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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Meeting Undergraduate Students' Expectations of the University Experience: How
Enrollment Managers Can Secure Students' Loyalties

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Benjamin J Shaver

Committee in Charge:

University of California, San Diego

Professor Carolyn Huie Hofstetter, Chair

California State University of California, San Marcos

Professor Delores Lindsey
Professor Patricia Stall

2012

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The Dissertation of Benjamin J Shaver is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego
California State University, San Marcos

2012

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving wife, Jill, who supported me in countless ways throughout my dissertation journey. Not only did you make the typical sacrifices that spouses do to make our dream of achieving a doctorate a reality, but you also spent dozens of hours developing my thinking about the issue of student retention, and for that I am particularly grateful. Truly, you went above and beyond. You even befriended my colleagues and audited one of my courses!

From the early stages of brainstorming about the study's design to the final stages of tirelessly editing my dissertation drafts, you were involved in the process. Throughout, you were there for me when I was frustrated and didn't know how to proceed. You always patiently got me back on track and cheered me on.

Although I have spent my higher education career considering solutions to educational issues, you helped me approach these problems from the standpoint of a researcher. You honed my analytical skills and taught me to listen to the data. You also helped me push the boundaries of what I thought I was capable of achieving as a university leader.

Lastly, you showed me how to keep our daily lives in balance to sustain us through to the end. I don't think I could have done that without you. I am especially thankful for your willingness to maintain relationships with friends and family when I couldn't always make the time.

I love that we share the same passion for education, and I look forward to a lifetime of partnering with you to better the lives of students. You have my eternal

gratitude for all of your much-needed support, Jill. Now I am ready to support you in your next great endeavor! - With all my love, Ben

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Meeting Undergraduate Students' Expectations of the University Experience: How
Enrollment Managers Can Secure Students' Loyalties

by

Benjamin J Shaver

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2012

California State University, San Marcos, 2012

Professor Carolyn Huie Hofstetter, Chair

Historically, university leaders have met campus enrollment goals by focusing on recruiting prospective students. In the last few decades, however, as global competition for fewer students in a poor economy has forced them to spend more on recruitment and marketing, they have realized that retaining current students is actually a more cost-effective enrollment strategy than merely recruiting them. This realization has come about, in part, because for-profit companies in the service industry are finding it more profitable to concentrate on retaining customers' loyalties

than expanding their customer bases. The business practice of developing long-term relationships with customers by meeting their expectations is known as *relationship marketing*. Although this is an established theory and practice in the business community, university administrators have yet to fully realize its potential as an enrollment management strategy. Considering that for a century, about half of university students have failed to graduate, enrollment managers should welcome a new approach that might remedy this long-standing retention issue.

This study utilized relationship-marketing theory as a framework to understand the issue of university student retention. Relationship-marketing and enrollment management literature were reviewed to examine the relevance of customer service strategy to student retention efforts.

The qualitative study used a multiple cross-sectional design to examine student loyalty at three points in time during the undergraduate student life cycle. Freshmen, seniors, and alumni from a public research university in California were interviewed about their expectations of university life, satisfaction with university experiences, and demonstrations of loyalty behavior. To supplement the interview data, blogs written by freshmen, seniors, and alumni attending eight campuses in the same university system were analyzed for evidence of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with their experiences as well as evidence of loyalty behavior.

The research findings provide insight into what factors affect undergraduate students' loyalties throughout the student life cycle. When it came to the university experience, these findings showed that students' loyalty behaviors was more strongly linked to the fulfillment of their expectations than to the achievement of their

satisfaction. The findings also illuminate how university leaders can meet the expectations of students in order to retain them.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Gone are the days when enrollment managers could sit back and expect enough prospective students to apply to their universities that they could easily meet enrollment goals. Due to reduced government subsidies, global competition amongst universities over a shortage of college-bound students (Fayerman, 2002; Helgesen, 2008) has forced campus leaders to aggressively market their universities in order to attract new students (Sines & Duckworth, 1994; Trustrum & Wee, 2007). This is an increasingly expensive undertaking, calling for more innovative and cost-saving strategies. New academic journals, such as the *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, are publishing research findings on marketing strategies relevant to higher education. Now that higher education has entered the marketplace, university administrators are experimenting with improved enrollment management techniques based upon these marketing strategies (Hossler, 2009).

Traditionally, businesses have concentrated their marketing efforts on attracting new customers to maximize profits. Over the last few decades, however, service-oriented businesses have shifted away from this traditional marketing strategy toward a *relationship-marketing* approach that focuses on developing long-term relationships with existing customers (Barnes, 1994). This approach assumes that retaining satisfied customers will ultimately prove more cost-effective than continually spending marketing dollars on securing new customers (Barnes; Berry, 1995; Sines & Duckworth, 1994).

Some higher education scholars have suggested a relationship-marketing

approach to enrollment management might similarly cut student recruitment costs and increase student retention (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007; Helgesen, 2008; Rowley, 2003; Trustrum & Wee, 2007). Despite decades of effort to improve retention rates, only about 50% of university students persist until graduation (American College Testing, 2003), which is a regrettable statistic. Vincent Tinto, a national authority on university student retention, explains,

Rates of dropout from higher education have remained strikingly constant over the past 100 years. With the exception of the period during and immediately following World War II when the GI Bill was in effect, rates of dropout have remained at about 45 percent. (Tinto, 1982, p.694)

The retention rates for first generation college students, who have an especially difficult time establishing relationships on campus, are even more dismal. If enrollment managers could retain more current students, their need for recruiting new students in the future to meet enrollment goals would diminish.

Developing long-term relationships with students might lead to their retention. When one considers undergraduate students spend anywhere between two to five years of their most formative years studying, working, and living within a university community, it is easy to appreciate how powerfully bonding the student-university relationship can be. Consider that alumni often refer to their university as their *alma mater*, which literally translates to *nurturing mother*.

The development of a strong university-student bond may not only profit the university in the form of increased student retention, but may also result in benefits after students graduate. Loyal alumni are likely to promote the university to prospective students, give donations to the university, and perhaps return to their alma

mater for graduate school. Whereas the concept of *student loyalty* is largely absent from enrollment management literature, the construct of *customer loyalty* is a familiar one in business marketing literature. Investigating this literature may help inform our understanding of loyalty within the context of higher education.

Despite some interest in relationship marketing amongst higher education scholars, a comprehensive review of the literature reveals that few have empirically researched whether such an approach to enrollment management actually works. What research does exist has largely been conducted by market researchers in the for-profit community (Rowley, 2003). Therefore, before concluding enrollment managers should adopt these practices, further examination of the relevance of their findings to a higher education setting is required.

Can a relationship-marketing approach to enrollment management strengthen a university's retention efforts? This study examined whether university administrators can manage enrollment more effectively by keeping students loyal to the university.

The researcher's interest in this topic stems from years of experience as an assistant director of admission at a small private college. Every year, the college consistently boasted six-year retention rates exceeding 90%. Administrators at the college attributed this success to the strong personal relationships forged with students during the admission process and sustained throughout their years spent on campus. Now that the researcher works at a large university, he wishes to explore similar ways that universities might cultivate long-term relationships with students to increase their retention and future involvement as alumni.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between *students' expectations of their university experiences* and their university loyalty at various points in the *undergraduate student life cycle*. Studies have shown that students are more prone to suffer disappointment or withdrawal when their university experiences don't match their expectations (Darlaston-Jones et al., 2003). This study identified some of these unmet expectations undergraduate students have. Findings should enable university leaders to learn which student expectations of university life will, if not met, lead to student dissatisfaction. By understanding students' expectations, university leaders can then find ways of meeting them, which may result not only in students' retention but also their willingness to possibly donate money, promote the university, and remain engaged with the university as alumni.

Research Questions

Relationship-marketing theory places customer retention under the larger umbrella term of customer loyalty because repeatedly purchasing the services of a service provider is only one way for a customer to demonstrate loyalty. For example, a customer might also show their loyalty to the provider by recommending the service to others. Understanding the issue of university student retention from a relationship-marketing perspective similarly involves placing student retention within the larger framework of student loyalty. A student can demonstrate loyalty by continuing to enroll in classes at that university. She can also show her loyalty by recommending her university to others.

This study of university student loyalty answered the following questions:

- 1) How does undergraduate students' satisfaction with their university experiences relate to their retention behavior?
- 2) How does undergraduate students' satisfaction with their university experiences relate to their loyalty behavior?
- 3) What are undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences?
- 4) How does the fulfillment of undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences relate to their retention behavior?
- 5) How does the fulfillment of undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences relate to their loyalty behavior?

Methods Overview

To answer these questions, a qualitative study of student loyalty at three points in time during the undergraduate student life cycle was conducted. This multiple cross-sectional design simultaneously examined three student cohorts (a cohort of first-year students, a cohort of seniors and a cohort of alumni) who currently attend or attended the same large public research university in California. Semi-structured interviews with seven participants from each cohort were conducted about their expectations for university life, their satisfaction with university experiences, and their loyalty behavior. Interviewees' responses were transcribed and analyzed for common themes.

As a supplement to the interview data, blogs posted by freshmen, seniors, and alumni attending eight campuses within this same university system were analyzed. Bloggers posted online reviews of their university experiences to encourage or discourage prospective students from attending their universities. Trends pertaining to

bloggers' satisfaction with experiences and their loyalty behavior were analyzed in a manner similar to the interview transcripts.

