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Student satisfaction and empowerment through complaining in institutions of higher learning

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STUDENT SATISFACTION AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH COMPLAINING
IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

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This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the students who have given up

on institutions of higher learning

Acknowledgments

After examining 240 dissertations and thesis acknowledgements, Hyland (2003)

determined that acknowledgements are not just "academic gift giving and self-

presentation" (p. 242). Instead, he found that acknowledgements are "intimations of the

shared ways of understanding experience, representing a window into the personal world

of student writers and the processes of engaging in the disciplines" (p. 261). In addition,

he discovered that acknowledgements reveal social and cultural characteristics within "a

broad generic structure" (p. 242). This researcher (me, that is) feels that the

acknowledgement section is the most difficult part of the dissertation to write. The

difficulty includes forgetting to mention someone, misspelling names, and worrying

about how people may react to my comments.

Okay, I am just going to get to the point. I have divided the acknowledgements

into three sections: USF Faculty & Staff, USF students, and Relatives & Friends. You

may read all of the acknowledgements or just go to the section that applies to you. If

your name is not mentioned, contact this researcher immediately.

USF Faculty & Staff

I would have to say that USF has been good to me principally by giving me the

opportunity to meet so many wonderful people. First of all, I would like to thank my

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dissertation but for introducing me to a world of truth and social justice, music, and

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Abstract

Student satisfaction and commitment to an educational program are important

factors in determining student success. Although research on the subject of satisfaction

has primarily been conducted in the context of business, particularly with regard to

customer complaints and complaint management strategies, institutions of higher learning

(IHLs) are beginning to adopt business models to increase student satisfaction and

retention. Due to the pervasive perception of complaining as being negative, insufficient

data exist to determine whether the act of complaining has an impact on students' sense

of satisfaction and empowerment with their educational experience. Through one-on-one

interviews with 20 students at an urban career college, this qualitative study explores

students' sense of empowerment, satisfaction, and complaint behavior through the lens of

students' experiences. The results of this study indicate that the act of complaining can

be an important tool for students in addressing dissatisfaction with their educational

experiences. "Honest" complaining was found to be especially effective, a term

developed in this study to describe complaints wherein the students sincerely believed

themselves to be in the right. Further, the participants in this study unanimously

indicated that when their "honest" complaints were genuinely heard, they felt more

satisfied and empowered by the experience of complaining, whether or not they received

their desired outcome. These findings suggest that some IHLs should consider

establishing systems to encourage and address "honest" complaining as part of their

overall strategy to elicit feedback, increase retention, and promote positive word-of-

mouth.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

> One thing I've been telling a lot of people, is that the best thing I've learned from this school is patience. (Nilda)

Students in the United States currently have many choices for attending

institutions of higher learning (IHLs), such as four-year universities, community colleges,

vocational institutions, and face-to-face or online learning environments. Although these

institutions vary widely with regard to campus culture, curriculum, and other factors,

their students often share the same disconnect between initial expectations and actual

college experiences (Schroeder, 2001). For example, students frequently browse college

catalogs to help with their enrollment decisions; however, after enrolling they may be

disappointed to learn that some courses may not be offered for years at a time. When

students' experiences do not reflect their expectations, the level of their satisfaction

decreases (Kowalski, 1996).

Student satisfaction and commitment to an educational program are important

factors in determining student success (Bennett, 2003). Focusing on student satisfaction

allows institutions of higher learning (IHLs) to monitor continuously how effectively

they are meeting student expectations (Elliot, 2002). Although many factors influence

students' satisfaction with their educational experiences, few IHLs have developed

proactive strategies to discover the root causes of student dissatisfaction. With the

growing belief that higher education has entered a new environment in which quality

plays an increasingly important role (Koch, 2003; Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996; Sahney,

Banwet, & Karunes, 2004), awareness of sources of student dissatisfaction and how

students express their concerns has grown as well (Guolla, 1999; Seeman & O'Hara, 2006; Su & Bao, 2001).

Research on the subject of satisfaction has primarily been conducted in the context of business, particularly with regard to customer complaints and complaint management strategies (Bodey & Grace, 2006; Bolfing, 1989; Goodwin, 1990; Nyer, 2000; Plymire, 1991; Seeman & O'Hara, 2006). Studies show that consumers who were encouraged to complain reported greater increases in satisfaction and product evaluation compared to consumers who were not explicitly invited to complain (Blodgett, Wakefield, & Barnes, 1995; Bolfing, 1989; Chen-Yu & Hong, 2006; Dawes & Rowley, 1999; Gelb, 1987; Kowalski, 1996; Nyer, 2000; Oliver, 1997; Seeman & O'Hara, 2006). Retailers and service providers can view the act of complaining as an opportunity to solidify and strengthen relationships with their customers. Sellers can implement complaint management policies and procedures that are designed to maximize customer satisfaction (Blodgett, Wakefield, & Barnes, 1995; Johnston, 2001).

Unlike students, consumers of business products and services are empowered through a deliberate system of communication channels designed to improve their experiences, leading to increased satisfaction (Jones & Sasser, 1995). Students typically can voice their dissatisfaction only within boundaries construed by IHLs, with a lack of encouragement on the part of IHLs for students' "voice" (Wink, 2005). Traditional opportunities for students' voices to emerge include end-of-term course evaluations, participation in student government, and on-campus demonstrations. However, end-of-

term evaluations focus solely on students' experiences in a particular course and do not allow evaluators to assess the students' broader educational experiences.

Participation in student government is a possibility for only a few students each term; students who are struggling to earn passing grades, perhaps with the added responsibilities of jobs, children, or other factors, may not be even be able to attend open meetings, let alone actively participate as an elected member of student government. On-campus demonstrations, while open to all, are generally infrequent and focus on one shared concern. These traditional avenues, taken alone or together, have been found to be inadequate for student expression. If IHLs are to create broader opportunities for student voice, one means available to them is through complaining.

Complaining as a strategy for voicing dissatisfaction can be described as both authentic (Kowalski, 1996) and instrumental (Alicke, et al., 1992; McDiarmid, 2004). This study focuses on student empowerment through authentic, instrumental complaints. Authentic complaints are motivated by true dissatisfaction and stem from the complainer's genuine feelings of dissatisfaction (Kowalski, 1996), while instrumental complaints are expressed for the purpose of changing an undesirable state of affairs (McDiarmid, 2004). According to Su and Bao (2001), many students may consider complaining but are discouraged from doing so by their own low sense of empowerment and their lack of trust in persons of authority. Thus, there is an absence of true student empowerment (Nieto, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

There is a lack of empirical and theoretical research in the area of student satisfaction and complaint behavior (Dolinsky, 1994; Elliot, 2002; Guolla, 1999). In addition, due to the pervasive perception of complaining as being negative, insufficient data exist to determine whether the act of instrumental complaining has an impact on students' sense of satisfaction and empowerment with their educational experience.

Similarly, few research studies have looked at demographic factors such as gender or cultural background that students do or do not share, which may influence how they express their dissatisfaction through complaining. Only a few studies (Chiu, Tsang, & Yang, 2001; Mooij, 2004; Watkins & Liu, 1996) relate to cross-cultural issues of student satisfaction and complaint behavior. IHLs typically consist of a majority dominant culture with one or more underrepresented groups who are forced to compete with the majority's dominant culture (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). Students from underrepresented groups often have had fewer opportunities than their majority counterparts to attend college and, once enrolled, have generally found it more difficult to succeed academically and to graduate (Wilson, 1994).

Research suggests that the more satisfied and involved a student is in college, the more likely he or she will be academically successful and graduate (Astin, 1984). Therefore, if the relationship between college experiences and college success were better understood—particularly for underrepresented minority students—perhaps IHLs could enhance the success of minority students on their campuses (Eimers, 2001). In addition, if IHLs were to become more aware of the nuances of co-cultures, they might also be

able to create a more inclusive platform for student voices to emerge (Astin, 1984;

Cummins, 1989).

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

This qualitative study attempted to explore and understand student satisfaction

and complaint behavior through the lens of students' experiences, as well as to suggest

strategies to improve student satisfaction at IHLs. One-on-one interviews were conducted

with 20 students from a vocational college in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Prior research in the area of business consumer complaints has found that

satisfaction and complaint behaviors may be influenced by demographic factors such as

ethnicity, culture, and gender (Chiu, Tsang, & Yang, 2001; Cornwell, Bligh, & Babakus,

1991; Eslami-Rasekh, 2004). In this vein, this study also examined how these factors

may play a similar role at institutions of higher learning. As increasing numbers of

underrepresented minority students enroll in IHLs (Eimers, 2001), exploring and

understanding such demographics may help colleges and universities to create an

environment and culture conducive to progress in college, persistence, and graduation.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

The following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. What factors do students identify as influencing their sense of satisfaction

    with their educational experiences at institutions of higher learning (IHLs)?

2. When students are dissatisfied with their educational experiences, how do

    they express their dissatisfaction?

    a. What role does complaining play?

      b.   What factors do students identify as barriers to complaining?

      c.   What factors encourage or facilitate student complaints?

3.   What relationship exists between students' ability to express dissatisfaction through complaining and their sense of empowerment and satisfaction with their educational experiences?

4.   Which shared demographic characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, and cultural background, may influence students' complaint behaviors?

<div align="center">Theoretical Rationale</div>

Wink (2005) claims that educators in a paternalistic system often play the role of experts who must decide what is good for their students. Further, the business of education has become a "vast undertaking and mass experience in society, involving tens of millions of people, huge outlays of money, and diverse forces contending over curriculum and funding" (Shor, 1992, p. 11). With so much at stake, administrators of IHLs and "bureaucratic pedagogies" (Shulman & Luechauer, 2002, p. 4) have created an educational system where students have little voice. This system has created what Aronowitz (2000) refers to as "the corporate capitalist machine" where schools "rob students of their individuality and instead train them to become cogs" (p .3).

Student participation and true involvement may be the most important place to begin this change because student involvement is low in traditional classrooms and because action is essential to gain knowledge and develop intelligence (Shor, 1992). Piaget (1979) states that we learn by getting involved, by doing, and by thinking about our experiences. According to Katsap (2003), "there is no disagreement among shapers

of political and educational policy regarding the importance of the empowerment of

learners" (p. 140). Empowerment is a process of enabling an individual to think, believe,

carry out an activity, and criticize their own work and decisions autonomously (Czuba &

Page, 1999).

One of the key elements explored in this study was students' sense of

empowerment as related to their sense of satisfaction. With that in mind, this study used

critical pedagogy (Freire, 1974) and student empowerment (Nieto, 1994; Shor, 1996) as

its theoretical framework.

Critical pedagogy is a method of teaching that aims at assisting students in

challenging and questioning any form of domination and the values and practices that

reflect domination. It is an approach of teaching that promotes critical consciousness or

an in-depth understanding of the world. Shor (1996) defines "critical pedagogy" as:

> …habits of thought, reading, writing and speaking which go beneath the surface
> meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional
> clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning,
> root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action,
> event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass
> media, or discourse. (p. 129)

This mode of teaching is primarily influenced by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian

educator who heavily endorsed students' ability to think critically about their educational

experiences. This allows students to recognize the connection between their experiences

and the social context within which those experiences are embedded.

Freire (2000) argued against the banking system of education in favor of a

liberatory, dialogical pedagogy aimed at enhancing student consciousness of oppression

and, in turn, transforming oppressive social structures through "praxis" (reflection in

action). Freire believed in certain core values that formed the backbone of all his

intervention strategies, be it in the political arena or in educational reforms. These values

were humanism, liberation, and solidarity. One way to achieve critical pedagogy is by

allowing students to become empowered and express their dissatisfaction through

complaining. Once their complaints are received and investigated, then solutions can be

created to ameliorate their dissatisfaction. As Freire (1974) states, the solutions need to

be with the people and never for them or imposed upon them.

One of the important ingredients of critical pedagogy is student empowerment. In

education, empowerment has been defined as "the dynamic process of adopting the

values and enacting the practices of enlightened self-interest in order to align student and

faculty goals for the class" (Shulman & Luechauer, 2002, p. 44). It seems that most often

students are not empowered and do not have a significant voice to express their

dissatisfaction (Nieto, 1994). Nieto goes on to state that "discussions about the

developing strategies to solve educational problems lack the perspectives of one of the

very groups they most often affect, students" (p. 392). By giving voice to students, they

may become more empowered.

Astin's (1984) theory of involvement was also utilized to better understand the

benefits of students' direct involvement in their educational experiences. This theory

postulates that students' levels of involvement and engagement in college are directly

related to their learning and development in college. The level of student development is

also closely tied to the level of involvement with peers, professors, and academic

program. One of Astin's most important findings is that institutional type tends to exert

little influence on measures of student development and success. That is, it is not the type of institution per se that has an effect on undergraduate student development, but the opportunities to get involved and to interact with others, along with the commitment that the institution has toward learning, that make the key difference. The impact of college on undergraduate students increases when students believe they are valued, when undergraduate education is taken seriously, and when student and faculty interaction is frequent and meaningful.

Sonia Nieto, Ira Shor, Paulo Freire, and Alexander W. Astin offer unique paradigms that have made critical contributions to educational theory and practice. With their lens, this study attempted to explore, interpret, and understand issues regarding student empowerment, voice, and expression of dissatisfaction through complaining.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the existing body of research regarding student satisfaction and complaint behavior by investigating new aspects of student satisfaction, empowerment, and complaint behavior and by considering the implications of more research into this field. A qualitative research design was chosen for this study in order to identify thematic data to complement quantitative research findings in the literature (Chiu, Tsang, & Yang, 2001; Eslami-Rasekh, 2004; Phau & Sari, 2004).

The findings of this study bring new insights to the field of student dissatisfaction and complaint behavior that can assist teachers and administrators to better handle student complaints, thus leading to an increase in student satisfaction and success (Mayo, Helms, & Codjoe, 2004). Previous research has suggested that more investigation was

needed in this area with respect to institutions of higher learning (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998; DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, 2005). This study also contributes to cross-cultural research into student satisfaction through examining student dissatisfaction and complaint behavior and their relationship to cultural differences (Eslami-Rasekh, 2004; Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007).

Definitions of Terms

This study utilized terminology found in the fields of education, psychology, and business. Definitions of each term are provided below to facilitate the reader's understanding of the study.

Co-culture is used in this study when discussing "groups or social communities exhibiting communication characteristics, perceptions, values, beliefs, and practices that are sufficiently different to distinguish them from other groups, communities, and the dominant culture" (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007, p. 11).

Complaints are broadly defined as articulations of dissatisfaction that are expressed toward another with the aim of bringing about awareness of a behavior subjectively experienced as harmful and initiating a change in the criticized behavior (Stauss & Seidel, 2004, p. 16).

Culture is defined as "a set of human-made objective and subjective elements that is shared among a group of people who have a common language and may have lived in the same time and place" (Triandis, 1994, p. 23).

Dominant culture refers to the culture of a group which is in power (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). According to McLemore (1994), in American society this

group "was created as people of English ethnicity who settled along the Atlantic seacoast and gradually extended their political, economic, and religious control over the territory….In the United States, affluent adult white males generally meet the requirement of dominance and have done so since the establishment of this country" (p. 60).

Institutions of higher learning (IHLs) are defined as colleges and universities which offer courses to students who are adults or have successfully completed high school requirements.

Student empowerment is defined as the dynamic process of adopting the values and enacting the practices of enlightened self-interest in order to align student and faculty goals for the class (Shulman & Luechauer, 2002). Alignment should not be construed to mean "forcing the student to want what the teacher wants" or "allowing students to impose their demands on the teacher" (p. 44). Rather, alignment occurs when students and faculty share the authority and responsibility to devise the processes and measures necessary to facilitate learning.

Student satisfaction is generally accepted to be a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of a student's educational experience. Student satisfaction results when actual performance meets or exceeds the student's expectations (Grossman, 1999).

Student voice is the active opportunity for students to express their opinions and make decisions regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of their learning experiences (Rogers, 2005).

Personal View on Complaining

My complaint is that most of us are not complaining enough. Many people view complaining as a negative construct. They relate it to behaviors like whining, nagging, and crying. Although negative connotations have been attached to complaining, there are positive aspects, as well. I believe that through complaining many problems and tensions can be reduced. There may be negative short-term effects; however, in the long run the results will be positive.

Complaining is one means of direct communication. In my own personal and professional life, instigating, analyzing, and synthesizing complaints have dramatically helped my communications with others. We tend to control our emotions by suppressing our complaints about people or things. But in my case, I have managed to maintain longer and healthier relationships by listening to the complaints of my partners, friends, and family members and not taking their comments personally. I have noticed that by allowing a path for others to complain regularly, the amount of complaining decreases. Even though at first I was shocked by others' complaints about me, I have now managed to change my perspective (most of the time) and take those complaints as opportunities to see myself through someone else's eyes and find ways to improve myself.

In my professional life, I have been an instructor for 10 years at a career college that will be referred to as Halo College in this study. Halo is a 144-year-old, private, career college with students from many different social, ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds, ranging in age from 17 to 54, male, female, and some in transition from one gender to another. As you can imagine, the patterns of complaining were vast. I placed a

question in almost all of my major exams asking students to write down three complaints about my class. Although they were not graded on their answers, making it part of their grade to give an answer made it more likely that everyone would participate in the exercise. This was most important for those students whose cultural framework included socially constructed barriers to complaining. It was also completely unexpected, making them challenge their reality and start to form a new concept about their classroom experience.

Receiving feedback through student complaints has helped me do a better job as an educator. Although all types of comments were informative, asking for their complaints created a way for my students to voice their concerns safely which, in turn, built trust. I began this method of receiving feedback from day one by asking my first quarter students to write down anonymously five complaints about schools they attended in the past. By making space for my students' voice, they felt more powerful in my class. This has created a safe and enjoyable classroom culture.

Not everyone at my institution has agreed with my views on complaining. Like most people, they were only thinking about its negative aspect. Some of them were worried that encouraging students to complain could create a culture of complaining. The lack of research in the area of student complaint behavior and complaint outcomes in educational settings has made it very difficult to construct a complaint management model for our institution.

I have presented business models of service oriented organizations to campus administrators, but they felt that an academic institution was completely different from

other types of business organizations. It seemed to me that most successful business organizations have utilized consumer complaining to their advantage. They realized that they needed to give voice to their customers, which, in turn, empowered the customers to complain, to refuse a service or return a product with which they were not satisfied. For example, by asking customers for their feedback and then making some kind of change based on the information, the customers felt that they were respected. These businesses have managed to improve the quality of their products and services while at the same time improving the quality of their relationship with their customers.

Another very interesting aspect of complaining is the role of culture in a person's complaint behavior. Different cultures complain differently. For example, my Asian students have rarely complained directly to me. I have heard them speak in their native language to others about my class. I have had the most difficulty convincing many of these students to voice their complaints openly. On the other hand, my European American and African American students have tended to be very vocal about their concerns regarding my class. Handling complaints has taught me a great deal about different cultures and given me insight into managing my class in a way that better facilitates learning. I have been able to orient myself to other cultures, which has helped me get closer to my students.

Like Plymire (1991) described in his article, "Complaints as opportunities," I have worked to reduce my rhetorical questions in order to listen sincerely, learn, and act on others' complaints. However, I have noticed that many people solicit feedback, including complaints, but then do not do anything with the information. For example, at

Halo College we had a strict dress code that did not allow students to ever wear jeans,

running shoes or hats, and included many other restrictions such as no untucked shirts or

facial piercings (see Appendix B). Every time students made a complaint about

something like the dress code over which I had no control, I shared with them the

attempts I had made to change it and also showed them the responses I received from my

superiors regarding their complaint. If there was something I could do, I would do my

best to make the change to benefit them. The dialogue between my students and me has

empowered me as a facilitator and has created more equality between us. The students

have seemed to be more comfortable in a class where they could safely exercise their

freedom of expression and be who they were or wanted to be.

        Like other academic institutions, Halo had students complete teacher evaluations

toward the very end of the quarter. In my opinion this was the most ineffective way of

generating feedback. If the student was dissatisfied, he or she would probably not care to

take the time to provide feedback once their opportunity to affect meaningful change had

passed. These students may have given up by the end of that course. Their feedback

would not directly benefit them because instructors were not given the results until after

the term was over. Another issue with these evaluations was that they seemed to be just a

formality. This had the effect of taking away all of the students' power. The only power

they had left was to quit.

        The college where I have been working is a small, private school. I believe it is

even harder for students to complain at larger institutions with more complicated

bureaucracies. If the teacher will not listen to a complaint or the student is afraid to

approach the teacher directly, the students may not be able to figure out who they can turn to. Many institutions are aware of these issues but are not willing to take action and make the necessary changes. The costs associated with them are too high. These schools have defended their lack of action by saying they are not a business entity. I do not agree. In my opinion, a college is a business providing services to students. As such, everyone would benefit if IHLs were willing to invest in systems to encourage and act on student complaints.

I strongly advocate empowering students by allowing their voices to be heard. In this study, participants were encouraged to share the stories of their experiences of dissatisfaction and complaining at IHLs. Examples of their stories are included in Appendix E and were selected to illustrate examples of some of the obstacles experienced by students at Halo College. Juan's story is related to a dispute regarding challenge exam credit, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the difficulties encountered with high staff turnover and poor office management. Rafael's story involves a financial aid award, a promise to disburse money he was entitled to receive, and a decision by the college to hold the funds. Charles's story is about his frustrations with one teacher's grading practices, his repeated attempts to satisfy the instructor's requirements, and ultimately giving up. Samantha's story describes how the business and financial aid offices first encouraged her to take out a personal loan, then insisted on holding half of the money for possible future tuition costs.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Addressing students' needs with respect to complaining and empowerment may allow the administrators of institutions of higher learning (IHLs) to improve students' satisfaction with their educational experience. Previous research into which factors lead to higher satisfaction have pointed to the importance of acknowledging student perspective and voice in IHLs. This section examines the literature related to the research questions of this study and is organized around the following topics: Factors Affecting Students' Sense of Satisfaction with Their Educational Experiences, Expressing Dissatisfaction, Complaining and Empowerment, and Demographics and Complaining.

Factors Affecting Students' Sense of Satisfaction

with Their Educational Experiences

Students as Consumers of Higher Education Services

Student life is a web of interconnected experiences which overlap and influence student satisfaction (Sirvanci, 1996). Lomas (2007) states that, "Changes in the higher education sector in recent years have significantly reduced the differences between universities and other types of organizations and it has been argued that students have become 'consumers' of higher education services" (p. 31). In an empirical study, through in-depth interviews, Lomas found that senior managers and administrators were much more supportive of the view that students should be regarded as customers than those

members of staff who were lower in the organizational chart. These findings were

consistent, irrespective of the type of college or university participating in the study.

In looking at the future of IHLs, Morley (2003) posed the question as to whether

there is a move towards an entitlement culture in higher education with students asking,

"'What can I get?' rather than, 'What should I do?'" (p. 42). Morley goes on to state that

universities have changed in the last 30 years and students are no longer content to just

ask, 'What should I do?' and no longer afraid to ask, 'What can I get?' "Universities and

their staff are starting to face up to this challenge of the changing culture" (p. 18).

Research has shown that quality measures can be used to identify areas that need

improvement as well as areas to be celebrated for their excellence. The term "customer

service" is often used synonymously with quality, and quality is frequently defined as

meeting and exceeding customer expectations (Sirvanci, 1996). In order to successfully

implement quality in educational institutions, the true customer must first be determined.

However, among the groups within higher education (faculty, students, and

administrators), there seems to be little agreement as to who the true customers are.

Participants in Sirvanci's research study concluded that both students and instructors are

suppliers of the product, the product being knowledge.

According to Cleary (2001), it is reasonable to assume that most IHLs are

proponents of quality. Therefore, any inquiry that helps to define and identify quality

should be beneficial in their efforts to attain it. He goes on to state that individuals

employed at colleges and universities, both academicians and administrators, have a

professional responsibility to continuously strive for educational excellence. Perceived

quality derives from the consumer's overall evaluation of a service experience.

Furthermore, quality can be distinguished from satisfaction since quality is a general

attitude, whereas satisfaction is linked to specific transactions (Chow, 2003).

In her 1998 study of students' perceptions of their learning outcomes, Drew found

that student outcomes were strongly oriented towards personal and professional skills and

qualities. Since the mid-1980s there has been a growing interest in higher education in

the development of those personal attributes in students which allow them to make use of

their academic knowledge and to be personally effective. This interest has been linked to

employment, to the argument that in a fast-changing world professionals need to

continually adapt and learn, and to the move towards mass higher education, where many

students see their course of study as a route to improved career opportunities.

