

A POSITIVE APPROACH TO MINORITY STUDENT RETENTION

AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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### **Abstract**

This is a study that investigates the minority student retention problem at Texas A&M. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data are taken into account. In the quantitative portion, six variables are related to retention. These six variables are study habits, living arrangements, friends or peer support, involvement in extracurricular activities, involvement with a mentor or faculty member, and students' background characteristics. The sample consisted of one hundred forty-four junior and senior students. The test instrument was a survey questionnaire. In the qualitative section, the subjects are interviewed in four- or five-membered groups. Also, the deans and department heads are petitioned for information about the retention programs of their college. It was discovered that for these students, the most important factors in their retention were peer support and involvement with a mentor. Finally, the responses by the deans and department heads are reported.



## **A Positive Approach to Minority Student Retention**

Over the past 20 years, the number of minority students attending predominantly white colleges and universities has increased tremendously. Minority recruitment plays a very important role in bringing quality students to the university. However, the actual number of recruited minority students that finally graduate is not as high as it could be. Walton (1979) found that the proportion of minority students who leave the university without finishing their education is at a much higher level than for their white counterparts. Thus, there is a minority student retention problem.

Minority student retention is different from retention of students in general because minorities have many different problems in addition to the traditional problems faced by Anglo students. Specifically, these problems arise from being a minority on a predominantly white college campus; therefore specific programs are needed to meet the unique needs of minority students.

Retention of minority students is important because the number of minority-origin professionals is decreasing, while the minority percentage of the population is increasing (Hodgkinson, 1985). There is a strong need for minority

professionals (Minor, 1985), both for the nation and the minority group itself. To educate people from the minority areas of the community is to invest in people who have social knowledge and the abilities that will help to improve the community as a whole.

In order to accomplish this task, the student needs to feel like a relevant part of the university (Lewis, 1986). The rate of retention of minority students is a product of the student's interaction with the university's academic and social systems. The better integrated into these systems students are, the more likely they will persist until graduation (Allen, 1985). Students need to feel that the university welcomes them without making them feel stigmatized or patronized. This calls for a caring, supportive atmosphere at the university (Lewis, 1986). More specifically, knowledge of cultural differences are valuable dimensions of a person's personality and the presence of these diversities enhances and enriches the total university community. A sense of pluralism should replace the "traditional monocultural attitudes of the academic environment" (Applewhite-Lozano and Varhely, 1985). Thus, the entire university has the opportunity to benefit from having minority students.

On the contrary, some faculty members do not see things this way and faculty attitudes and reactions play an important

role in the completion rate of minority students on predominantly white campuses (ERIC/CUE, 1984). According to Garcia, Stile, and Carrillo (1984), many faculty feel that minority recruitment and retention will lower the "standards" of the university. However, several studies have shown that with study skills programs and counseling, minority students made significant improvements in grade point averages, study habits, and attitudes (Garcia et al., 1984).

Furthermore, many white college students react toward minority students as if they were invisible (Loo and Rolison, 1986). Rather than opening their arms to accept multiculturalism, these students expect minority students to conform to white standards. Combine this with institutional indifference, "reflected in a paucity of minority faculty, few or no ethnic studies courses, little or no support for minority student organizations, and covert racism on the part of white faculty and students," and one has an isolated minority student body (ERIC/CUE, 1984). This causes sociocultural alienation among the ethnic minorities. Loo et al. (1986) found that dropout behavior by minority students was due to "social estrangement" as well as academic factors; while on the contrary, white student's dropout behavior was usually a result of academic factors.

This study uses Green's (1985) definition of retention,

which is the following: retention is keeping students who might otherwise dropout; more specifically it refers to the development of programs or other forms of special assistance for students with identified deficiencies. This study considers, in the words of Allen (1985), "the 'fit' between a particular group [minority students] and a particular type of organization [predominantly white universities]." It is different from most minority student retention studies because it centers on positive retaining behavior as opposed to "dropout behavior" (Loo et al., 1986). Also, it takes into account both qualitative and quantitative data as Noel, Levitz, Salvri, and Associates (1985) say a retention study should.

Recent studies in the area of retention have expressed that qualitative data is very important to any retention study. Noel et al. (1985) suggest that a "profile of the persisters" is to be drawn. In order to effectively accomplish this task, the researcher must talk to the students. It is hard to derive some information, such as feelings or impressions, from a questionnaire, but literature indicates that these things can contribute to the attrition of a student. "Effective retention research involves more than assembling periodic head counts and determining who has dropped out and why" (Noel et al., 1985).

This study is relevant because it attempts to elaborate

exchanges between individuals and the school in which they are part of (Applewhite-Lozano et al., 1984). This study tries to locate what is being done in the area of minority student retention by each college and department. It explores what programs or policies are associated with successfully retained students. Also, it attempts to see if the programs used by the student made a difference. It asks, why were these students successfully retained when others dropped out? Was it something the university did, or was it some character trait of the student? Can the reason the student was retained be incorporated into a university-wide retention program to aid other students? If so, how?

A shortcoming of this study is that it is based on the particular student retention data available at the university. In other words, Texas A&M does not currently track students beyond their sophomore year. Gosman, Dandridge, Nettles, and Thoeny (1983) suggest, the university should keep track of overall attrition and graduation rates on an individual basis. This data should be used to analyze the university's retention. However, the students at most universities are not tracked, so one must rely on incomplete and possibly misleading quantitative data for retention studies.



**Table 1 Variables That Affect Minority Retention**

<b>Major Factors</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>Study Habits</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Living Arrangements</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Friends or Peer Support</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Relationship with a Mentor</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Involvement in Extracurricular Activities</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Background Characteristics</b>



## Background

There are many ways to study and ameliorate minority student retention problems. Some factors, such as employing minorities at all levels, improve the university milieu and might be called university-centered solutions. (Lunneborg and Lunneborg, 1985). This study, in contrast, is based on student-centered solutions. Noel et al. (1985) say that there are six major variables that affect minority student retention (see Table 1).

The first two factors are study habits and living arrangements. The more quality time spent studying and the more in-depth studying the student does, the more likely the student is to graduate. Also, students who live on campus (at least during the first two years) tend to have better grades (Noel et al., 1985).

Step three pertains to the friends of the student and/or any type of peer support received. Allen (1984) claims that involvement with some type of minority support network contributes to retention. Garcia et al. (1984) found a higher retention rate among the students who had been tutored and counseled by their trained peers than among those that received no treatment.

The next step includes the ability to form a relationship

with a mentor or a faculty member. According to Garcia et al.(1984), a strong support person or mentor is the most important factor in the retention of minority students in an institution of higher education. White et al. (1986) agree that a strong support person can sometimes be all that keeps a student from dropping out. An influential faculty member in contact with students can influence their decisions to continue their education in school. (Lewis, 1987). "The reasons cited were that it [mentor or faculty person] eases the transition to university life; it makes one feel confident and willing to work; and it makes [the student] feel that people are genuinely concerned" (Lewis, 1987). A student's interaction with a peer group or a faculty member helps determine his or her level of social integration into the university. (Loo et al., 1986).

