English or integrated into that department in the same way. The loose structure of the English curriculum meant that she would not know many of her fellow majors. Since she entered Limestone with credits in English, Emily took courses with older students during her first two years and moved along in the department faster than her cohort. Her intention to pursue a Ph.D. after college set her on a more solitary course; except for cultivating relationships with professors who could write recommendations, social networking would not expand her opportunities. Todd regretted not making a career and major decision earlier because he took courses that would probably not count toward the requirement and might postpone his graduation. He also predicted that his motivation to succeed and his enjoyment of his courses would increase when he committed to a department.

David's reluctance to declare a major stemmed from his broad array of interests and illustrated the frustration some students feel at having to limit themselves to one discipline. He was able to find an multidisciplinary program by majoring in economics

in the Arts and Sciences College rather than the Business College. He could work toward knowledge in international development but in ways that suited his academic disposition. Besides his determination and ability to acquire knowledge from several different directions, he was challenged and inspired by the pedagogic style of humanities courses. When he took his first business class, he found his professor to be inflexible and the course material boring. That experience discouraged him from taking a full load of business courses in the future. His attraction to classes which relied on discussion and interaction between professor and students played an important role in his decision.

Students saw their decisions to choose a particular major as a commitment to a career path. Usually that path was a clear one, like Katie's or Amy's, but in David's case his major could lead to a variety of specific options. His search for a multidisciplinary major on campus and his resistance to being categorized by a particular department predicted that he would enjoy having broad choices in the future. The other students in my research felt comfortable with the more narrow path ahead of them, at least at the time of the study. Their goals of becoming veterinarian, professor, physical therapist, or accountant were within reach and motivating. The satisfaction they were beginning to experience in their major courses came from their strategic choice of pedagogical approaches and compatible classmates and from their self-assessment of learning styles and abilities. With vocationalism as a common ultimate goal, their decisions about a major suited their individual dispositions. These choices were ordered and reasonable in light of their perceptions of themselves and the field of Limestone University. As they became identified with their major, they wove its pursuit into the fabric of their total college experience.

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion

In “Lives Under Construction” I set out to understand the behavior and decisions of a small group of sophomores attending Limestone University, a research university with an array of academic and social options. In repeated interviews they told me about their backgrounds at home and high school and described the ways they were negotiating the bureaucracy of their college. Their classroom experiences and choices about academic work revealed their serious dedication to the college game and their occasional frustration with teachers and teaching. I also looked at the ways they carved out a space for themselves on a busy large campus, producing capital that they could use later.

The research taught me that vocationalism mattered to these students. Beyond their everyday lives as youthful students, they were striving toward a wider life as adults. Their large decisions—such as the choice of a major—were made with an eye to the future beyond college. Choosing a major was choosing a career. In their more immediate lives vocationalism drove them to value high grades. Many of their smaller decisions, such as where, when, and with whom to study, considered the effect on grades. Part of their determination to earn a high GPA was a firm belief in the educational system, particularly in their deferential acceptance of the role of faculty and in their conviction that their college education held importance for the success of their futures.

So strong was their motivation for high grades and future success, that their academic and social lives merged in pursuit of those goals. Although various researchers (Tinto, 1975, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1999) have divided students’ lives into social and academic areas, I found the two so intertwined as to be inseparable (Beekhoven et al., 2002). As sophomores these students subordinated parties and dating to the demands of academic success. Often their social choices, such as their preference of friends, reflected their determination to study hard.

Their processes for choosing a major field turned out to be varied within the guiding standard of vocationalism. In Amy’s case, status as the first in her family to attend college indicated that the choice of a practical major clearly leading to a stable

career in accounting would suit both Amy and her parents. Emily, also a first-generation student, chose an academic career in English which disturbed her parents. Others chose majors by assessing themselves as students and evaluating departments by the type of classroom experiences they would have and the type of students who would be their classmates.

Their satisfaction with their classrooms depended in large part on their professors. Teaching style, organization of the classroom, and assessment methods affected the quality of student experience and determined whether they would choose more courses in that department. Students enjoyed meeting their professors outside of class but rarely pursued that opportunity beyond clarifying course requirements.