The nature of the relationship between expectations and loyalty at each of the three points in the student life cycle was then assessed. Additionally, themes evident within the responses of first-generation university students were reported because these students are reputed to have unrealistic expectations of university life, which might explain why they historically have been more difficult to retain.¹

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the problem of university student retention as well as an introduction to a relational approach to customer retention that is well established in the service industry. Chapter 2 delves deeper into the associated relationship marketing and enrollment management literature to ascertain whether empirical research exists that might support a relational approach to student retention. Chapter 3 describes in greater detail the study design and methods as well as outlines ways that the study fills an important gap in the existing literature on university student retention. Chapter 4 presents the findings the researcher discovered from the collection and analysis of the interview and blog data. Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the significance of the researcher's findings, the relationship of these findings to retention

¹ In the retention literature, researchers describe students' expectations that do not align with the realities of university life as *unrealistic*. However, we must be cautious when applying this term to the expectations of first-generation students, who typically have no familiarity with higher education. It seems judgmental to declare their expectations unrealistic when they have had nothing upon which to base their expectations. In this researcher's opinion, the responsibility lies with universities to make certain that incoming students know what they can realistically expect from university life.

and relationship-marketing literature, and the contributions these findings make to enrollment management theory and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between students' expectations of their university experiences and their loyalty at various points in the undergraduate student life cycle. Various relationship marketing and enrollment management literature was reviewed to examine the relevance of customer service strategy to university student retention efforts.

The first section of this chapter provides a historical overview of the relatively new field of university enrollment management and its evolution over the last few decades. The second section examines the theory and practice of relationship marketing as it is discussed in customer service literature. The third section reviews studies in which higher education researchers have successfully applied relationship-marketing principles within college and university settings. This section also examines the growing enthusiasm for relationship marketing as an enrollment management strategy within higher education. These sections of the literature review demonstrate the potential that relationship-marketing theory and practice possess for addressing the issue of university student retention.

The fourth section of this chapter examines student retention from a relationship-marketing perspective, which places customer retention within the larger framework of customer loyalty. Studies of student loyalty as well as general studies of customer loyalty and their determinants are reviewed.

The fifth section of this chapter examines how students' expectations of their university experiences influence their institutional loyalties. Although business

marketers regularly inquire about their customers' service expectations and attempt to meet them, university leaders have tended to provide the educational services they think students want without consulting them. What literature does exist regarding student expectations of university life is reviewed. First learning and then meeting students' expectations is an important strategy for retaining students that university leaders have yet to fully embrace.

The sixth and final section introduces the concept of the student life cycle. Currently, enrollment managers focus almost exclusively on the recruitment and retention of students, but give little consideration to maintaining the loyalties of students once they graduate. Relationship-marketing theory asserts that the relationship between a customer and an institution can and should be developed over the entirety of a customer's lifetime. The ways a university can benefit from developing a loyal alumni base that will aid future recruitment and retention efforts are discussed.

The chapter concludes with some remarks concerning how a relational approach to enrollment management might particularly aid the retention of disadvantaged first-generation students, a student population particularly prone to dropping out of college.

Glossary of Terms

The following table provides a glossary of terms used in the literature; this terminology forms the lexicon utilized throughout this research study. In order to illustrate comparisons, each term (and respective definition) from the service

marketing literature is paired with its counterpart term from the enrollment

management literature:

Table 1: Glossary of Comparable Terms Used in the Service Marketing Literature and Enrollment Management Literature

Service Marketing terminology		Enrollment Management terminology	
Term	Definition	Term	Definition
Customer experience	The period of time from when a customer first receives services from a provider to when he/she stops paying for services	Student experience	The period of time from when a student matriculates to a university until he/she graduates from or transfers out of the university
Customer expectation	A desire the customer had for his/her service experience prior to the service transaction	Student expectation	A desire the student had for his/her university experience prior to matriculation
Customer changed expectation	A desire the customer had for his/her service experience prior to the service transaction that changed during his/her experience	Student changed expectation	A desire the student had for his/her university experience prior to matriculation that changed during his/her experience
Customer met expectation	The fulfillment of a desire the customer had for his/her service experience prior to the service transaction	Student met expectation	The fulfillment of a desire the student had for his/her university experience prior to matriculation
Customer satisfaction	The degree to which customers are happy with aspects of their service experience	Student satisfaction	The degree to which students are happy with aspects of their university experience
Customer retention	The customer's act of continuing to patronize a service provider	Student retention	The student's act of remaining enrolled at a university

Table 1: Glossary of Comparable Terms Used in the Service Marketing Literature and Enrollment Management Literature (cont.)

Service Marketing terminology		Enrollment Management terminology	
Term	Definition	Term	Definition
Customer retention behavior	The customer's act of continuing to patronize a particular service provider or switching to another service provider	Student retention Behavior	The student's act of remaining enrolled or transferring out of a university
Customer life cycle	The period of time beginning when a customer first has contact with a service provider, continuing through his/her customer experience, and lasting as long as he/she remains in contact with the service provider.	Student life cycle	The period of time beginning when a student first has contact with a university, continuing through his/her student experience, and lasting as long as he/she remains in contact with the university as an alumnus/alumna.
Customer loyalty	A customer's acts of allegiance to a service provider, such as recommending its services to others	Student loyalty	A student's acts of allegiance to one's university, such as applying to graduate school at the university or donating time and/or money to the university.
Customer loyalty behavior	A customer's act of encouraging or discouraging others to use his/her provider's services	Student loyalty behavior	A student's act of encouraging or discouraging others to apply to his/her university. Also, a student's act of choosing to apply or not apply to graduate school at his/her university, or choosing to donate or not donate money to the university.

The Evolution of University Enrollment Management

The practice of enrollment management in higher education was developed in the early 1990's as a means for university administrators to exert greater control over student enrollment (Hossler & Bean, 1990). In the face of competition with other universities for prospective students, enrollment managers were tasked with increasing the number of applicants as well as the number of admitted students who enrolled. Additionally, they were sometimes given directives concerning the composition of the incoming freshman class, such as increasing its diversity or academic quality. Consequently, enrollment management responsibilities fell most often to senior admission officers at universities, such as directors and deans of admission (Hossler, n.d.).

At this time, many universities also hired marketing experts to work in their admissions or public relations offices and assigned them the task of attracting new students by publicizing the university through various media. Some larger universities even created whole marketing departments to handle this responsibility. Because these marketing efforts were intended to complement the university's recruiting efforts, enrollment managers were typically involved in the supervision of both (Hossler, n.d.).

At the start of the new millennium, enrollment managers now faced global competition from other universities for students. This increased competition convinced them that retaining current students was as critical to meeting enrollment goals as recruiting new students (Helgesen, 2008). Their thinking was influenced in

part by marketing researchers in the for-profit community discovering that marketing to existing customers to secure their loyalty should be just as high a priority for businesses as marketing to new customers (Berry, 1995).

Market researchers reached this conclusion based upon evidence that capturing new customers requires a much higher level of investment than retaining existing customers (Rowley, 2003). In fact, Kandampully & Duddy (1999) claim organizations have realized it is five times more expensive to attract a new customer than to retain an existing one. Leigh and Marshall (2001) similarly claim it costs five to seven times more to identify and acquire new customers than to retain and expand business with existing ones.

Researchers within higher education have found the recruitment and admission functions of universities represent significant institutional expenditures, so it is possible retaining students might prove a more cost-effective approach to managing enrollment (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007). According to Matthews (2009), because 25% of first-year students do not return to the institution where they began their college career, “significant improvement in the retention of current clients is the low-hanging fruit of revenue increases for colleges and universities” (§ 10).

Now that university administrators are devoting the same amount of attention to retaining students as recruiting them, enrollment management responsibilities at most universities are no longer tasked solely to the admission office. Rather, they are spread across all departments on campus impacting student retention, such as the financial aid, residential life, and academic advisement offices. Many universities now have standing enrollment management committees composed of representatives

from these offices, which establish institutional enrollment goals and devise strategies for meeting them (Hossler, n.d.).

Relationship Marketing: Theory and Practice

In the business community, market researchers have found the best way to retain customers is to develop long-term relationships with them. This approach, which focuses on attracting and retaining customers by winning their trust and building their loyalty (Trustum & Wee, 2007), was first termed *relationship marketing* by Berry in a 1983 marketing paper (Berry, 1995). Hunt and Morgan (1994) have defined relationship marketing as “all marketing activities toward establishing, developing and maintaining successful relational exchanges” (pg.22).

When relationship marketing was introduced, it represented a major departure from transactional marketing, which had been the dominant marketing strategy since the 1950's. Transactional marketing focuses more on the four Ps of marketing – product, price, place and promotion - than on the customer. Using an impersonal mass-marketing approach, companies influence customers to make isolated purchasing transactions (Trustum & Wee, 2007).

Just when higher education was being urged to adopt business-marketing approaches, some of the basic concepts of transactional marketing were being challenged by those in the service industry (Stokes, 1997). Whereas transactional marketing proved profitable for product-oriented businesses, service-oriented businesses, which dealt personally with customers, found a relationship-marketing approach more profitable (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007). Customers demanded businesses provide them with value to supplement their core services, so customer

relationship and retention became of great importance to the survival of service-oriented businesses (Trustrum and Wee, 2007).