The fifth group of variables pertains to the student's involvement in extracurricular activities, which helps the student become integrated into college life and contributes to the student's retention. Specifically, minority student organizations exist to assist the students with cultural identification and provide peer support. Involvement increases a student's opportunity to interact with faculty, staff members and other students; to become better oriented to the environment; to feel less isolated; and finally, to take an

interest in college life (Rooney, 1985). In 1984, Allen found that students who were more involved had higher occupational goals. However, Minor (1985) warns that excessive expenditures of time for social and nonacademic activities can be the cause of a student's failure in school. Coincidentally, because many Asian-Americans do not view themselves as minorities, they are less likely to be involved in minority activities (Rooney, 1985).

Finally, there are many important factors in the student's background that will be significant in retention. According to Minor (1985), the student's past academic record and ability are the most important factors in the student's background. Garcia et al. (1984) agrees that it is not race alone that makes one disadvantaged; rather a combination of factors such as low socioeconomic status, and inferior primary and secondary schooling, that must be taken into account. The academic preparedness of the student is very important. Other factors from the student's academic background that are important include the ethnic majority of the student's high school, the student's degree plans or long range goals, and the academic self-confidence of the student. In fact, White and Sedlacek (1986) claim that students who perceive themselves as having good examination skills are more likely to succeed academically. The family support of

the student is also a factor in retention. The family may have encouraged or discouraged the student from attending or continuing in college. The education of the parents is also a consideration because educated parents tend to expect their children to attend college and succeed. Interestingly, the number of dependents and the number of siblings in college is not a factor in the student's retention (Baird, 1984), nor was the sex of the individual (Allen, 1985). Lastly, adequate financing was a major factor from the student's background that contributed to retention.

### **Methodology**

The data collected for this study was both of a quantitative and qualitative nature. The instrument for the quantitative part of the study was a survey questionnaire. A modified, stratified, random sample of four hundred students was drawn from the minority junior and senior pool at Texas A&M. Only juniors and seniors were used because statistics show that once a student makes it to his/her junior year, chances are high that he/she will graduate (Noel et al. 1985). The survey questionnaires were sent to a sample comprised of 50% Hispanic students, 23% Black students, 21% Asian-American students, and 6% Native American students. Note

**Figure 1 Mail-Out Questionnaire Composition**

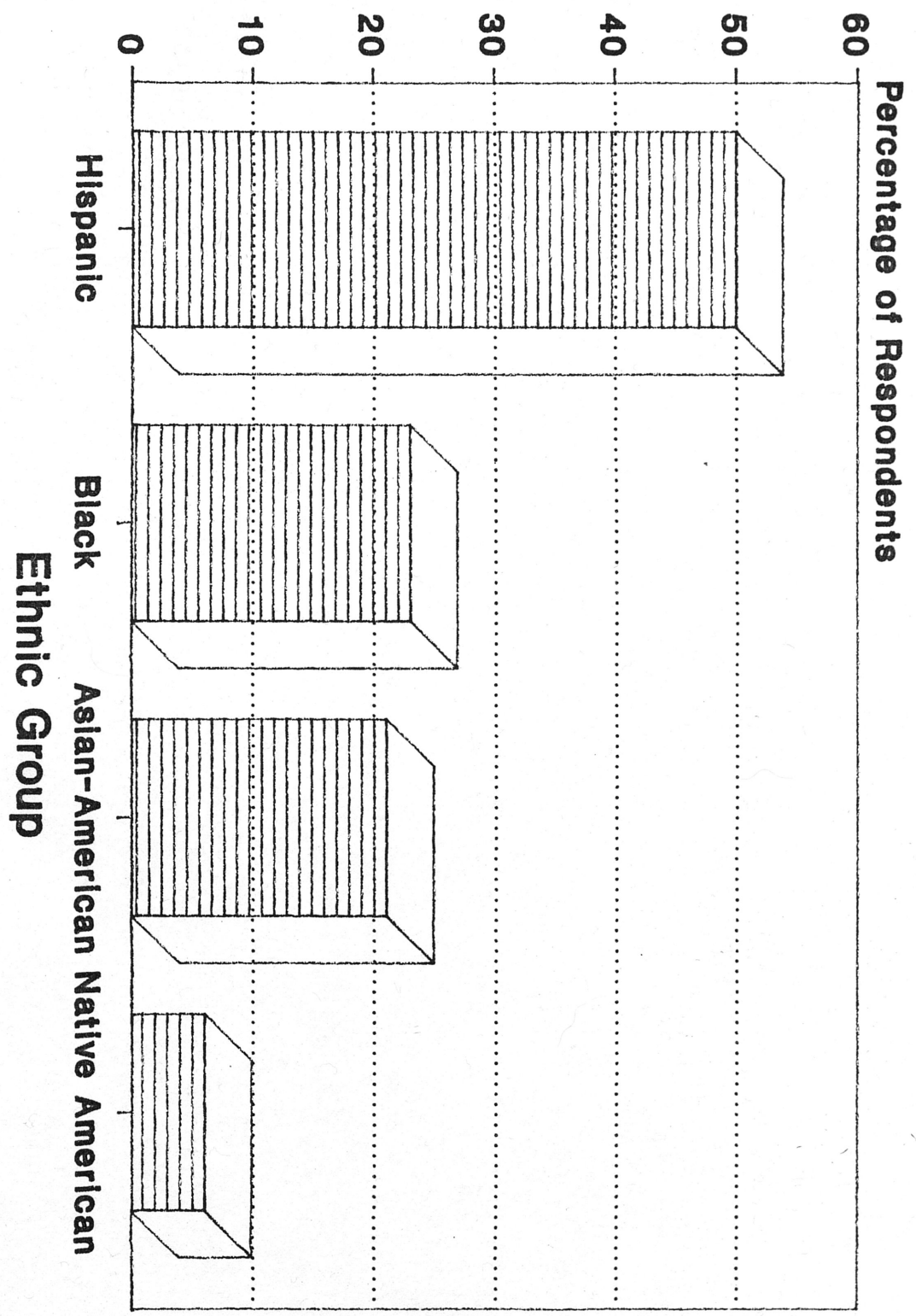
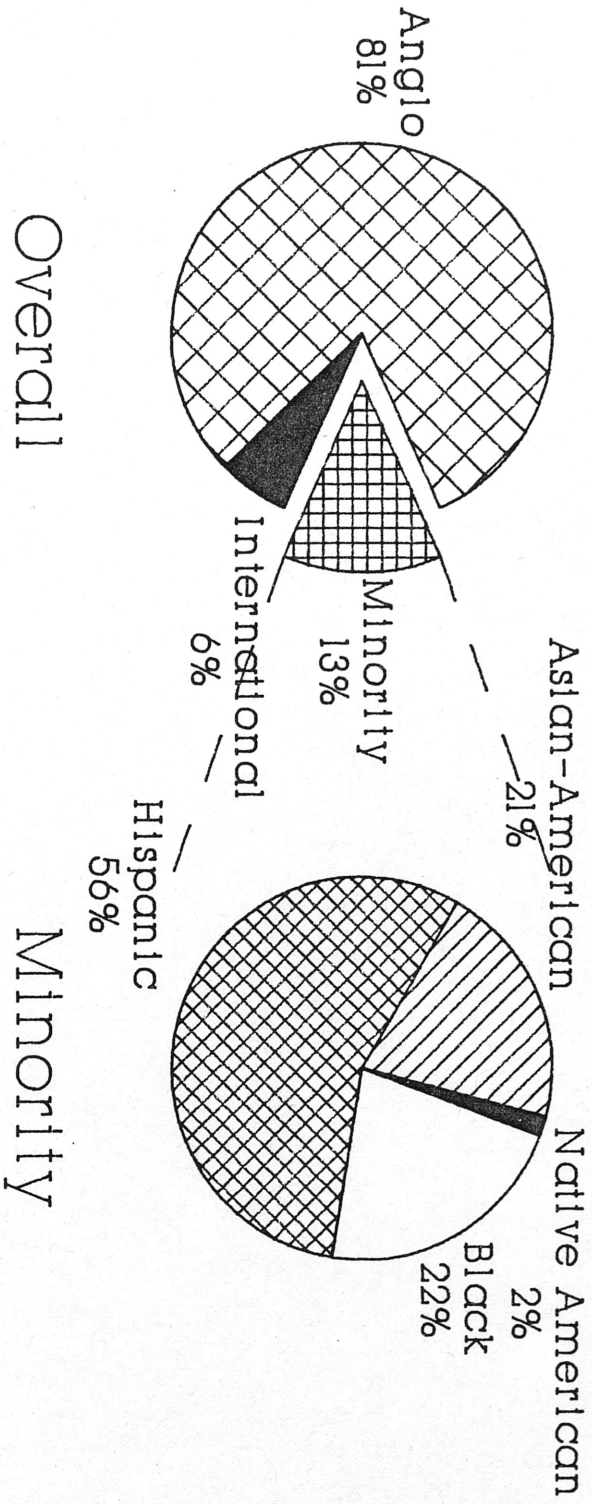