### **Entering and Mastering College**

Students built individual lives while they were in college, but their dispositions in all areas, especially their attitude toward their education, were molded by their families and by their high school experiences before coming to Limestone. The first-generation students expected their college educations to propel them to careers that were out of reach to their parents; their parents had made sure they would have that opportunity by stressing academic success throughout their early lives. The other students planned to join their parents in professional settings; attending college and thriving there were assumed in their families. The sole gender distinction that I saw in my study was a difference in the reliance on family after enrolling in college between the men and the women. The young men in this group talked to their families regularly and discussed their plans and their struggles with them, but rather than asking for advice, the men were often informing their parents. The women, on the other hand, depended more on their parents for emotional support when college life upset or confused them. They relied on parental affirmation of their decisions more than the men did.

Like initiates in any field, students enter college with a mixture of optimism and trepidation. They had learned from movies that college students enjoy parties and merely tolerate classes, but they knew from their parents and teachers that a college degree is a minimum requirement for adult life. The students I interviewed set about to master the art of being a college student armed with their strong *doxa* or belief in the system.

Except for Todd, the evaluations of their high school teachers had led them to believe they could continue to earn good grades in college. Beginning with registration, however, they met obstacles. As they learned to negotiate the complications of a large campus, they acquired *le sens du jeu* and felt increasingly confident. No matter how challenging their negotiation became, they did not resist the college game because they felt the stakes were too high; it was necessary to play along.

One of the lessons they learned was the importance of faculty to their success. They responded to this lesson differently depending on their stage of development; some assigned their professors more accountability and others began to claim that responsibility for themselves. They wanted to impress their teachers with their interest and compliance with course requirements. In return they expected the professor to organize the class efficiently, explain material carefully, and assess fairly. In this respect their relationship to faculty mirrored the way they would interact with future employers, another indication of their vocationalism. This is not to say that these students approached their courses only with cold calculation for the future. They had moments of genuine excitement about courses and teachers, even when the material was unrelated to their major. More common, however, was a feeling that they needed to persevere through the tedium of a course or a sense of frustration at the complexity of a particular class.

### **Looking to the Future**

Horowitz (1987) would call these students the New Outsiders because of their intense desire for the credential of the degree. Unlike the collegiate student of the past, they declared a truce in the war on the faculty so that they could earn high grades. Managing time presented the biggest hurdles to these students. They expected a lot from their college years—high grades, friends, useful experiences—and the only way to achieve it all was to sleep less. All of these students suffered from fatigue regularly, but they considered fatigue the cost they had to pay for a bright future. This emphasis on vocationalism showed in their social choices as much as their academic ones which blurred the distinction between the two areas. They preferred friends, especially study partners, who shared their dedication to a high grade point average. Todd and Amy tried

to confine their studies to weekdays so they could enjoy the weekends: parties and athletics for Todd, hometown friends and family for Amy.

Beyond the common stress on academics, each student chose a unique way to define the culture of the field for him/herself. Katie and David joined social and service organizations as part of their traditional campus involvement although even those affiliations were seen as helpful to graduate school admission or career goals. Emily, Amy, and Todd enjoyed their small groups of friends but chose not to belong to organizations. In each case studying usually came first, and friends fit around the edges of the calendar. Their social integration took a variety of forms but did not seem to match with the norms and values of the campus community—if indeed there were uniform social norms and values. Instead of looking for community, it might be more useful to describe the practice of these students as individual capital building. Each of them gained experience in negotiating bureaucracy, interacting with adults and other students, and working toward a valuable credential. They would be able to convert that capital into admission to graduate school or career goals later. The metaphor of capital building and converting fits the vocationalism they demonstrated in their everyday practice.