Marketing researchers have declared relationship marketing not just a new model, but also a new paradigm. According to Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007), this paradigm is built on the premise of learning everything relevant about the customer and then using that information to serve them. Christopher, Payne, and Ballantyne (as cited in Trustrum and Wee, 2007) state relationship marketing involves a commitment to high-quality service, as well as customer retention, long-term time scales and high levels of customer contact. Zeithaml and Bitner (as cited in Trustrum and Wee, 2007) identified distinctive benefits of businesses using relationship marketing as: reduced costs, free advertising through word-of-mouth, and the lifetime value of a customer.

Relationship marketing is currently a widely accepted and practiced customer retention strategy in the business community. According to Berry (1995), “Relationship marketing is at the forefront of marketing practice and academic marketing research. The concept of marketing to existing customers to win their continuing patronage and loyalty is becoming well integrated into the various sub-disciplines of marketing” (pg. 237). Hennig-Thurau and Hansen (2000) concur, claiming, “The concept has found its place in marketing theory and has become an integral part of standard textbooks on marketing” (pg.3).

Marketing researchers have studied several for-profit as well as non-profit service industries and determined relationship-marketing techniques compatible with them. These service settings include health care, banking, life insurance, non-profits,

membership programs and frequent flyer programs (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007). Higher education institutions should also be included amongst them as highly customer-centered service organizations. Consequently, building relationships with students and providing them with quality service are important (Trustum & Wee, 2007).

A Relationship-Marketing Approach to Enrollment Management

Now that researchers have begun to study higher education as a service industry, they are realizing the applicability of relationship-marketing theory and practice to university enrollment efforts. Ackerman & Schibrowsky (2007) argue it is appropriate to apply relationship-marketing principles to student retention issues. They assert these principles can only be used when customers are able to select a service provider, switch between service providers, and have an ongoing need for a service. University students can select from amongst thousands of higher education institutions, are able to transfer to other colleges and universities when they wish, and have an ongoing need for universities' educational services in order to complete degree programs.

Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007) believe the future of higher education is in building long term relationships with students. In their article, "A Business Marketing Strategy Applied to Student Retention: A Higher Education Initiative," they coin the term *Student Relationship Management* (SRM) for those programs designed to build relationships with students to increase retention. They claim SRM is not just a retention tool, but an institutional philosophy based on a marketing concept which prompts university leaders to take a different view of the institution's interactions with

students. Upper administration needs to appreciate that student retention is every university employee's job, not just the responsibility of an enrollment manager or an enrollment management committee. Everyone on campus who has contact with students shares responsibility for building and strengthening student relationships.

University administrators who have adopted a student relationship management philosophy realize the need for continuity in relationships with students as various departments across campus interact with them. Students tend to relate to their university as a single entity in their interactions, so they are oftentimes frustrated when departments do not have the same knowledge of them (Trustum & Wee, 2007).

At the start of the millennium, Ahlert (2000) predicted the customer-oriented use of information files would become critical for managing one-to-one relationships. Now software companies, such as Oracle, Sungard, and Datatel, design powerful customer relationship management (CRM) databases for universities, which provide greater continuity to the student-university relationship. These databases enable departments on campus to collect, store and share personal data about students. CRM technology has its roots in relationship-marketing theory, which posits organizations must remain informed about their customers in order to satisfy their needs (Trustum & Wee, 2007).

Due to the growing popularity of relationship-marketing practices in higher education, many university administrators are now investing in CRM systems to manage student enrollment (Hossler, 2004). For example, in a news release published as recently as September 2009, the University of San Diego announced its investment in CRM technology (Sungard, 2009):

In support of its efforts to increase national and international enrollment, create a more diverse student body and raise the profile of incoming classes, the University of San Diego has implemented the Banner Relationship Management solution from SunGard Higher Education...“The University of San Diego and other institutions are under increasing pressure to measurably improve recruiting and enrollment outcomes,” said Mark Zimmerman, vice president at SunGard Higher Education. “Successfully meeting recruiting goals involves a complex set of interactions that begin with navigating candidates toward the institution, then guiding students toward successful graduation, all the while cultivating loyal bonds that support lifelong institutional ties.” (§ 1, 6)

Because the implementation of CRM technology in higher education has been so recent, there are few documented success stories. One of the few is DePaul University, which launched its program in 2003. Campus Technology magazine did a case study on DePaul in 2008 and suggested other universities look to them as an example of how a successful institution-wide strategy for CRM can work (Briggs, 2008).

DePaul has been using CRM to quantify student satisfaction with regular surveys, and then using the data to improve retention and alumni relations. DePaul regularly asks its first-year students questions to determine if there are factors that might keep them from completing their first year. Frequent surveys of students might include questions on what they would like to see specifically in their particular college, as well as overall at the university. Other questions might include how well their advisor is working for them, how productive that relationship has been, and what else their advisor could be doing to help them (Briggs, 2008).

Audrey Bledsoe, manager of CRM technologies at DePaul University, said

the biggest challenge to implementing CRM was getting campus users to understand students are customers whom they need to keep satisfied (Briggs, 2008). Currently, there is resistance within higher education to adopt a relationship management approach because some faculty members feel it is inappropriate to treat students as customers (Eagle & Brennan, 2007; Lomas, 2007). For instance, professors Svensonn and Wood (2007) argue the student-university relationship is fundamentally performance-based, not purchase-based, so students have no right to dictate how educational services are provided.

There must be campus-wide acceptance that student-university relationships are partially purchase-based in order for universities to embrace CRM as a fitting enrollment approach. CRM companies assert students behave as consumers when they pay and register for courses, apply for graduation, and donate as alumni (Bejou, 2005). Increasingly, students are seeking out the universities that offer them the treatment they believe they deserve as paying customers (Sines & Ducksworth, 1994). Furthermore, in practice, universities treat students as consumers by marketing to them and then selling them degrees and an enriched alumni life (Trustrum & Wee, 2007).

Managing Enrollment by Developing Student Loyalty

Service organizations are discovering it is more profitable to foster long-term relationships with customers to secure their loyalty than just to retain them (Helgesen, 2008; Rowley, 2003; Trustrum & Wee, 2007). Although customer retention and customer loyalty are similar enough concepts many authors use them interchangeably, there are important differences between them. Whereas the retention construct has a purely behavioral character, researchers understand the loyalty construct to possess

both behavioral and attitudinal aspects (Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000). Henry (2000) points out customers are sometimes retained even when they don't feel loyal toward an organization. For example, this can occur when a customer is dissatisfied with an organization, but cannot afford to switch to another service provider.

Current definitions of customer loyalty found within the marketing literature focus more upon the attitudinal aspects that distinguish it from mere retention. Oliver (1997) defines customer loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (pg.56). Rowley (2003) claims “loyalty is associated with the customer's willingness to continue in a relationship” (pg.250).

Service organizations appreciate customer loyalty not only because customers continue their patronage (Rowley, 2003), but also because they refer others to try their services. Marketing researchers have recognized the benefit of “word-of-mouth” referrals that loyal customers can generate (Trustrum & Wee, 2007; Rowley, 2003). Some researchers have even suggested breaking the loyalty construct into two separate constructs in recognition of these two benefits: a *loyalty: patronage* construct and a *loyalty: recommend* construct (Rowley, 2003; Helgesen, 2008).

Marketing researchers have extensively studied what factors create customer loyalty. They have determined customers are more likely to remain faithful to companies that provide service quality, ensure customer satisfaction, and establish long-term relationships with them (Rowley, 2003).

Market researchers who have studied higher education as a service industry have found that ensuring student satisfaction creates student loyalty. Helgesen (2008) defines customer satisfaction as "a summary psychological state or a subjective summary judgment based on the customers' experiences compared with expectations" (pg.57). He surveyed 443 undergraduate students at a small Norwegian university about their degree of satisfaction with, and degree of loyalty to, their university. He found the strength of their loyalty increased when service experiences met their expectations.

Similarly, Aurand, Judson, and Karlovsky (2007) interviewed 19 student-athletes about their relationships with the university. They found those students who reported having the greatest satisfaction with their collegiate experiences were the ones most likely to describe their relationship with the university as a *partnership*.

Market researchers who have studied higher education as a service industry have also discovered providing service quality creates student loyalty. Hennig-Thurau, Langer, and Hansen (2001), professors at University of Hanover, Germany, surveyed 1,162 former university students, some of whom had graduated and some of whom had dropped out. The students who graduated consistently praised the quality of professors' teaching, while the students who failed to graduate did not.

Lastly, market researchers who have studied higher education as a service industry have found fostering long-term relationships with students creates student loyalty. Ackerman and Schibrowsky (2007) state the end goal of relationship building is to develop students whose loyalty to the institution prevents their departure. They

assert the benefits of using a relationship-marketing approach include reduced student attrition, institutional cost savings and the development of loyal alumni and donors.

In one such study, Bruning (2002) surveyed 122 first-year university students about their attitudes toward their university using an organization-public relationship scale. He was motivated to do so because public relations research has shown customers who identify themselves as in a relationship with an organization tend to remain customers. He found participants' student-university relationship attitudes ultimately distinguished those who returned to the university from those who did not.

In another study, Pompper (2006) examined whether the communication exchange between a college and its key publics offered a context for promoting a relationship-centered approach to student retention. By evaluating face-to-face communication, written communiqués, information needs, technology, and communication climate, he analyzed relationships between a technical college and its 454 students and the surrounding community. He found public relations played a key role in the development and maintenance of relationships among college administration, faculty, staff, students, and the community, which have been shown to increase student retention.