Figure 2 Student Population



Data from Research and Measurement



could be contacted through the Department of Multicultural Services because of their frequent contact with the staff. They, too, were encouraged to complete their questionnaires. Forty-three people were interviewed by telephone and twenty-one people were given questionnaires. Thus, the final sample consisted of one hundred forty-four students (a response rate of 36%). The ethnic breakdown of the responses was 46.8% Hispanic, 26.6% Black, 10% Native American and 19.4% Asian-American (see Figure 3). Also, 55.6% mailed the survey back, 14.6% handed the survey back, and 29.9% of the respondents were interviewed by the telephone (see Figure 4). Because the sample size is so small, caution must be used in making any generalizations from the findings to other minority student populations.

The questionnaire was four pages long and required five to ten minutes to complete. The first thirty-nine questions were multiple choice (to be filled out on a scantron). The last five questions were short answers (to be filled out directly on the survey form). The questionnaire gathered information about the student's family background, past academic performance, present academic performance, living arrangements, friends, peer support, study habits, experiences of racism, mentors, involvement in extracurricular activities, demographic information, and perceptions of their academic

department and college.

The questionnaire was drafted by the researcher, and then approved by the project's advisors. It was then tested on a pilot group of students. After incorporating the students' suggestions, a copy of the questionnaire was sent to the Texas A&M Department of Research and Measurement Services. The instrument was then modified to decrease wording bias and to increase the clarity of the questions (see Appendix, A.01).

Prior to the analysis of the data, the responses of the students in the short answer portion of the questionnaire were categorized and coded on the scantron by the researcher (e.g., the student's year of birth, major, number of student organizations participated in, exposure to racism on campus, and response to racism). Also, the student's mode of returning the survey was coded on the scantron.

The analysis of the data was completed by Texas A&M Department of Research and Measurement Services in several phases. First, the frequency distribution of the students' responses were noted. Then, bivariate relationships were studied. This was done to find out how closely pairs of variables were related to each other. Finally, statistical tests were used to determine the significance of the bivariate relationships.

The qualitative data was collected in two ways. First,

four- or five-member group interviews were conducted by the researcher. Noel et al. (1985) say that qualitative data is just as important as quantitative data, and it should be used equally with quantitative data. The groups were composed of a mixture of ethnic minorities. Each interview took approximately one hour. The interviews were audio taped on cassette. The students who were interviewed signed release forms which stated that all information given during the interview could be used in the paper, unless otherwise stated, and the identities of the students would remain confidential (see Appendix, A.02).

The second source of qualitative data was from correspondence with the deans and department heads from each college. The researcher requested information about the type of programs offered in the particular colleges or departments which were designed to aid in minority student retention. They were sent a cover letter in campus mail which explained the project, and a form to complete, which eased the amount of work required of the recipient (see Appendix, A.03). Again, because of the low response rates, the researcher had to do follow-up phone calls (two weeks, four weeks, and six weeks) after the letters were sent. Finally, after much work, the secretaries of the deans and department heads came to the rescue and sent the researcher the requested information.

## **Description of the Sample**

This study was conducted at a large public, predominantly white university of approximately 41,000 students. The population of interest was defined as Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian-American junior and senior students. Four percent of the respondents in the sample came from cities with a population of less than 5,000, 27% from a population of 5,001-50,000, 61% from a population of 50,001-1,000,000, and 8% from a population of 1,000,000+ (see Figure 5). The average income of the students' households was approximately \$30,000. While the average number of years of college the mothers of the students attended was 2.0, the average number of years of college the fathers attended was 2.3. The percentage of students from the various colleges of Texas A&M is shown in Table 2.

## **Results**

In this section, the researcher has divided up the findings from the questionnaire data into the six areas that were hypothesized to affect retention. In the following section, the results are referred to as "associations" because

Table 2 **Student Response by College**

<b>College</b>	<b>Percent of Respondents</b>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Architecture</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Business</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Engineering</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Geoscience</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Liberal Arts</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Medicine</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Science</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Veterinary Medicine</b>	<b>3</b>



of the cross-sectional nature of the data, which precluded inferences of cause and effect.