Pursuing studies at an IHL is a major undertaking (Chow, 2003). Chow along

with other researchers (Anisef, Ashbury, & Turrittin, 1992; Hunter & Leiper, 1993;

Oliver, 1997) found that the possession of a degree in higher education has often been

conceived as one of the crucial determinants of later-life economic success, status

attainment, and achieving goals. Pursuit of a higher education degree entails not merely a

strong commitment of time and effort, but also the investment of an enormous amount of

financial resources. As students make a greater contribution by paying more towards the

cost of their education, they have increased expectations regarding the services and

facilities that IHLs provide in support of their studies (Jones, 2006).

The services and facilities advertised in IHL catalogs and Web sites, and as

described by recruiters and admissions counselors, must be generally consistent with the

services and facilities students encounter after their enrollment. IHLs need to ensure that

their claims and promises are deliverable (Jones, 2006). In addition, pressure on

recruiters to meet enrollment goals increases the potential for misunderstandings that give

rise to student complaints and legal disputes. A key challenge for many IHLs is to

determine methods to ensure that students entering their institutions have realistic

expectations which will encourage them to make the necessary academic, social, and

personal adjustments. Research shows that unrealistic expectations of IHLs are not

confined to applicants from non-traditional backgrounds (Cook & Leckey, 1999; Lowe &

Cook, 2003). Unless IHLs address the shortfall between expectation and reality, they

may provide fertile ground for complaints to develop.

Students' demands and expectations of what IHLs should provide can be expected

to rise. Students are also becoming more inclined to openly criticize their institutions as

demonstrated by a growing number of Web sites and discussion forums devoted to such

issues (Baty & Wainwright, 2005). With IHLs offering similar courses, the quality of the

student experience offered at respective institutions is likely to become a determining

factor for IHL applicants in choosing a place to study.

Educational experience and academic performance are two inextricably related

educational outcomes. Consistent with findings from earlier studies (Brookman, 1989;

Shim & Morgan, 1990), educational aspirations, attitudes, and expectations towards IHLs

have been identified as significant predictors of students' academic performance, success,

and satisfaction (Chow, 2003; Tam, 2004).

Higher education is increasingly recognizing that it is a service industry and is placing greater emphasis on meeting the expectations and needs of students (Cheng & Tam, 1997). In today's competitive environment, a university must identify what is important to students, inform students that they intend to deliver what is important to them, then deliver what they promise (Elliot & Healy, 2001). Student satisfaction results when actual performance meets or exceeds the student's expectations and student satisfaction is being shaped continually by repeated experiences with the IHL (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998; Szymanski & Henard, 2001).

Grossman (1999) found that satisfaction was significantly influenced by trust. Universities can build trust by treating students in a consistent and equitable manner, meeting students' expectations, and handling student complaints in a caring manner. Perceived quality of an educational experience is a consequence of student satisfaction (Athiyaman, 1997). In his research, Elliot (2002) discovered that "instructional effectiveness" (p. 271) was also a fairly strong and significant predictor of overall student satisfaction. Instructional effectiveness was comprised of fourteen items which assess a student's academic experience, to include curriculum, academic excellence, and effectiveness of faculty.

Evaluation of Student Satisfaction

In order to attract and retain students, universities must identify and meet student expectations (Elliot & Healy, 2001). Harvey (1995) states that a student satisfaction approach goes hand-in-hand with the development of a culture of continuous quality improvement. He goes on to say that teaching and learning do not occur solely in the

classroom or under the tutor's direct supervision and that the total student experience is becoming ever more central to the students' attitudes toward IHLs. Many IHLs perform some evaluations of other aspects of student experience beyond the assessment of the quality of teaching and learning.

Through a survey of 1,805 students from an upper-Midwest university, Elliot (2002) discovered that a majority of the students wanted to feel as though they were important to the university and felt that they should be the evaluators of the service being provided. Moreover, he found that students needed to interact with instructors who were fair and unbiased and were able to provide quality instruction: "Satisfaction easily reflects outcomes of reciprocity that occur between students and an instructor" (McCollough & Gremler, 1999, p. 120). In order to ensure satisfaction, some researchers, such as McCollough and Gremler, have taken education to the next level by exploring the possibility of offering a "conditional student satisfaction guarantee" (p. 121). In their study, most students appeared to support the idea of offering a guarantee in the classroom and that this guarantee might keep "instructors on their toes as a double-check to make sure that material is relevant and current or that students see themselves learning" (p. 119). However, opponents (Bay & Daniel, 2001) believe that such a guarantee is inappropriate in a university setting and that student evaluation should be sufficient to determine the students' overall experience.

One concern about evaluations is that the questionnaires used in a typical student satisfaction survey ask for perceptions and do not seek to collect additional data with respect to expectations (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998). Also, not all IHLs have systematic

student evaluation processes in place and of those that do, very few make these evaluations compulsory for students (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998). Voluntary completion of evaluations provides limited data as it is coming from only a portion of the student body.

Satisfaction with Academic Program

Shim and Morgan's (1990) quantitative study collected data from 16 major universities across the United States. The purpose of their study was to investigate the factors influencing students' attitudes toward their majors and satisfaction with their majors/departments. The influence of professors and advisors is significant for predicting overall satisfaction with majors/departments. Shim and Morgan found that the students themselves, their parents, and their professors all play a significant role in forming a student's favorable attitudes towards a major. Positive and committed attitudes toward a major, which will eventually lead to higher satisfaction, need to be encouraged among students.

Students are important stakeholders in the quality of monitoring and assessment processes and thus, IHLs should obtain their views. Harvey (1995) states that anyone collecting students' views should only collect what they can use. He goes on to state that it is counterproductive to ask students for information and then not use it; students become cynical and uncooperative if they think no one really cares about what they think. IHLs need to listen to, examine, and make use of student views. If data from surveys of students is going to be useful then it needs to be transformed into meaningful information. Harvey concluded that IHLs should be held accountable for the information

they develop as a result of the data gathered, and that the IHLs should ensure that the information is systematically reported in order to improve the quality of education. Many IHLs have come to realize that they need to retain students as well as to attract new students. Patterson, Johnson, and Spreng (1997) demonstrated empirically a strong link between satisfaction and retention.

The higher education system has been shifting its focus from quantitative to qualitative expansion. Although defining quality with respect to education is difficult or impossible, attention needs to be paid to quality. Quality plays an important role in higher education. Higher education is also being driven towards commercial competition imposed by economic forces (Owlia & Aspinwall, 1996). The terms "customer" and "market" have met with resistance from some educators, who argue they are applicable only to commercial environments. Various methods such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Customer Relations Management (CRM) aim at satisfying the needs of various stakeholders through the design of a system based on certain principles and practices (Helms & Key, 1994; Koch, 2003; Seeman & O'Hara, 2006). However, the use of these strategies has posed problems in formulating a single, comprehensive solution. While the needs and interests of the various customer groups may not always coincide, the best method of resolving different interests is to recognize their existence and to look for the issues that unite the different parties (Sahney, Banwet, & Karunes, 2004).

As universities plan recruiting and enrollment management strategies, they must first identify what is important to students to attract them and then deliver a quality education to retain them. The most effective and efficient means of recruiting students is

through word-of-mouth promotion which comes from current satisfied students. Studies

which have focused on determinants of students' satisfaction in IHLs have discovered

that satisfied students are necessary to accomplish the goals of higher educational

institutions (DeShields, Kara, & Kaynak, 2005). Researchers such as DeShields, et al.

(2005) and Brookman (1989) have looked at satisfaction and retention among various

students in higher education. These researchers concluded that change is necessary in the

higher education system to apply customer-oriented principles used by profit-making

institutions.

<div align="center">Expressing Dissatisfaction</div>

<div align="center">*Background of Complaining and Satisfaction*</div>

Stauss and Seidel (2004) broadly define complaints as:

articulations of dissatisfaction that are expressed toward firms and /or third-party
institutions with the aim of making a provider aware of a behavior that is
subjectively experienced as harmful, receiving compensation for adverse effects
suffered, and making a change in the criticized behavior. (p. 16)

Researchers (Guolla, 1999; Watkins & Liu, 1996) have discovered that many

others have created their own definition, but few have attempted to explore the concept of

complaining, especially in relation to culture, ethnicity, race, and student satisfaction.

Kowalski (1996) states that, "Although everyone complains at least occasionally,

surprisingly little research has been devoted to the topic of complaining" (p. 2).

The goal of learning more about complaining is to reduce its causes in order to

increase satisfaction. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction arises as a consequence of a

perceived discrepancy between expected and experienced performance (Stauss & Seidel,

2004). Consumer complaining behavior (CCB) is an important aspect of the fields of

business, finance, and marketing. According to Phau and Sari (2004), "research has

found that CCB is a complex phenomenon influenced by a multiplicity of factors in the

choice of a particular complaining action. These factors include demographics,

psychographics and attitudes toward complaining, general attitudes towards businesses,

and product attributes" (p. 410). Singh and Pandya (1991) suggest that businesses should

develop post-purchase strategies to encourage verbal responses and avert or avoid private

and third-party responses. Most businesses would like to reduce complaining and

increase customer satisfaction, but they are not truly aware of the advantages of using

complaints as a basis for making future business plans (Dolinsky, 1994).

Importance of Complaining

Cornwell, et al. (1991) emphasize the significance of complaining by stating:

> So important is the single complaint, that it has been argued that in low growth,
> highly competitive markets, a viable marketing strategy is to maximize the
> number of complaints from dissatisfied consumers to achieve the lowest possible
> level of consumer turnover. (p. 3)

There is a consensus among researchers that complaints allow sellers to fulfill

their obligations to buyers. Many existing businesses rely on information obtained from

complaining to improve the quality of their services and products (Best, 1981; Fisher,

Garrett, Arnold, & Ferris, 1999; Singh & Pandya, 1991). The importance of effective

business-customer relationship management has been increasingly recognized by both

academic and marketing practitioners (Watkins & Liu, 1996, p. 70).

Jones (2006) looked at how IHLs must respond to a growing complaints culture

by students becoming more assertive in their demands and expectations of their higher

education experience. As students make a greater contribution by paying more towards

the cost of their education, they have increased expectations regarding the services and

facilities that IHLs provide in support of their studies. The result has been a growth in

the number of complaints (Baty & Wainwright, 2005).

In order for IHLs to know what services their students want and require, it is

imperative that there is an effective means for obtaining student feedback. This is

important for monitoring student satisfaction and for addressing areas of concern in order

to further enhance the student experience. However, student surveys are limited in that

they are generally offered only once a year or once per academic term and capture only a

small portion of a student's educational experience (Audin, Davy, & Barkham, 2003).

In handling students' complaints, it is vital that IHLs treat complaints seriously, as

this cannot only mean the difference between retaining the student and the student

dropping out, but can also prevent a resort to legal processes. Scrine (2005) recommends

mediation as a mechanism to be used by IHLs in an attempt to resolve complaints with

students in-house. He describes mediation as a process of intervention by an

independent, neutral third party which has been found to be effective in many scenarios,

including disputes with students. If the situation is beyond repair, the mediator will

involve any legal or trade union representatives in drafting and signing the final

settlement or compromise agreement.

IHLs also need to ensure that lessons are learned when a complaint investigation

reveals shortcomings in processes and procedures. Staff whose departments are the

subject of a complaint should be careful that they do not act defensively, as this can serve

to exacerbate an already fragile relationship with the student. One approach to elicit staff

cooperation is to emphasize how complaints can provide useful feedback from students on services and facilities provided by the IHL; and that by addressing any concerns raised through these processes, the IHL is able to continually enhance the quality of the student experience (Lyman, Wilson, Garhart, & Heim, 1985).

Some IHLs, such as Oxford University in the United Kingdom, have moved towards a student contract (Richards & Halpin, 2006). The contract reiterates the students' own responsibility in the educational process in terms of attendance at classes and submission of work. It is designed to preempt complaints from students attributing poor academic performance to failings on the part of the IHL.

Guolla (1999) states that students are customers since they receive a highly valued service. Students with high levels of satisfaction engage in favorable word-of-mouth communication like recommendations to friends or asking whether an instructor teaches another course. On the other hand, students with low levels of satisfaction "engage in negative word-of-mouth communication, including complaints to a department chair or dean" (p .90).

The purpose of Tam's (2004) quantitative study was to investigate numerous aspects of the student experience in higher education to contribute to the knowledge of quality learning and the necessary conditions in the institution that are required to promote quality learning in students. Data were collected from two cross-sections (n=998 in 2000 & n=912 in 2002) using an online questionnaire for a wide range of variables about the students' background, university experience, and learning outcomes. A key research question was whether the students changed or developed during the

period they attended university and, if so, how much and in what direction. It was discovered that students' involvement in the university experience and interaction with the institutional environment were the two most important determining factors. In addition, students' interactions with teachers were found to be significantly related to their personal improvement.

Tam (2004) concluded that "[t]he major implication for universities and their managers and teachers is to shape the educational and interpersonal experiences and settings of their campus in ways that will promote learning, to induce students to become involved in their university experience and activities, and to exploit the various university settings and opportunities to their fullest….It is important that institutional policies and practices are oriented towards developing a climate in which students' responsibility and active participation in their own university experience are promoted" (p. 256). By creating a safe environment for the students, both the university and the students will be successful.

According to Jones and Yonezawa (2002), students' perspectives are not generally respected or heard. Their findings came as the result of a partnership between the Center for Research and Educational Equity, Assessment, and Teaching Excellence (CREATE) at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) and 18 secondary schools serving a largely minority student population from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The partnership's goals included access to courses and educational opportunities to increase students' post-secondary options, student access to meaningful and challenging curriculum, and creating classroom communities "in which students'

ethnic and linguistic identities, backgrounds, and lives are viewed as important and integral sources of knowledge" (p. 253). Partner schools utilized strategies such as student inquiry groups to gauge the experiences of students and then share that data with teachers to jumpstart conversations about student learning. Jones and Yonezawa stated that "[t]his partnership has created new spaces for dialogue, reflection, and equity-minded action" and has provided opportunities to "try out different ways of creating a meaningful and high quality education for *all* students" (p. 253).

Holmes and Smith (2003) investigated students' complaints about how faculty members graded them on both essay assignments and quantitative problems. Lack of fairness in grading and too little feedback from instructors were students' main complaints. Strategies such as setting clear assignment objectives and using matrices and rubrics would help to reduce these negative student comments.

Disadvantages of Complaining

One disadvantage of complaining is that the employees are subjected to the direct complaints of angry customers who expect a personal answer. Marketers in most cases do not know the reasons for consumer dissatisfaction and consequently cannot take corrective action. Other than lack of knowledge about complaining behavior, institutional barriers characteristic of marketing institutions such as retailers, distributors, and manufacturers discourage direct complaints from consumers (Hernandez, Strahle, Garcia, & Sorensen, 1991).

Cultural values, which are discussed below, play a role in complaining. For example, an aspect of American culture is the frequent use of legal action. According to

Hernandez, et al. (1991), this may be related to individualism and masculinity, which

makes people want to get the most out of life. Mooij (2004) found that in the United

States, obese people have started suing fast food chains, holding them responsible for

their weight gain. The voicing of complaints has had negative effects on many

organizations that were not producing effective products and/or services. In sufficient

numbers, consumers' complaints may stimulate regulatory action against a company and

destroy a product, dilute or erode brand equity and in the process, the market share (Phau

& Sari, 2004).

<div align="center">Complaining and Empowerment</div>

Nieto (2005) believes that in order to reflect critically on school reform, students

need to be included in the dialogue. One way to begin the process of changing school

policies and practices is to listen to students' views about them, especially from those

students who are categorized as "problems" and are most oppressed by traditional

educational structures and procedures (p. 392).

In regards to evaluation, IHLs need to commit to reflect on their own practice

with a view towards improvement. This can lead to tangible improvements in the quality

of the student learning experience. Evaluation for improvement minimally includes

collecting triangulated evidence from the key participants (staff, colleagues, students) by

using a variety of instruments. Furthermore, if this kind of process is to become

embedded, organizations need to establish a climate which values student involvement in

the evaluation of teaching and the assessment of learning (Pennington & O'Neil, 1994).

IHLs need to involve students and to see evaluation in a positive, developmental light, incorporating qualitative feedback to define and assess teaching quality more correctly. In education systems which are resistant to change, mistakes are most often diagnosed and penalized, rather than built on as learning opportunities. There is potential for both competence and incompetence in all teaching methods. Quality improvement is not an easy part of learning to manage, but its importance cannot be ignored (McIlveen, Greenan, & Humphreys, 1997).

Student empowerment has been defined as the dynamic process of adopting the values and enacting the practices of enlightened self-interest in order to align student and faculty goals for the class (Shulman & Luechauer, 2002). Alignment should not be construed to mean "forcing the student to want what the teacher wants" or "allowing students to impose their demands on the teacher" (p. 44). Rather, alignment occurs when students and faculty share the authority and responsibility to devise the processes and measures necessary to facilitate learning.

Student empowerment is relevant to the educational experience which in turn influences student satisfaction and whether students express their dissatisfaction through complaining (Lozier, 1996). In order to promote student empowerment, educators that adopt critical pedagogy allow the teachers and students to engage in dialogue that can facilitate the transmission of information both ways. Collins (2000) states that Freire's critical pedagogy "…is more interested in working problems out through dialogue, strategies, and projects with (not for or on behalf of) the oppressed themselves in what he calls 'true' acts of education" (p. 258).

Demographic Characteristics and Complaining

Eimers (2001) has suggested that minority and nonminority students often have different experiences and perception of these experiences in college. The findings of his study suggest that the relationship between college experiences and progress are quite similar for the two groups. This point reinforces the need to further explore how minority and nonminority students interpret their college experience and whether satisfaction with their college experience comes from similar types of activities, relationships, and environments.

Although "minority" cannot be considered a homogeneous group, it has been suggested by Eimers (2001) that minority students, in general, encounter common experiences in college that are different than their nonminority counterparts. This suggestion was based on Eimers' findings that minority students tend to report higher levels of prejudice on campus and that they may be less likely to get involved because they have a more difficult time identifying with a critical mass of their peers or specific faculty with whom they feel comfortable. Eimers also found that minorities have a wider range of cultural and traditional differences than their majority counterparts.

Underrepresented minorities have typically had fewer opportunities to attend college and, once enrolled, have generally found it more difficult to succeed academically and graduate (Wilson, 1994). Research suggests that the more satisfied and involved a student is in college, the more likely he or she will be academically successful and graduate. Therefore, if the relationship between college experiences and college success were better understood—particularly for minority students—perhaps IHLs could enhance

the success of minority students on their campuses. Astin's (1984) theory of involvement postulates that students' levels of involvement and engagement in college are directly related to their learning and development in college. The level of student development was also closely tied to a student's level of involvement with peers, professors, and the academic program.

The impact of college on undergraduate students increases when students believe they are valued, when undergraduate education is taken seriously, and when student and faculty interaction is frequent and meaningful. In addition, the impact of college increases when effective teaching and an understanding of learning are demonstrated in the classroom. How college affects students has been an area of inquiry that has been extensively studied. In few of those studies (Schroeder, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), however, have researchers specifically examined how the undergraduate student experience influences progress in college for different types of students.

Different teaching practices influence minority as well as nonminority skill development in very similar (and positive) ways (Eimers, 2001). Administrators and faculty can develop programs and initiatives to build stronger links and opportunities with students; create a welcoming and positive campus climate; and enhance the instruction, advising, and academic programs that all students experience (Kuh, 1993). Further, many of these initiatives can be established and maintained without significant cost to the institution (Graham, 1998).

Although Eimers' (2001) study was undertaken at a single university system, interestingly, minority students, in contrast to nonminority students, reported higher

levels of progress in intellectual development, similar levels of satisfaction with faculty-student relations and academic quality, and lower levels of satisfaction with the campus environment. Further research could focus on whether these results are consistent across different institutions, and if so, what implications they suggest.

Other researchers (Canada & Pringle, 1995) have found that mixed-sex education, at least as typically configured, may pose notable disadvantages for girls and women. It has been reported that in comparison to women who attended mixed-sex colleges, women who attended women's colleges had greater self-esteem at graduation, were more engaged in college activities and more likely to reach high levels of achievement in their careers and higher salaries.

Research in cultural psychology has found that an individual's values, concepts of self, perceptions of others, and patterns of interactions with his/her environment are influenced by the "cultural meaning systems" in which they operate (Liu & McClure, 2001, p. 55). Cultural meaning systems provide individuals with group-defined views of the world, belief systems, motivational forces, institutional orientations, etc. According to Liu and McClure (2001), cultural meaning systems are derived from one of two main systems known as "individualism and collectivism" (p. 57). In collectivist cultures, groups' affiliations take precedence over individual goals. Collectivists tend not to express their emotions outwardly, especially negative emotions that often are repressed in public settings. Negative emotions are likely to be discussed in intimate social settings (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007).

People with an individualistic cultural orientation believe that everyone should have equal rights and complete control over their own destiny. Research has shown that persons associated with the individualistic culture tend to voice their complaints more frequently than those from collectivist groups (Mooij, 2004). For example, Chiu, Tsang, and Yang (2001) state that the Chinese attach great importance to face. Losing face has demoralizing repercussions and thus is usually avoided. One way the Chinese deal with this is by not complaining about an issue in order to avoid exposing a person's faults. Although this would make them less likely to complain, there is a higher probability that dissatisfied Chinese consumers would complain when the situation does not involve direct confrontation.

Chiu, et al. (2001) conducted both quantitative and qualitative studies with Chinese students in order to learn about Chinese cultural complaint behavior. Through quantitative hypothesis, statistical significance was found suggesting that Chinese people were less likely to complain in a face-to-face situation. When complaint action involved direct personal confrontation, Chinese students tended not to complain.

Different cultures are presently being studied in order to find out the disparities and similarities among them. Another recent and interesting study in the same field was conducted by Eslami-Rasekh (2004), who compared face-keeping strategies in reaction to complaints between Persian and American English-speaking students. Persian society, has cultural values that are different than those of American society. Where American society values individual privacy, individual rights, and autonomy of individuals, Persian society is more group-oriented and places more emphasis on the importance of society,

family, solidarity and common ground. In the dominant American culture, distance is a

positive cultural value, associated with respect for the autonomy of the individual. The

study found that native speakers of Persian tended to be much more detailed, elaborate,

and emotional in their explanations of situations than American speakers. Many other

cross-cultural differences and patterns were discovered which helped produce a clearer

picture of differences in communication styles.

The concept of culture has been related to consumer behavior through values. Liu

and McClure (2001) state that when dissatisfied, customers in an individualistic culture

are more likely to voice their complaints than those in a collectivist culture. Moreover,

customers in a collectivist culture are more likely to express private responses than those

in an individualistic culture. Culture not only affects consumers' behaviors, but also

influences their intentions to engage in future behaviors. A collectivist culture does not

necessarily mean that they are passive. Rather, the voicing of their complaints privately

could be detrimental to existing businesses (Fisher, et al., 1999; Liu & McClure, 2001).

Results from several studies (Chiu, Tsang, & Yang, 2001; Cornwell, Bligh, &

Babakus, 2001; Hernandez, et al., 1991; Liu & McClure, 2001) suggest that ethnicity is

an important aspect of consumer complaining behavior. It is hoped that ethnicity will be

incorporated in future research designs on complaining and other consumer behaviors

(Cornwell, Bligh, & Babakus, 1991; Phau & Sari, 2004).

Summary

Students are considered by many IHLs, and by the students themselves, to be

consumers of higher education services. As students make a greater contribution by

paying more towards the cost of their education, they have increased expectations regarding the services and facilities that IHLs provide in support of their studies. Students are also becoming more inclined to criticize their institutions openly when educational experiences do not match expectations. In today's competitive environment, IHLs must identify what is important to students, inform students that they intend to deliver what is important to them, and then deliver what they promise.

Evaluation of student satisfaction is generally undertaken at IHLs through end-of-term surveys. However, the questionnaires typically used for these surveys ask for students' perceptions and do not seek to collect additional data with respect to expectations. Not all IHLs have systematic evaluation processes in place and of those that do, very few make these evaluations compulsory.

Consumer complaining behavior (CCB) theory is utilized by many profit-making institutions to reduce the causes of consumer complaints in order to increase customer satisfaction. CCB is a complex phenomenon influenced by factors such as gender, ethnicity, cultural background, attitudes towards complaining, and general attitudes towards businesses and products. Complaining as a strategy for voicing dissatisfaction is motivated by the complainer's genuine feelings of dissatisfaction (authentic complaints) that are expressed for the purpose of changing an undesirable state of affairs (instrumental complaints).

Students' perspectives are not generally respected or heard. Presently students can voice their dissatisfaction only within the boundaries construed by IHLs. In this paternalistic system, educators are often cast in the role of experts who decide what is

best for the students. However, educators that adopt critical pedagogy allow dialogue to take place that can ultimately result in greater student empowerment and satisfaction. Student empowerment is relevant to the educational experience which in turn influences student satisfaction and whether students express their dissatisfaction through complaining.