Grubb & Lazerson (2005) argue that the “Education Gospel” that a college degree is necessary for all workers, “is now so deeply embedded in American higher education that it cannot be wished away” (p. 2). The students I interviewed had the company of almost all college students in their commitment to preparing for the future. Their vocationalism could be seen on a daily basis as they made decisions that would protect their high grade point averages. Emily and Todd often studied alone to avoid distractions, but the other students in this group converted their academic time to social time by studying with friends who were equally committed. Choices during class registration time reflected vocationalism also. Students wanted courses that challenged them to learn and grow but where an A would be possible. Some classes were difficult or frustrating, but the worst criticism for a course was “a waste of time.”

Students used a variety of strategies to choose a major and become committed to that discipline—the primary task of the sophomore year. They looked at the offerings at Limestone with an eye to their own habitus, their proven academic skills, and their

chances for career success. Their decisions may not have been entirely rational, but they were certainly reasonable within the bounds of the field of their campus. Hodkinson (1999) labels this decision-making process “pragmatically rational” (p. 261) because it may appear haphazard to an observer but make sense within the disposition of the student and the nature of the field.

### **Literature of College Impact and Field**

In analyzing the data provided by my interviews, I relied on the models that describe the impact college has on students and other literature that examines how students make decisions. Tinto (1975, 1993), Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005), and Astin (1993) claim that students are more likely to persist until they graduate when they integrate or fit into their institution. Integration, or sharing the “normative attitudes and values” of the people in the group (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, p. 51-52), can come from any fulfilling experience with either academic or social realms of the campus, such as participation in organized activities and interaction with professors. College impact models promote student involvement as a logical ingredient to college success, but they do not explain the process by which students choose or resist integration. The source of individual motivation is unclear in these models also.

To elaborate on the college impact models, I added the element of societal impact on students. From every outside influence—parents, teachers, the media—young people hear that a college degree is fundamental to adult success and high grades in college will lead to an even better future. This motivation, which I am calling “vocationalism,” could be said to endanger their integration because their faculty by expecting cognitive skills may not share their “normative attitudes and values.” Students may also subordinate the social aspect of college life. Interaction with both faculty and peers becomes secondary to obtaining good grades.

Students, as my small group demonstrate, may attend class together and cheer for the same teams, but to assume they all conform to institutional goals can be risky. Rather than depending on the model of student integration which emphasizes following institutional values, Beekhoven, De Jong, and Van Hout (2002) propose combining it with rational choice theory. Merging the two offers a view of students as active agents



making decisions strategically based on individual assessment of the benefits. They learn to play the college game during their first semesters on campus, but they make daily choices that reflect their own dispositions. The strategies they use to decide their behavior reflect their goals, and for this group, the overriding goal was vocationalism. They looked to the future and their unique temperaments when they chose a major, considering what sort of classes and teaching styles they preferred and evaluating their own suitability for that sub-field. In their everyday lives vocationalism appeared in the drive for high grades which organized their time and even influenced their choice of friends. Always, as agents, they were motivated by personal goals, not necessarily by the mission of the university.

Although the institution could not dictate their behavior, it did represent the field where these student-agents practiced their lives. As such it influenced their choices. Limestone had conventions that were both peculiar to itself and shared with other colleges. When these students first entered the university, they began to learn their field and how to play the college game. They were acquiring *le sens du jeu* which would make them effective as agents to carry out their goals in that place. Their decisions, while maybe not entirely rational, made sense within the context of their dispositions and field. Within the field certain activities and skills carry value or capital, and students set about accumulating them when they enter the field. In the case of the university, capital comes in the form of high grades, interaction with others, and a degree which can be converted into graduate school admission and economic success after graduation. But capital does not accrue to all students equally; students who enter college with more skill in interacting with adults and with parental experience with college are apt to accumulate more capital on campus than their peers who do not.

### **Limitations and Implications for Further Research**

The research for this study looked at a small, fairly homogeneous sample of sophomores at one research university. They were all white, from roughly middle-class families, and of traditional student age. Certainly large numbers of college students do not match their profile. Students from other ethnic backgrounds and with different family financial status will enter with other dispositions and motivations. Students who support

themselves and those who have parental obligations have unique demands on their time. The setting for this study as a public research university excludes two-year colleges, private schools, proprietary schools, and other variations of post-secondary education which offer students different contexts. Thus, further research should investigate whether my emphasis on student as agent would prove valid in other settings with other students.