Given the significance of student loyalty to enrollment management efforts, it is important to review research studies identifying the key relationship variables that determine loyalty. Commitment has been one of the most frequently used variables for determining the strength of a marketing relationship and has been viewed as an important antecedent to customer retention (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007). According to Hennig-Thurau and Hansen (2000), commitment concerns the

customer's emotional bond with the company and a conviction that remaining in the business relationship will yield greater benefits than leaving it. In their article, "The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing," Hunt and Morgan (1994) found commitment to be a key mediating variable in relationship-marketing success.

In the same study, Hunt and Morgan also determined trust to be a key mediating variable affecting relationship-marketing success. Callaghan, McPhail, and Yau (1995) define trust as the level to which each party feels they can rely on the integrity of the promise offered by the other. Several researchers recognize trust as a critical element in marketing relationships (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007; Trustrum & Wee, 2000).

Expectations of the University Experience Influence Student Loyalty

Universities are accustomed to surveying students to measure their level of satisfaction with campus services. The assumption is that the more satisfied students report they are, the more likely they are to remain loyal to the university and persist. However, university administrators are not giving equal attention to learning whether students' expectations of the university experience are being met. Although there has been significant investigation into the first-year experiences of students, fewer studies have focused on the expectations of students commencing their university studies (Miller, Bender & Schuh, 2005). This can lead faculty and staff to make erroneous assumptions about students' needs and desires, as universities tend to provide information to students based on the universities' expectations, not those of the student (Pithers and Holland, 2006). As Sander et al. assert (as cited in Tricker, 2003),

Higher education has typically adopted an ‘inside out’ approach – with us on the inside assuming we know what students expect and want from higher education. However, successful service industries have been shown to think ‘outside in’. They research what customers expect of the service and then work to provide the service that meets those expectations (pg. 5).

Low (2000) conducted a nationwide survey of undergraduate students to determine their levels of satisfaction with university life. In her published analysis, she concludes university administrators ought to be measuring student satisfaction along more dimensions than just institutional performance:

For greatest impact and accuracy, satisfaction should be viewed within the context of student expectations (levels of importance). For example, the availability of parking and the quality of food service repeatedly surface as areas of high dissatisfaction to students across the country. But when asked to indicate the importance of these areas in their overall educational experience, students rate parking and food service relatively low. Thus, the interrelationship between importance and satisfaction is crucial to a fuller understanding of student perceptions (pg. 2).

Students' expectations, and their experience during their first year, have a tangible influence on student engagement and retention (Longden, 2006). Darlaston-Jones et al (2003) claim that as university students become more conscious of their customer rights, gaps between their expectations of service delivery and the reality of that service will likely contribute to student withdrawal. If university administrators wish to retain more students, they need to identify which aspects of the university experience are most important to students and endeavor to satisfy them in these areas. If students voice dissatisfaction with parking, for example, they are unlikely to drop out of college over this. If, however, they express dissatisfaction with, say, faculty

instruction, this may be important enough to them to seek enrollment at a university that will better meet their needs.

It is commonly accepted by marketing professionals that a customer's level of satisfaction with a product or service is heavily based upon initial expectations. Szymanski and Henard (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of the empirical evidence on customer satisfaction and reported that disconfirmation of expectations (a product or service falls short of expectations) is one of the most strongly related variables to customer satisfaction. Consequently, businesses regularly survey customers to learn whether the product or service they provide is living up to their expectations.

Similarly, higher education researchers such as Ripple (1984) have discovered that the more students' expectations of their anticipated university experience align with their actual experience, the more they are prone to be satisfied. Ripple surveyed 332 entering freshmen at the College of William and Mary first during orientation week and then again near the end of their first year. He found that not only satisfaction but also persistence was positively related to a similarity between a student's anticipated experience and actual experience.

Sadly, several studies have shown that students' expectations of university life do not always align with their actual experiences. Smith and Wertlieb (2005) examined 31 first-year students' social and academic expectations and compared those expectations with students' experiences at the middle and end of their first year at the university. They found these students had unrealistic expectations of university life that were not met.

Darlaston-Jones et. al. (2003) administered a questionnaire to 56 first year

psychology students before and after a semester of classes and determined their class experiences did not live up to expectations. They discovered the participants expected that their professors would know each student and their personal situation. The researchers pointed out that their expectations were completely unrealistic, given that the students were part of a psychology cohort of approximately 300 students.

Researchers at the University of Adelaide (Crisp et. al., 2009) conducted a survey of Australian first-year undergraduate students and discovered they had many unrealistic expectations of university life, such as assuming that professors would read drafts of their papers, grade their assignments in less than a week, and be readily accessible to them for consultations. The researchers reported that most Australian universities are not equipped with the resources to meet such high expectations.

Within higher education, disconfirmation of expectations can occur as a consequence of the university admission process. Seidman (1989) warns universities that information provided to prospective students must be realistic or they are going to be frustrated by the lack of congruence between themselves and the institution upon matriculation. Although universities may successfully enroll students in this manner, they may have trouble retaining them in the long run.

Crisp et. al. (2009) suggest that if universities provide opportunities for students to articulate their expectations, and then use this information to dialogue constructively with staff and students, there should be greater alignment between expectations and satisfaction with the university experience. This can be achieved by either changing students' expectations to better match the reality of the university experience or by the institution changing some of its approaches to better match

students' needs.

What have universities learned thus far from prospective students about their expectations for university life? Survey tools, such as the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE) are available to institutions that wish to gather information on student expectations so they can better respond to them. In 2007, 126 North American colleges and universities conducted the BCSSE with over 100,000 students (Crisp et al., 2009). Researchers such as Kuh (2007) have used the BCSEE to determine that disparities exist between entering students' expectations and their level of engagement in the first year of college. For example, first-year students expect to study more hours and achieve a higher grade than they actually do. They also expect their university to provide support for non-academic activities and social interaction.

USA Group Foundation (Lana Low, 2000) conducted a national survey of over 420,000 college and university students and reported the following expectation trends:

- Freshmen and sophomores have higher expectations than juniors and seniors.
- Females have higher expectations than males across all institutional types.
- African-American students have the highest expectations among all ethnic groups.
- Students living on campus have higher expectations than those living off campus.
- Students for whom the institution is their first choice, rather than the second or lower choices, have higher expectations for their college experience.

Customer service surveys have shown that customers actually have different levels of expectations for a service or product. Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman (1993) report that three types of service expectations exist: desired service, predicted service and adequate service. Whereas customers desire to receive a high level of service from a company, they also admit they predict to receive a lower level of

service. Additionally, there is a certain minimum level of service customers must receive in order for them not to take their business elsewhere. In the realm of higher education, Licata and Maxham (1999) similarly found that college-bound students have two distinct levels of expectations of university life – a lower level of realistic expectations of what will happen, and a higher, ideal level of what should happen.

Researchers have discovered that prospective students' expectations of university life are highly individual. Richard James (2002) claims that students' expectations pertain not only to quality, but also to personal relevance (for example, a student may question whether a course is really right for her). From this, he concludes that students' expectations are highly diverse and individual in character.

Students' university expectations can extend even beyond graduation. James (2002) asserts that students' expectations don't just pertain to their day-to-day experiences on campus, but also to the career and life outcomes that degree completion might make possible. Lam and Kwan (1999) categorize university students' expectations into four major areas, three of which ("general benefits of becoming educated," "maturation and personal development" and "to get a job") are career and life outcomes. So, even students who graduate college having had positive experiences can still ultimately become dissatisfied later in life if their education does not help them realize their dreams.

Because today's university students are behaving more like consumers, their service expectations are higher than ever. Tricker (2003) reports that, unlike previous generations, students now expect universities to provide them with the following:

- Flexibility and choice in the delivery of education

- Access to cutting edge technology
- Two-way communication between themselves and with the university
- Consultation about the learning experience
- Accurate information about their courses, assessment procedures, etc.
- Honesty with respect to whether their needs can be met or not
- Quality and professionalism in the provision of services
- Access to suitably qualified teachers and appropriate learning support
- Value of study to career prospects

Although meeting students' higher expectations has proven increasingly challenging for university faculty and staff, they are finding that the benefits of doing so can extend beyond just retaining students. Meeting or exceeding students' expectations can result in securing their lifelong loyalties.

Developing Loyalty over the Student Life Cycle

Businesses leaders have learned relationship marketing involves developing customer loyalty over the lifetime of the customer-business relationship (Trustum & Wee, 2007; Helgesen, 2008). Marketing researchers have attempted to describe the deepening of this relationship in various ways. For example, Christopher et al. (as cited in Trustum & Wee, 2007) use the imagery of a 'loyalty' ladder. Customers start at the bottom rung as Prospects and climb to the next rung when they become Customers. As their loyalty to the company increases, they ascend to the Client rung, then the Supporter rung, then finally the Advocate rung.

Hunt (as cited in Rowley, 2003) describes the customer-business relationship as progressing through five stages of increasing customer loyalty. In the first stage of the relationship, companies attempt to make customers aware of their existence by marketing to them, and customers respond by choosing the companies with which they wish to do business. In the second stage, customers establish personal contacts with

several departments throughout the company, while the company strives to win their trust and meet their service expectations. In the third stage, the company looks for ways to add value to their core services so customers do not leave the relationship for another service provider. In the fourth stage, both parties are invested in the relationship and will endeavor to resolve any instability. In the final stage, customers hopefully break ties with the business having had satisfying service experiences that inspire them to give positive word-of-mouth recommendations to others.