Although a review of the literature found that many studies have analyzed the effects of IHLs on students, there is a lack of research which specifically examines empowering students by giving voice through complaining. This study aims to fill that gap. In addition, this study contributes to cross-cultural research into student satisfaction by examining student dissatisfaction and complaint behavior and their relationship to gender, culture, and ethnicity.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and understand student satisfaction and complaint behavior through the lens of students' experiences, as well as to suggest strategies to improve student satisfaction at institutions of higher learning (IHLs). In addition, this study examined how satisfaction and complaint behaviors may be influenced by demographic factors such as ethnicity, culture, and gender at IHLs (Chiu, Tsang, & Yang, 2001; Cornwell, Bligh, & Babakus, 1991; Eslami-Rasekh, 2004).

Research Design

While quantitative research is designed to quantify specific components of a phenomenon, qualitative research focuses on the essential nature of a phenomenon. Qualitative researchers utilize strategies such as interviews and observations in order to gain knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative methodology was selected for this study because of its focus on the meaning of individual experiences within a particular vocational college (Merriam, 1998). The participants and the college that was the setting for this study were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

A qualitative approach utilizing one-on-one interviews was selected for this study as defined by Patton (2001), Bogdan and Biklen (2007), and Creswell (2005) to take advantage of the high level of trust the researcher had built with potential study participants, as well as the opportunity to elicit in-depth responses and to administer

individual follow-up questions. A focus group interview with four student volunteers from one of the researcher's classes was utilized for the purpose of testing and verification of the interview questions. Focus group participants reviewed and commented on the verbiage, length, and flow of each question. After some discussion, they recommended that no changes be made to the interview questions. Two of the focus group participants stated that they would "really have to trust the person" in order to respond fully to the interview questions in a one-on-one setting.

Research Setting

The San Francisco campus of Halo College was selected as the site for this study. Halo College was established as a non-profit educational institution in 1863 and at the time of this study consisted of 11 campuses in three states: California, Oregon, and Hawaii. In 2007 the college converted from non-profit to for-profit status. Halo offered associate degree programs in computer technology, telecommunications, several areas of business, medical office administration, and medical assisting, as well as diploma and certificate programs within these same subject areas. All programs were offered on day or evening schedules. Student enrollment varied by campus and by quarter. The San Francisco campus was located in the downtown financial district of the city with a total student population of approximately 600 full time and part time students. Instructors at this college were required to have earned at least a bachelor's degree and to have had relevant industry work experience. At the time of this study, the researcher had been an instructor in the business and computer technology departments at this campus for 10 years.

The student population at Halo was made up of individuals from diverse cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds. Demographic data available at the time of this study for the San Francisco campus indicated a diverse student population. Ages ranged between 16 and 55 years, with 62.29% of students being between 19 and 24 years old. Students were also of several different ethnic groups, with Asian/Pacific Islander (46.93%), Hispanic (19.83%), and African American (12.85%) representing the majority of students. Approximately 5% of students reported having some type of physical or learning disability ([Halo] College Campus Report, Fall 2002). To be eligible for enrollment, students must have earned either a high school diploma or General Educational Development high school equivalency diploma (GED). In addition, prospective students were required to achieve minimum passing scores on either the Career Programs Assessment Test (CPAT) or Compass test in mathematics, English reading, and English writing.

<div align="center">Research Participants</div>

All participants in this study were selected from the San Francisco campus of Halo College to take advantage of the researcher's familiarity with the students and the institution, as well as the ethnic mix and age range of the student body.

Information about this study was advertised to the students through postings around campus and on the main campus Web site which popped up each time students logged onto their computer workstations. Students wishing to participate in the study were asked to complete a questionnaire to determine whether they met the necessary criteria. Criteria included past or present dissatisfaction with an educational experience

at an IHL, gender, cultural identity, and ethnicity. After review of the completed

questionnaires, a purposeful sample was selected based on the participant selection

criteria in order to ensure that the characteristics of the participants would contribute

meaningful data with regard to the focus of this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Detailed information regarding participants' demographic information is included in

Table 1 on page 57. Volunteers were allowed to select the best date and time for their

own interview. They were also given the option as to whether their "real" name or a

pseudonym would be used for this study. All of the participants asked that they be given

a pseudonym for the purposes of this study.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

One-on-one interviews with the 20 participants of this study consisted of 20 open-

ended questions. Additional questions emerged as the dialogue took different paths as

participants described their experiences and expressed perceptions, feelings, and

knowledge regarding those experiences. Each one-on-one interview lasted for

approximately one hour. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by

the researcher for data analysis with sufficient context to interpret them. The transcribed

data was made available to the student participants in a read-only electronic format or a

printed version to provide an opportunity for participants to check for validity and

veracity of the transcribed interviews. Eight of the 20 participants chose to review their

transcribed interviews and verified that the transcriptions were accurate. The remaining

12 participants declined to review their transcriptions.

Interviews were conducted in an on-campus conference room during the month of May 2008. All of the interviewees were given a copy of the consent form to read and sign. Each participant was also asked to complete a demographics questionnaire.

Interview Questions

A pilot focus group was conducted prior to the start of individual interviews to explore themes and refine the interview questions. Focus group participants were recruited by means of asking for volunteers from one of the researcher's classes, and consisted of four student volunteers. The following interview questions were agreed upon by the focus group participants and the researcher. For each of this study's research questions, interview questions were formulated as shown below:

Research Question #1

What factors do students identify as influencing their sense of satisfaction with their educational experiences at institutions of higher learning?

Interview Questions:

a.   Tell me about your experiences as a college student. What do you like about being a student? What do you like about your school?

b.   Is there anything you don't like about being a student or about your school?

c.   Overall, are you satisfied with your educational experience in higher education?

    d.   What factors do you think have had the biggest influence over your

        sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with your educational

        experiences?

Research Question #2:

    When students are dissatisfied with their educational experiences, how do

they express their dissatisfaction?

Interview Questions:

    a.   Think about an experience you had as a college student when you felt

        dissatisfied with something at school. Please describe that experience.

    b.   Did you complain to anyone about this experience? Why or why not?

    c.   At the time, how did you feel about the idea of complaining?

    d.   Please describe any factors that made you hesitate before you

        complained.

    e.   Please describe any factors that made you feel more inclined to

        complain.

Research Question #3:

    What relationship exists between students' ability to express

dissatisfaction through complaining and their sense of empowerment in and

satisfaction with their educational experiences?

Interview Questions:

    a.   After you voiced your complaint, what happened?

b.   Did you feel more or less satisfied with your overall educational

experience after you complained? How did you feel after you

complained? Why?

c.   Did you feel empowered or disempowered by this experience? Why

do you think you felt this way?

d.   Given your previous experience with complaining, do you think you

would complain again if you were to feel dissatisfied with your

experiences at school? Why or why not?

e.   How do you define complaining?

f.   How would you categorize complaining? Would you categorize it as

being positive or negative? Why?

g.   What do you think about people who complain?

Research Question #4:

Which shared demographic characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, and

cultural background, may influence their complaint behaviors?

Interview Questions:

a.   Do you think the fact that you are a man/woman had any influence

over your willingness to complain? Why or why not?

b.   What about the gender or other characteristics of the person to whom

the complaint was directed? Do you think that had any influence over

your willingness to complain? Why or why not?

   c.   Do you think that other factors such as family, cultural background,

ethnicity, or anything else played a role in your willingness or desire to

complain? If so, which factors do you think influenced you and how

were you influenced by them?

   d.   Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Data Analysis

Transcripts of the interviews were reviewed, compared, identified, and analyzed

by the researcher. Themes and recurring patterns of meaning emerged as a result of data

analysis. The researcher carefully coded the data according to these themes. The data

was examined through the lenses of Sonia Nieto, Ira Shor, Paulo Freire, and

Alexander W. Astin with particular attention to issues pertaining to student involvement,

empowerment, voice, and expression of dissatisfaction through complaining.

Researcher's Background

At the time of this study the researcher, Farbod Karimi, had been teaching day

and evening classes in the Business and Information Technology departments at Halo

College for 10 years. As a further benefit for his students, he designed, implemented, and

taught nationally recognized bootcamps for Microsoft and CompTIA certifications. Mr.

Karimi was nominated by students and selected for recognition of teaching excellence in

Who's Who Among Teachers in America, and was named Halo's 2001 Teacher of the

Year. Throughout his 10 years at Halo, he received consistently high scores on students'

end-of-term evaluations and purposefully developed relationships of trust with his

students. In addition to his work at Halo, Mr. Karimi has trained more than 200 high

school instructors in the use of office productivity software for use in the classroom as well as volunteered, tutored, and prepared at-risk students for California high school exit exam.

Farbod Karimi received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business Administration from the University of Ottawa, Canada and a Master's Degree in Education with an emphasis in Adult Education from San Francisco State University, California. Mr. Karimi is a CIW certified instructor and administrator and holds CompTIA's A+ , Network+, i-net+, and Security+ certifications, is a Certified Fiber Optics Technician, and holds MCP and multiple MOS certifications.

Protection of Human Subjects

Proper permission from IRBHS was obtained prior to conducting the interviews for this study. Participation in the study was anonymous, and participants were asked for permission to record their conversations while being interviewed by the researcher. (See Appendix A)

Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability and validity of the data, member checks were utilized, as well as exploring and mitigating, as much as is possible, the researcher's assumptions and potential biases relative to the study. Member checking is a "process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account" (Creswell, 2005, p. 52). Research participants were encouraged to inquire as to the progress of the study at any time, and were given the opportunity to explore and discuss preliminary findings.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This section presents the information gleaned from the participants' responses to the interview questions, as well as information that emerged organically as part of the interview process. I have attempted to maintain the authenticity of each participant's point of view and have used direct quotes from their interviews to give their voice and perspectives. Their responses and their stories were genuine, and I was honored that the students trusted me enough to share their personal experiences openly.

The first part of this section offers a brief profile of each of the 20 participants, with related demographic information. The second part outlines the results of the four research questions as presented in Chapter I.

Participant Profiles

Alma

Alma is a hardworking Accounting student who is planning to continue her education to become a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). She is 24 years old and comes from Nadi, Republic of the Fiji Islands. She loves her family, culture, and traditions. She stated passionately that her family and country are more important to her than anything. She has a 4.0 Grade Point Average (G.P.A.) and is planning to start her own business in the near future.

Angela

Angela decided to attend Halo College after 11 years of working in retail. She is a 34-year-old Irish student who loves to learn new skills and actively participates in class

discussions. Her major complaint is the lack of classroom management by instructors at

Halo College. She has complained several times to the administration and enjoys

controversial class discussions.

Bashir

Bashir is 21 years old and emigrated from Palestine when he was five years old.

He has changed majors three times and dropped out of Halo College twice. He began as

a Network Security major, dropped out after two quarters, and returned to the Business

Administration degree program. After having been back for only one quarter, he had

enough of Halo College and decided to go to a four-year school. He came back to Halo

after finding out that his units were not transferable and he is currently in the

Telecommunications program at Halo. He is very knowledgeable about the subject

matter covered in his major and the curriculum. He has attempted several times to voice

his concerns but, according to him, the administration is always at lunch when he tries to

contact them.

Carolyn

Carolyn was born in Norway and is in her late 50's. She was laid off from her job

after 25 years and decided to learn computers and software applications at Halo College.

She is about to graduate. She is currently working for the U.S. government and will

continue her education towards a Bachelor's degree after leaving Halo. Her primary

complaint was that the college did not enforce the policies listed in their catalog such as

dress code and attendance policies.

Carrie

Carrie was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, and immigrated to the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1960s when her father changed careers. She has been working at the International House of Pancakes (IHOP) for 20 years. Tired of being a waitress, she has decided to make a career change at the age of 47 to pursue a degree in Medical Office Administration. She is very happy about this decision and has been struggling to manage working, spending time with family—especially with grandchildren—and doing homework.

Charles

Charles is a new Telecommunications student who is only 18 years old and has finished his first set of courses. He was born in San Francisco, California and loves programming and troubleshooting personal computers. He jokingly refers to himself as "the white boy with an attitude." According to him, he had an "awful English teacher" which made him consider dropping out several times—beginning only two weeks into his studies . He is extremely candid and has no fear of voicing his complaints about teachers and staff publicly.

Charmaine

Charmaine is a 27-year-old African American student and mother of four. Her education was previously interrupted due to problems with the law. She graduated with an Associate's degree in Business Administration from Halo College. Now she is back to update her skills due to the rapid changes in application software and skills needed in the

workplace. Currently, she is unemployed and trying to balance raising children, attending college, and making money.

Damilo

Damilo began as a Business Administration student but, after consulting with me, switched to Accounting. He is a 21-year-old Filipino who has gone through many personal obstacles at an early age. He is very proud to have made it so far and is very excited to be graduating in two quarters. Damilo will be the first in his family to graduate from college.

Ife

Ife is a 34-year-old African American student currently pursuing a Network Security degree at Halo College. He has never worked with a computer before but loves learning, especially the hands-on technical labs. When Ife is dissatisfied with something at Halo, he is vocal and expresses his feelings immediately. At the time of this study, Ife had a work study job in the Business Office.

Jamila

Jamila attends college despite many personal challenges. She is a 31-year-old single mother who was born in the Bayview area of San Francisco and is surviving without anyone's support. She is a peer mentor at Halo College's Learning Resource Center (LRC) and has been a support person for many of Halo's African American students. She is extremely motivated with her studies, and hopes to be selected as one of the speakers at the graduation ceremony.

Jamo

Jamo is a 21-year-old student who immigrated to the United States from Manila, Philippines. He was five when he left his homeland. Jamo is currently in the fifth quarter of a six-quarter Network Security program. He is scheduled to graduate soon, and says he is overall satisfied with his educational experience. His grandmother has had a great deal of influence on his educational decisions.

Josh

Josh refers to himself as "the big white boy who is the minority at [Halo] College." He was born in San Francisco, California and is taking night classes at Halo to earn his Associate's Degree in Business Administration. He just had a baby boy at the age of 19 and is extremely serious about learning. He has been critical of some of his teachers and the Admissions Department. He feels that teachers play favorites and that the admissions advisors are like "used car salesmen."

Juan

Juan is 24 years old and was born in Mexico City, Mexico. He is a Network Security major and works as a freelance computer repair and maintenance technician. He has a seven-year-old son about whom he is always worried. He has been evicted several times during his studies at Halo College but has managed to balance everything again.

Mariposa

Mariposa is one of the most energetic students at Halo College. She sleeps only four hours a night and has a beautiful little three-year-old child. She was born in Rio de

Janeiro, Brazil. She is extremely independent and would like to start her own business

after getting her business degree from Halo College.

Mustafa

Mustafa is 24 years old and immigrated to the United States from Morocco about

four years ago. After hearing the Halo College commercials, he enrolled in the

Accounting program. He is extremely serious about his educational goals and feels that

the other students need to be more serious about their goals, plans, and objectives in this

country. He already has few connections for an accounting profession.

Nilda

Nilda was born in Bogotá, Colombia, and is an energetic student with extremely

high expectations of her education. She is 28 years old, has a great sense of humor, and

once stated that she is "brown on the inside and white on the outside." She is currently in

the last quarter of her Business Administration program.

Rafael

Rafael is a 35-year-old Mexican-American brother of 12 siblings. In order to get

attention at home he would have to scream on a regular basis. He is in the Network

Security program and is hoping to work at Facebook or Google. He has been homeless

for several years and is happy to be back on his feet in his new one bedroom apartment.

Rosminda

Rosminda is a 28-year-old from Guatemala City, Guatemala. She stated that she

planned on dropping out of college several times because of the strange behavior of one

of her medical instructors, who Rosminda described as exhibiting four personalities

during the course of one two-hour class period. Rosminda's sister also attended Halo College in another program. She blames her sister for recommending Halo College. She stated that she would never recommend Halo College to anyone because they are not organized and some of the teachers don't sincerely care about the students.

Samantha

Samantha is a sixth quarter Medical Office Administration student with a baby boy who is two months old. Although she has learned a great deal and found a great career prior to finishing her degree, she had several complaints about her educational experience. She is 26 years old and was born in Los Angeles, California. She said that she would never come back to Halo College, even for a visit. She felt that she was misled by the campus director and that financial aid was trying to take advantage of her by not disbursing her funds.

Von

Von is from Mainland China and her ultimate dream is to become a registered nurse. She is currently 20 years old and wants to be a millionaire when she is 40 years old. As a result of taking a Business Math course, she has discovered a way to becoming a millionaire in 20 years. She has complained several times of students who have been distracting in class. She is currently completing an externship at a local medical center and loves working as a medical assistant.

Participant Demographics

Participants in this study included 11 female and 9 male students between the ages of 18 and 55. Ethnicities represented were Asian (4), European American (6),

Middle Eastern (2), African American (3), and Hispanic (5). Figure 1 illustrates

participant ethnicity as a percent of the study population. Participants also represented

students from all areas of study at Halo College, including Accounting (3), Business

Administration (7), Telecommunications (2), Network Security (4), and Healthcare (4).

Figure 2 gives a visual representation of the percentage of participants' academic majors.

Detailed information regarding each participant's gender, ethnicity, quarter in school,

academic major, and age is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Nationality	Current Quarter	Major	Age
Alma	Female	Fijian	5	Accounting	24
Angela	Female	Irish	4	Bus. Admin.	34
Bashir	Male	Palestinian	3	Telecommunications	21
Carolyn	Female	Norwegian American	6	Bus. Admin.	55
Carrie	Female	Scottish	3	Healthcare	47
Charles	Male	European American	1	Telecommunications	18
Charmaine	Female	African American	1	Bus. Admin.	27
Damilo	Male	Filipino	4	Accounting	21
Ife	Male	African American	4	Network Security	34
Jamila	Female	African American	6	Bus. Admin.	31
Jamo	Male	Filipino	5	Network Security	22
Josh	Male	European American	5	Bus. Admin.	19
Juan	Male	Mexican	4	Network Security	24
Mariposa	Female	Brazilian	5	Bus Admin.	21
Mustafa	Male	Moroccan	5	Accounting	24
Nilda	Female	Columbian	6	Bus. Admin.	28
Rafael	Male	Mexican	4	Network Security	35
Rosminda	Female	Guatemalan	3	Healthcare	28
Samantha	Female	European American	6	Healthcare	26
Von	Female	Chinese	5	Healthcare	20
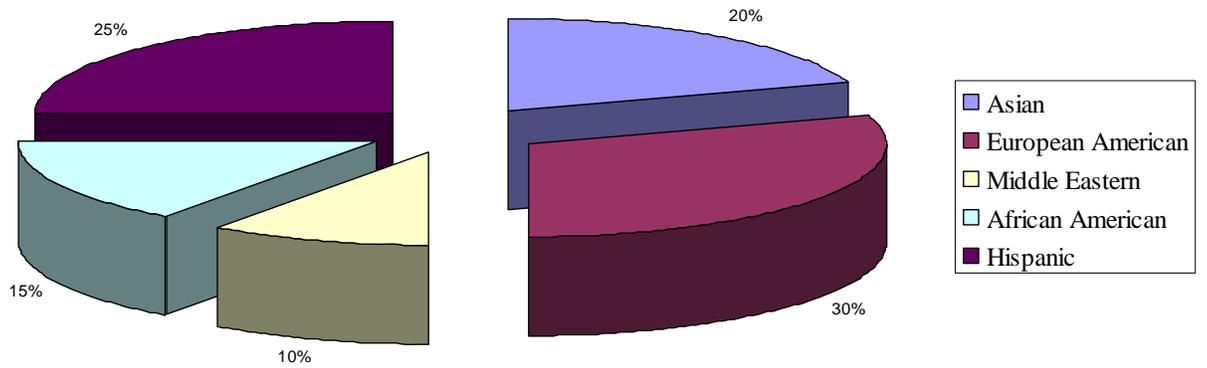
Figure 1: Breakdown of participant ethnicities shown as percent of total participants
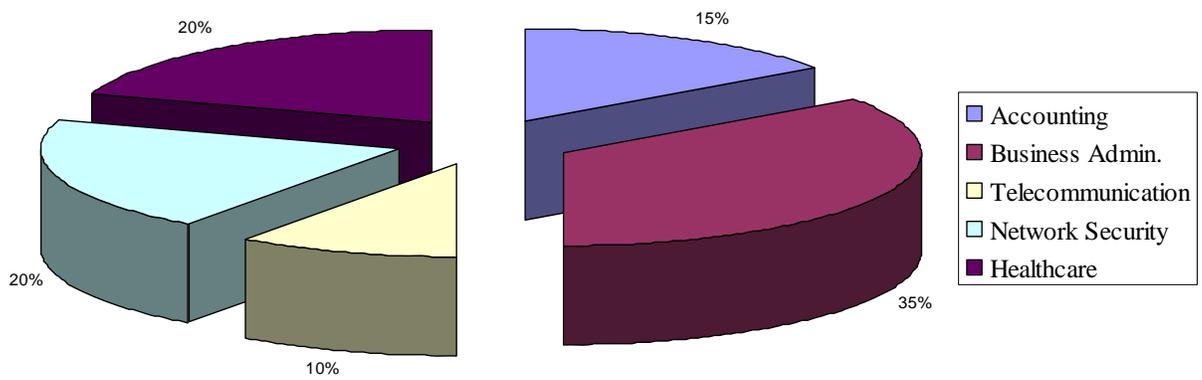
Figure 2 : Breakdown of participants' declared academic majors
shown as percent of total participants

Responses to Research Questions

Research Question #1:

What Factors Do Students Identify as Influencing Their Sense of Satisfaction

With Their Educational Experiences at Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs)?

Students identified various factors that influenced their sense of satisfaction with

their educational experiences. In order to facilitate understanding, I have divided these

factors into four categories: Administration (which includes administrative issues and

interactions with administrative staff), Faculty (including teachers and teachers'

assistants), Personal Factors (including issues with classmates or other students), and

Other Factors.

Administration

Halo College is different from many other Institutions of Higher Learning (IHLs)

in that it is a multi-campus institution with shared dress code and attendance policies. It

also offers free brush-up courses and lifetime job placement assistance to graduates of its

degree and certificate programs (Appendix B). In addition, Halo has recently undergone

major corporate- and campus-level management changes, including conversion from non-

profit to for-profit status. Students were not informed about most of the changes to

management or for-profit status prior to their being implemented. Several study

participants commented that the way the transition was handled had an adverse impact on

their educational experience.

Organization. Fifteen of the 20 study participants (75%) stated that they liked an

organized, professional, and structured administration when asked about what they liked

as being in a college. In the following example, Rafael points out some things he noticed

about his school's lack of organization and communication between departments:

> Well, there are times that it seems that it's not quite as professional as it should
> be. There seems to be a lot of the left hand not knowing what the right hand is
> doing. The financial office will have information that the business office needs,
> and the business office receives a check that the corporate office hasn't
> acknowledged. Or someone who's actually in school is being called by the dean
> of the information technologies to come back to school to finish his education and
> after I told him two or three times that I'm the guy you've been calling, it took me
> the fourth time to realize who I was, that he could now stop calling me and asking
> me to return to [Halo] because I'm here. (Rafael)

Enforcement of policies. Fair and consistent enforcement of policies was of

concern to many study participants. Twelve participants (60%) spoke about their desire

to study in a professional environment, which was a factor in choosing to enroll at Halo.