I found only one difference between the men and women in this study—their reliance on family support—yet I did not discover whether their vocational motivation was affected by their gender. Although these young women have a generation of role models of successful career women, was their commitment to professional school and career the same as the men's? Katie's exclamation when she was overwhelmed with work "that I just wanted to quit school and marry rich" was intended to be funny, but would a young man have joked the same way? Did the men and the women come at their vocationalism and put it into practice in different ways? For both men and women I saw little emphasis on romantic relationships in this group. Holland & Eisenhart (1990) suggest that the women in their study protected themselves from the "sexual auction block" with romantic relationships which then reduced their academic performance and motivation (p. 213). Further study might reveal a reason why the women and men in my study, fifteen years later, seemed to subordinate interest in relationships to their primary vocational goal.

A closer look at classroom experience would examine in more depth the complex relationship between student, professor, classmates, and content material. How does student vocationalism play out in the instructional setting? Some of my participants felt comfortable in large lecture courses with exams while others preferred small discussion classes which required writing. David valued and sought interaction with faculty while the others only talked to professors about course issues. Where do these dispositions originate and can or should they be altered by the institutional environment? All these students bestowed on their teachers the authority to frame the academic experience. Should they be encouraged to take more responsibility for their own learning and expand their use of agency?

These students were not immune to forces from the larger society although they rarely mentioned them. Romantic relations are one area where media influence could be

expected. Another is the consumption of alcohol which is promoted by advertising and entertainment media. Their vocationalism may be shaped by conceptions of the adult world from the media or by immediate economic concerns. Where did it come from? The answers to this question could explain how students use the contributions of family, high school, and the broader society in their decisions as agents. The intersections of student agency and motivation with race, class, gender, family, peers, the media, and higher education policy deserve close and repeated exploration.

### **Implications for Practice**

University administrators and faculty could benefit from further consideration of the findings in this study. Living on campus is assumed to have value in helping students persist to graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Likewise student social integration to any group of peers should help (Tinto, 1993). Much programming for students who live on campus aims to bring them together for learning and fun. My research indicates, however, that each student will make a decision whether or not to participate based on the personal value of that activity. Levine & Cureton (1998) claim that “more people are doing things individually and in separate groups than campus-wide” (p. 7). Most of those students are persisting in school until graduation so they are finding satisfaction at some level whether they participate in programmed activities or not. In addition, emphasis on resident students neglects the large number who commute to campus and have other adult responsibilities besides classes. Each student acts as an individual agent and may accept or reject institutional efforts at programming according to a unique set of goals.

The common experience that all students have is in the classroom although my research suggests that even academic practice varies across the campus. Levine & Cureton (1998) agree that “campuses increasingly are places in which instruction is the principal activity” (p. 7). Considering how significant these students found their academic lives, more attention should be paid to the quality of those experiences. Students who are as motivated as my participants could take a more active role in their own learning than merely listening to lectures and repeating information on a multiple choice test. Yet few of the courses they took as sophomores demanded critical reading, discussion, or writing. Further investigation into the structure of the Honors Program

might lead to ways that all students, regardless of their pre-college background, can enjoy the benefits of that strong interdisciplinary approach. A corollary effort should be made to help all students understand the value of such intense academic involvement to their personal growth and goals.

An aspect of research with undergraduates that is both exciting and frustrating is that students change. My interviews only lasted for one semester; already by the time of this writing these students had grown. Individual students do not hold still long enough for thorough study. All their experiences before our interviews had an impact on the practice of their lives and their answers to my questions. But new experiences shaped their behavior in subtle or dramatic ways. Future events will continue that process although the pace of these encounters may decline after they leave the bustling circus of the campus. The participants of my study afforded me a snapshot of their lives which revealed their dedication and determination and gave every indication of success. Their contribution to this research was considerable and I value the opportunity they gave me to share their lives under construction.

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