As with the development of customer loyalty, the process of increasing student loyalty should take place over the course of the entire student-university relationship life cycle (Rowley, 2003). In a white paper published by Sungard Higher Education, a CRM software developer, they suggest university leaders nurture student relationships starting from the time they are prospects until they become students, then alumni, then continuing learners (Sungard, 2007). Although enrollment managers have historically focused on the recruitment of prospective students and, more recently, the retention of current students, they have yet to concentrate their efforts on students after they graduate. Beyond just retention, it is important for university leaders to realize there are additional benefits to maintaining long-term relationships with students, such as alumni giving and word-of-mouth referrals (Ackerman & Schibrowsky, 2007).

Rowley (2003) applied Hunt's five stages of the customer-business relationship to interpreting the student-university relationship:

1. Choosing a partner (Introduction) - Students gather information about universities by attending campus visit programs, viewing university websites, reading brochures, and speaking with admission counselors. They assess whether what the

university has to offer matches their needs. At this introductory stage, communication with students takes place largely through university admission and marketing departments.

2. Structuring the relationship (Experimentation) - For incoming students, orientation and first quarter experiences are pivotal because they are learning about the nature of the relationship and their role as students. For universities, the responsibility for representing the relationship shifts to orientation staff, resident advisors, faculty, academic advisors, financial aid counselors and other university representatives on campus with which students have personal contact.

3. Devoting time to developing the relationship (Identification) - Students and university service agents need to spend time getting acquainted and understanding each other's expectations. Universities must provide students with quality service that meets their expectations. Students must embrace or challenge university values. If they reject them, they may end the relationship by withdrawing from the university.

4. Maintaining lines of communication (Continuous Renewal) – Students are now upperclassmen that have settled into the campus community and are committed to programs of study. They have relationships with faculty, student life staff, and, most importantly, other students. They are less likely to withdraw, because they have invested a considerable amount of time and energy into the relationship. However, circumstances in their personal lives may conspire to make it difficult for them to continue their education. When this occurs, a mature discussion between the student and a university representative can strengthen and maintain the relationship.

5. Parting on good terms (Dissolution) – As students prepare for graduation, universities can add value to their education by assisting them with their career preparations and job searches. They can organize job fairs, arrange internships, and conduct workshops on resume writing and interviewing techniques. It is important that students part with fond memories so they recommend the university to others or continue the relationship as graduate students.

Enrollment managers can implement relationship-marketing techniques during every phase of the relationship life cycle. University efforts to develop students' loyalty first begin when students are becoming aware of the university. During this time of recruitment, universities can establish long-term relationships with prospective students through their marketing and recruitment activities.

In marketing, customers base their expectations upon promises businesses make them when promoting their services. Consequently, in order for one-time purchasing transactions to develop into long-term customer relationships, businesses must take care to fulfill their marketing promises to customers or they will become dissatisfied and sever the relationship. Although it may be tempting for universities to promise prospective students stellar educational experiences, unless they can make good on these promises, giving them unrealistic expectations will only result in their eventual dissatisfaction and possible departure (Aurand, Judson, & Karlavsky, 2007; Trustrum & Wee, 2007).

Taking a relationship-marketing approach to recruiting prospective students can lead to greater retention. This can be achieved through the strategic targeting of particular students. It is neither feasible nor cost-effective to develop close

relationships with every university applicant, so CRM companies suggest admission counselors establish relationships with just those students their university seeks to educate, according to its educational mission (RIGHT NOW, 2008). Once admission counselors have determined which applicants are the “right fit,” they can influence them to enroll by taking a personal interest in them. They could do so by offering them scholarship money or inviting them to participate in a summer bridge program. Once enrolled, these students are more likely to be retained because the university has convinced them they belong there.

Once students matriculate, enrollment managers can continue to employ relationship-marketing techniques to further increase students’ loyalty. During this time of retention, they can do this by creating a student-centric campus climate and adopting a CRM service philosophy.

Students are less likely to transfer out of a university if they feel valued and get the support they need from faculty and staff (RIGHT NOW, 2008). Elliott and Healy (2001) surveyed 1,805 mid-western university students and discovered Student-Centeredness was one of the key variables students identified as contributing to their satisfaction with campus life.

Of course, in order for universities to focus on students’ needs, they must first devise a means for determining what those needs are. Audin, Davy, and Barkham (2003) conducted longitudinal surveys of student cohorts at the University of Leeds to discover students’ quality of life. They found these surveys yielded useful data that enabled the university to make campus changes improving student satisfaction.

One way universities can become more student-centered is to adopt customer relationship management practices. CRM companies assert more students would be retained if university leaders restructured their services to better manage student relationships (RIGHT NOW, 2008). Because students think in terms of the “institutional experience,” not the “departmental experience,” universities need to manage their departmental operations as one process (Trustrum & Wee, 2007).

In order for universities to do this, campus departments must support and collaborate with one another. Consequently, it is crucial universities establish and maintain communication and student record systems that share student knowledge (Rowley, 2003). Seeman and O’Hara (2006) conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals involved with the planning, development and implementation of a statewide community college CRM database system. The interviewees reported the benefits derived from their CRM implementation included improved customer data management and increased customer loyalty.

It is important for universities to understand implementing CRM technology is not worthwhile unless they couple it with a well-organized and continuous internal marketing process (Trustrum & Wee, 2007). Internal marketing concerns the management of relationships within the university to produce customer-oriented staff. University administrators should ensure all employees who have direct contact with students appreciate the importance of providing quality customer service and take shared responsibility for developing student loyalty (Trustrum & Wee, 2007).

Even once students graduate, university leaders can employ relationship-marketing techniques to increase students’ loyalty to their university. Historically,

university administrators have tasked their alumni and development offices with nurturing relationships with graduated students. However, as enrollment managers come to appreciate the importance of not only graduating students, but also developing their lifelong loyalties, it makes sense for them to begin working more closely with representatives from these offices.

Together, they can ensure that alumni maintain close associations with the university which can result in loyalty behavior, such as donating money and returning to the university for graduate school (Bejou, 2005). Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, it can inspire alumni to recommend their alma mater to future generations of students, which would aid the university in its recruitment efforts (RIGHT NOW, 2008).

Although alumni offices already maintain relationships with graduated students by hosting on-campus reunions, enrollment managers could forge even stronger relationships with alumni by ensuring the university contributes to their career success. Aurand, Judson, and Karlovsky (2007) interviewed 19 sophomore Division I student-athletes about their relationships with their university. They found those athletes that described their relationship with the university as a *partnership* (characterized by the highest levels of commitment and trust) claimed the university demonstrated a commitment not only to their success as collegiate athletes, but also to their eventual success as professional athletes. One possible way universities could commit to students' career success is to provide continuing education opportunities to alumni wishing to upgrade their marketable skills.

Using Relationship Marketing to Retain First Generation University Students

One social benefit of adopting a relationship-marketing approach to enrollment management is that more first generation university students are likely to be retained. Universities have a social responsibility to retain first generation students because they have been shown to be overrepresented in the most disadvantaged racial, income and gender groups (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Furthermore, they are more at-risk for dropping out of college than other students. Ishitani (2003) found the risk of attrition amongst first generation students to be 71% higher than that of students with two college-educated parents. In another study he conducted three years later, Ishitani (2006) discovered they are exposed to higher risks of departure throughout the college years than their counterparts are.

First generation students frequently drop out of college because they feel like they don't fit into the campus community, oftentimes despite solid academic performance (Lehmann, 2007). Other studies on first generation students have shown they receive less faculty support (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008) and possess no communal identity of their own (Orbe, 2004). Consequently, a relational approach to retaining students might prove especially successful with this population. Establishing personal bonds with them may help correct inequities in campus support and belongingness, thereby fostering social justice where it did not previously exist.

Summary

Although a few higher education scholars have produced opinion papers asserting a relationship-marketing approach to enrollment management could work, they have produced almost no empirical evidence of their own to support these claims.

This is due in part to the fact that enrollment management is a relatively new field. At present, only one higher education journal, *The Enrollment Management Journal: Student Access, Finance, and Success in Higher Education*, is dedicated to the empirical study of this field. Its first issue was only recently published in the winter of 2007.

A few universities, such as DePaul University and University of San Diego, are pioneering the use of student relationship management systems to manage enrollment, but it is too early to declare whether their investment in these technologies will prove successful. At first glance, it seems enrollment managers should await further empirical evidence and university case studies to emerge before deciding whether to embrace relationship-marketing practices.

Thankfully, however, several marketing researchers in the business community have conducted empirical studies of relationship marketing in various university settings and consistently found it as effective in retaining students as it has in retaining customers in other service settings. They have demonstrated that developing long-term relationships with students increases their loyalty, which in turn positively contributes to university enrollment efforts.