Halo's policies regarding professional dress on campus and prohibition of food and

beverages in classrooms and hallways contributed to the professional environment it

intended to create for its students. However, as a result of recent management level

changes, campus staff had become lenient with enforcement of these policies and

students were disappointed. Josh and Damilo were particularly descriptive when talking

about this issue:

> Things have changed a lot. It's like the whole dress code thing. You know, we
> had a dress code, everybody was supposed to have tucked-in collared shirts, dress
> slacks, dress shoes, no jeans, no T-shirts and all that. Nowadays you come to
> school and it's people in sneakers, jeans, T-shirts, baggy pants. (Josh)

> …but your presentation is everything, you know?...That's the main issue that I've
> had a problem with…and so far, nothing has been done about it. Nothing! Most
> of the teachers…don't enforce it at all. I've had teachers in the past tell me that
> I've had to be in dress code…[a]nd I understand it, because it's part of the school
> structure….Or *was* part of the structure….That was one of the big losses of this
> school, was losing that structure. It's sad to say that I chose this school because
> of that structure….When I came, my impression was, "Okay. This school is

good. They have good structure. Everybody looks focused, and just handling their business." It's just hard to see it like this, now. I'm kind of glad that I'm almost done. (Damilo)

Other participants felt they had been singled out unfairly for disciplinary action when not adhering to dress or attendance policies. Seven out of 20 (35%) participants stated that they believed some students at Halo were singled out unfairly. Jamila and Alma's stories are representative of those students who felt they were victims of unfair treatment:

> …like for example, the dress code. Us who have been here longer, [staff] thinks that we should always dress up. With the new people, they don't get dressed up so why do we have to dress up? So then we feel as though that's like they're getting treated better 'cause they want them to stay here. Since we're leaving, we should dress up anyway. (Jamila)

> No, I still think they're picky. I still think that they are choosing the students that they want to choose the students. Like, you know, I think they're nitpicking. Like, 'Okay, well today I'm gonna pick on [Alma].' Or, 'Today I'm gonna pick on [Lisa].' Or, 'Today I'm gonna pick on so and so.' You know? I don't think they have a specific guideline. It's hecka students here, especially like first quarter students who come to class maybe 30 days out of the whole quarter or something like that. You know? Maybe three weeks. Maybe once every week or whatever. You know? And they're still gonna be here next quarter and all that other stuff and I don't think they should pick on us. They know we get good grades. They know that we're gonna come to class. They know that even if we miss class we're gonna make it up. So you need to focus on the people who are just now starting and aren't gonna continue. They shoulda been focusing more on that. In our first quarter, maybe more people would show up and finish versus them focusing on that when you're in your fifth quarter. (Alma)

Honesty and caring. Another factor identified by participants as affecting their sense of satisfaction was the lack of honesty and caring of the administration. Eight out of 20 participants (40%) felt that they had been misled by administrative staff in cases involving transfer of academic credit, class availability, programs of study, promised graduation dates, organizational structure change, tuition, financial aid and textbook

availability. For example, Rafael was first told that he would be receiving a tuition

refund, but shortly before he was to receive the check, he was told that the funds would

be applied to possible future charges, instead.

> I had the wind knocked out of me because they told me that I wasn't gonna get a
> check at all until July because the financial aid office then decided that they
> needed to hold that money to make sure it would cover any other potential
> expenses….I just, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I got instant depression.
> And then I just…I started getting frustrated. And then I got upset and…I had to
> go and advise them that I was very upset and disappointed with [Halo] and its
> process and I had lost complete and total faith in the organization and it's very
> probable I would not be returning, that I would now be going to state college
> instead because I could get better financial aid and it's a cleaner process, it's right
> up front, you know exactly what's going on. (Rafael)

Tuition value. Seventeen participants (85%) mentioned high tuition costs in

relation to a perceived lack of services provided. The following excerpts illustrate some

of these students' awareness and concerns:

> We're not blind. We see what goes on. It's just a matter of would you say
> something. And that's why right now I feel that after I get into a position where
> my personal life is calmed down a little bit, I think I do need to write a letter to
> [school administrators] and say, 'Hey, look. I think this is shady. I think that our
> dollars are ill-placed, ill-spent. Because our bathrooms are dirty but our dean's
> wearing an Armani suit. You do the math.' (Samantha)

> We're paying for this education and you gotta get your money's worth, especially
> for a school like [Halo] which costs a little more than like a state college. So, I
> mean, we're customers. And the product is the development of our own mind.
> And if you're not investing in that, you're not investing in yourself. And if you're
> not protecting that, you're not protecting yourself. (Rafael)

Communication. Participants identified a lack of communication from the

administration of Halo as an important factor influencing their sense of satisfaction.

> The only contact I had—and this is sad—was with Financial Aid, because the
> school wants their money. That's sad. They've only contacted me when they
> want, when my tuition is up, and that monthly payment is up. That's sad, man. I

know, now, that we're not non-profit anymore, you know. It plays a big role, man. I'm sorry to say that I'm happy I'm leaving this school. (Bashir)

In addition, students felt that the administration was being too secretive. For example, 6 out of 20 (30%) stated that Halo should somehow notify students about staff changes. Alma and Mariposa's comments were typical of the participants' responses:

> I don't know them. I don't trust them, like, at all. Period. When they get new people in this school, they should…have a thing where, you know, they get to introduce to the students, the students get a little bit comfortable, like…the name with the face, you know? And you don't even know the name, so how you going to go and talk to somebody that's just, like, a complete stranger? (Alma)

> I don't like that most of the time students are unaware of when staff comes in or leave. Because a lot of the time, since it's a small school, the students develop some kind of relationship with people and they learn how to trust certain people. And then when they leave, and someone else take on to them, to take care of their schedules and things like that. And it just doesn't seem right because it's a professional school and you wouldn't leave your job and not notify other people. (Mariposa)

Many of the participants seemed to have made a special connection with one or more members of the school's staff, such as an Admissions advisor, Business Office staff, or dean. These connections helped to create an environment of trust where the students and staff were known to each other and students felt better able to communicate their concerns. Carolyn, Jamila, and Damilo shared similar feelings about the importance of connecting with staff or faculty.

> The admissions. I really clicked with the admissions advisor that I had originally. It turned out we were from the same state. It was [staff]. She's from Ohio. And [another advisor] and I really hit it off. And then I just found other staff. I'm trying to think who else was there when I was first there. The deans made an impression on me. And there were different people who were in the LRC and most of them I got along with really well. So just the dynamics of people being really helpful. (Carolyn)

All the teachers know your name. You're not Student #66 or the last four digits of your Social Security number. Like they literally know your name. They know you personally. They know if you're gonna pass the test or you're not gonna past the test. Or, you know, they know your study habits and things of that nature. (Jamila)

This is not like [the] State [university]. At State, all my friends that go to State, they tell me how hard it is to speak to their instructor, to speak to their counselor. You know, at [Halo], you're supposed to have that close connection, because the school is not that big. You're supposed to be able to have that, to speak to your counselor, or your instructor, when you feel it, you know. I can't remember who told me, but I do recall them saying that it's an open-door policy. And I haven't seen it, for a long time. (Damilo)

All of the participants indicated that they had a special connection with one or more of their teachers. This tendency to bond to faculty and staff, combined with a high rate of employee turnover as a result of the recent changes at Halo, played a role in participants' sense of satisfaction with their educational experiences.

Faculty

The faculty played an extremely important role in student satisfaction. Even as the school's administration was undergoing significant changes, the teachers could alleviate many of the students' concerns. For example, Jamila talks about how important the teachers have been to her in dealing with changes in the administration.

Lately I've experienced disorganization in my school because they're changing management, and they've just turned from non-profit to profit and it, at times, doesn't feel like they've got it together. But as long as the teachers care about their students and their educations, which they do at my school, I'm cool with that. (Jamila)

Every participant mentioned an experience with their teachers as having some kind of impact on their sense of satisfaction. Participants talked about a long list of positive and negative interactions with their teachers including issues with fairness and

favoritism, quantity and effectiveness of assignments, grading practices, organization and

consistency, caring, and personality and behavior.

Fairness and favoritism. Fourteen participants (70%) discussed how teachers

need to be fair and respectful, and should refrain from favoritism. The following

examples are typical of these students' comments:

> So I…did every single assignment, did it to the best of my ability, and [still]
> wouldn't receive full points. And then the person next to me gets full points with
> actually having more things wrong than I do. (Charles)

> I think when I felt dissatisfied with something in the school was when I took a
> class and the teacher, I don't know, it was just, I don't know if he's a bad teacher
> but his teaching skills was not compatible with my learning skills and it caused
> me to fail a grade and he would give up on the students himself. Saying things
> like, 'I'm not gonna teach you this because you're not gonna get it anyways.'
> And I told him that he sucked. (Mariposa)

Quantity and effectiveness of assignments. Several participants mentioned

homework assignments as being important to their overall educational experience. One

of the study participants, who was also a former student, talked about an unfair

assignment which I gave the class and how frustrated she was as result of this experience:

> I came to you because I felt that the homework was…overly thorough….I was not
> getting information from doing the homework that way. I didn't understand the
> point the homework, and even though I was spending the three to four hours
> doing it, I didn't know what I was really supposed to be learning from doing it.
> Often, even if I answered the question, I wasn't sure if I'd answered it correctly.
> And so I complained that I didn't like the homework, that it didn't seem pointful,
> and definitely it took much too long. (Angela)

Grading practices. Half of the participants stated that fair grading played an

important role in their sense of satisfaction. When students compared grades, they were

upset to find that unfair and inconsistent grading practices were taking place. Josh and

Charles spoke about their experiences with grading:

I think the most dissatisfied I was, was let's see, I was a 6th quarter, I was taking QuickBooks class, and basically the teacher threw us a book, said do the projects, do the assignments, turn 'em in, that's it. No lecture, no anything. Well at the end of the quarter…I was, you know, in Chapter 10 on my 10th final project, somebody else is in Chapter 6, and we're getting the same grade in the class. (Josh)

Beginning math, yeah, it's very frustrating. And the beginning English I get thrown into, and then I get thrown in with a teacher who grades on whatever she wants as opposed to what her syllabus says. (Charles)

Organization and consistency. Participants indicated that teachers who are organized and consistent are important to students' sense of satisfaction with their educational experiences.

Overall, as a college student, personally, I have high expectations for a college….Some of the instructors I had didn't really have a good plan, a good layout for the students. (Damilo)

Caring. Another very important factor which played a major role in student satisfaction was "caring." With the exception of one student (Carrie), all of the participants stated that "caring" was very important to their overall educational experience. The participants stated they felt they would know when a teacher cared and that made a drastic difference in their willingness to stay in class and learn. The word "caring" recurred throughout most of the interviews. Even when students were talking about factors such as teacher flexibility or teaching style, "caring" seemed to be the primary ingredient. For example, Jamo and Bashir referred to the caring factor when talking about the importance of teaching:

I find the benefits of it because the teachers are more involved in their student's education. They care more, and they're more working with the student, rather than just teaching a course and just hoping that everyone gets it. If one student doesn't get it, then that teacher will stop, talk to that student, to see where they have problems, and they work with them. (Jamo)

The teachers not caring. They just, you know, it felt like they just came to work, gave their speech, and that's it. And the rest is all up to the student. There was no, you know, and, ifs, or buts. If you needed help, they would tell you to go to the library. (Bashir)

Von talked about how her friends seemed to care more about her than some of the

teachers:

Some friends were encouraging me to complain 'cause, like I said, my other friend, she was taking that 240 class. But at the same time she didn't really want to say anything because it's about her as well. But people were telling me to complain, of course, 'cause that's my education. And it showed that they did care rather than the teachers caring for my education (Von)

Personality and behavior. A few of the study participants talked about teachers

that exhibited behaviors which affected the students' educational experiences. Examples

included an instructor that seemed to have multiple personalities in the classroom and a

teacher that shared very personal information with a student.

We all talk about it. Everyone's like, 'Yeah. She's crazy. How is she today?' It's not like no one knows. We all talk about it. (Rosminda)

I don't think people really know how she is in the classroom or how rude she is. Because like yesterday, for instance….She was standing there, I was writing on my sheet, and she was giving me the nastiest look ever. And I'm like, and I knew she was looking at me but I'm just gonna do my work….She got mad that I ignored her. She gets pissed if I don't get pissed off with her. Like because she's in a bad mood and she's like, you know, but it's things like that….I understand you could be having a bad morning, a bad day, whatever. But as students we're expected to go to school, do our thing, work hard, and then leave. And I understand some students don't but then when I get that negative or, you know, it's just not cool….I mean, she has her good days, her bad days. When they're bad, they're bad. Like she made this girl cry one time in class….I almost just want to laugh. I'm like, 'Oh my god. You're so off the wall.' (Jamila)

He was going through a lot of personal problems. And unfortunately because I wasn't 19 or 20, I was older, he started, I don't know if the word "confide" is right but he started talking about his personal problems to me and a couple other students….And he was very bitter….he'd sit in the classroom with the lights off hoping no one would come in….He wasn't always really supportive in explaining

things. I didn't really feel he should have been in that position. I know eventually

left.   (Carolyn)

Personal Factors

At the time of this study, many Halo students had been out of school for a long

time, were single parents, worked full time, cared for sick or disabled family members, or

had little or no support from friends and family for their educational pursuits. For

example, after the September 11 tragedy, Carolyn was laid off from the airline she had

worked for after 25 years. ("September 11" refers to the attacks of September 11, 2001

wherein terrorists crashed hijacked passenger planes into the Pentagon and World Trade

Center buildings in New York City.)

> Because when I lost my job with the airlines a number of years ago, and I was
> trying to decide where to go to learn the Microsoft applications. I went to, I think,
> three or four schools to try to figure out where would I really fit. And I really
> liked [Halo] over the others. Some of 'em were just tutorials. You'd sit and
> you'd read a book or you'd read a manual on how to type. And someone's just
> standing around to answer questions and I didn't like that. So when I went to
> [Halo] and I actually sat in one of [the teacher's] classes and saw the dynamics
> and the interaction, and just the school was attractive to me. That was a key to me
> too. I'm sensitive to my surroundings. So I wanted to be somewhere where I felt
> comfortable. (Carolyn)

> I was very nervous when I was first coming [back to school]. It was a giant
> readjustment for me because I had been out of school for ten years. (Angela)

> Twenty years ago, almost exactly 21 years ago I went back to high school, got my
> high school diploma, and I went through ROP and I got a Home Health Aide,
> CNA Home Health Aide degree. And I wish I woulda kept going but I was
> having problems in my marriage. Then I ended up divorced. So now, 20 years
> later, that's because I was working at IHOP for the last 17 years. I had a
> grandchild at the age of 36. My son made me a grandmother when he was 16. So
> I looked at it, weighed it out, and figured well, I can either make this good or I
> can make it bad. And I decided to make it good. So I put myself off again. So I
> stayed where I was, I was remarried, buying a home, so kinda stuck in a situation
> where I had to be. But one day I got really upset with my job and I kept hearing
> myself bouncing off walls, how angry I was. I was like, well I could either, again,

make it good or make it bad. So again I made it good. So that's when I came back to school and figured I'm getting older, the job's not getting any easier, so here I am. (Carrie)

Many of these students had attended one or more other IHLs in the past, but

without academic success. For these students, the highly structured, accelerated

programs at Halo offered an opportunity to approach their education in a new and

different way and achieve their educational goals where they had not able to do so in a

traditional IHL.

Many participants found personal growth and development to be just as important

to them as academic achievement. This included learning new skills, refreshing and

improving old skills, interaction with others, and hands-on learning.

Most of all, what I really enjoy is learning something new. And meeting new people and the experience I get learning with other people. It increases the experience and it enhances the lesson. And it makes me feel more complete as an individual, that I'm not just a bump on the log. There's something going on upstairs."(Bashir).

I like using my brain. I like learning new skills and refreshing and improving old ones. I was very self-conscious about the things that I wasn't as good at anymore. After 10 years of retail I had not required writing very much. I had begun writing things on my own and I had seen how I didn't structure sentences as well as I used to on written paper. It's not a problem anymore at all but that was upsetting to me. And my spelling was atrocious because I didn't have to write and I didn't have to spell very often, and I was never particularly good at spelling. I was worried about the grammar parts that might have fallen to the wayside. Because it's a sign of intelligence. And I was basically worried about looking less intelligent to people and getting stuck in retail for the rest of my life where I really didn't feel like I belonged. (Angela)

Several participants talked about the importance of obtaining current, marketable

skills. They understood the profound impact which a lack of these skills was having on

their ability to get and keep good jobs and, by extension, on their self-respect and the

respect of friends and family. In addition, one of the participants mentioned the importance of networking with people which would help them in their future career.

Other Factors

Other factors which participants said played a role in increasing their satisfaction as students were a clean campus, up-to-date equipment, comfortable surroundings, ample parking, security guards, and attending school with friends. Although some of these factors were given less emphasis than others by the participants, they nevertheless played a role in the participants' educational experiences.

Campus environment. In regards to the campus environment, Mustafa made a statement about how Halo used to be, before the conversion to for-profit status and changes in management: "So I liked the professional way Halo College present the school and everything, and I like the location—it was clean and nice—and the reputation of the school.

Samantha also talked about her experience of the facility, comparing the faculty restroom with those designated for student use. She had accessed the faculty/staff restroom one day by waiting until an employee had gone in, grabbing the door before it could close, and waiting for the employee to enter a stall so she could enter the faculty restroom unobserved. At the time of this study, Halo employed only one janitor to maintain a four-floor, multi-use building with classrooms, offices, learning center, and student lounge, with men's and women's restrooms on all four floors. The second floor restrooms were locked and for the exclusive use of Halo faculty and staff.

> I mean just the cleanliness of the bathrooms, for instance....The women's faculty
> bathroom is spotless on the 2nd floor. The 3rd and the 4th floor, the mirrors haven't

been washed down. The sinks are so dirty you don't want to wash your hands in them. All the toilets are overflowed. But you know what? There's new toilet paper and the stuff's picked up off the floor every day so I guess that constitutes for cleaning a bathroom, right? (Samantha)

Up-to-date tools and equipment. Several participants mentioned having access to current versions of software and up-to-date hardware, textbooks that have been recently updated, and ready access to specialized tools and equipment relevant to their majors, were important factors affecting their educational experiences.

And the one thing I liked about how it was in the beginning, they actually offered to get your scrubs the day of the orientation…and then they actually gave you your…blood pressure stuff. (Von)

Our computer at home was old so I didn't have the newest programs. So I would come in on Fridays to work at [Halo's] LRC. (Carolyn)

And of course they're getting these tools from the companies that are supplying our books. So they have a contract with those people to get the books from them, so in turn they have to get the tools from them. I don't know if that's how it works but I'm sure that's….So when I think about complaining it's like, well okay, so you complain to them, what are they gonna do? They've already signed a contract. They've already paid for all of these tools to be shipped here. And they're not gonna turn that down. And they're buying them probably for a fraction of the cost that they're charging us for 'em. If they bought us good tools we'd be, they'd be charging us three hundred dollars for them instead of a hundred dollars for them. (Josh)

Parking. For those who drove their cars to school, parking was a major concern. The San Francisco Halo campus did not include any type of parking facility and, because of its location in the heart of San Francisco's financial district, on-street parking was extremely limited, even for evening students. Nearby, privately-owned pay lots ranged in price from $12 to $25 per day. No hourly parking lots were available within several blocks of the campus. Jamila stated, "I don't like the fact that we don't have a parking lot." Nilda, who rode her bicycle to school, said, "For the money that I'm paying, I can't

even park my bike inside the place." Halo did not have any facilities for secure bicycle

parking and did not permit students to bring their bikes into the building. One student's

brand new bicycle was stolen, despite its being locked to a pole outside Halo's front

doors and in visual range of Halo's security desk. The security guard did not see

anything and the bicycle was never recovered.

One participant voiced her concern about the security guards. Halo College

outsources their security from a private security firm. There are usually two full time

security guards on duty at all times while school is in session.

> I don't like how the guards change every month. One of them was a little creepy.
> (Nilda)

Attending school with friends. Enrolling in school together with friends or family

members, as well as forming supportive friendships in school was also mentioned as an

important factor affecting students' educational experiences.

> …if I was to do this over again I think I would be, well I don't know if I would
> change it. 'Cause some things that I'm getting out of this school now that are
> actually not even that related to this school are helping me more than what I
> would get at, say, [the local community college]….Friends, instructors that are
> going above and beyond to help us with things outside of the school. You know,
> to further our careers. Just things that I've learned and, you know, this school has
> worked around my schedule a lot, too. I have a wife and kids and I work full
> time, so I get off at 5, I can come to school at 6 and go 'til 10, you know, and go
> home and do my thing. So I think that's also refrained me from complaining to
> higher authorities because, you know, it worked for me. (Josh)

> I have to admit I've met a lot of great people since I've started here. I bet, I'm
> sure that'll still be friends when I leave. And I mean that. I'm very much of a
> people person. I mean, working in a restaurant for 17 years I think I'd have to be.
> (Carrie)

Summary

Participants in this study identified several factors as influencing their sense of satisfaction with their educational experiences. Major issues related to the administration and faculty, as well as personal and other miscellaneous factors. Participants stated they like an organized, professional, and structured administration that communicated openly with the students. They also said it was important to them that policies were enforced fairly and consistently. Participants indicated they wanted to feel as if the administration and faculty were honest with them and cared about their learning. The role of faculty was found to be very important, both in terms of classroom organization and student learning, but also the relationships of trust that students formed with their teachers. Personal factors affecting satisfaction included personal growth and development, learning new skills, interaction with others, and opportunities for hands-on learning. Participants in this study also mentioned several other factors that affected their sense of satisfaction with their educational experiences, including access to up-to-date equipment, clean and comfortable surroundings, ample parking, and a safe and secure campus. Students also indicated they enjoyed attending school with friends and forming new friendships on campus.

Research Question #2:

When Students Are Dissatisfied With Their Educational Experiences,

How Do They Express Their Dissatisfaction? What Role Does Complaining Play?

What Factors Do Students Identify as Barriers to Complaining?

What Factors Encourage or Facilitate Student Complaints?

Students expressed their dissatisfaction through a range of behaviors such as showing their anger, ignoring the situation, withdrawing from the class, dropping out of school, giving negative end-of term evaluations, telling others, complaining, and sometimes using profanity or planning physical action against the person who had created the dissatisfaction. Figure 3 illustrates some of the ways in which students respond to dissatisfaction.

Mariposa showed her anger by speaking out to the teacher and using profanity in front of the rest of the class:

> I think when I felt dissatisfied with something in the school was when I took a class and the teacher, I don't know, it was just, I don't know if he's a bad teacher but his teaching skills was not compatible with my learning skills and it caused me to fail a grade and he would give up on the students himself. Saying things like, 'I'm not gonna teach you this because you're not gonna get it anyways'….I told him he sucked and I would not take a class with him again, he was a horrible teacher….He was embarrassed because other students laughed at him….If he did say anything, I wasn't trying to listen. I think for most, all I remember was his facial expression. (Mariposa)
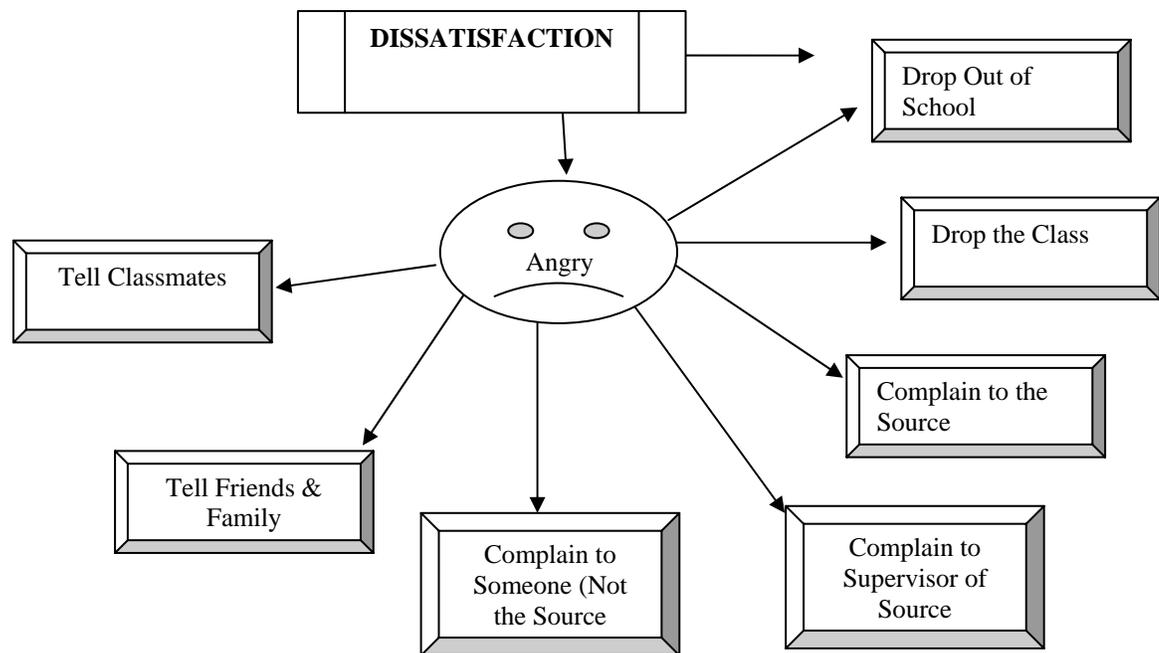
Figure 3: Outcomes of student dissatisfaction as described by
the study participants

Josh and Nilda chose to keep quiet instead of complaining to anyone about the

issues that were bothering them. Josh felt that complaining would just add to his feelings

of frustration because he believed no action would be taken, whereas Nilda both felt that

the administration would not do anything to correct her problems and feared possible

retribution from students if she complained about them.