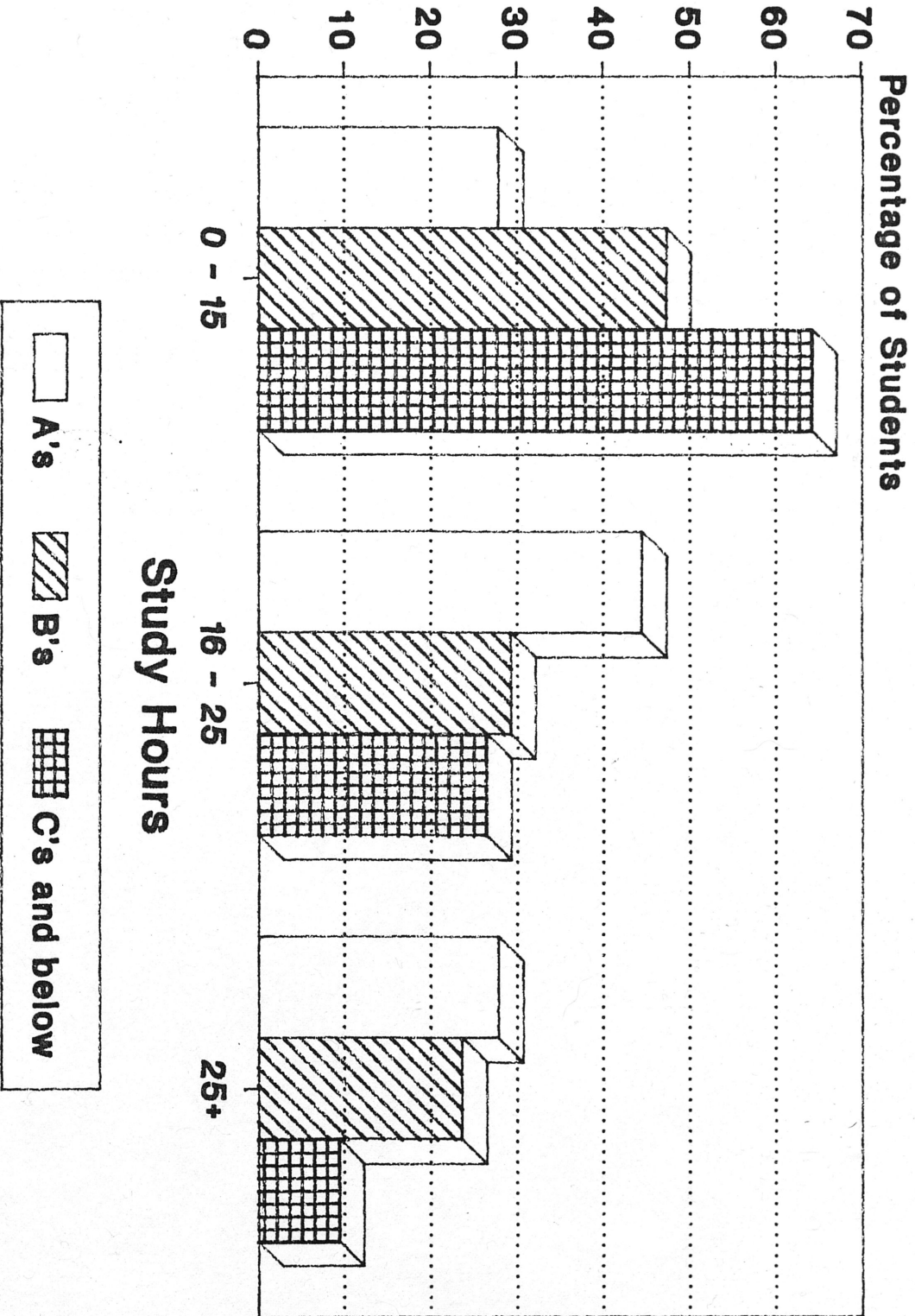
### *Study Habits*

As expected, there was a strong association between the amount of time the student studied and the grades the student received ( $X^2=39.23$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). Of the students who claimed to have made A's, 44.4% studied 16-25 hours per week; oddly enough, 27.8% of the students studied 0-15 hours per week and 27.8% studied 25+ hours per week. Of the students who made B's, 47.2% studied between 0-15 hours per week, 29.2% studied between 16-25 hours per week, and 23.6% studied 25+ hours per week. Of the students who made C's or below, 64.2% studied between 0-15 hours per week, 26.4% studied between 16-25 hours per week, and 9.4% studied 25+ hours per week (see Figure 6). It appears that B and C students were less willing to spend enough time studying.

The largest overall factor that prevented studying was procrastination. Specifically, 50.7% of the students surveyed claimed that the main reason for their not studying was procrastination. Receiving 25.7% of the vote, lack of time was the second largest factor. Only 9.0% of the people surveyed claimed that they had no interest in the material. The other



Figure 6 Association of Study Hours and Grades



respondents stated that some factor other than those prevented them from studying (see Figure 7).