Because these findings have typically been published in business marketing journals rather than higher education journals, university enrollment managers may not be aware this empirical evidence exists. This review of the literature has shown the potential relationship marketing possesses to be an effective enrollment management strategy. To further understand how enrollment managers can meet the expectations of university students, more research is needed on the expectations that entering

students have of university life, as well as which expectations, if met, typically result in increased student retention and loyalty. This study fills these gaps in the literature.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine whether university leaders might better retain students and secure their loyalties if they focus on meeting their expectations. This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How does undergraduate students' satisfaction with their university experiences relate to their retention behavior?
- 2) How does undergraduate students' satisfaction with their university experiences relate to their loyalty behavior?
- 3) What are undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences?
- 4) How does the fulfillment of undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences relate to their retention behavior?
- 5) How does the fulfillment of undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences relate to their loyalty behavior?

This chapter begins by describing the study's design that was used to explore the relationship between student expectations and student loyalty throughout the undergraduate student life cycle. Rationales are given for why certain key design decisions were made. Also, ways are identified in which this study fills an important gap in the literature on university student retention. Lastly, the study's data collection, analysis and reporting methods are described.

Research Design

This qualitative study used a multiple cross-sectional design to examine student loyalty at three points in time during the undergraduate university student life cycle. Data were collected using both interviews and document analysis.

Three groups of students (freshmen, seniors, and alumni) were interviewed about their expectations of university life, satisfaction with their university experiences, and their loyalty behavior; the students were currently attending, or had attended, the same public research university in California (referred to in this study as *Cohort University* or *CU*). During transcript analysis, the nature of the relationships between satisfaction, expectations and loyalty at each of the three points in the student life cycle were assessed.

Additionally, as a supplement to the interview data, a document analysis of student-written blogs was conducted; the blogs consisted of online reviews by freshmen, seniors, and alumni from the same public research university system as the interviewees (referred to in this study as the *Cohort University System*, or the *CU System*). Students and alumni of the CU System either wrote positive reviews of their experiences encouraging prospective students to apply to their campuses, or negative reviews discouraging prospective students from applying. The blogs were coded for evidence of students' satisfactions/dissatisfactions with their experiences as well as for evidence of loyalty behavior. Once analyzed, the nature of the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty at each of the three points in the student life cycle was assessed.

The following table illustrates which data collection methods were used with which study populations:

Table 2: Data Collection Methods by Study Population

Data collection method	Undergraduate student life cycle		
	Freshman year	Senior year	Post-graduation
Interviews	CU Freshmen interviewees	CU Senior interviewees	CU Alumni interviewees
Blogs	CU System freshmen bloggers	CU System senior bloggers	CU System alumni bloggers

Note. CU stands for Cohort University.

The expectations of first-generation university students, a population that the literature has shown to be particularly challenging to retain, were also examined. Although first-generation students were not designated as a study population, the responses of all interviewers who self-identified as being first-generation students were analyzed for unique themes. Students were considered first-generation if their parents did not attend college, took college courses but did not complete bachelor degrees, or completed their bachelor degrees overseas. These study findings will help university leaders meet expectations common to first generation students so they can better retain this at-risk population.

Rationales for Design Decisions

The rationale for choosing the customer service theory of relationship marketing as the theoretical framework for the study was that, whether those in higher education readily admit it or not, students are indeed customers of a service. Also,

relationship marketing is an established theory and practice in business, so it provides a solid foundation for a research study.

Student Loyalty was chosen as a study variable because a fundamental principle of relationship marketing is that the best way to retain customers is to develop their loyalty. Student Expectations of University Life was selected as another study variable because the 30 student-written blogs were analyzed in a pilot study and it was discovered that students' expectations influenced their satisfaction with university services. The rationale for studying these variables over the course of the student life cycle (three points in time) instead of at just one point in time was that research has shown that student expectations and satisfaction with university services fluctuate over time.

The rationale for choosing to conduct the study on students at a large public university was that enrollment managers at those types of institutions are more likely to benefit from this study's findings. This is primarily because learning and meeting students' expectations is often a greater institutional challenge in a large, impersonal university setting than at a small private college, where closer relationships between campus representatives and students are easier to foster.

The decision was made to select all interviewees from the same university to reduce the number of confounding variables introduced by sampling student populations from multiple universities. Also, it was decided to collect data from parallel sources (CU student/alumni interviewees and CU System student/alumni bloggers) rather than just one source to strengthen the study's findings and increase generalizability. Finally, CU transfer students and alumni who transferred to CU from

the study were excluded because they had had multiple university experiences that might confuse the study's findings.

Significance of the Study

This study fills a gap in the research literature on the retention of university students in several significant ways. First, the study used relationship-marketing theory borrowed from customer service literature to understand the problem of university student retention. By acknowledging that students are customers of the services universities provide, the study examined student retention, expectations and loyalty in the same way that customer retention, expectations and loyalty have been studied by business marketing researchers. This yields new insight into the educational needs and desires of university students and how to best meet them.

Second, most retention studies have been quantitative in nature, providing mostly survey data. This study provides much needed qualitative data gathered by means of interview and document analysis.

Third, relatively few retention studies have focused on students' expectations for university life, preferring instead to examine students' satisfaction with university services. Relationship-marketing theory posits that customers' expectations are just as critical a factor to their retention as their satisfaction.

Fourth, most researchers who have studied the retention of university students have limited the scope of their research to first-year student populations. This is because research has shown that the majority of students who drop out of college do so before the start of the sophomore year. Vincent Tinto writes,

Past research has implicitly assumed that the process of student departure is essentially invariant over the course of the student career. Typically, past research has taken data from one time period, for instance, data on retention between the start of the first year and the beginning of the second, to describe the process of institutional departure over the entire college career. (Tinto, 1988, p.438-439)

This study fills a gap in the literature by examining the expectations and loyalty behaviors of not only first-year students but also upperclassmen and alumni because some of students' greatest expectations (such as quality instruction within their selected major, realization of their career goals) cannot be fulfilled during the first year in college. Likewise, some of students' greatest displays of institutional loyalty (such as alumni giving) do not take place until after graduation from college.

Fifth, the study analyzed blogs written by university students to prospective students to learn how their expectations of university life were fulfilled or unfulfilled. This source of data is new to retention studies. The benefit of this type of data collection over interviewing was that it eliminated interviewer bias by examining "customer-to-customer" communications rather than "customer-to-researcher" communications. Students were more open and honest in their anonymous comments to one another than they were expressing them to the researcher in a formal interview setting.

Interviews

Interviewee Demographics

Twenty-one current students and alumni of a large public research university in California were selected to interview about their expectations of and satisfaction with their university experiences, as well as their loyalty toward their university.

Specifically, seven freshmen, seven seniors, and seven alumni were selected.

The information collected from these Cohort University interviewees included the following demographic data:

Stage in Student Life Cycle: Freshman, Senior or Alumni

Gender: Male or Female

Major: Interviewees were asked what majors they were studying/had studied.

First-Generation University Student: Interviewees were identified as the first in their families to attend a college/university based upon how they answered the interview question, “If your parents went to college, what were their experiences like?”

Transfer Students: Prospective interviewees who were transfer students to Cohort University were excluded from participation in the study because they had had multiple college/university experiences.

University: All interviewees were current students at, or graduates of, Cohort University.

Year of Entrance to University: This data was only collected from alumni interviewees.

Age: Prior to participating in the interview, all interviewees acknowledged they were at least 18 years of age.

The following table lists the demographic data for each of the 21 interviewees:

Table 3: Cohort University Interviewees – Demographics

Interviewee	Stage in student life cycle	Gender	Major	First-generation university student	Year of entrance to university ^a
Interviewee 1	Freshman	Male	Linguistics	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 2	Freshman	Female	Psychology	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 3	Freshman	Female	Cognitive Science	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 4	Freshman	Female	Writing	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 5	Freshman	Male	Biochemistry	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 6	Freshman	Female	Media	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 7	Freshman	Female	Media	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 8	Senior	Male	Sociology	No	n/a
Interviewee 9	Senior	Female	Psychology	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 10	Senior	Female	Computer Science	No	n/a
Interviewee 11	Senior	Female	Pharmacy/Chemistry	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 12	Senior	Female	Biology/Economics	No	n/a
Interviewee 13	Senior	Female	Biochemistry	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 14	Senior	Female	Economics	Yes	n/a
Interviewee 15	Alumni	Female	Economics	No	2005
Interviewee 16	Alumni	Female	Communications	Yes	1979
Interviewee 17	Alumni	Female	International Studies	Yes	2005
Interviewee 18	Alumni	Female	Biology	Yes	2005
Interviewee 19	Alumni	Female	Economics	No	2005
Interviewee 20	Alumni	Male	Pol.Sci/Urban Plan.	Yes	1999
Interviewee 21	Alumni	Female	Linguistics	No	1973

^aYear of Entrance data was only collected on alumni.

Context for the Research

All interviewees were attending or had attended Cohort University. CU enrolls approximately 23,000 undergraduate students. The male-female ratio is almost 1:1 (52% of students are female). Students of color represent 64% of the undergraduate student population, with most of these being of Asian-American descent. About one-third (34%) of undergraduate students are first-generation university students. Cohort University is a highly selective institution - the 2009 entering class of freshmen had an

incoming average GPA of 3.96 and composite SAT I math and verbal scores of 1257. The university's six-year graduation rate is 85%.

The researcher's position toward the university studied is that he was never an undergraduate student there. Also, he is not currently an employee of this university, but was employed there in the past.