> In my seventh quarter, now, I've decided to stop trying to argue with [staff], and
> anyone else, about, 'No, this is what you said you were going to do for me, and
> I'm not going to accept anything less'….[and about other students being
> disruptive in class:] But I've never really complained out loud to anyone about
> that….I'm slightly intimidated by those students that are disruptive, so I feel like
> if I'm going to point the finger, then they could backlash. (Nilda)

Because I felt that it was going to be basically beating my head into a wall. Like it was just gonna go nowhere….I thought about going to the dean. But…I feel that nowadays nothing is going to be done. I'm gonna be told that it'll be taken care and then brushed under the rug. (Josh)

When Charles was unable to resolve his ongoing problem with grades in an

English class, he gave up and stopped attending the class:

I didn't even drop the class. I just stopped going. Like I'm sure it'll show up as a drop, but if it shows up as an F, whatever. I'm still gonna have to re-take it. I'm still gonna have to re-pay for it. Like there's no outcome there….I just, I couldn't take it anymore. I was tired of coming here and being stressed out over this lady. You know what I mean? Like I was, I'm coming here to learn and do my thing, like yeah, I've got a bunch of bullshit classes that I've got to get through, but that's all part of the process. I have no problem getting through those B.S. classes to get to the classes that I want to get to. And I understand that but, I mean, if that's how it's gonna be set up then I'm not gonna take English until my very last quarter. And even then, I'm not gonna take it with her. (Charles)

Bashir utilized several methods to express his dissatisfaction. He started by trying

to resolve his problem by speaking to administrative staff, then he expressed his anger

verbally, and he finally dropped out of school altogether and attempted to transfer to

another IHL. Then, when he became frustrated with the new school, he withdrew his

application for admission and returned to Halo:

And then finally we sat down, then we went over my, you know, what I have left and he was like, 'You're not graduating until the following quarter.' And, you know, I'm going along with what he said, that I was graduating at this point. Now you're telling me I'm not graduating until the next point. So we had a little thing there…'cause at that point I just like, okay, what's next? What are you guys gonna tell me next? I'm not graduating for another quarter? Even if I pass all my classes? What's next? So I started to get frustrated and I just lost my mind. I started yelling at all of 'em. You know? 'Cause it's twenty-something-thousand dollars now and it's like, now you're just playing with my mind. So, and that was, me taking a break was actually me dropping out of that school. But then I decided to come back and just finish up anyway 'cause I had to pay for it anyway. And the reason why I dropped out was because another person who didn't really help me out when I was trying to transfer, she didn't know what she was talking about. (Bashir)

In her interview, Von talked about how she and her classmates expressed their

dissatisfaction with one of their teachers through the end-of-term evaluations:

> For example, when one of the teachers, when he first started here, like [that teacher], when he first started here nobody liked him. I didn't like him. Just the way how he was. He wasn't really teaching all that well. He was just reading off the PowerPoint and the handouts. Everybody complained. And when we first did the [evaluations], the room was so quiet and all you hear was typing. Like people were, it seemed like people were writing an essay. And now, it's been like two years now 'cause that's, when I first started is when he first started, and now it's like his attitude and personality's so different from when he first started. He's more approachable and now when we do type [the evaluations], it's a whole different point of perspective. You still hear people typing but now it's in a positive way.

Talking to classmates was frequently the participants' first response to

dissatisfaction with something at school, particularly when they were dissatisfied with

something that happened in the classroom. Angela stated this most clearly in her story.

> Well I remember at one point I was in a class where we were watching a video and it was a two-hour, was it two hours? It was a long video. It was a long video and then we were given a quiz afterwards. And there were only four questions. And I had paid very good attention and I'd taken pages and pages of notes. And I got one of the questions wrong. I didn't catch one of the things we needed and so on that quiz I got, I think, because if you get one wrong out of four that's a 70 percent. And that was really dissatisfying to me because I didn't feel it was a reflection of my ability to learn or pay attention….Initially I complained to the people next to me. And I showed them the pages of notes that I had taken and I had taken a freakish amount of notes. Most people didn't do well on the quiz. They didn't. But they weren't going to say anything. And I just was frustrated.

In extreme cases, some students at IHLs might plan or even carry out acts of

violence against the person they believed to be responsible for their dissatisfaction.

Appendix C includes examples of students that attacked teachers, academic advisors, and

members of thesis committees. Only one of this study's participants indicated any

thoughts of violence against Halo staff or faculty. The student stated that although he

would not go out of his way to hurt his teacher, if the teacher happened to be walking

across the street when he was driving by, he would run the teacher down with his car.

All of the students who participated in this study actively complained.

Complaining was conducted in different manners. According to the results and what the

students stated about other classmates, the majority of students would initially complain

amongst themselves. After that, their complaining would extend to family and other

friends outside the school environment. Some students would directly complain to the

source of the problem, while others would go to that person's supervisor. Many students

preferred to ignore the whole situation, seeing no use for complaining. Trust played a

major role in determining to whom they would complain; they would only go to teachers

or staff they trusted.

Role of Complaining

Definitions of complaining. Each participant was asked to give his/her own

definition of complaining. Many participants defined complaining as expressing

dissatisfaction with a situation, while others emphasized the need to have their voices

heard, to get what they believed they were entitled to, or a way to solve a problem. Each

of the examples which follow best describes these different perspectives on complaining.

Definitions related to voice:

Complaining to me will be to try to get what is rightfully yours and to make the
people hear you. (Juan)

Complaining to me is going to voice your opinion and basically the person you're
voicing your opinion to really disagrees with you. So you're complaining to them
so you could try to basically convince them to go your way. (Jamila)

Definitions that related to expectations:

> Complaining is like an expression of something's not going right with that person. Like, it's not going their way….They expect something out of whatever that's happening, and they're not getting that, so, if they complain that this is my expectation, and you guys aren't meeting it, so, I'm going to make a complaint. (Jamo)

> Something that I'm not happy about, and I'm going to voice my negative opinion about it. Like…if I ordered a burger, and I wanted it medium, and it came out, and it's well-done, I'm going to complain. And, well, in a nice way, but I'm going to be like, "Hey, that's not what I ordered. This isn't right." I guess that's the only way I could describe complaining. (Nilda)

One participant defined complaining as a means to solve a problem:

> I think for myself, complaining is, a lot of people assimilate complaining to whining. I think complaining is more like when there's something wrong and people feel like they've got no control of the situation, they cannot fix themselves, then they voice out to someone else to maybe get an opinion back, to maybe help them direct, you know, their thoughts, or maybe to get the problem solved. (Mariposa)

Another participant used complaining to reduce his level of stress over a

dissatisfying situation:

> My opinion on complaining is complaining is basically a way for me to relieve stress. If something is bothering me, I can go complain and it gets it off of my head. Whether it's going to help or not, it depends on who you're complaining to. (Josh)

Many participants simply defined complaining as a way to express their

dissatisfaction:

> I would define a complaint as bringing to light something that you find dissatisfaction with. That you felt could either run better, be better organized, or something that doesn't run to your expectation. Or does not work in the way that you perceive it should. (Ife)

> I define complaining as, I guess, viewing, identifying a problem and just raising that issue. I mean, 'cause I guess to me complaining is not really a bad thing. It's just really providing maybe input or feedback to something and then just following up and making sure it gets resolved. (Charmaine)

Complaining for me is just expressing my dissatisfaction with a situation or a person or like something that's going on. It's not being satisfied. (Charles)

Complaining is stating when something is not going right for you. (Rafael)

Basically saying what you have in your mind. Complaining about the issue that you have. And usually when somebody complains, it's not in a good tone. (Von)

Complaining as being positive or negative. Seventeen of the 20 study participants

(85%) categorized complaining as both being positive and negative, while two

categorized complaining as purely negative, and one as always positive. When friendly

talk or other means of communication failed to resolve an issue, complaining sometimes

became the student's last resort. For example, Charles stated that students got angry at

first and then found someone to talk to about their dissatisfaction. He said they would

begin by talking about the problem with classmates, move on to telling family members,

and then, if the issue still was not resolved, they would take the issue to the supervisor of

the person whom the student believed was responsible for their dissatisfaction. Charles

went on to say that complaining offered a last chance for the teacher to make a

difference:

> Yeah, myself, I hesitated because I was like, okay, well maybe, you know, she might have something here. Maybe she just wants the paper a completely different way. Some teachers have to have things a certain way and I understand that. So I tried to go out of my way to make it her way. And still it didn't, I don't know, just didn't receive full points. And I thought that it was, you know, she was trying to take it out on me for being late to her class when she knew that she can only grade me down 10 percent [for participation]. (Charles)

Another student, Ife, found that complaining could lead to better understanding of

a situation. When he thought he had been enrolled in the wrong class, for which he

would not receive credit towards his major, he complained to someone in the deans'

office. It turned out that there had been no mistake, and that the course did count towards

his major. Ife said:

> He looked at my record, he explained, he saw that the [class] actually did count….[M]y fears were not justified, basically. The course did count towards it and testing out of [another class] did put me a class ahead. (Ife)

Letting go or giving up. An interesting aspect of this study was the finding that

many of the participants would just let go and move on from a dissatisfying event.

Eleven of the 20 participants (55%) reported an experience where they felt their

complaint was not taken seriously or heard, after which they gave up hope and decided

just to move on. They reported that the lack of acceptance and respect they received after

complaining, in addition to not being listened to, made them give up.

Success with complaining. Four of the 20 participants (20%) had success with

complaining where their voice was heard and they received a response. These students

reported feeling extremely satisfied that someone sincerely listened to them and took

action to resolve their problem. For example, once Ife complained and a staffperson

seriously listened to him and worked with him, he made the following statement:

> Once I realized that, you know, I was corrected, I felt satisfied. I felt that, I did feel, I can't speak for everyone, [staff] in particular did look at my case, did understand what I was asking him, and did alleviate my concerns. (Ife)

Finally, 25% of the study participants reported various experiences with

complaining. Three of them were still going through the complaint process, so far

without success, and the other two did not indicate whether they were satisfied with the

results or whether they would continue the process.

Once they were ready to state their complaint, many participants reported that they were not sure to whom they should complain. Without proper information about the responsible person or department, 15 out of 20 (75%) of students would consult with trusted classmates and teachers before going to the administration. Charmaine stated:

> Because I didn't really know who to talk to. I didn't know if I should, 'cause I felt like I didn't want to go over the teacher's head and go to the dean, so I didn't really know who. And then there was some time that lapsed before so I figured they wouldn't, you know, and then when I did call, they didn't respond. (Charmaine)

Two participants mentioned that even their teachers were not sure who was in charge of handling student complaints. For example, Samantha asked a teacher to whom she should complain and her teacher, a recently-hired member of the school's adjunct faculty, had no idea.

Barriers to Complaining

Although 8 out of 20 (40%) responded that nothing made them hesitate to complain, several barriers to complaining were mentioned and discussed. Examples of barriers to complaining included embarrassment, doubt, guilt, self-blame, lack of confidence, fear of retaliation by faculty through grades, not wanting to get the person in trouble, not knowing who to complain to, fear of talking to strangers, lack of trust, feeling it would be a waste of time or would be ineffective, losing one's temper, lack of time to devote to the problem due to work, family, or other obligations. Fourteen out of 20 (70%) mentioned that the main reason for not complaining was non-responsiveness to complaints. Six out of these 14 felt that whomever they complained to would look at

them as nagging and whining. In her response to the word "complaining," Alma

differentiated whining from complaining. She stated that complaining is:

> Something I'm not happy with. Meaning, like, I'm complaining about it because
> it's not going my way, right? So I'm not happy with it Or you could be just
> whining, but whining is different. (Alma)

Others just gave up on complaining because they did not believe it would do any

good. Early on, Rosminda discovered that complaining about her particular issue was a

waste of time because other classmates had tried complaining about the same thing

without results. She responded to my question as to why she just accepted her teacher's

unacceptable behavior by saying that:

> It's almost expected. Because even before I had her [the teacher] I've heard
> stories. My sister had her. And I know there's a history there. And I'm like, it's
> just the way she is. And I don't agree with it, but I'm like, well, if people have
> complained, I know they've complained, and she's still acting the same way, then
> I guess I was just like whatever. I thought it would be a waste of time, personally.
> (Rosminda)

Charmaine also expressed her concern about wasting time with complaining :

> At that time I had a really demanding job and then my home life was also
> demanding. It was like having three jobs at a time. I really didn't have time to
> keep coming down here and following up. (Charmaine)

Mustafa's response to barriers to complaining was a little different than that of the

other participants. He stated that he would not complain without proper preparation.

When I asked him to discuss particular factors which made him hesitate to complain, he

responded that:

> Just, I mean, just the way how I'm going to complain. Because I don't want to go
> there and just complain, and leave with empty hands. I just need my complaint to
> be very effective, and everyone would hear it. But I just didn't get to that point.
> (Mustafa).

Mustafa went on to talk about an anonymous paper he wrote in class which he found to be an effective way of complaining.

> And he [the teacher] likes my paper, because he was like, he didn't know I wrote it. He was just like, 'Oh, well this student, he kind of did the complaint very well, because he cited all of the positive things about the school in the beginning, and then his complaint was after, and this is a very good way. But, the school is not going to be impacted in a bad way.' (Mustafa).

Bashir, Von, and James felt that students were simply afraid to complain:

> A lot of people are scared to, you know, complain about a teacher who has the power of their grade. (Bashir)

> They're scared. Scared of what might happen to them. Scared that it might took an effect of their grades. (Von)

> But definitely, when I first had [that teacher], like after hearing about how hard it is, and how much of a hard-ass teacher he is, I was scared to death about complaining, (Jamo)

Factors that Encourage or Facilitate Complaining

As previously mentioned, trust and feeling confident that they were "right" were the predominant factors motivating the participants in this study to complain. Ten out of 20 (50%) stated that they would only complain to someone they trusted. The other 50% did not specifically mention the word "trust" but mentioned words related to trust such as "comfortable," "understanding," and "connected" when talking about teachers or staff they would turn to for help. This group went to people that they knew and apparently trusted.

Alma and Carolyn's responses were typical of the students that specifically mentioned "trust:"

> And then you've got all these new faces. So, and then, of course, if I have a problem, I'm not going to go to a new face, right? Because I don't trust them. I don't know them. I don't trust them, like, at all. Period. (Alma)

So a lot of times I'll go around and try to figure out who's the best person I can talk to. Or talk to someone I think I can trust and say, 'Who do you think I should go to with this? (Carolyn)

Bashir and Jamo's responses did not specifically use the word "trust," but

indicated a similar, safe feeling:

Especially [that instructor]. [He/She] brought me out of rough times several times, and [he/she is] still there. Having somebody like that around, who doesn't expect anything back, even if you offer it several times, is great. And I think that's what some people need. (Bashir)

Well, certain people I feel comfortable complaining to. I'll complain to teachers, personally, when it comes to their own classes. When it comes to something that is in the hands of the administration of [Halo], I feel kind of iffy about it; kind of feel like, well, if I feel this way, and a hell of lot of other students feel this way, I'd rather give the chance that someone else is going to complain about it. But with certain teachers and certain people, I already have that connection where I feel like I can be honest with them. (Jamo)

Other factors that participants identified as having motivated them to complain were

financial impact, family influence, desire to see results, a feeling of safe environment

created by faculty, and feelings of irritation, hate, and anger.

Many participants waited until the dissatisfying situation made them extremely

angry before complaining. For example, Rafael stated:

I was a little hesitant because I was afraid I might lose my temper and I know what it's like when I lose my temper, when I'm really upset, and unfortunately I had situations very early on where I completely, totally lost my temper and I was afraid that I would. But I also knew that I had to get it off my chest. I couldn't, there was no way I was gonna let it burn in me 'cause then it would just get worse. (Rafael)

Like Rafael, other participants, including Juan, Jamila, Charles, and Carrie discussed how

their level of anger would intensify when they felt dissatisfied with their educational

experience. As they were telling me about their experiences during the interviews for

this study, I could see that they were reliving their anger all over again, just by talking

about it.

Samantha is a part time mentor in Halo's LRC who referred to her experience

where a teacher along with other students collectively created a hostile environment for

her in the classroom. She was frustrated because she was sincerely trying to help and

tutor other students outside of class, and it seemed that neither the teacher nor the

students appreciated her.

> I'm sick of being called names. I'm sick of being called a goody-goody because I
> help out around here. And then they come back and say, 'Oh, well will you help
> me do this?' After they've called me these names. And I just kind of went on a
> tangent. Now that tangent, I knew, was in a way very anger-directed. It wasn't a
> logical, formal complaint like you'd normally be like, 'This is wrong, blah blah
> blah.' But it is a form of complaining. I went off at, not at the instructor but to
> the instructor, about my concerns about [Halo] College at itself, on all that I was
> experiencing. So that's kinda how the complaint happened. (Samantha)

Another interesting outcome of the interview process for this study happened

during Rosminda's interview, Samantha's classmate, who was telling the exact same

story from her own perspective. When I asked Rosminda to tell me about a time that she

felt dissatisfied with her educational experience, she responded:

> One incident, we were in class and students were disagreeing about basically how
> the teacher was teaching the class….And basically then students started arguing
> about the teacher….And it was just, it got really confrontational. And the teacher
> wasn't doing anything to, I guess, stop it. Or, I felt like this one girl, I felt really
> bad of her. She was almost being threatened in class. Basically these girls were
> just really aggressive towards her. And I'm like, I go to school to learn. Not
> listen to arguing. I understand disagreements but not threats. You know what I
> mean? So then I was sitting there and I'm pretty calm but I was getting really
> mad. And then the teacher just wasn't doing anything. I'm like, isn't the teacher
> supposed to step in and, you know, do their thing? But he just wasn't doing
> anything. And so I got to the point where I just got up and left class. And I've
> never done that before. I just got up and left. I'm not one to just leave a class,

you know? And so I went outside, I was breathing, and I was like okay, and then
I went to go talk to the dean. (Rosminda)

Clearly Rosminda and Samantha were both angered by this incident, by the teacher's

inaction and by the actions of this specific group of students.

Summary

The participants in this study reported that they expressed their dissatisfaction in

many different ways, including showing their anger, ignoring the situation, dropping the

class, dropping out of school, giving negative end-of term evaluations, telling others,

complaining, and sometimes using profanity or planning physical action against the

person who had created the dissatisfaction.

All of the participants in this study complained and for most of them, complaining

was a multi-step process that could be stopped at any point, either because the problem

was resolved or the student chose to give up. The first step usually involved the students

talking to each other about the source of their dissatisfaction. Next they would talk to

their friends and family about the problem. After that, they would try to find someone in

authority to take their complaint to, usually to someone with whom they had already

formed a level of trust.

Barriers to complaining included not knowing where to take the complaint, fear of

retaliation, feelings of embarrassment or guilt, and a belief that the complaint would not

be heard or acted on. On the other hand, a strong motivation to complain was a feeling of

being "right" together with a strong desire to correct the situation. If students had

someone they trusted to take their complaint to, they were more likely to complain.

Research Question #3:

What Relationship Exists Between Students' Ability To Express

Dissatisfaction Through Complaining and Their Sense of Empowerment

and Satisfaction With Their Educational Experiences?

When students at Halo College were dissatisfied, they had the option to go to their

teachers, the campus Academic Affairs office, or the corporate offices. At the time of

this study, no student government or other body representing the students existed. The

campus Academic Affairs office included a Director of Student Services and a Registrar

who were willing to respond to student concerns. However, they could only help in a

limited way, primarily with issues regarding student records and scheduling.

Participants who were able to identify a particular person to go to with their

complaint, and who dealt with them openly and honestly, did report feeling empowered

by the experience.

> Emotionally, initially, I always feel slightly disempowered because I feel like I
> should have found the solution myself. I feel empowered after I leave because I
> did state my problem, my point of view. I acted as if my voice and my point of
> view mattered. It was important. It wasn't an illusion. It wasn't something I was
> going through that wasn't true. I wasn't just bitching for the sake of bitching. I
> had a problem that needed addressing. But if the person doesn't listen to you or
> they blow you off, or they do treat you like your problem is superficial or you're
> really not handling it yourself or nobody else really has a problem with this, why
> do you? Then you don't feel empowered. You do feel disempowered. And that
> is…one of the reasons people don't like to complain because they can't be sure
> how people will react to the complaint. (Angel)

In contrast, those who felt that their complaint was heard and then just dismissed

reported feeling either less empowered or completely disempowered. Charmaine

expressed how she felt disempowered by her experience, saying, "At the time, [I felt]

disempowered because nothing happened. Nobody got back to me." Bashir also

discussed his frustration:

> After complaining and not getting the results anybody wanted I felt like they had
> us in a box. Just running through a maze like a little mouse. So I felt like we
> didn't have anything. We didn't even have a voice. We were just going to the
> school, we were paying for it, and that's it. We came in at a certain time, they
> locked the doors, even though we had the ability to leave. Or at least for the
> students who wanted to get their education, they'd lock the doors on us and then if
> we had something to say it was just on me. That's how I feel. (Bashir).

Some students took the empowerment issue to another level by talking about how

their voice was not heard even before they enrolled in school. Josh stated:

> It's kinda like they just throw you in there. They cater to everything you say.
> You come in, they ask you questions like, 'What kind of learner are you?' You
> know? 'Well, I'm very hands-on, I'm very one-on-one.' 'Oh! This is perfect for
> you then. We offer courses that are hands-on, small classes where teachers are
> one-on-one with the students.' If I came in and said, 'Well, I'm a very book
> learner,' 'Oh, that's great! We have books. We study out of books.' And it took
> me a while to realize it, but they totally tell you what you want to hear. (Josh).

Mustafa was one of the students who did not feel empowered because he felt that

the administration was indifferent about enforcing one of their policies. He said:

> I feel less empowered, because I wasn't expecting that answer that I get. So that's
> why I felt very disempowered. Yeah, I was not expecting to hear that, so I was
> expecting to hear something else, you know? 'Well, yeah, we're going to enforce
> it again, or we going to do something about it,' or just completely…they just
> ignore it and say everything is fine. (Mustafa)

Some participants suggested that if more people would complain, the level of

empowerment would increase. Nilda supported this view by making this statement:

> I felt empowered because the teacher agreed with me. And so I felt like I'm not
> the only one who is seeing this. And as far as the dress code, you know, five of us
> talking to [staff] about it, all at the same time … like, god, I felt empowered then.
> I had more people with me. I'm not the only one who feels like this isn't right.
> (Nilda).

Nine of the 20 study participants also mentioned that the lack of listening to their

complaints decreased their sense of empowerment. Bashir and Nilda expressed this most

succinctly:

> …but people don't complain because they don't think that no one is going to
> listen besides their instructor. Your instructor has to listen to you, but when you
> go to the office…they're usually on the phone. When I pass by, they're on the
> phone, they're doing paperwork, the lines are LONG out the door….At State, all
> my friends that go to State, they tell me how hard it is to speak to their instructor,
> to speak to their counselor. You know, at [Halo], you're supposed to have that
> close connection, because the school is not that big. You're supposed to be able
> to have that, to speak to your counselor, or your instructor, when you feel it, you
> know. I can't remember who told me, but I do recall them saying that it's an
> open-door policy. And I haven't seen it, for a long time. (Bashir)

> I talked to the dean but I feel like sometimes you're not really listened to. I
> understand maybe they get a lot of complaints. I get that. I get that kids don't
> want to do their homework or whatever. They feel like they're getting too much
> work or whatever. But sometimes there are legitimate complaints. (Nilda)

When asked about the effect their experiences had on their sense of

empowerment, few of the participants were able to answer immediately. They did not

appear to think of themselves as having any type of power over their experience as

students. Instead, they seemed to think of the IHL as having all the power and

themselves as having to either fight for what they deserved, or give up on some things

just to get through school and get their degree.

Summary

The results of this study indicate a direct connection between the act of

complaining and the student's sense of empowerment. Participants who reported feeling

like their complaints were heard and acted on, even if they did not get the outcome they

were hoping for, unanimously reported feeling more empowered by the experience.

Participants who either did not complain about the situation, or who reported that their complaint was ignored or not taken seriously, said that they felt less empowered or completely disempowered by the experience.

Research Question #4:

Which Shared Demographic Characteristics Such As Gender, Ethnicity,

and Cultural Background May Influence Students' Complaint Behaviors?

The student population at Halo was very diverse. The participants in this study were asked to discuss the influence of certain demographics in addition to any other factors which influenced their complaining behavior. They were asked specifically about gender, ethnicity, and cultural background. Other factors which the participants introduced were age, religion, friends and family, including parents and grandparents, and traditions. Several participants indicated that they themselves played a major role in their own complaining behaviors rather than demographic factors. Two participants indicated that they individually were responsible for their complaining behavior and that nothing else influenced it.

Gender

At Halo College certain programs had a higher female to male ratio. For example, the Healthcare programs tended to consist of more female than male students. On the other hand, the Technology programs tended to have more males than females. Other programs, such as Business Administration, had a well balanced population of males and females.