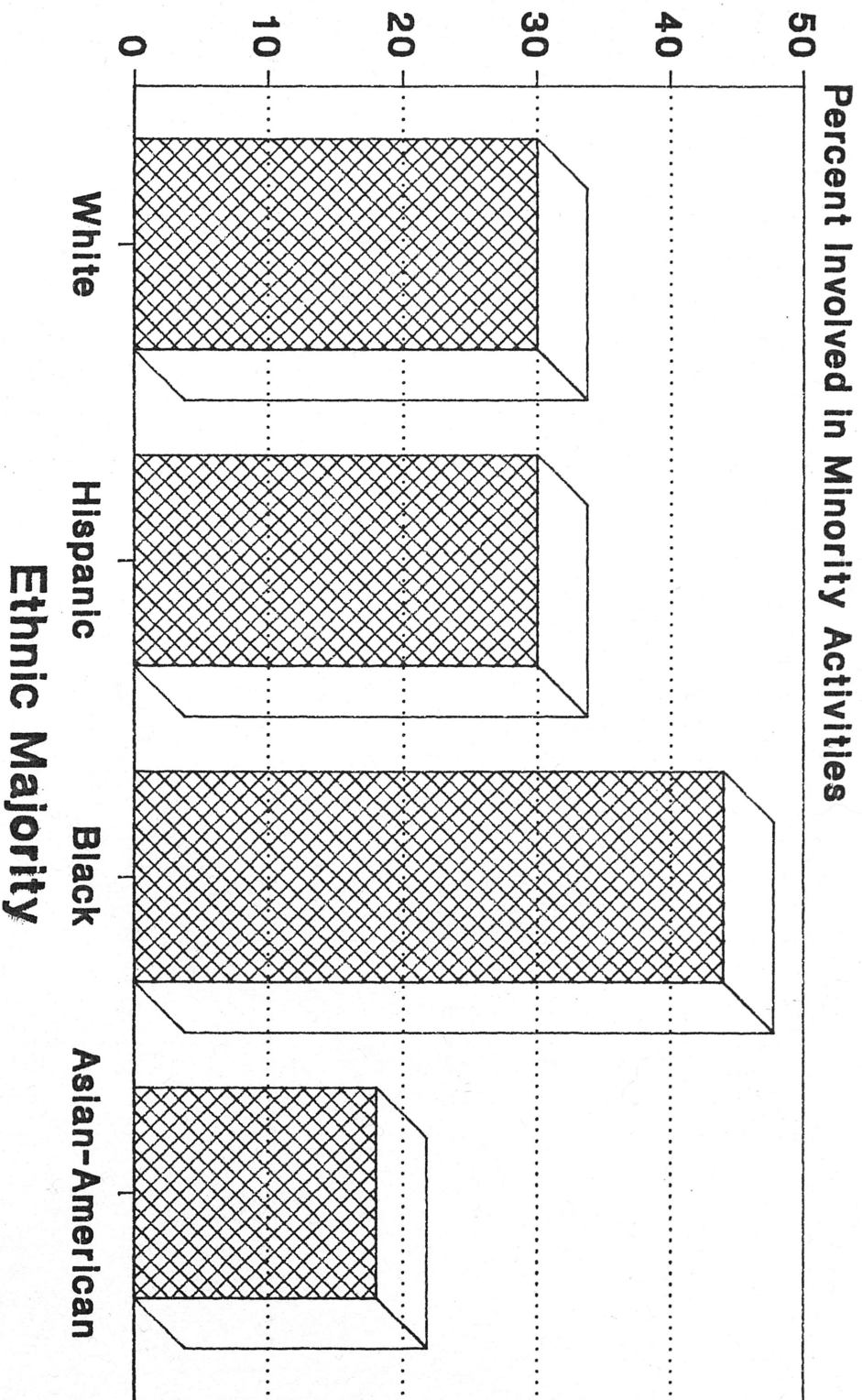
Eighty-six percent of the students surveyed had long range goals and ninety percent had made some career plans. However, there was not any significant association between the grades of the students, long range goals, and career plans. Likewise, no significant correlation between grades and ethnicity appeared in the data. Also, there was no significant correlation between ethnicity and usage of a tutor nor amount of group study. Interestingly, of each ethnic group surveyed, a larger percentage of the Black students made use of a tutor than any other ethnic group.

It was expected that the more time spent in group study, the higher the grades of the student would be. The expected relationship between the grades and the frequency of group study was not found. There was, however, a general trend for people who "occasionally" or "frequently" used quiz files to have higher grades than people who "always" or "never" used a quiz file. This seems to suggest that students should not depend too heavily on quiz files, but they should not ignore them altogether either.

### *Living Arrangements*

There were no significant trends found in the material

**Figure 7 Ethnic Majority of High School and Minority Involvement**



about the living arrangements of the students.

Sixty-nine percent of the students surveyed live off campus and thirty-one percent live on campus. Interestingly, 30% of the students have never lived on campus and 29% have never lived off campus.

#### *Friends or Peer Support*

There was a highly significant correlation between high grades and having goal-oriented friends. Of the students with goal-oriented friends, 65.2% got A's and B's ( $X^2 = 31.99$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ). Similarly, of the student with self-directed friends, 61.2% got A's and B's ( $X^2 = 28.86$ ,  $p < 0.005$ ).

Of the students surveyed, 96.5% said their friends were goal oriented; 68.5% said their friends were involved in extracurricular activities; and 92.3% were self-directed. Very few claimed their friends were "party animals" or uninterested in academics.

If the student's friends were goal oriented, the student tended to have career plans. To a lesser extent, if the student's friends were self-directed, the students tended to have made long range goals.

*Mentor or Faculty Advisor*

There was a significant correlation between the grades of the students and whether or not they had a mentor. Of the students who got A's and B's, 33.3% said they had a close relationship with a professor or some mentor here at A&M ( $X^2 = 7.23$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Also, a highly significant correlation showed there was a connection between the presence of a mentor and how often the student felt there was a genuine concern for his/her education here at A&M ( $X^2 = 11.0$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There was no association between the ethnicity of the student and the use of a mentor. There was no association, as well, between a genuine concern felt by the students and the grades the students earned.

*Involvement in extracurricular activities*

There was a highly significant association between the amount of community involvement and the level of involvement in minority activities. There was also a highly significant correlation between the students who said their friends were very involved in extracurricular activities and those who said they participated in minority activities never or occasionally.

Overall, there was no significant association between the number of student organizations and the grades of the



student. Also, there was no significant association between the level of involvement in student organizations and the grades of the student. However, of the people who made A's, 22% were always involved and 11% were frequently involved.

There was no association between the income of the student's household and the amount of involvement in extracurricular activities. Coincidentally, there was no significant association between the exposure to racism and the level of student involvement. Ethnicity was not associated with level of involvement either. Forty-four percent of the Asian-Americans, 43% of the Hispanics, 30% Native Americans, and 24% of the Blacks claimed to be always or frequently involved in extracurricular activities.

There was a highly significant association between those students who attended some type of minority orientation and those involved in minority activities. Conversely, there was no significant association between the ethnic majority of the student's high school and the amount of minority activities involved in. Of the students who were always involved in minority activities, 70% came from predominantly white high schools. However, of the students who went to predominantly white high schools, only 30% were frequently or always involved in minority activities. Of the students who went to a predominantly Black school, 44% were frequently or always



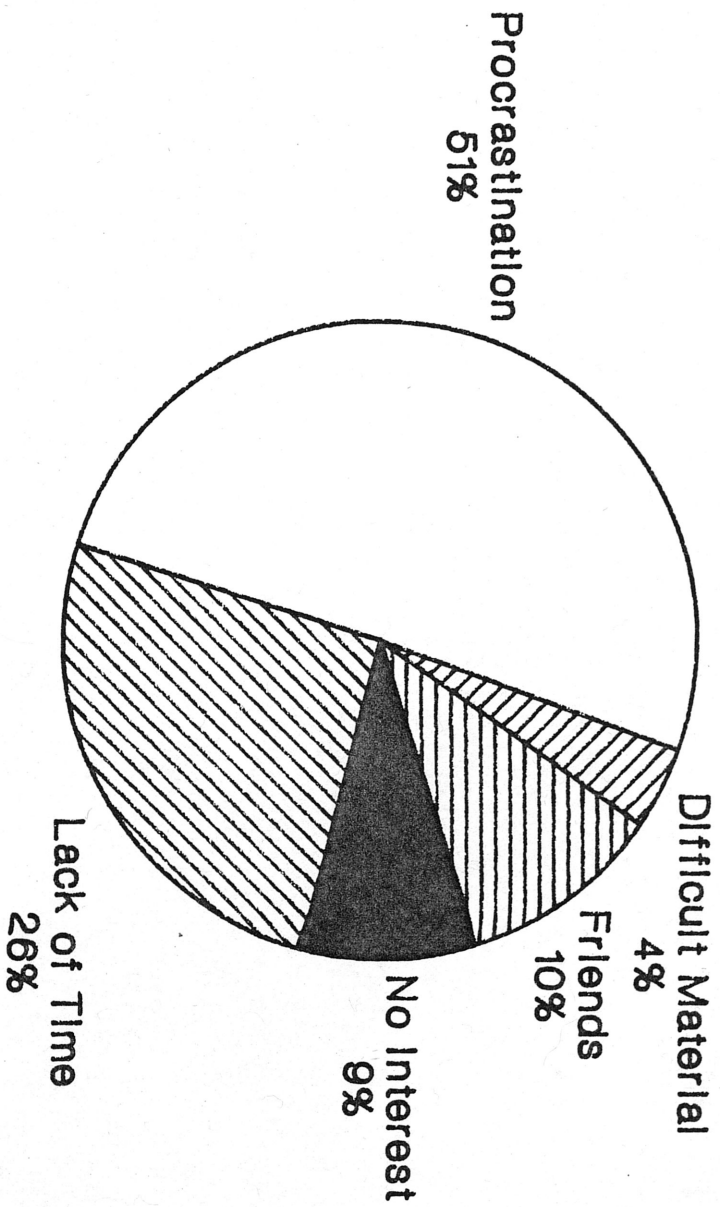
involved in minority activities. Of the students who went to a predominantly Hispanic school, 30% were frequently or always involved in minority activities. Finally, only 18% of the students from predominantly Asian-American schools participate frequently or always in minority activities (see Figure 8). This is an illustration of the nonminority self-perception of Asian-Americans.