Participant Selection Process

Permission from the Council of Resident Deans at Cohort University was granted to recruit undergraduate students who fit the study criteria (freshmen and seniors over the age of 18 who were not transfer students). Recruitment flyers (Appendix A) were posted in the dormitories on campus and other common areas to make students aware of the study. Additionally, announcements about the study were posted in Cohort University's electronic student newsletter. If students wished to participate in the study, they were instructed to email the researcher. Those who contacted the researcher were emailed a description of the study's purpose and procedures (Appendix C).

Similarly, permission was granted from the CU Alumni Association to post an announcement about the study in the CU alumni electronic newsletter. The announcement informed them to contact the researcher by email if they were interested in participating. Those who contacted the researcher were sent an email (Appendix B) and a description of the study's purpose and procedures (Appendix C).

Participants were informed on the information sheet that by agreeing to participate, they acknowledge they are at least 18 years of age and were not a transfer student to Cohort University. Transfer students were excluded from the study because

they had had university experiences at multiple universities. Students and alumni were provided an incentive to participate by offering each of them a five-dollar gift card. This promise to participants was stated in the information sheet.

When potential participants contacted the researcher, he answered any questions they had about joining the study. Because interviewees were asked to provide responses that may have placed CU or a campus in the CU system in a negative light, interviewees were ensured anonymity and told their responses would be kept confidential. Throughout the study, care was taken not to identify the actual universities studied by employing the pseudonyms *Cohort University*, *CU*, *Cohort University System*, and *CU System*.

An interview date and time was then arranged with the participant that was convenient for him or her. The student's or alumni's willingness to participate in the study was known only to the researcher, so neither the CU Council of Resident Deans nor the CU Alumni Association had knowledge of which of the potential interviewees agreed to participate. Seven of the freshmen, seven of the seniors and seven of the alumni were selected for interviews.

Data Collection

The interviews took place over the telephone at the agreed-upon date and time. The researcher initiated the calls. Before conducting the interviews, he reminded the participants that he would be audio taping the interview, as was stated in the information sheet.

The researcher asked approximately 20-25 questions (Appendix D) of the interviewees using a semi-structured interview format. Each interview lasted between

45 minutes to an hour. At the conclusion of the interview, he reminded the participants that he might follow up with them with a few additional questions or needed clarifications.

Data Analysis

The researcher used an audio recorder to record the telephone interviews. He then transferred the audio files to his personal laptop computer. Access to the audio files was password-protected and only he knew the password. Furthermore, his laptop computer also had a security password known only to him.

He then transcribed the audio files into interview transcripts using the qualitative analysis software, HyperRESEARCH, installed on his personal laptop computer. Based upon a review of the literature on determinants of student loyalty and initial findings from a pilot study, each interview transcript was coded for three general themes: expectations of university life, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with university life, and indicators of loyalty/disloyalty to the university. Each interview transcript was further codified by applying one of eight sub-codes to each coded entry (i.e., the expectation theme was broken down into academic expectations, social expectations, etc.). Additionally, during the analysis of the interview transcripts, if any emergent codes arose unexpectedly from the data, these were incorporated into the coding procedure. Once themes were identified within the interview transcripts, the nature of the relationship between expectations and loyalty at each of the three points in the student life cycle was then assessed.

Finally, during data analysis, the findings from interviews with first-generation university students were analyzed. These first-generation students served as a unique

study population because literature shows they have more unrealistic expectations of their university experience than other students. These students were identified during data analysis by how they responded to the interview question - "If your parents went to college, what were their experiences like?"

Data Reporting

As noted earlier, when writing the dissertation, the name of the public research university studied was not revealed. The university was referred to in the study report under the pseudonym of *Cohort University*.

When writing the dissertation, the participants were not identified by name. Rather, when it was necessary to refer to a particular interviewee, the interviewee was identified by study population and by number (i.e., Alumni Interviewee 3).

When quoting from an interview transcript for the dissertation, all references to geographic subdivisions smaller than a state (such as city or county of residence) mentioned by a participant in her interview were deleted, so as not to divulge personally identifiable information. Similarly, when quoting from an interview transcript for the dissertation, all references to elements of dates (other than years) mentioned by an interviewee were deleted so as not to divulge personally identifiable information. If other types of personally identifiable information appeared in the interviews, care was taken to exclude this information when quoting from the transcripts in the dissertation.

At the conclusion of the study, all interview audio files and transcriptions were erased to protect the identities of the participants. Additionally, once it was confirmed that participants had received their electronic gift cards via email (as compensation for

participation in the study), all sent and received emails from participants were systematically and thoroughly deleted. Also, all emails to or from participants that were in the email spam folder as well as any participant email addresses that appeared in the address book were deleted. Lastly, no emails to or from participants were printed out, so there was no need to shred any paper documents.

Blogs

Data Collection

Blogs written anonymously by undergraduate students who were currently attending or had attended campuses in the Cohort University System were analyzed for trends about their satisfaction with university life and their loyalty behavior. Blogs were taken from a heavily trafficked website created by former MIT students called studentreviews.com, which contains over 95,000 student-written college and university reviews (as of November, 2010). The creators developed the website as a resource for prospective students to evaluate whether attending a particular college or university might be a worthwhile investment. Current students and alumni of various universities blog anonymously on the site about the positive and negative aspects of their university experiences to give prospective students a realistic idea of what they can expect to experience should they enroll at their university.

Blogs on this site were chosen because, based upon research of other university review websites, this site offered by far the largest database of in-depth reviews about students' university experiences. Also, these blogs offered a "ready" source of data to analyze; therefore, the researcher did not need to gain permission from another party before using the blogs.

On the website, reviews are broken into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Both the positive and negative categories of blogs were analyzed to learn how students talk about their expectations of the university experience.

The value in studying these student-written blogs in addition to student interviews was two-fold. First, it was assumed that because students were expressing their level of satisfaction to prospective students and not representatives of the university, their comments were likely to be more honest and revealing. A pilot study had already been conducted in which thirty blogs were analyzed, and this certainly proved to be the case. Many students' blogs displayed strong language and emotions, such as anger, disappointment, and distrust of their university, as well as affection, loyalty and reverence for their university. It seemed doubtful they would express these sentiments as openly to a researcher during an interview, so this method of data analysis eliminated the issue of interviewer bias. Second, analyzing student blogs was one of the only ways to learn about the dissatisfaction of the most disloyal of students, because these unhappy students might not consent to an interview with a researcher.

Blogger Demographics

The information collected from this site on bloggers who were currently attending or attended a campus in the Cohort System included the following demographic data:

Stage in Student Life Cycle: First Year Student, Second Year Student, Third Year Student, Fourth Year Student, Fifth Year Student, or Alumni. If the student was a second or third year student, the student's blog was excluded from the study because

only freshmen, seniors, and alumni were being studied; moreover, all fourth and fifth year students were grouped together as seniors.

Blog Category: When bloggers post their reviews, the site requires them to categorize their reviews as Positive, Negative or Neutral; if blog entries were designated as Neutral, they were excluded from the study.

The following table lists the number of bloggers by stage in the student life cycle and blog category:

Table 4: Number of Cohort University System Bloggers by Stage in the Student Life Cycle and Blog Category

Blog category	Stage of the student life cycle		
	Freshman	Senior	Alumnus/ Alumna
Positive review	57	42	40
Negative review	26	24	15

Gender: 124 bloggers were male and 80 were female.

Campus within Cohort System: Only blogs of undergraduate students who were attending or had attended 8 of the 10 campuses in the Cohort System were collected and analyzed. One campus in the system has no undergraduate degree programs, so it was excluded from the study. Also, one campus was so recently established that no blogs had been posted about this university.

The following table lists the number of bloggers who were attending or who had attended the CU system by campus:

Table 5: Number of Bloggers in Cohort University System by Campus

Campus A	Campus B	Campus C	Campus D	Campus E	Campus F	Campus G	Cohort University
42	24	16	24	22	31	20	26

Major: On the website, bloggers select their degree programs from a list of 77 majors. If students were double-majors, they were only able to select one major. For reporting purposes, bloggers' majors were grouped into 14 broader constellations of academic studies.

The following table lists the number of bloggers by major:

Table 6: Number of Cohort University System Bloggers by Major

Business / Economics	The Arts	Political Science	Plant / Animal Sciences	Biology	Engineering	Cognitive Sciences
30	3	17	2	24	16	20
Physical Sciences	Social Sciences	English	Phil./Religion	Other	Undecided	Not reported
13	13	14	2	19	7	15

Transfer Students: If a blogger mentioned that she had entered a CU System campus as a transfer student, her blog was excluded from the study because the student had had multiple university experiences.

Context for the Research

The Cohort University System, a public research university system in California composed of 10 campuses, enrolls approximately 159,000 undergraduate

students. The CU System is highly selective - the 2010 entering classes had incoming average GPAs ranging from 3.55 to 4.15 and composite SAT I scores ranging from 1653 to 2060. As of 2009, The CU System's six-year graduation rate was 82%.

data analysis. As of November 15th, 2010, there were a total of 204 positive and negative review blogs posted on the site by students and alumni about the Cohort University System. Of the 204 blogs, 139 of the reviews were categorized (by the bloggers themselves) as *positive* and 65 were categorized as *negative*. Blogs were typically one to three paragraphs in length. All 204 blogs were selected for analysis.

Qualitative analysis software (HyperRESEARCH) was used to assist in coding the blogs. Based upon a review of the literature on determinants of student loyalty and initial findings from a pilot study, each blog was coded for satisfactions/dissatisfactions with the university experience and well as indicators of loyalty to the university. Also, during analysis, emergent codes that arose unexpectedly from the data were incorporated these into the coding procedure.