An unexpected and interesting result of this study was that 75% of the male

participants believed that women were more likely to complain. Their statements were

based on their actual observations in their classes at Halo. On the other hand, based on

their observations, 80% of women stated that men were more likely to complain. The

following are three examples of this point of view:

> From what I see, I think that women have a tendency to complain more. It's
> because I think men are more apt to take their complaints and internalize them.
> They stuff them and they'll lash out in other ways. Whereas women voice their
> opinion on everything. And I think that they're very open to complain about
> anything and everything. That's just my opinion. I think men have the
> complaints, they just don't choose to voice them as much. (Josh)

> Only because in our society I feel, not that it was directly, I was raised that way,
> but indirectly you see women don't, I mean back in the day when I was comin'
> up, women don't really complain. We were kind of indirectly told to just go with
> the flow. And it's not ladylike or nice. And I was raised to be nice and ladylike.
> So it's just really hard. It's getting easier now, but that just seems like that's a
> part of our society. (Charmaine)

> We have this ego, you know. Most men—young adults—have this ego about
> letting their pride get in the way. They don't really want to show weakness, or
> they don't really want to address something that they feel. They just think about
> it, keep it to themselves, and hold a grudge or something. If I show any kind of
> weakness, or complaints about it, then it's showing that I'm not a real man about
> it. (Damilo)

It was very interesting to learn how gender played a role in complaining. As it

can be seen from the above quotes, students' responses included personal opinions and

biases, the role of family with gender, and stereotypes. Even sexual preference was

perceived as a factor by one participant. Some participants appeared to feel

uncomfortable answering questions about gender, possibly because they did not want to

sound sexist. When Mustafa was asked to talk about gender he said," Well, I hate saying

things or naming names. This is between you and me." After I assured him that there

would be complete anonymity, he said:

> I think they would listen to a woman, more than a man. That's what I would
> think. Because, probably woman will show them all that—I don't know how to
> say it. Yeah, different. Yeah, man or woman, their complaint will be different,
> from the receiver of the complaint. I think so, yeah. (Mustafa)

Rafael's answer to whether gender had a role in complaining was a solid, "No,"

with this follow-up:

> I don't generalize men and women as being one way or the other because it's just
> something you get in trouble that way. I think whether you're a man or woman, if
> you, I mean our society has changed a lot in the last 40 years, 30 years. (Rafael)

Culture versus Family

Fourteen out of 20 participants (70%) mentioned that family has a major influence

over their complaining behavior. Twelve out of the 14 (60%) stated that their mother

specifically played the major role. Out of all of the participants who mentioned family,

nine of them firmly stated that family and not culture played a role.

No one identified "family" as being influenced by culture or as being part of their

cultural background. All of the participants identified "family" and "culture" as two

separate things, unrelated to each other. In the following example, Samantha clearly

differentiated culture and family, making them mutually exclusive from each other:

> I think as far as cultural background and ethnicity and all that stuff, not really. I
> don't think that really has much of a difference. However, family issues I think
> does have a big role in it. And it's, I am the first generation to go to college. And
> I do have some things that I hold to high standards and that would be the place
> that I go to school. (Samantha)

Other participants went into detail about the role of each parent. Mothers seemed to have greater influence over their decisions to complain than did fathers. Bashir and Damilo gave their perspectives in these examples:

> My dad stays quiet. He's just like, 'Why are you complaining? Why are you wasting your time?' But my mom, the littlest thing. Like if I gave somebody five dollars and the item cost two dollars and they gave me two dollars back instead of three, she's gonna go back for that extra dollar no matter how far we are. She's gonna go back. She's like, 'No, that's a dollar.' And I'll be like, 'You know what? It's gonna cost me five dollars just to drive back from Daly City to San Francisco just to get that dollar back. It's not worth it.' She's like, 'No, I want that dollar.' And she'll make me go back. (Bashir)

> Probably more my family than my culture. Well, I'm Filipino, so, I don't know. I've never thought about that, but my family—my mom definitely raised me to be respectful and honest and, like, straightforward with people, because, sometimes, when you want something, you just kind of have to tell them, even though it may not be the most prettiest thing, but….So, definitely, more my family than my culture. My culture is, like, it's weird. In my culture, the women seem to have more of a say in what the family gets, or whatever. (Damilo)

Six participants discussed the role of family and country of birth. In the following example, Mariposa combined family, culture, and country of origin to describe how her complaining behavior was influenced. She even compared her home country with the United States, where she was then living.

> Yeah, because back home, like I'm from Brazil. I was raised and born in Brazil. You don't take shit like that….People don't sugarcoat things. Because when you do, it's a sign that something is wrong. So I think my culture does play a huge factor into me being able to voice myself. I'm not afraid. In the States I've noticed that people are very, not that they are but they want to be politically correct all the time. And they are overly sensitive on things that are just really, to me it doesn't matter. Race, money, where you come from, things like that. Back home, it's not like that….Over here, the culture is so different that people are afraid to say things because at the end of the day, nobody is really going to take the time to change. It's more like I'm making money off of this and it's always about the investors, the people who are putting the money in, who's going to pay, things like that. So I think that's why people don't voice, don't say anything. But it doesn't stop me. (Mariposa)

Although many participants mentioned their country of origin and their race, most

of the participants referred to family rather than culture as having played the major role in

influencing their attitudes toward complaining. Other participants preferred to take

responsibility themselves for their attitudes about complaining. For example, Von gave

that impression:

> Well, only a person would know whether they should complain or not. Unless
> they grew up from a background where it's loud, they don't take nothin' from
> nobody. For me, I just took it upon my own self. I didn't take it from family. I
> didn't take it from the religion or any of the society. I just decided upon my own
> choice to stand up for myself 'cause who else is gonna stand up besides yourself?
> And some people, they could, their family might push them to complain. Like my
> family, I push them to complain. (Von)

Other Factors

This study focused on the role of certain demographic characteristics in

complaining behavior, rather than a detailed discussion into the differences between

culture, customs, tradition, and religion. However, one participant talked about the

influence of religion on his complaining behavior:

> [M]y two older sisters… they were born over there but they were raised here.
> And everybody else [in the family] was born in the United States, different parts.
> We just, I mean regardless because we were born here, we still follow tradition.
> Or not tradition but culture. Like how my dad and my mom was raised. And we
> still do things differently now that we're older but as little kids we followed them
> a lot. And religion played a big role….In everything. (Bashir)

Another interesting discovery was the role of an individual's work in influencing

complaining behavior. Carolyn's response to the factors which played a role in her

willingness or desire to complain was as follows:

> I think it goes back to, I think a lot of it has to do with my background, my work
> background. Working in the airlines again, being in another position teaching,
> being an empowered ticket agent as a service director, dealing with business

people, resolving issues. I think that has a big part. And then wanting to help
people. I really want to help people. I love being in customer service. I think of
all the factors, I think one of the biggest things that helped me grow and grow up
was working in the airlines. And being forced to work in these different
positions. And not being afraid to speak up when I felt that the time was
appropriate. (Carolyn)

Several participants mentioned the role of age in their willingness to complain.

For example, Carrie spoke about her own age as being a factor, while Carolyn said she

was influenced by the age of the person to whom she would take her complaint:

If you've got something on your mind about a teacher, or a student, or
somebody's gonna kick your butt because so-and-so said something, you know,
you're scared. Especially if you're younger. I think being older, personally, I'm
not so worried about that kind of stuff. There's a respect thing. (Carrie)

And [the administrator] was older and she was very approachable. (Carolyn)

Overall, the responses to this research question were the most varied, perhaps because the

study population was equally diverse in terms of ethnicity, cultural background, gender,

and age.

Summary

Gender and family seemed to be the main demographic factors which participants

identified as playing a role in their complaint behaviors. Participants in this study

differentiated the roles of family and culture, making each of them mutually exclusive.

In regards to gender, most participants reported that they did not believe their own gender

was a factor in their complaint behavior, but reported a perception that the opposite

gender would be more likely to complain than their own.

Religion was mentioned as having influenced one participant's attitudes towards

complaining, as well as influencing all other aspects of his life. Another participant

spoke about the influence of her work experience, having been in a supervisory position working directly with customers and handling their complaints.

Some participants identified age as a factor affecting their attitudes towards complaining. The older students felt that their age gave them a different perspective and made it more likely that their complaints would be heard, while one participant said they were more comfortable complaining to someone older.

Two participants indicated that complaining was not influenced by any of these factors. They reported that they had developed their own attitudes towards complaining, but could not articulate how those attitudes were formed.

Summary of Findings

Multiple factors played a role with regard to participants' sense of satisfaction with their educational experiences, across every department of the college. Participants referred to various aspects of the IHL ranging from the condition of campus facilities to how instructors managed their classrooms. This study found that students' response to dissatisfaction is a progression, usually beginning with anger, eventually leading to complaining (see Figure 3, on page 73). Every participant in this study had engaged in complaining and each had different experiences with its outcome.

In general, "trust" and "caring" played major roles in participants' willingness to complain, to whom they chose to complain, and how they responded to the IHL's resolution of their complaint. Establishing relationships of trust enabled the students to have a voice by creating a safe environment for them in which to voice their complaints. Trust and voice often led to a sense of empowerment and increased student satisfaction.

Even if the student did not receive an expected outcome to their complaint, s/he appreciated the time and respect given by the teacher or staff who listened and took action on their behalf.

This study's findings with regard to demographic factors affecting students' sense of empowerment and satisfaction with their educational experiences included the influence of family, the student's age, and religious background. These factors had not been specifically anticipated by the researcher, but emerged as a result of the participant interviews. Nearly all of the study participants indicated that family played a major role, whereas none of the participants felt that culture had any influence with regard to their educational experiences. Some participants reported that their age was a factor, and one student stated that religion played a role in their overall sense of satisfaction, empowerment, and willingness to complain. Gender was not found to be a factor.

The findings of this study indicate a clear connection between students' expectations of IHLs, their sense of satisfaction with their educational experiences, and their shared attitudes and behaviors with regard to complaining. The results of this study may be useful to IHLs as they form new policies and procedures to address changing student populations and the issues that most affect their academic success.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

A complainer is carrying around a 100-pound rock, looking for some place to unload it. If you won't take it, they'll chip off little pieces and hand over some to everyone they meet…People with complaints always tell someone about it. They have to or they'll explode. (Bennett, 1990, p. 250)

The significance of the data presented in this study lies not so much in accepting student complaining, but in the value of initiating an understanding of student complaint behavior and its effect on empowerment. The problem statement of this study points to the lack of empirical and theoretical research in the area of student satisfaction and complaint behavior. This research study attempted to explore and understand student satisfaction and complaint behavior through the lens of students' experiences. In addition, this study suggests strategies to improve student satisfaction at institutions of higher learning (IHLs).

Discussion

After reading and examining the participants' interview transcriptions, several themes emerged. These included issues related to trust, the pursuit of personal goals, feeling valued as a person, the influence of certain demographic characteristics, "honest" complaining, and empowerment. Contained within these themes, but distinct from the primary themes, are certain sub-themes which are detailed below.

Trust

When a student first walks into an IHL to obtain information, s/he begins to establish trust through encounters with the school's staff and promotional materials. For example, the promises made by the advertisements, catalog, admissions advisors, and

financial aid advisors all play a role in the creation of trust. Students, not being privy to

the information and experience available to school employees, have to place their trust in

what they are told about degree programs, support services, cost, instructor qualifications,

and all of the other details related to the education a student could expect to receive at

that institution. After enrolling at the IHL, the level of trust may increase through actions

of all IHL stakeholders. Any perceived breach of trust on the part of the institution leads

to student dissatisfaction and a potential for complaining.

Breaches of trust described by this study's participants included being enrolled in

the wrong program or being assigned wrong classes, being promised tuition

reimbursement that was later denied, published policies that were not enforced or were

enforced for some students and not for others, and lying about available programs by

admissions staff. For example, one student was promised a telecommunications major,

then told it was no longer offered after he had completed one quarter of classes—and

paid one quarter's tuition and fees. The comments of two participants in this study, Josh

and Ife, about an admissions advisor making false promises, are clear examples that some

admissions representatives may go to any length to meet the institution's need for higher

enrollment numbers without a sincere consideration of the students' needs. Factors on

which trust may be built, and potential outcomes as a result of gaining or losing trust, are

presented in Figure 4 (page 98).

Ironically, lack of "trust" was the major factor in this study which stopped a

student from voicing his or her complaint. If the student did not trust the institution to

respond appropriately to his/her complaint, or if the student did not feel some level of

trust in the person to whom s/he would complain, the student was less likely to voice

his/her complaint.
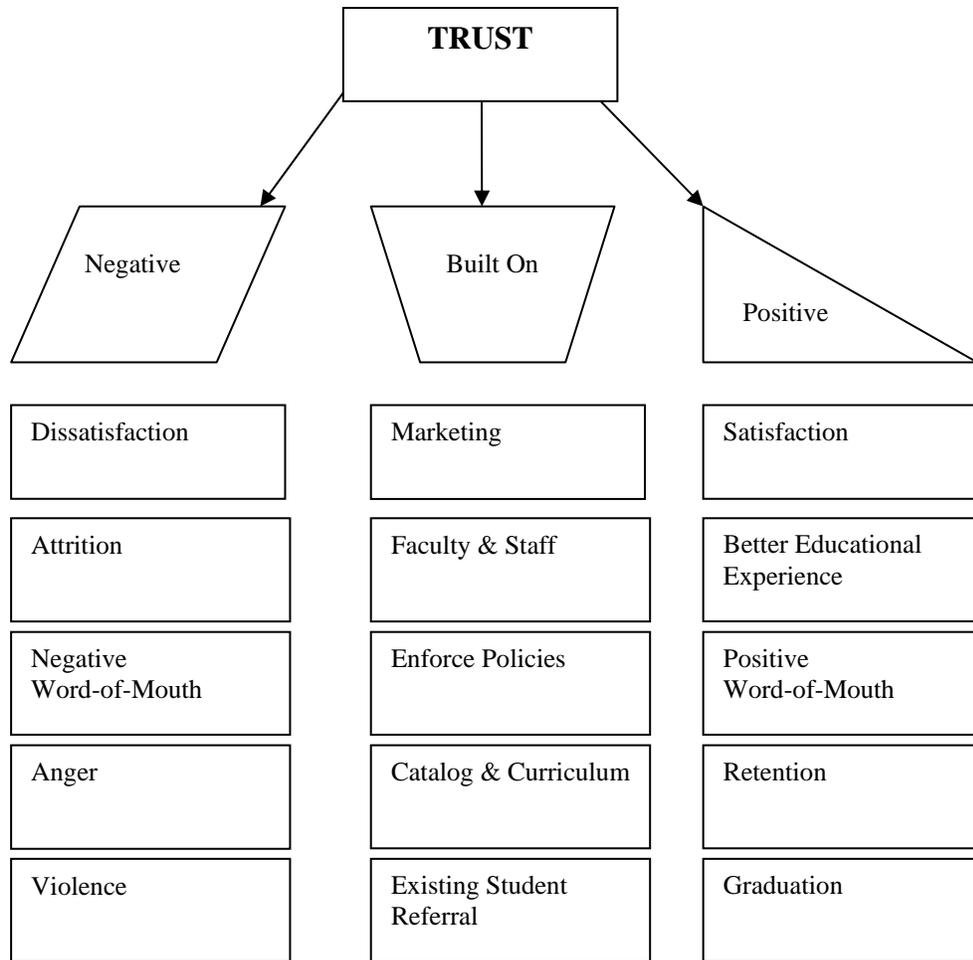
Figure 4: Examples of areas upon which students may build trust,
positive outcomes of establishing trust,
and potential negative outcomes of loss of trust

IHLs need to ensure that their claims and promises are deliverable (Jones, 2006).

They need to make sure that they do not heighten students' expectations just for the

purpose of increasing their enrollment. Once there is a dissonance between expectations

and the IHL's reality, students begin to lose faith in their system and resort to different

types of behaviors to address their dissatisfaction. These behaviors include getting angry,

becoming indifferent, dropping from specific classes or out of school, giving negative

end-of term evaluations, negative word of mouth, complaining, and in some cases,

resorting to violence.

Expectations

Students' expectations of IHLs are changing. As Morley (2003) concluded, there

is a move towards an entitlement culture in higher education with students asking,

"'What can I get?' rather than, 'What should I do?'" (p. 42). Morley went on to state that

universities have changed in the last 30 years and students are no longer content to just

ask, 'What should I do?' and no longer afraid to ask, 'What can I get?' In light of this

changing culture, IHLs may need to pay more attention to the notion of entitlement when

making promises to potential or enrolled students.

In her recent study, Strage (2008) found that younger students seemed to want

college to be an extension of high school, where older students were more focused on

learning that could be readily applied to real world situations. Younger students wanted

instructors and courses that were fun, engaging, less challenging, and employing active

instructional strategies. In contrast, the older students indicated they wanted their courses

and instructors to be more rigorous and more serious.

Although students' expectations are also framed by influences outside the IHL, such as word of mouth influence of friends and family, the recruiting methods used by the IHL lay the foundations on which students build their initial trust in the institution. If the IHL is presenting false impressions of what the institution can actually offer, students' trust is built on those false promises and will inevitably lead to dissatisfaction.

Student expectations are often influenced by the IHL's marketing strategies. This may be particularly true of career type colleges which rely on television advertising and other similar marketing materials to encourage increased student enrollment. More traditional learning institutions, on the other hand, participate in their own brand of marketing through perpetuating an almost mythic reputation for excellence in learning or graduating highly successful people in their fields.

Television and other media advertisements portray IHLs as being not only the solution to potential students' economic difficulties, but also as being environments filled with happy, smiling, well-groomed students that are completely satisfied with their educational choices. Some television ads go so far as to include images of successful graduates living apparently affluent lives. These images create high expectations for entering students which frequently are not and cannot be fulfilled by the IHL.

Students' expectations can also be driven by a customer mindset. By referring to high tuition costs and getting their money's worth, several students in this study considered themselves as customers. Sirvanci (1996) emphasized the need to find the true customer in order execute a system of quality in educational institutions. Jones'

recent (2006) study also indicates that as a result of an increase in students' financial

contribution towards their education, their expectations are also increasing.

Included in students' expectations of IHLs are their expectations related to

faculty. Based on my interviews with this study's participants, Halo's students appeared

to have higher expectations of faculty than staff. These expectations related not only to

quality of instruction and classroom management, but extended to expectations that the

teachers would be their advisors and advocates, who would take action on their behalf if

needed. It is not known whether the students had these expectations of their teachers

because one or more teachers had helped them in the past, or whether the students held

these expectations as a result of another influence. It is also not known whether these

expectations are common to students at different types of IHL, are common to students at

only career colleges, or common only to students at Halo.

Elliot (2002) highlighted the importance of teacher effectiveness as a strong

predictor of student satisfaction, while Athiyaman (1997) stated that perceived quality of

an educational experience is a consequence of student satisfaction. In line with the

findings in Elliot (2002), Halo students indicated that they were dissatisfied because

several of their teachers did not meet expectations by failing to manage the classroom

effectively, engaging in unfair grading practices, practicing favoritism, etc. The

participants in this study unanimously wanted Halo to enforce policies and treat students

in a consistent manner, listen to students' concerns, and handle complaints in a caring,

respectful, and consistent manner.

Communication

At the time of this study, Halo College had recently undergone some major

changes, including purchase by an investment group, change from nonprofit to for-profit

status, turnover of administrative and instructional staff, and a potential change of

campus location. With so many changes at Halo, students were under the impression that

the administrators would be communicating information that affected the students, either

directly or indirectly. When the school did not provide its students with current relevant

information, the students were upset and angry.

For example, several participants mentioned bonding with a member of the staff

or one of their teachers had improved their educational experience. The problem

occurred when all of a sudden the faculty or staff member disappeared. This lack of

communication by Halo increased student dissatisfaction. As Alma stated:

> When they get new people in this school, they should introduce … like, have a
> thing where, you know, they get to introduce to the students, the students get a
> little bit comfortable, like, "Oh, I know who to … the name with the face, you
> know?" And, you don't even know the name, so how you going to go and talk to
> somebody that's just, like, a complete stranger?

If Halo (and other IHLs) instituted systems to improve and encourage better

communication with students, the school as well as the students would benefit because

there would be fewer misunderstandings such as resulted in Ife's incident, detailed in

Chapter IV, where he was not informed about "campus designated courses" until he was

enrolled in one and complained because he thought it was a mistake.

On the other hand, Halo was very good at communicating student recruitment

strategies that involved referrals by current students. Appendix D gives examples of

flyers that were posted all over campus that promised free iPods and other incentives to

students whose referrals enrolled at Halo. One participant, Nilda, was particularly

affected by the lack of communication from college staff about topics she felt were

important, as well as the pervasive recruiting flyers. She said, "I think that the dean and

the faculty kind of just see dollar signs, right now."

Halo did not employ a central way of communicating with its students on a

regular basis. New student orientations were the only occasion where the major players,

such as the campus director, student services, career services, financial aid, business

office, etc., were introduced. The only means of communication Halo utilized regularly

was the "splash page," an electronic announcement page that opened automatically when

students logged onto school computers. Halo also used papers posted in hallways,

elevators, and restrooms announcing events such as financial aid workshops. The

administration assumed that the faculty would convey any necessary information to the

students, and the faculty were informed during faculty meetings about any information

they would be required to share with their students.

Unlike other IHLs, Halo did not include any type of student government, or

include student representatives at any staff or faculty meetings. There was no formal

procedure through which students could voice their concerns, make suggestions for

improvements, or bring ideas for student events. This complete lack of student voice in

all aspects of the day-to-day operation of the campus is an example of what Wink (2005)

described as a paternalistic system that played the role of experts who must decide what

is best for the students.

Pursuit of Personal Goals

All of this study's participants indicated they were working toward achieving some type of personal goal. As Halo students they all expected to earn an Associate's degree or certificate of completion. However, because Halo's focus was on career-based education, all of the participants were also looking beyond school to new, better-paying jobs and more comfortable lives. With trust in the IHL established, students began to develop personal academic goals consisting of learning new skills, getting a degree with a high grade point average (GPA), graduating on time, growing intellectually, and attaining a new career. When something came between the students and their personal goals, students felt dissatisfied which led to complaining, dropping a class, or dropping out of school completely.

Barriers reported by participants to the pursuit of their personal goals included favoritism in the classroom; false/misinformation; problems getting financial aid; unfair grading practices; unprepared, unskilled, or incompetent staff and faculty; interruptions by classmates; broken equipment; and noisy study areas, among others. Table 2 on page 105 provides examples of each of these barriers as reported by the participants in this study.

Other barriers mentioned in this study were "fear" of complaining and its outcome; for example, fear of receiving a lower grade or embarrassment. Holmes and Smith (2003) conducted a study in which they investigated students' complaints about grading. Like the students at Halo, these students' main complaints were about unfair

grading practices and how the teachers might retaliate, which would lead to students'

embarrassment or a low grade.

Table 2

Barriers to the Pursuit of Personal Goals with Examples from Participants' Experiences

Barrier	Participant Example
Favoritism in the classroom	Allowing a student more time than anyone else to submit an assignment.
False or mis-information	Admissions staff enrolling a new student into a program that had been discontinued in order to meet recruitment goals.
Problems with financial aid	Financial aid staff promising overpayment refund, then holding the funds against possible future charges.
Unfair grading practices	Two students receiving different grades for identical work.
Problems with faculty or staff	Lack of proper counseling, unskilled faculty who could not manage their classes.
Interruptions by classmates	Poor classroom management leading to interruptions.
Broken equipment	Computers going offline or functioning poorly during class or in learning labs.
Noisy study areas	Learning resource center overrun by students talking on cellular phones, visiting with friends, eating and leaving garbage all over computer workstations.

Feeling Valued as a Person

In their interviews as part of this study, all of the participants appeared to be strong, self-confident individuals. However, multiple themes emerged to suggest that these students wanted the respect of their teachers and classmates, as well as some assurance that the people they trusted with their education valued them as individuals. When they did not get that assurance, or when something happened to suggest that they were not respected by someone at school, this resulted in dissatisfaction and the potential for complaining. Similarly, those participants that reported complaining but not having their voices heard were not only disappointed in not having their issue resolved, but also felt marginalized by the person to whom they had complained.

As previously stated, "caring" emerged as an important element in nearly all of the participants' interviews. The students wanted their teachers to care about doing a good job, and to care whether the students were understanding the information or gaining the skills being taught. If, as my participant Bashir said, the teacher just "came to work, gave their speech, and that's it," the students felt the teacher did not care about their educational outcomes.

Demographic Characteristics

Influence of Family

When asked about whether culture played a role in their attitudes toward complaining or complaint behaviors, the participants in this study unanimously stated that family, not culture, played a role. The participants did not recognize family as an aspect of culture, or as being influenced by culture. However, Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel

(2007) describe family as the most powerful carrier of culture, and Gudykunst (2001)

states that children learn cultural rules of communication and behavior from their parents.

According to McGoldrick (1989), families do not develop their rules and beliefs in a

vacuum. Instead, what you think and how you act are all transmitted through family

from the wider cultural context.