#### *Background characteristics*

The highest correlation was between the grades the student made in high school and college grades. If the student received good grades (A's and B's) in high school, they continued to receive high grades in college. Those who got good grades in high school but not in college would probably have students left the university as freshmen or sophomores.

There was no association between the amount of encouragement to attend college which the student received and the college grades of the student. Similarly, there was no significant association between the amount of discouragement from going to college which the student received and the college grades of the student. Along the same line, there was no significant association between the amount of encouragement to stay in college and the college grades of the student. On the contrary, there was a highly significant

Figure 8 **Factors That Prevent Studying**



association between the years of college the parent attended and the amount of encouragement to go to college the student received. Of the parents, the father's years in college has the higher association with amount of encouragement the student received. Specifically, the more college the father attended the more encouragement the student got to attend college. Finally, there was no association between the size of the city the student was from and their grades in college.

In summary, the strongest factor involved in the retention of minority students appears to be the presence of a mentor. The friends of the student were also important. The students with the higher grades claimed to have goal-oriented or self-directed friends. Also, higher grades were obtained by students who studied 16-25 hours per week. Finally, students who made A's and B's in high school continued the trend in college. The findings, although only associative, suggest the importance of mentors and peer groups in minority student success in college.

There were several other interesting factors discovered. Procrastination was the factor that prevented students from studying the most. There was a strong association between the students who attended some type of minority freshman orientation and those who participated the most in minority activities. In a university milieu such as Texas A&M, it

appears that strengthening student involvement and providing positive reinforcement influence retention more than negative experiences of racism influence attrition but, those students who have left due to racism were not part of this study.

### **Discussion**

It was believed that the more time a student spent studying, the better the student's grades would be. However, the questionnaire showed that the majority of the "A" students did a medium amount of study, 16-25 hours per week. This would indicate that quality time was spent studying and spare time was spent doing other things. It would appear that students who studied less did not devote enough time to their studies, and the students who studied more did not use their time as effectively as possible. On the other hand, the majority of the students who got grades lower than A's did not spend as much time studying as the "A" students did. This researcher theorizes that perhaps a little more study time would enable other students to be "A" students as well. Even though the majority of the students claimed to procrastinate, it is possible that the "non-A" students procrastinated a little bit more and that is why they did not study quite as much.

As far as the type of studying done, this researcher could not find any trends in the grades and the type of studying done. However, the use of quiz files did raise an interesting

observation. That is, the students who used quiz files but did not rely on them totally received higher grades. This would suggest that students should make use of quiz files, when possible, to supplement their studying but not as their only form of studying.

According to the literature, students with long range plans and/or career plans tend to be retained. This is confirmed in this study because the vast majority of the students in the study have career and long range goals and they were all retained students.

In the area of living arrangements, it was stated in the literature that living on campus helped students to make better grades. This study did not find any evidence of this. In fact, the students who lived off campus had slightly higher grades. This is not to say that living off campus will increase student grades, however. Because 30% of the respondents had never lived on campus and 29% had never lived off, it would seem wise to devote more study to minority student retention and living arrangements before drawing conclusions.

As far as friends or peer support is concerned, the researcher feels that they are very important to the retention of the students. It was stated in the background section that a higher retention rate occurred among the students who have a peer support network. Both qualitative and quantitative data



show this. A large portion of the respondents claimed to have goal oriented and/or self-directed friends. When interviewed, the student claimed that the single most important reason they are still in school when others are not is because they were self-directed or goal-oriented. It would appear that the proverb "birds of a feather flock together" is true in this circumstance. These goal-oriented, self-directed students sought a peer support group with similar ideals. This was one major factor that contributed to their retention in college.

The presence of a mentor or faculty advisor was the most significant factor, found by this study, that contributed to retention. This is in strong agreement with the information found in the literature. The mentor can be the deciding factor in whether or not the student feels a part of the university. The data show that students who had a mentor more often felt that there was some genuine concern for their education here than those who did not. However, those who had a mentor did not necessarily have higher grades. This leads the researcher to believe that although the mentor is a critical factor in retention he/she must be used in conjunction with good study habits if the students are to be retained.

According to this study, the level of involvement was only marginally involved in the retention of the students. It is the belief of the researcher that involvement in minority

activities was a significant source of peer support for some students and therefore important, but overall involvement in extracurricular activities is not, in the eyes of the researcher, necessary for retention. It should, however, be noted that for a few students involvement in extracurricular activities was the reason for their retention. Also, involvement in some type of minority orientation program seems to facilitate involvement in other minority activities for many students. It should also be noted that most of the Native Americans surveyed and interviewed did not participate in minority activities as much as other minority students because they felt minority activities were always directed towards Blacks and Hispanics. Furthermore, during the telephone interviewing process, it was quite often disclosed that Asian-Americans did not view themselves as minorities. It is the belief of the researcher that this occurs because in many other nonuniversity circumstances Asian-Americans are not treated as minorities. Another possibility is that many of the multicultural programs are so directed toward Black and Hispanic students that other students feel left out. Finally, with regard to the background of the students, the researcher believes that past achievement is a significant predictor of future achievement. This is not to say that because a student got high grades in high school, he/she will

get the same high grades in college. What the researcher means is that those student who make specific goals early, are self-motivated and self-assured when they begin college, and dedicate themselves to their chosen task are more likely to be retained. This is because, as stated in the interviews, quitting was never an option for these students. These are the type of students who are going to be successful wherever they go or whatever they do. These types of students were retained because of their own individual efforts and not because of the efforts made by the university. Many of these students never received "encouragement to attend college" per se; it was something that was just expected and not necessarily discussed.

In the qualitative data collected, the vast majority of the students felt that the minority advising of their college was either "never" or only "occasionally sufficient". On the contrary, the majority of the students said that the academic advising of their college was sufficient. In the opinion of the students surveyed, the colleges are doing a fine job with academic advising, but they need to improve on the minority advising.

Also, an alarming area this study identified was that the majority of the students surveyed never or only occasionally made use of programs offered through their college or

university which were designed to benefit the minority student population. In many colleges, there exist a wide variety of of programs, but more should be done to encourage student participation. However, it should be noted that this number may be inflated because some of the colleges do not currently have programs that benefit minority students. Finally, the colleges that had the most minority programs, Engineering and Science, also had the highest retention rates. The researcher would also like to note the difficulty in obtaining information about minority programs from the deans perhaps; there is a lack of full commitment here.

In the following discussion, the researcher will summarize several good programs that are now in existence. In the the College of Engineering, there are several programs which contribute to retention. First, there is clustering; specifically, groups of minority students are encouraged to enroll in the same sections of common courses. This helps provide the minority student with a study group and reduces the feelings of ethnic isolation. Next, early in their college career the students are required to attend an orientation class which teaches the student time management skills, study tips, note taking etc. This class also helps make the student aware of programs and people on campus that are there to aid him/her. This type of program encourages the

development of a peer support group network. Also, the students are supplied with a study center. This is a place where they can work together as a group or study individually. The study center, which is located in Weisenbaker, has a quiz file that is accessible to the students. Finally, in addition to the aforementioned programs, the college provides academic advising and an enrichment summer program.

Many of the colleges offer summer programs which are beneficial to minority students. The College of Liberal Arts, offers a "four-day program designed to introduce the students to academics and student life at Texas A&M." In addition to being exposed to curricula and careers, the students are introduced to social activities. This allows the students to get to know each other and eases the transition to college.

The College of Science has a one week summer program in which the students become oriented to the university. They are introduced to university officials, study habits, and support services. This is the beginning of a long association between the students and the faculty. The students are also clustered in the same way as the College of Engineering. The students reconvene several times during the semester to register their progress. The aim of this program is to provide a peer network for the students and to develop possible mentor relationships within the college.



The Department of Biochemistry and Biophysics has a Minority High School Student Research Apprentice Program. This pairs students with research mentors in life sciences. The students spend six weeks living and working in research labs during the summer at Texas A&M. They also attend classes where they interact with other students in the program while discussing their research. They are allowed to meet the faculty and get exposed to university life. This time permits the students to form relationships with mentors early in their academic careers. These relationships can continue until graduation. It also creates a peer support group for the minority students.

Some college programs are specifically established to provide mentors for the students. For example, the College of Education has the Faculty Minority Mentor Program. In this program, faculty members are assigned one or two students. They serve as an extended family for the student during their school term. This program is designed to aid in minority student retention. The College of Architecture has the Peer Advisors program. In this program, upperclass minority students are paired with freshman and transfer minority students. They serve as a peer support team as well as a valuable resource to the student. This college also has a program named Connections. This program is designed to

introduce students to the world of Architecture. Finally, the Department of Recreation Park and Tourism Sciences has the OMEGA seminar. This is a type of "counseling assistance for 'at-risk' students." It also offers career exploration, time and stress management, study skills, and goal setting opportunities.

In addition to all of the programs offered by the academic colleges, there are several nonacademic programs designed to promote minority student retention. A very large promoter of retention is the Department of Multicultural Services. They provide programs such as ExCEL, a minority freshman orientation program. The staff serves as mentors and counselors to many students. Some student committees promote retention. For example, the Black Awareness Committee and the Committee for the Awareness of Mexican American Culture provide peer support, peer identification, as well as general camaraderie for many minority students. Finally, the Department of Student Services has the Staff Together Achieving Racial Sensitivity (STARS) program which promotes minority student retention and development. There are several other programs and functions of the aforementioned, this serves as a brief synopsis.

### **Recommendations**

This study asked many questions in the beginning and now it will attempt to answer them. In an attempt to answer the question why were these students were retained, the researcher discovered, there was no one "main reason" as to why these students were successfully retained. The reasons were as varied as the students themselves. However, the researcher believes that there are some aspects of the university experience that aided in the retention of minority students. First, minority students should be encouraged to attend some type of minority orientation program prior to beginning college. This program should allow the students to interact with many caring members of the faculty who can serve as mentors to the students. This mentor should take an active interest in the well-being of the student and be available for consultation by the student. Also, this program should encourage upperclass minority students to associate with the less experienced students. This will help to set up a some revolving type of peer network for the students. This is also something that the student could do for the students who follow him or her in school. This will aid the students who otherwise would be inclined to drop out because of feelings of isolation or loneliness.

The researcher also believes the students should be instructed in useful study skills. This instruction should

include the merits of tutor usage, group study, individual study, time management, and quiz files. This might aid the student who would otherwise drop out because of academic frustrations.

The university should have counselors and advisors to help the student develop long range goals and career plans. These advisors might also help motivate the student about school and encourage him/her to take an active part in getting a "complete education" (involvement in extracurricular activities and exploration of collateral curricula) while in college.

Finally, this researcher would suggest more research be done focusing on the students who were retained. There should be more work done in the area of living arrangements, friends/peer support, and use of a mentor.

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## Appendix

A Positive

A.01

November 1, 1990

Dear Student:

I am a minority Honors Thesis student working in the area of minority student retention. I am working with Kevin Carreathers and Bonne Bejarano-Sandars of the Department of Multicultural Services and Dr. James Copp of the Department of Sociology. Enclosed are copies of a survey which is to help determine the role of certain factors in minority student retention. It has been theorized that six major things affect minority student retention. These factors also contribute to the success of ethnic minorities. We are attempting to measure these factors with varying degrees of academic success.

This survey requests information on six areas that contribute to academic success and persistence. These six areas are: 1) friends, 2) living arrangements, 3) ability to form relationships with mentors, 4) involvement, 5) study habits, and 6) background.

The survey should take no longer than 7-10 minutes of your time. Please return the scantron as well as the survey. Only put your name and student ID number on the scantron. Please use a #2 pencil on the scantron. Questions 1 and 40-44 should be completed directly on the survey sheet.

The responses and information contained within this survey will be confidential. No information will be released on an individual basis. If you would like to know the results of the study, they will be at Sterling C Evans Library in the thesis section upon completion of the study.