The participants in this study indicated that their attitudes towards complaining, as

well as how and when they were most likely to complain, were profoundly influenced by

their families. Further, they emphasized the influence of their mothers over that of their

fathers. The importance of family on student complaining behaviors was an unexpected

finding for this study.

Gender

There was no finding in this study to indicate whether gender played a role in

complaining behavior. Due to a drastic difference in male to female ratio in different

programs of study, it was not clear as to whether gender played a role. In addition,

participants' responses did not specifically indicate whether gender played a role in

complaining behavior. One interesting notion that did emerge was that the male

participants believed that women were more likely to complain, while the female

participants believed that men were more likely to complain.

<div align="center">

Honest Complaining

</div>

All of the study participants differentiated between what I will call "Honest

Complaining" and other types of complaining. Honest complaining is defined here as

complaining only when you believe yourself to be in the right. Other types of

complaining would include complaining in order to try to get something you didn't really deserve, complaining about something very minor, making a false complaint in order to make someone else look bad, etc. The participants in this study had all complained to someone about something that was genuinely bothering them.

The participants unanimously identified honest complaining as "good," and other types of complaining as "bad." For example, a false complaint made by a student to get someone else in trouble would be a "bad" complaint. On the other hand, a complaint about a teacher that is coming to class 20 minutes late every day—depriving the students of their opportunity to learn—would be a "good" complaint.

According to the results of this study, complaining seems to be the last resort, short of violence, for students to express their dissatisfaction with IHLs. As a result of the advent of various communication technologies such as discussion forums on the Internet, students are more inclined to openly criticize IHLs (Baty & Wainwright, 2005). On the other hand, recruiters face tremendous pressure to meet enrollment goals which may increase the potential for misunderstandings that give rise to student complaints and legal disputes. A key challenge for many IHLs is to determine methods to ensure that students entering their institutions have realistic expectations which will encourage them to make the necessary academic, social, and personal adjustments (Elliot & Healy, 2001).

Empowerment

Similar to Jones and Yonezawa's (2002) findings, students at Halo felt they were not generally respected or heard. It seemed that at Halo, students were not included in the dialogue for changes in curriculum, or other things that affected them as students.

Nieto (2005) strongly believes that student views play a critical role in improving the

quality of education, especially in the case of students who are marginalized in the

system. Astin (1984), Freire (2000), and Shor (1996) believe in involving students in the

educational process in order to give them voice which will lead to student empowerment.

Participants in this study whose complaints were heard and then dismissed reported

feeling either less empowered or completely disempowered. Some of the participants

even mentioned how disempowered they felt in the initial stages of enrolling at Halo

when the admissions advisors did not really listen to them and just pushed them to sign

the necessary papers.

According to Shor (1996), students develop critical thinking skills, are inspired

learners, and become skilled workers and involved citizens through student-centered,

empowering education. This approach to education is a dialogue in which teachers and

students mutually investigate everyday themes, social issues, and academic knowledge.

In this way, students become active agents of their learning.

In the writings of Freire (1974, 2000) and Shor (1992, 1996), critical pedagogy is

described as having played a major role in increasing student voice and empowerment.

These authors question how students can become empowered if they are not truly listened

to. According to Katsap (2003) there is no "disagreement among shapers of political and

educational policy regarding the importance of the empowerment of learners" (p. 140).

Teachers play a major role in increasing student empowerment because they face

the students on a regular basis. Dialogue is also critically important in empowering

students. Nieto (2005) emphasizes the importance of listening to students, especially

those in underrepresented groups. Listening and giving voice to these groups may help

them with a sense of empowerment and reduce marginalization of certain students within

the system.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Practice</div>

In my interviews with this study's participants, I found that the students had

several shared factors which played a role in their satisfaction with their educational

experiences. The factors important to Halo's students were issues such as consistent

enforcement of policies, a sense of caring from faculty and staff about their academic

success, receiving value for their tuition dollars, and other factors as outlined above on

pages 59-72. While these specific factors were common among the Halo students,

students at other IHLs may choose other factors that have a greater impact on their sense

of satisfaction. The findings of this study, like those in Elliot and Healy (2001), suggest

that IHLs must identify what is important to students, inform students that they intend to

deliver what is important to them, and deliver what they promise in order to increase

student satisfaction.

As one method of obtaining information about what is important to their students,

I recommend that IHLs incorporate student complaints into their system of evaluation

and feedback to get the students' true feelings. Techniques from the business

community, such as Total Quality Management (TQM), could be adapted for use in the

academic world.

Saylor (1992) describes TQM as follows:

The Total Quality Management philosophy provides an overall concept that
fosters continuous improvement in an organization. This philosophy stresses a

systematic, integrated, consistent organization-wide perspective involving everyone and everything. It focuses primary emphasis on total satisfaction for both internal and external customers, within a management environment that seeks continuous improvement of all processes and systems. The TQM philosophy emphasizes the use of people, usually in multi-functional teams, to bring about improvement from within the organization. (p. 35)

Helms and Key (1994) insist that students at IHLs are more than customers in the classroom. They suggest that in order to improve classroom teaching, features should be examined from traditional TQM implementations dealing with both customers and employees to find out how to apply them in the classroom. According to Helms and Key, TQM can improve the bureaucratic, administrative details of enrollment and financial aid, but can be especially useful in improving instructional delivery.

TQM is put forward here as an example of lessons learned in the business community that might be successfully adapted for use in IHLs. Other strategies may exist, or new ones could be created, to take advantage of the extensive experience in customer satisfaction, complaints, and complaint management that are offered by the world of business. Furthermore, if this kind of process is to become embedded, IHLs need to establish a climate which values student involvement in the evaluation of teaching and the assessment of learning (Pennington & O'Neil, 1994).

Many IHLs use end-of-term evaluations to elicit student feedback. However, prior research found that these evaluations are often not effective. One concern about evaluations is that the questionnaires used in a typical student satisfaction survey ask for perceptions and do not seek to collect additional data with respect to expectations (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998). Also, not all IHLs have systematic student evaluation processes in place, and of those that do, very few make these evaluations compulsory for

students (Aldridge & Rowley, 1998). Voluntary completion of evaluations provides

limited data as it is coming from only a portion of the student body.

Instead of relying on the limited information that can be obtained by using end-of-

term evaluations, IHLs should establish methods to take advantage of the information

available through student complaints. To facilitate that process, and to increase student

satisfaction, IHLs should clearly indicate a place where students can take their

complaints. Because the findings of this study point to a common pattern of complaint

behavior (Figure 3, page 73), IHLs may be able to increase student satisfaction and

prevent negative word-of-mouth by providing an easy way for students to voice their

complaints to someone empowered to take action. This is a better course of action than

allowing the dissatisfaction to grow and spread through indirect complaining.

Although many IHLs have a system to deal with major complaints, such as a

campus ombudsman or grievance policy, most student complaints might be handled more

quickly, less formally, and more easily for the student if some additional resources were

given to this issue. All of the participants in this study complained, but none of them

took their complaint to the ombudsman, nor did they follow the official grievance

procedures for Halo. None of the participants mentioned knowing anything about either

of those options. In most cases, the students took their complaint to trusted faculty or

staff.

If IHLs decide to solicit student complaints and change how they manage

complaints, it will be important for faculty and staff to participate willingly. One

approach to elicit staff cooperation would be to emphasize how complaints can provide

useful feedback from students on services and facilities provided by the IHL; and that by addressing any concerns raised through these processes, the IHL would be able to enhance continually the quality of the student experience (Lyman, Wilson, Garhart, & Heim, 1985).

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research which could add to the findings of this study would examine the value of student complaints from the perspective of the administrators and faculty of IHLs. It is important to discover their opinions and beliefs about student complaining, and to learn whether a system to better address student complaints would improve the quality of their educational service. In addition, future research on the expectations of students towards faculty, particularly with regard to expectations of teachers as advocates, would add to our understanding of student expectations and satisfaction.

The importance of family on student complaining behaviors was an unexpected finding for this study. Further research into the influence of family on student satisfaction and on how students respond to dissatisfaction would help IHLs frame policies to encourage student retention and academic success.

Conclusion

The results of this study clearly point to how complaining can be an important tool for students at IHLs to use to address dissatisfaction with their educational experiences. Further, the participants in this study unanimously indicated that when their complaints were genuinely heard, they felt more satisfied and empowered by the experience of complaining, whether or not they received their desired outcome.

Although no institution can reasonably expect to eliminate or fully mitigate all

student complaints, IHLs may increase student satisfaction and academic success through

inviting and encouraging structured complaining. IHLs can learn valuable lessons from

the business community's extensive research and experience with consumer complaints

as they explore how complaining might be utilized to benefit the IHLs and their students.

<div align="center">Researcher's Reflections</div>

Before undertaking this study I believed that I was fairly well-informed about my

students' feelings regarding their educational experiences. I now realize that many

complex matters need to be addressed. For example, the participants shared invaluable

information which would drastically help our school. It concerns me that Halo's

administrators would not invite these suggestions and take appropriate action.

As indicated in the literature, many IHLs do not have a systematic structure in

place to continuously evaluate the quality of the educational services they provide. End-

of-term evaluations and grievance procedures commonly used by IHLs have been proven

to be ineffective. Many students give up on their institution's educational system and just

go through the motions to complete the requirements and get their degree. I found that

throughout the interviews with this study's participants, the proactive students who cared

enough to voice their complaints were often not taken seriously. Sad to say, even I am

not taken seriously when I present students' concerns to Halo's administrators unless I

mention the possibility of a lawsuit.

Throughout the period in which I conducted this study, I found myself thinking

about the students who had dropped out of Halo and wondering whether they had

complaints that they had decided to keep to themselves. What is the worst that could

happen if IHLs' administrators began sincerely facilitating students' honest complaining?

Based on my research and my personal experience, I truly believe that this could be a

win-win situation where the students would have more outlets for expressing what is

important to them, and administrators could address student dissatisfaction by either

clarifying or correcting the problem. Once again, I am not suggesting that administrators

blindly listen to students and do whatever the students want, but rather explore solutions

through dialogue and discussion. The participants in this study repeatedly voiced their

concern about incompetent teachers, inconsistent or nonexistent policy enforcement,

favoritism, and dishonesty. These are the voices of students who truly care and would

like to bring about a positive change in order to help no only themselves, but their

classmates and their school.

When comparing Halo to the business industry, it seems that most business

organizations take their customers very seriously. Like for-profit businesses, Halo is

solely dependent on student tuition for its survival. Review of the literature indicated that

businesses have had far more success in retaining customers by listening to and

addressing customer complaints. Many businesses proudly display their policies and

goals on their walls and websites, many stating that they value customer complaints and

continuously work to improve their products and services. In the world of business, the

customer has rights such as the ability to return a defective or unsatisfactory product.

Many successful businesses attempt to listen and offer alternative solutions to dissatisfied

customers in order to retain that customer. One way to encourage more students to attend and properly finish college is to increase student communication and involvement.

The findings of this study indicate that promoting honesty, respect, and caring at IHLs is important to gaining students' trust and forming cooperative relationships between students, teachers, and administrators working toward student success. Most of the students at Halo would like the faculty and staff to be honest with them. Even if students' complaints are invalid, they want someone to listen respectfully to their concerns, and in an honest and caring manner, give them straightforward answers. I have earned my students' trust by doing just that. These relationships of trust have made the depth of information shared by the participants in this study possible, and have transformed me into an even more avid student advocate, no matter where I am teaching.

One year after I advertised for volunteers to participate in this study, I am still being approached by students who want passionately to share their stories and experiences with me. It is unfortunate that my doctoral study is one of the very few outlets these students have in order to speak up about issues at this college.

After visiting other Halo campuses as well as several similar, two-year colleges, I realized that these issues are not unique to Halo. I am gratified to have conducted this study at a two-year college, as most of the literature I found during my research focused on four-year institutions. This study has helped me delve more deeply into students' states of mind as they each went through their unique complaining process. From the first breach of their trust, all the way to dropping out of Halo, I feel that I was able to glimpse the reality of being a student at a two-year college.

Many of the students at Halo have asked if they could have a copy of this dissertation when completed. These students, often labeled as "at-risk" by Halo's administrators, are assumed to have no interest in reading anything. I am very excited at the prospect of learning what my participants and other students have to say about my research. My hope is that my study may initiate a change in the way educators view students and help us begin to see through their lens.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

IRBHS Permission and Documentation

From: irbphs [mailto:irbphs@usfca.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, April 29, 2008 8:49 AM
To: Karimi, Farbod
Cc: katz@usfca.edu
Subject: IRB Application # 08-046 - Application Approved

April 29, 2008

Dear Farbod Karimi:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #08-046). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.

Sincerely,

Terence Patterson, EdD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
----
IRBPHS - University of San Francisco
Counseling Psychology Department
Education Building - 017
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117-1080
(415) 422-6091 (Message)
(415) 422-5528 (Fax)
irbphs@usfca.edu

PARTICIPANT/STUDENT CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO
CONSENT FOR STUDENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Purpose and Background

Mr. Farbod Karimi-Shirazia, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is conducting a study on student empowerment through complaining in institutions of higher learning. I am being asked to participate because I am a student at San Francisco campus of [Halo] College.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will participate in one 60-minute interview with the researcher.
2. I will be asked about my perceptions and experiences as a student.
3. I will participate in an interview that will be digitally recorded, and transcribed.
4. I may edit and review the transcriptions to make sure it correctly represents my perceptions and experiences.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. Some questions may make me uncomfortable but I may stop answering questions at any time or skip questions that make me uncomfortable.
2. Names and data collected will be kept confidential. Only the researcher and the Committee Chair Dr. Katz will know my identity as a participant. My name will be not used in the data or in the report without approval, a pseudonym will be used instead. Only the researcher will have access to the data and all files will be securely stored in the researcher's home. Upon the completion of the research, the data gathered from my interview will also be deleted, shredded and destroyed.
3. Because of the time required for my participation I may become bored or tired.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to me by participating in this research study. The anticipated benefit of these procedures is a better understanding of student empowerment through complaining in institutions of higher learning.

Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement

I will not be reimbursed for participation in this study.

Questions

I have talked to Mr. Farbod Karimi-Shirazia about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call him at ███ ██████ or Dr. Susan Katz at ██████████.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researcher. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by FAX at (415) 422-5528, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the:

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
University of San Francisco, School of Education
School of Education, Room 023
Department of Counseling Psychology
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, California 94117-1080

Consent

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights," and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to have my child be in this study, or to withdraw my child from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to have my child participate in this study will have no influence on my child's present or future status as a patient in my pediatrician's office.

My signature below indicates that I agree to allow my child to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Signature of Subject   Date of Signature

_____   _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date of Signature

RESEARCH SUBJECTS' BILL OF RIGHTS

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a participant, I have the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is trying to find out;

2. To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice;

3. To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes;

4. To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be;

5. To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study;

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study, both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study;

7. To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise;

8. To refuse to participate at all or change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study;

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and

10. To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study.

If I have any questions, I should ask the researcher. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling 001 415 422-6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to IRBPHS, School of Education, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080 USA.

RIGHT TO CONFIDENTIALITY/PSEUDONYM ASSIGNMENT

As a participant for this study, please indicate your feelings regarding confidentiality.

CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

_____ Please use my legal name in all documentation required to complete the above-mentioned research study.

OR

_____ Please conceal my identity by using a pseudonym in referring to me in the documentation required to complete the above-mentioned research study.

CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

_____ Please use the pseudonym _____ when referring to me in the documentation required to complete the above-mentioned research study.

OR

_____ Please choose a pseudonym for me.

PLEASE READ, SIGN, AND DATE:

     I understand that I have the right to speak candidly yet confidentially for this research study. By checking the above sections, I am either granting permission to use my legal name or asking to be referred to by a pseudonym.

_____   _____
Signature   Date

APPENDIX B

[Halo] College Dress Code, Attendance, and Brush-Up Policies

[Halo] College
~ Student Professional Appearance Policy ~

Professional appearance (overall image and dress) standards for [Halo] College students mirror those of local business and industry. [Halo]'s policy prepares students for successful transition to the workplace. All [Halo] campuses are fully committed to implementing and enforcing the provisions of this policy. The desired look is clean, neat, and professional. Your appearance is part of your overall presentation as a student and an employee. * **Medical students** have specific dress standard guidelines (please see below).

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCE
Professional Appearance Day is **MONDAY**   .

MEN	WOMEN
• Collared dress shirt (tucked in) and tailored slacks	• Dress or suit
• Necktie	• Blouse/sweater with coordinated skirt/slacks
• Socks and dress shoes	• Dress shoes

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR RELAXED PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCE
Relaxed Professional Appearance **TUESDAY - FRIDAY**   .

MEN	WOMEN
• Collared or polo shirt	• Blouse, sweater, or polo shirt
• Tailored slacks	• Skirt or slacks
• Socks and appropriate shoes for business	• Appropriate shoes for business

THE FOLLOWING ARE UNACCEPTABLE AND NOT PERMITTED:

MEN	WOMEN

MEN

- Shorts of any type
- Denim clothing, jeans
- Cargo, baggy, or "overalls" clothing
- Undergarments visible
- T-Shirts
- Tight, revealing, or spandex clothing
- Sweats/sweatshirts
- Tank tops
- Crop tops, bare midriffs, or exposed navel
- Torn, dirty or ripped clothing
- Hats, caps or bandanas
- Sunglasses
- Hiking, athletic, canvas shoes, sneakers work boots
- Thongs, flip/flops, beach footwear
- Facial or body jewelry other than earrings
- Inappropriate or distracting hair color or styles, tattoos, or overall appearance

MEDICAL STUDENTS (Male & Female):
Navy, a combination of navy/white, or white Scrubs must be worn at all times. Outerwear must be dark blue or white (sweatshirts or jeans jackets are not permissible).

WOMEN

Shoes must be all white.

- Denim clothing, jeans
- Shorts of any type
- Skirt length more than 3 inches above knee
- All pants must be at least mid-calf in length
- Tight, low cut, sheer, or spandex clothing
- Undergarments visible
- T-Shirts
- Sweats/sweatshirts
- Tank tops, halter tops, spaghetti straps
- Crop tops, bare midriffs, or exposed navel
- Cargo, baggy, or "overalls" clothing
- Torn, dirty or ripped clothing
- Hats, caps or bandanas
- Sunglasses
- Hiking, athletic, canvas shoes, sneakers, work boots
- Thongs, flip/flops, beach footwear
- Facial or body jewelry other than earrings
- Inappropriate or distracting hair color or styles, tattoos, or overall appearance

[Halo] College Attendance Policy
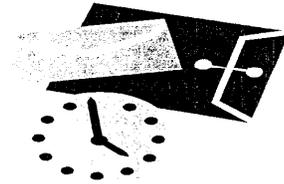
ATTENDANCE and TARDY POLICIES

Attendance and punctuality are directly related to academic and workplace success. You are expected to attend all classes as scheduled. Your academic transcript shows the percent of attendance for each course along with the final grade.

PERFECT ATTENDANCE

Attend all classes, arrive on time, and remain for the full class meeting

- ✓ Quarterly - Be recognized at the quarterly awards program!
- ✓ Duration of your program - Be recognized at your graduation ceremony!

MONITORING YOUR ATTENDANCE

Students who limit their absences to those shown in the chart will meet the 85 percent standard. Students who exceed the limits shown in the chart will not be admitted to class without first meeting with a dean.

Using 70 percent as a guideline, you will be with-drawn from any course if your absences exceed those shown in the chart.

Attendance Guideline Chart

Number of Class Meetings per Week	Quarter Schedule (11 wks) Maximum # Absences to Maintain 85% Attendance	Modular Schedule (5 wks) Maximum # Absences to Maintain 85% Attendance
1	2	1
2	3	2
3	4	2
4	6	3
Number of Class Meetings per Week	Quarter Schedule (11 wks) Maximum # Absences to Maintain 70% Attendance	Modular Schedule (5 wks) Maximum # Absences to Maintain 70% Attendance
1	3	2
2	6	3
3	9	4
4	12	6

TARDIES OR EARLY DEPARTURES

Students who exceed the limits shown below will not be admitted to class without first meeting with a dean

If you incur further tardies or early departures, you will be withdrawn from class if you exceed the limits shown below.

Number of Class Meetings per Week	Maximum Tardies or Early Departures	
	Attendance Advising Required	Limit for Continued Enrollment
1	2	3
2	4	6
3	7	9
4	10	12

APPEALS

Appeals of dismissal from class must be submitted in writing to the Campus President

When Absent Communication is Important:

- ✓ Contact the Academic Affairs office
- ✓ Contact instructors.
- ✓ Inform the Academic Affairs office of phone number or address changes.
- ✓ Submit documentation for your absences (examples: a doctor's note, auto repair slip; notice of court appearance, etc.)

Fridays At Heald

- ✓ Non scheduled Fridays allow one-on-o▮▮▮▮ruction, tutoring, project team meetings, special course activities, and supplemental learning workshops.

[Halo] College Brush-Up Policy

Brush-up privileges are offered to degree and diploma graduates who wish to refresh the skills they learned at [Halo] College. The privilege applies only to those courses successfully completed in the student's original program, provided space is available and such courses are currently offered. Due to continuing changes in the technology field, brush-up privileges do not include training in software upgrades or networking technology courses. Neither internship nor externship experiences are eligible for brush up.

APPENDIX C

Examples of Student Violence as a Response to Dissatisfaction

March 27, 2007 (New York Times)
When Student-Adviser Tensions Erupt, the Results Can Be Fatal
By DENNIS OVERBYE

Being a graduate student is the most grueling and intense part of becoming a scientist, but it rarely leads to murder. Here are some rare instances.

Take the case of Theodore Streleski, a Stanford mathematician. In 1978 he bludgeoned his adviser, Karel deLeeuw, to death with a ball-peen hammer after being told that, after 19 years of graduate school, he wasn't going to get his doctorate. Mr. Streleski received a sentence of seven years based on a defense of diminished capacity, according to newspaper accounts. He did not admit any remorse when he was freed, but said he didn't have any plans to kill again.

In 1989, Jens P. Hansen, a graduate student at the University of Florida School of Medicine, went to the home of Arthur Kimura, his professor of pathology, and shot him. Dr. Kimura was the chairman of a committee that had just voted to terminate Mr. Hansen's graduate study, after seven years, with a master's degree. Mr. Hansen is serving a life sentence, according to a notice in The Florida Independent Alligator, a student newspaper.

In 1992, just a year after a shooting at the University of Iowa in which the gunman killed five people and himself, Frederick M. Davidson, an engineering student at San Diego State, began the defense of his master's thesis by gunning down the three professors on his committee. He is serving three life sentences.

But having a doctorate does not confer immunity from academic rage. In 1992 Valery Fabrikant, an engineering professor, went on a shooting rampage at Concordia University in Montreal. He killed four of his colleagues, whom he blamed for his failure to get tenure and for trying to get him fired. Dr. Fabrikant is serving a life sentence and doing research from his cell. In a statement posted on a Web site, www.geocities.com/benny_patrick/new9.html?20072, in 2002, he wrote, "I hope to be remembered as a person who had enough courage to fight lawlessness with deadly force and I hope to encourage others to do the same."

December 24, 2005 (Boston Globe)
Attack on professor is linked to grade
UMass student charged in knifing
By Cristina Silva and Caroline Louise Cole, Globe Correspondent

On Thursday, the last day of the semester, professor Mary Elizabeth Hooker cheerfully greeted her hematology class at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell with homemade baked goods and coffee from Dunkin' Donuts, friends said.

That evening she headed to her Cambridge home, unaware that a student, concerned about his failing grade, was following her with a knife in his car, police records state.

Nikhil Dhar, 22, knocked on Hooker's door at 6:30 p.m., started shouting at her and dragged her to the ground, beating her and stabbing her numerous times before slashing her neck and ripping off her shirt, witnesses and police said. He fled but was quickly apprehended by a neighbor.

Police said they found a bloody note with the word kill in his right coat pocket.

Hooker remained in stable condition in the intensive-care unit of Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital yesterday, as Dhar, 22, pleaded not guilty to charges of armed assault with intent to murder and assault and battery with a dangerous weapon.

The stabbing sent tremors of anxiety through faculty and students at the commuter school as well as in the tranquil middle-class neighborhood where Hooker lived by herself.

Hooker, an associate professor in the department of clinical laboratory and nutritional sciences, was described as "wonderful" and "sweet" by colleagues and did not seem a likely target for a hostile assailant, said Garry Handelman, who worked with her.

"She is not the kind of teacher a student would go after," he said. "She is extremely kind, very gentle, very considerate."

Friends and acquaintances of Dhar said they were shocked to hear that the reserved student, an elected senator on the student government, had been arrested and charged in the attack of a professor.

"Honestly, I would never have known that he would do something like this," Mita Hirani, a student at Lowell, wrote in an e-mail. "He's a nice kid and just very active in school and always there for everyone."

Kyle Coffrey, who served on the student government with Dhar, said Dhar is very quiet.

"He kept to himself, but if you tried to talk to him, he was very open, very friendly," Coffrey said. "Everyone says the same thing; we are all shocked."

According to police records, Dhar followed Hooker home from school, trailing several cars behind her so she wouldn't see him. He later told police he went to her home intending to discuss his grade with her, according to court documents. He and Hooker had wrestled over the knife, he told police, and she probably thought he "was a burglar."

Dhar said he left his knife in the car, but Hooker, dressed in a blue night shirt, was carrying a knife when she opened the door, according to the police report.

But Hooker did not mention a knife to police, according to the police report. Hooker told police that when Dhar said he wanted to discuss his failing hematology grade, she told him that she would get dressed so they could go to Dunkin' Donuts to talk it over, according to court documents.

Dhar then became "very irate" and "abusive" toward her, Hooker told police, dragging her out of the house and onto the ground. He stabbed and beat her, according to the police report.

Carlos Madden, 21, who lives a few houses down from Hooker, said he heard shouting and ran outside to find Dhar crouching over Hooker's body as she lay on the sidewalk covered in blood.

"He started slowly walking away," Madden said. "When I caught up with him at the corner, he said, 'I have a knife.' He seemed pretty calm. He told me, 'She started it.' "

Madden called police on his cellphone and directed them to the street. When they arrived, Hooker was standing on her front porch, bleeding with a 4-inch slash in her neck, according to the documents.

Dhar was standing on a nearby lawn with "blood all over his hands" and on his sneakers, the police report states.

Dhar was ordered held with out bail yesterday after the arraignment at Cambridge District Court until a dangerousness hearing on Wednesday. A woman and three men standing outside the courtroom identified themselves as Dhar's relatives but declined to comment.

Stephen Hrones, Dhar's lawyer, said Dhar does not have a record and is in Massachusetts on an international student visa. Dhar, who is from Calcutta, wanted to work in the biotech field and is the oldest of two sons, Hrones said.

"He was there to discuss something with his teacher," Hrones said. "There is absolutely nothing in his past that would indicate an incident of this nature. He seemed to have friends at school. He was involved. His family is very supportive. . . . Obviously, this is a much more complicated scenario than anything the police say or that you can see on TV."

Dhar's parents were stunned by the charges, Hrones said. "They are not taking it very well," he said.

William T. Hogan, chancellor at UMass-Lowell, issued a statement saying that Hooker, a member of the university's faculty for 12 years, "is a valued member of the faculty known for her dedication and devotion to her job, her peers, and her students."

Hooker was a research associate at a US Department of Agriculture laboratory in Beltsville, Md., before she started teaching at UMass-Lowell in 1993. She is a Boston University graduate with a doctorate in biological sciences from Georgetown University. She has written papers for journals on such subjects as parasitic wasps and Mexican bean beetles.

Dhar is a member of the school's senior class, according to Patti McCafferty, a spokeswoman for the university, but is still working to complete his junior-year course work.

Kanti Prasad, the faculty adviser of the Southeast Asian Student Association, of which Dhar is a member, said the stabbing sent shock waves through the university's faculty and made him double-check his grade book. Prasad, a professor in the university's electrical and computer engineering department, said, "We are a tough school and expect a lot from our students, because we are preparing them for the top jobs, and that is our reputation.

"A failing grade shouldn't be the end of the world," Prasad said. "Usually I find the students may argue but they accept it."

APPENDIX D

[Halo] College Recruitment Flyers

APPENDIX E

Examples of Students' Stories

The following participants' stories were selected to illustrate examples of some of the obstacles experienced by students at Halo College. Juan's story is related to a dispute regarding challenge exam credit, compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the difficulties encountered with high staff turnover and poor office management. Rafael's story involves a financial aid award, a promise to disburse money he was entitled to receive, and a decision by the college to hold the funds. Charles's story is about his frustrations with one teacher's grading practices, his repeated attempts to satisfy the instructor's requirements, and ultimately giving up. Samantha's story describes how the business and financial aid offices first encouraged her to take out a personal loan, then insisted on holding half of the money for possible future tuition costs.

JUAN'S STORY

At the time of this study, Juan's experience was still unresolved. Juan suffered an

injury to his arm that has left him with nerve damage and pain. He has been working

with Halo staff either to receive challenge credit for a required keyboarding class, or to be

excused from the requirement due to his disability. With several changes in academic

staff in the past year, Juan has had to explain his situation and appeal for help over and

over, so far without success.

> My experience began here at [Halo] College with the office. I have a problem
> with my arm. I have an injury and I have a couple of operations on it. So the
> nerve system is really messed up right now. So I have to take the medication.
> They want me to do the Keyboarding class and I told them that, I took the
> [challenge exam], I tried to do it as best as I can and I got a 29%.....And they
> asked for 30, 30 words per minute, and I got 29. And I talked to [staff] and they
> were like, 'Well, you know, if you have actually the problem with your arm, 29 is
> really good. I mean it's one point. Might as well actually just give it to you. If
> you bring us a letter from the doctor you can actually get it, you can actually get
> the credit for the class.' I brought the letter. It seems [staff] really tried to help
> me. I was actually very satisfied. With [another staff] it was another case. I tried
> to explain, I have to explain myself from scratch. It looks like, it looks from there
> actually it's starting to look uphill problem. I tried to convince him. And it sound
> to me, for me it was kinda like ridiculous to try to explain an injury with that letter
> from a doctor and trying to say, 'You know what? This is not a game for me.
> This is an injury that I cannot really do this and I really don't want to take a
> class.' Finally, after giving all that, he was kinda like, 'Okay, fine. It is true.
> You have this, you have the letter. Okay, fine.' But he didn't put it on the
> system. Now they want me to actually do it. They want me to do it again. And
> every quarter it's the same. Every quarter I have to fight about, well I already
> took Psychology but they want me to take it again. And since they don't actually
> have, they don't put it in the system, they just put it away and let the next person
> take care of it, and the next person. And I was really upset about that.
>
> I complained to [staff]. He, I think because he was on his way out, he didn't
> really care. He was just kinda, 'Okay, okay. I'll fix it. I'll fix it. I'll fix it.' I
> brought the letters. I did everything that they asked. And now that I find out, my
> file is empty. I don't know what they did with the letters. I have emails. I have
> everything. And they just disappeared.

Juan discussed his lack of respect and trust for the administration:

Oh, you can see. You can really see that they're really, I mean they don't even want to look at your face because they know that you can tell that they are really lying. And they always go like, 'You know, we can actually,' or they'll play music to distract you. And I even told the guy last time, you know, 'Turn of the music because it's really distracting. It's really pissing me off'….There was music playing, he was, lights. This is not a discotheque. Do you want to go to a club? Go to a club. This is an office. Shut off the music and pay attention to me. And he actually saw, and I said to him, 'If I have to, I will make my doctor call you guys. But if I have to make my doctor call you guys, the next call is going to be my lawyer.' Because how stupid do you think I am? I mean I know I am an immigrant, but still. I'm not gonna be push over by some, I don't know. I think they tried to trick me. And not only me. I'm not saying that it's especially me. I think it's just kinda like, when I talk to more and more students, it looks like it's not me. And it's not only me. It's kinda like if I talk to them they tell me, 'Well, you know, I don't get credit for this class, and this class, and this class from other colleges.' Which actually are very serious classes. And they don't want to give you credit for those? Makes no sense.

I'm concerned. I just want to finish this. I really want to finish school. And it's a lot of money. So I'm a little bit concerned about that. So I'm scared. I don't want to actually get so much in debt and not actually get anything in return. And like I said, I was talking to them and I can see that they don't really care. They want to put more and more and more problems so I will actually, and it will be one of two things: Either they will give up, which is unlikely, or they hope that I will give up complaining. And they're wrong about that because I don't care. I'm gonna move forward. Like I said, I have everything. The only problem would be the next quarter is coming and it's hard for me to kinda like balance work, school, and how to deal with them. It's just an extra thing that I don't really need. And they don't seem to care. They're just kinda like, it's like I said, they know that we're under so much pressure that we have to give up. They hope that we have to give up.

RAFAEL'S STORY

Rafael's story involves the business and financial aid offices of Halo. He was

supposed to receive a check from the school that he had planned to use for rent and other

expenses but was surprised by a telephone call from Halo staff telling him the school had

decided to hold the funds for possible future expenses.

> I have been receiving financial aid through various sources, and one of them was through a third-party voucher that got lost in the system. And originally it supposed to be posted in January and it wasn't until May they finally found it and posted it. And by that time, the second voucher was received. And then there was a situation where there was going to be a certain amount of credit available. And that was gonna be very important to me for my June and July expenses. That was going to be my rent. So we went through the whole process and it took me nearly three weeks of working with the business office to figure out all the accounting faults that had happened, to get it all straightened out, and working with them and the financial aid office it was determined that first I was gonna get a $1700 credit and then it was determined that once the final voucher was credited I was gonna end up with approximately $2800 dollars. Which made me very, very happy that I was gonna be able to pay my bills. And up until a certain point, I was very confident that I was gonna receive a check roughly May 28-29 in the amount of $2800, at least $1700 and then I found out $2800 so I just, my smile just became a whatever-eating grin. I was very, very happy about that I was gonna be able to cover all these expenses. And then they get to the point where we're right there at the finish line and it was just a matter of crossing the T's and dotting the I's and confirming whether they were gonna be able to cut a check on the 28th or I'd have to wait one more day, the 29th, for the business cycle to end. So that was at about 3:30 that I found out that this was all in line and then at 5:00 I got a phone call and I thought the phone call was to let me know precisely when I was gonna get the check. I had the wind knocked out of me because they told me that I wasn't gonna get a check at all until July because the financial aid office then decided that they needed to hold that money to make sure it would cover any other potential expenses. And it really just, it took the heart out of me. It took the wind out of me. I just, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I got instant depression. And then I just, I got, then I started getting frustrated. And then I got upset and I just, I had to just say to one of the other, I guess the academic counselors, I had to go and advise them that I was very upset and disappointed with [Halo] and its process and I had lost complete and total faith in the organization and it's very probable I would not be returning, that I would now be going to state college instead because I could get better financial aid and it's a cleaner process, it's right up front, you know exactly what's going on. I pursued

that once and I'm a little familiar with the process. The reason I was coming to [Halo] was because the convenience and the expediency and all of a sudden those two factors became null and void compared to the problems I went through and the fact that I wasn't getting the financial aid and I was just fed up with it.

After this incident, Rafael went to an academic counselor whom he knew

personally to voice his concerns.

I basically just walked in and I asked, I didn't just walk in. I waited and made sure he had a moment. I said I needed to speak with him for five minutes. And I just basically told him, 'I'm just giving you a heads up right now that this is gonna be my last quarter at [Halo]. I'm very disappointed. I've lost faith with this organization. One of the reasons I was gonna come here was because I had this voucher coming in that I knew I was gonna be able to use for my expenses and now that's being held back from me and now I just feel that this is a very unprofessional way to run an organization.'

He was a little speechless 'cause up at this point I had not expressed any kind of complaint or disappointment with [Halo]. And I guess, quite frankly, he wasn't really aware of what I was talking about because he was not involved….And I went to him because I said I need to get away from these other two people because they're the ones pissing me off. So I told him, my academic counselor, who you're supposed to go to with your problems. And I just, I had to get it off my chest. Initially, I was kinda hesitant because now I was very upset, I was mad, I was no longer depressed, I was just really, really disappointed and very upset and I was a little hesitant because I was afraid I might lose my temper. But I also knew I had to get it off my chest. I couldn't let it, I couldn't sleep on it. So that's why I had to make sure I got it off my chest. I said it, I was done, and I said, 'But when I've calmed down a little more I'll go in more detail with you but right now I just need to let you know. I'm very upset with the whole situation, this whole organization right now. I've lost complete faith in it.

After some time Rafael found some success through complaining.

I did follow up with the Dean of Students. He got involved and within a week he was able to convince the financial aid office to release $1,000 of the $2,800 that I was supposed to get. So it wasn't the whole shebang but it was something that really fortified my feeling that if you don't complain, nothing's gonna get done. And if you complain the right way, it's more chance of something getting resolved. So I felt very justified that I brought up the issue, I followed it in detail, and I stuck with it, and then I was rewarded with my own money, that it was resolved and that I was not deterred by the system.

CHARLES'S STORY

Charles told me about his experience with the teacher in an English class. Despite

several attempts to give the teacher what she asked for, Charles could not find a way to

earn full points on any of his English assignments and eventually dropped the class. He

felt singled out for unfair treatment by the teacher, and believed it was retaliation for

tardiness.

> It has to be when I turned in my first essay for English and, I mean, I know that I
> can write well. I've always been told I can write well, I feel comfortable with my
> writing, I know how I write and I know how to express myself. I put a lot of
> work into this essay and I knew it was a good essay. And then I turned it in, and
> she gave it back to me as a 40 percent. Not a 60, not a 50. A 40 percent. And
> then when I asked her what the deal with that was, as we were walking out of
> [Halo], she's going right and I'm going left or whatever, and I was like, 'So
> what's the deal with the grade?' And she goes, 'Well,' and gives me this little
> smirk and this little, you know, 'I don't think that this was you. This story was
> about you. And the assignment was the story is supposed to be about you, so…'
> and walked away. And I was like, really though? You are my English teacher
> who just gave me a 40 percent on an essay and the reason for that is, 'I don't think
> that it was you?'

I asked Charles whether the reason for such a low grade was something else such

as plagiarism or the paper being submitted past the due date. He responded:

> No. It was my paper. It was my story. It was about me. And on top of that, all
> she has to do for comments is say, 'I don't think that your thesis matches the body
> of your statement.' So my topic sentence didn't match the rest of the essay.
> Okay. Fine. Okay, I disagree with her when she says that. But even if, you
> know, she wants to say that's how it is and for some, whatever reason that's really
> how it is, that's fine. But is it 60 percent off of the grade? The only feedback on
> the actual paper was, 'Your thesis doesn't match your topic.'

Charles gave this teacher one more chance before complaining but when there

was no change, he went to one of the staff and complained. Here is the outcome.

> Before I even complained, the way I looked at it was, okay, if she wants to give
> me 40 percent on this essay, fine. I'm gonna make sure that she has no room to

mark me down for anything. So I went on my way, did every single assignment, did it to the best of my ability, and wouldn't receive full points. And then the person next to me gets full points with actually having more things wrong than I do.

"I went and talked to [staff] and then she had me write a statement about what happened and like, how I felt that everything went on, and went from there. And then she said, 'Okay, we'll do your next essay,' but she said to bring her the next essay. So that way I can go over it with her, you know, get the back comments of what I'm supposed to fix for the draft, show her the draft, and then make the corrections and then turn in the corrected paper. I didn't take her the draft but I just, I did the draft, I got the corrections, I did every little thing she asked me for, and then she turns me back my next essay as an 85. And, but see, I mean honestly, if a teacher gives me my draft back and says, 'Here's 20 things that are wrong with it. Fix it.' And you go through one by one and fix those 20 things, that's not a B paper, that's an A paper. If I did everything that you asked me to do and I did it well, that's full points. I should be getting full points on that assignment. Because I did everything that you asked of me. But yet even then, after she's been talked to, 'cause I mean I'm sure somebody talked to her or somebody had showed her the paper or whatever, I mean I guarantee something had happened, and then after that she gives me an 85.

Charles went deeper into discussing other factors which may have played a role in

the behavior of the teacher.

And I'm not saying that I was, you know, excluded, or picked out, or being picked on, or you know, being the black sheep of the class or whatever. I just assumed that, you know, I had trouble being there on time which, you know, affects my participation, which is 10 percent of the grade in her class. And that's all she had to mark me down for was that, you know, that being on time and that participation. But I don't think that she felt that that was enough. I felt that for her, she went out of her way to mark me down in other areas because I wasn't on time.

Charles clarified with me that the actual paper was on time and he shared some of

his hesitations to voice his complaint.

I hesitated because I was like, okay, well maybe, you know, she might have something here. Maybe she just wants the paper a completely different way. Some teachers have to have things a certain way and I understand that. So I tried to go out of my way to make it her way. And still it didn't, I don't know. Just didn't receive full points. And I thought that it was, you know, she was trying to

take it out on me for being late to her class when she knew that she can only grade me down 10 percent.

I was just sick of it. I was just, I just got tired of being irritated with getting up and going to her class to do everything that I'm there to do, and supposed to do, and then not receive points. Like what is the point of paying for this class, that I shouldn't be in in the first place, and having to go there, and doing everything I'm supposed to do, the way I'm supposed to do it, and basically get screwed for it?

At this time Charles begins to get angry by getting emotional and mentioning

other problems with this teacher.

I was definitely angry. Because it's like how is your teacher gonna sit there and tell you, 'Oh I don't think you wrote this essay. As a personal story. I don't think this story's about you.' It wasn't so much, 'You didn't write this essay.' She knew that I wrote the essay. She just didn't think that this is a story about me. Well, that's great. How long have I known this lady? You know? Like what? However many weeks for the two hours a day? I never knew her before in my life. I've never seen her before in my life. So for her to tell me what has and has not happened to me was a pretty big shock value. And then after that, it's just like going out of her way just to not give me points on anything.

I didn't even drop the class. I just stopped going. Like I'm sure it'll show up as a drop, but if it shows up as an F, whatever. I'm still gonna have to re-take it. I'm still gonna have to re-pay for it.

…it doesn't reflect on me. It reflects on her. The fact that she's failing me doesn't make me look bad. It makes her look bad. And she could say that it makes me look bad all she wants. 'Cause I even told her. I was like, 'You know by giving me a 40 percent, this only reflects you as a teacher, not me as a student.' She's like, 'No, that's your grade. It reflects on you as a student.' And I was like, 'Really? That's funny. Because I'm pretty sure that I did everything that you asked and you still give me a garbage grade.'

SAMANTHA'S STORY

I am in sort of a pickle right now. I am a good student here. I have a 4.0 grade average that I've held since I've been here. Again, I do tutor and mentor and help out where I can, regardless of what I need to do at home. And I was kind of at my wit's end when I did get evicted on Saturday from my parents. Not knowing where I was gonna turn. I thought I was gonna have to sell myself short of accomplishing my first goal. And that would've been to withdraw from school with the possibility that I have a quarter and a half left basically, a quarter and an externship. So I would've sold myself short of a degree, of a better paying job, of my own self-esteem and self-worth. All for the fact that I thought I was gonna be screwed and try to get, couldn't make ends meet to move and take care of my son and start my family. I came to school on Monday with basically the desire to withdraw or feeling that that was the necessity that was gonna happen. And upon being met by several of the faculty members, including the dean, was talked out of it. Which I was happy that that was true. They gave me options and that I was thankful for. However, I felt that their options weren't genuine. It wasn't like, 'Oh, [Samantha], we have a concern for you.' And this was kind of just, you know, as I sit here and think about it, it was kind of just reflected again when I just talked to [one of the program coordinators]. And, you know, it wasn't a genuine concern like, 'Yeah, you know, we really want you to succeed and you to make better for your family and you to provide for your son correctly,' and stuff like that. It was, 'Your success looks good for [Halo].' And that's what [the program coordinator] said to me just now. And I just thought about that. That was weird. Anyways…it was suggested by a teacher to ask Financial Aid for a private loan for basically housing expenses. When you go to a college, you go to a university, your whole financial aid package includes housing, and room and board, and books, and everything. Here, it doesn't. It's predominantly tuition-based. Because we all live locally and there's no dorms or apartments here for [Halo] students. So with that, my financial aid, I've taken out student loans through [Halo] so it's financed. I've also gotten CalGrants. I've gotten Pell Grants. I've gotten scholarships. Everything through here also and I'm very thankful for that. But I do have a majority of my tuition financed through student loans through [Halo] College. So going out on a limb and asking them for a private loan, I was hoping that they could do something for me and, you know, $2,500 dollars, $3,000 dollar range, so that I could move comfortably to my next location and relocate and start school again. So I had already made the decision to stay in school and the decision to continue. 'Cause I'm doing this for me. I'm not doing it for anyone else. Regardless of [Halo] College. I was then told by Financial Aid that they could offer me $2,500 to $3,000 and that was a legitimate cost. That was first month's rent, deposit, and then into costs for U-Haul and first month of daycare. That would get me by. I wasn't asking for the world. I wasn't asking for a $40,000 loan for housing. And so I was asking for [a month's expenses] and I could actually document all that, if they needed it. I pay $200 a

week for my daycare right now for my son. I spend, it's $1,000 for the place we're looking at for the apartment and the deposit's $400 and it costs $100 to rent a U-Haul. It all added up. I wasn't asking for anything else. They told me that, 'Yeah, that's possible. Let me go talk to the Director. You call to find a co-signer." Because I don't have a job. Called, asked my stepmother, 'Hey, look. Need your help.' She was hesitant but at the same time she knew that I don't ask for much. And the reason why she was hesitant is I have a sister and a brother that she's supporting right now, a 19-year-old sister and a 10-year-old brother. And it's not that it would be a stretch or anything just to co-sign. 'Cause, I mean, I'd pay it back. It was the fact that she felt she didn't want to show partiality by doing something for me. My sister wants a car right now. So, you know, that kinda thing. So she said, 'You know, you don't ask for anything. I'll do it. No problem.' Okay. Got the co-signer, got all our information, they come back in the room and say, 'Oh. We can only offer you $500.' So I'm sitting here thinking, 'Okay, well $500 is not much but it will help. I mean, anything will help at this point.' Because it's all happening so fast. And the more money we have in the bank the sooner, the better it looks on a credit application when we go to apply for an apartment 'cause they ask you what's your checking account balance, what's your savings account balance. So if we can show them that we actually have money in the bank also, that it looks better too. So I'm thinking the fastest way to do this. Well $500 would help. Okay, fine. I'll apply for $500. Upon entering the loan information into the computer, this spot where it says, 'Amount of Loan Requested' wouldn't let me enter $500. And so I asked and he's all, 'Well enter $1,000. See what it does.' I entered $1,000 and it accepted it. So I went through the application, entering in my information, went in the application entering my co-signer's application information, pressed 'Submit,' called the lady, the lady is like, 'Yeah, sure. We'll let you know in 24 hours.' I got the confirmation this morning saying, 'Yeah, you've been preapproved for $1,000. Credit agreement is on the way.' Okay, well that's all fine and dandy. As I'm talking to the lady on the phone, she says, 'Well your check will be mailed to [Halo] College to their Business Department. Okay. So the Business Office is gonna get it, it'll have your name on it, you know, attention whatever, and then they'll distribute your funds to you.' Okay. So [Halo will] cut me a check. Twenty years to pay it back, low interest rate, minimum payment $25, okay, thank you. Had all the information, went home, talked to my stepmom about it. She's like, 'Cool. Even better. Too bad you couldn't take the $2,500.' And still I'm thinking to myself, 'Why am I only getting $500 if I applied for $1,000 loan?' It didn't jive with me. And so I kept arguing the point with the guy. 'Hey, this loan check is gonna come for $1,000. When you apply for a loan, you don't apply for more than you're gonna get. You apply for the amount you need. So if you apply for $1,000, they say here, you're preapproved for $1,000, why aren't you gonna take $1,000?' So he's like, 'Well no, we could only give you $500 and that has to do with the fact that we could only allot $500 per however many quarters for living expense. For housing.' And so I even told him, I said, 'Do

you realize $500 wouldn't pay for a month's rent in a studio in the city? I mean, so living expenses, my ass.' I said, 'It's $1,000. It's me, my boyfriend who's soon-to-be husband, and a 7-month-old kid that I have to provide for. My boyfriend has a good job but we're trying to move out on our own with one income as a family. It's not gonna work unless I have this push.' And he was like, 'Well I can only give you the $500.' And he was so firm on it, it still didn't sink in. I was like, 'You know what? I'll come back tomorrow at 2:30 and talk to you.' He's like, 'Okay.' He's all, 'Cool.' He's all, 'We'll pull out the paperwork, sign it, whatever.' And I just kinda left the office. I thank him and said, 'Thank you for your time,' walked out. Upon talking to a couple other teachers today, they were like, 'Hey, you could've applied for that loan by yourself through your bank and got up to $40,000 a year that you need with that co-signer.' I mean, come on. And so I went onto B of A's web site just to check it out. I was approved for five grand, out the door. Five grand would help a lot more than a $500 check. I mean, and realistically, again, I wasn't asking for the world. $5,000 is not much to relocate. For a family to relocate. And $500, like I said, it would've helped but where was that other $500 gonna go? You know? And the thing is, is that, that check was being sent to [Halo] so obviously, you know, $500 goes into my bank account, $500 goes into the pocket of [Halo]. Somewhere.