The enclosed self-addressed stamped enveloped is provided to return the surveys after they are completed. Please return your survey as quickly as possible, so that we may begin analysis of the data. Surveys should be postmarked by **November 19, 1990**. Since none of the information is readily available, we would appreciate your participation in helping us collect this data. Questions or comments regarding the survey should be directed to Bonne Bejarano-Sandars at (409) 845-4551.

Sincerely,

Vincent C. Smith

Bonne Bejarano Sandars

A Positive

A.02

I \_\_\_\_\_ grant permission for Vincent C. Smith to  
(print name)  
use the comments made \_\_\_\_\_ in his retention study. I  
(today's date)  
understand that I will not be identified by name in any literature.

\_\_\_\_\_  
signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
dated



February 22, 1991

Dear Dean or Department Head:

I am a minority Honors Thesis student working in the area of minority student retention. I am working with Kevin Carreathers and Bonne Bejarano-Sandars of the Department of Multicultural Services and Dr. James Copp of the Department of Sociology. It has been theorized that six major things affect minority student retention. These factors also contribute to the success of ethnic minorities. We are attempting to measure these factors and their correlation with academic success.

I am writing to request some information about your college or department. Specifically, I would like to know what steps your college or department has taken to increase minority student retention. For example, I am looking for information on programs such as summer enrichment, clustering, tutoring, etc. Please limit the programs to those that have occurred in the last six years.

I have enclosed a form to make it easier to return the information requested. Please feel free to photocopy the form. It is not necessary to type the information requested. If you would like to know the results of the study, they will be at Sterling C. Evans Library in the thesis section upon completion of the study.

Please return the information as quickly as possible, so that we may begin analysis of the data. Responses should be campus mailed to the Department of Multicultural Services (mail stop 1121) by **March 4, 1991**. Since none of the information is readily available, we would appreciate your participation in helping us collect this data. Questions or comments should be directed to Bonne Bejarano-Sandars at (409) 845-4551.

Sincerely,

Vincent C. Smith  
University Honors  
Fellows Program

Bonne Bejarano-Sandars  
Student Development Specialist  
Dept. of Multicultural Services

MULTICULTURAL PROGRAMMING

DEPARTMENT:

YEAR OF PROGRAM: 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM:

SPONSOR OF PROGRAM:

GOALS OF PROGRAM:

ESTIMATED ATTENDANCE: \_\_\_\_\_

ETHNICITY OF THOSE IN ATTENDANCE: (Circle as many as applicable)

Black Hispanic Asian-American Anglo Native American Other \_\_\_\_\_

WAS ATTENDANCE MANDATORY? yes no

REASON FOR SPONSORING PROGRAM:

PERSON IN CHARGE OF PROGRAM:

LOCATION OF PROGRAM:

COMMENTS:

THANKS FOR YOUR HELP! PLEASE RETURN TO DEPARTMENT OF  
MULTICULTURAL SERVICES (MAIL STOP 1121) BY MARCH 4, 1991.

1. Name
2. What size city are you from:  
a) 0-5000    b) 5001-50,000    c) 50,001-100,000  
d) 100,001-1,000,000    e) 1,000,000+
3. How many were in your graduating class:  
a) less than 100    b) 100-300    c) 301-500  
d) 501-700    e) 701 +
4. What was the ethnic majority of your high school:  
a) Anglo    b) Afro-American    c) Hispanic  
d) Asian American    e) other (please specify on last page)
5. What is the approximate income of your parent's household:  
a) below 10,000    b) 10,000-30,000    c) 30,001-50,000  
d) 50,001-70,000    e) 70,001+
6. Approximately how many years of college did your father complete:  
a) 0    b) 1    c) 2    d) 3    e) 4+
7. Approximately how many years of college did your mother complete:  
a) 0    b) 1    c) 2    d) 3    e) 4+
8. On the average, what kind of grades did you get in high school:  
a) A's    b) B's    c) C's    d) D's    e) F's
9. On the average, what kind of grades do you make now:  
a) A's    b) B's    c) C's    d) D's    e) F's
10. On the average, how many hours per week do you spend studying:  
a) below 6    b) 7-15    c) 16-25    d) 25-30    e) 30+
11. How often do you make use of a tutor:  
a) never    b) occasionally    c) frequently    d) most of the time
12. How often do you study in groups:  
a) never    b) occasionally    c) frequently    d) most of the time

13. How often do you participate in minority related programs:  
a) never b) occasionally c) frequently d) most of the time
14. How often do you participate in non-minority related programs:  
a) never b) occasionally c) frequently d) most of the time
15. How often were you encouraged to go to college :  
a) never b) very little c) sometimes d) frequently e) always
16. How often were you discouraged from going to college :  
a) never b) very little c) sometimes d) frequently e) always
17. How often were you encouraged to stay in college:  
a) never b) very little c) sometimes d) frequently e) always
18. Do you receive any type of financial aid:  
a) yes (continue with 19-21) b) no ( go to question 22)
  19. Did you get a scholarship or grant:  
a) yes b) no
  20. Did you get a loan:  
a) yes b) no
  21. Did you get any financial aid other than the  
aforementioned:  
a) yes b) no
22. Do you live :  
a) on campus b) off campus
23. While in college, have you ever lived on campus:  
a) yes b) no
24. While in college, have you ever lived off campus:  
a) yes b) no
25. Do you have a close relationship with a professor or some mentor  
here at A&M:  
a) yes b) no



26. Do you have long range plans after college:  
a) yes b) no
26. Have you made some career plans:  
a) yes b) no
28. How often do you make use of programs offered which benefit minority students (through your college or the university):  
a) never b) occasionally c) frequently d) most of the time
29. How often do you feel that there is a genuine concern for your education here at A&M:  
a) never b) occasionally c) frequently d) most of the time
30. How often do you make use of quiz files or old exams :  
a) never b) occasionally c) frequently d) most of the time
31. Would you characterize the academic advising of your college as:  
a) none b) very poor c) sufficient d) good e) excellent
32. How often do you feel that the minority advising from your college is sufficient:  
a) never b) occasionally c) frequently d) most of the time
33. As a new student, did you participate in any type of minority orientation program (ex. Minority Freshman Orientation ,MFO, or Excel)  
a) yes b) no
34. Of the following, which one do you feel prevents you from studying the most:  
a) friends b) lack of time (ex. work) c) material of study is too difficult d) procrastination e) no interest in the material



If you had to characterize the group of people you associated with the most, would you say they were (this is for 35-39):

- 35. "party animals" a) yes b) no
- 36. goal oriented a) yes b) no
- 37. uninterested in academics a) yes b) no
- 38. very active in extracurricular activities a) yes b) no
- 39. self-directed a) yes b) no

40. What is your date of birth:

41. What is your major:

42. What types of student organizations are you a part of:

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43. What type of community activities are you involved in:

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44. Have you experienced racism on campus: \_\_\_\_\_

44a. If yes, what was it and how did you deal with it: \_\_\_\_\_

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