It is of particular note that all blogs categorized as positive were coded as indications of loyalty (because by virtue of writing the blog, the student was demonstrating loyalty by recommending the university to another student), while negative blogs were coded as indications of disloyalty. Once trends were identified within the blogs, the nature of the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty at each of the three points in the student life cycle was assessed.

Data Reporting

When quoting a specific blog entry within the dissertation, all references to geographic subdivisions smaller than a state mentioned in the blog were deleted so as

not to divulge personally identifiable information. Similarly, when quoting a specific blog entry within the dissertation, all references to elements of dates (other than years) mentioned in the blog were deleted so as not to divulge personally identifiable information. If other types of personally identifiable information appeared in the blogs, care was taken to delete these when making specific reference to the blogs in the dissertation.

Descriptions of this study's design and methods as well as all documents appearing in Appendices A-D were submitted to the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) at University of California, San Diego. The IRB submission was approved in November, 2010.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was twofold: the first was to examine how undergraduate students' satisfaction with university experiences relates to their retention and loyalty behavior. The second was to examine how undergraduates' expectations of their university experiences relates to their retention and loyalty behavior.

This chapter presents the findings discovered from the collection and analysis of the data. Interviewee themes discovered in relation to each of the five research questions are examined in turn. Additionally, blogger trends relating to the first two research questions are discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary of the major themes.

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Retention – All Interviewees

Seventeen satisfactions/dissatisfactions that students might express about their experiences at Cohort University were coded in the interview transcripts. The following three tables list these satisfaction/dissatisfaction codes, which are categorized into three groups: academic life, social life, and other aspects of the university experience.

Table 7: Code Names and Descriptions for Cohort University System Students' Satisfaction with University Academic Life

Code name	Code description	Example
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major	Degree of satisfaction with quality of classroom experience, curriculum, major offerings and major department	"Classes are boring, pointless, and occasionally maddening."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Instructors	Degree of satisfaction with professors and teaching assistants	"I've had professors who've contributed so much to my education and have left me feeling inspired."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Fellow Students	Degree of satisfaction with peers as classmates - not friends	"Not all students are the best and brightest, but most are hard working, and the very best are equal to the top students from any other institution."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Value of Education	Degree of satisfaction with experience based upon cost of education	"I'm sorry if this review goes against everything you perceived about [our campus], but it is simply not worth the outrageous \$8,000 each QUARTER to attend here. The education you will receive is nothing special."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Career Preparation	Degree of satisfaction with how well education provided job skills for success in career	"Most classes focus strictly on theory and are non-existent in real world application. You will not leave prepared with any sort of real-world skillset. I can count on one hand the number of classes that benefited my professional life."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Reputation	Degree of satisfaction with university living up to its ranking/reputation	"I've almost never had a hard time looking for work, or getting on the track to promotions. The degree opens doors."

Table 8: Code Names and Descriptions for Cohort University System Students' Satisfaction with University Social Life

Code Name	Code Description	Example
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Community/Campus Life	Degree of satisfaction with opportunities for involvement, sense of community and school spirit	"The spirit here is intense. You can't help but love [it here] because everyone else does, too. Everyone wears [university] gear all the time, and most of us know a fight song or two."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Fun	Degree of satisfaction with fun and leisure activities on campus	"There is absolutely NO social life here. No parties. Ever. Now I'm not saying that college is all about partying, but I mean come on, it has to play SOME sort of role."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships	Degree of satisfaction with fellow students as friends – not classmates	"I transferred in and lived in the dorms, and made friends immediately. However, you have to be the first to stick out your hand."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Belonging	Degree of satisfaction with feeling welcome and comfortable on campus	"White students are often made to feel unwelcome, particularly by some of the more radical professors and minority students."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Mattering to University	Degree of satisfaction with feeling like the university cares about the well-being of students	"I really feel like a number here. It's true. The whole faculty-student relationship is really impersonal. No one will spoon-feed you anything here."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Diversity	Degree of satisfaction with the composition of the student body	"Every day, I learn something new about people because there are so many different types of people in such a free environment where people can just be themselves. And I think that is where I really learn to be a better person."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Sports	Degree of satisfaction with competitive and intermural sports on campus	"Don't miss out on the athletic games. We might not have the best teams, but we certainly have the best fans."

Table 9: Code Names and Descriptions for Cohort University System Students' Satisfaction with Other Aspects of the University Experience

Code name	Code description	Example
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Student Services	Degree of satisfaction with student services offices on campus, such as the financial aid office, career services, housing office, etc.	"There's also a really convenient bus system, so if the weather's bad or you're feeling lazy, you can just take the bus since it's free as long as you have your ID."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Location	Degree of satisfaction with city and county in which the university is located	"The city itself is a smothering wasteland, the most sprawling suburban area in the country according to one study. In no way can this place be described as pleasing. Thick pollution blankets the entire city like a hot stinking rug."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Facilities	Degree of satisfaction with resources on campus	"There is no student union. Well, there is but there is almost nothing in it and no good places to hang out. It is also dirty, dark and depressing."
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Overall University Experience	Degree of satisfaction with university experience in general	"I don't think I could have made a better choice for a school in the whole state of California, and maybe even the country."

The following is an example of the process used for coding students' reasons for their retention behaviors. When an interviewee was asked whether she had ever considered transferring out of the university, she responded that she had always desired to stay:

(First-Year Interviewee 2) I've been happy. I like being by the ocean and the beach.

When analyzing the interviewee's transcript, the student's reason for persisting was assigned the satisfaction code for Satisfaction with Location.

Interviewees did not always offer reasons for their retention behaviors. Sometimes they simply responded that they had never considered transferring.

The satisfactions/dissatisfactions that the interviewees attributed their retention behavior to most frequently were these listed here (for a complete listing, refer to Appendix E):

- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships (6/21 interviewees)
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major (5/21 interviewees)
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Instructors (3/21 interviewees)

These three retention themes that emerged from the transcripts are now discussed in further detail.

Interviewee Retention Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships

The interviewees most frequently mentioned that their desire to either persist or transfer out was attributable to their ability to develop significant and meaningful relationships with fellow students (and sometimes university faculty and staff).

Interviewees who expressed satisfaction with their ability to befriend their peers usually acknowledged that they initially experienced frustration in doing so during their freshman year and sometimes sophomore year. They explained that once they made more of an effort to befriend their peers or get involved in campus activities as upperclassmen, their friendships started to flourish. Interviewees who expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to befriend their peers usually blamed their fellow students for being anti-social or the university for failing to offer enough on-campus

activities (or encouraging participation in them). Some interviewees even identified Satisfaction with Relationships as the most satisfying aspect of their university experiences:

(Senior Interviewee 4) Having a core group of friends and just hanging out with them and they always have your back and are always there for you. That's the best thing I think about my college experience so far.

Frequently, interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the friendships they had developed if they were not deep or lasting, which caused them to eventually consider transferring out. Alternately, if they were able to develop close friendships, this was sometimes such a powerful bond that it compensated for other dissatisfactions they had had with their university experience, such as Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major.

Interviewee Retention Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major

The interviewees frequently mentioned that their retention behavior was attributable to their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the quality of their majors or major offerings. Interviewees who expressed satisfaction with their major talked about how their program of study gave them the freedom to pursue their academic interests:

(First-Year Interviewee 2) I think the most satisfying thing is knowing that I'm taking the classes that I want to take and not classes that I just have to take.

Some also mentioned the opportunities that were available to them, such as conducting research alongside professors and being involved in interesting co-curricular programs associated with their majors.

Interviewees usually expressed dissatisfaction with majors if a particular major they desired was not offered at the university. Interviewees who had contemplated transferring out because of dissatisfaction with their major were usually aware that another local college or university offered a better or more specialized academic program in their area of academic interest, which tempted them to switch schools. Other interviewees who were dissatisfied with their majors usually complained that their education was too theoretical. They were concerned that the information they had learned would not be practical enough to adequately prepare them for their career. Rather than acting on their thoughts of transferring out, some of the upperclassman addressed this issue by graduating with their bachelor's degree from Cohort University and then supplementing their knowledge with more practical skills from graduate classes at other universities.

Interviewee Retention Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Instructors

Interviewees also occasionally mentioned that their retention behaviors were attributable to their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with professors and teaching assistants. Interviewees who expressed satisfaction with their professors talked primarily about how knowledgeable they were and how well-respected they were in their fields. Some interviewees also praised the teaching assistants who taught some of their classes for their competence and for the personal attention they showed students. Interviewees who expressed dissatisfaction with their professors complained that they perceived them as caring more about teaching graduate students and conducting research than about the well-being of undergraduates. Others complained that their professors

weren't necessarily uncaring, but that they were prevented from meeting undergraduates' learning needs due to sheer class size:

(Senior Interviewee 5) I think I would like to have smaller classes because my two majors were both really popular...in economics, classes are easily 200 to 400 people. It's intimidating to learn in such a large classroom where professors can't really slow down for you or cater to your needs. Personal classes. I probably should've gone to a private school.

Many interviewees also expressed dissatisfaction with their professors because they felt many of them were unable to communicate their considerable knowledge to students in ways that were understandable. Rather than transfer out because of this dissatisfaction, a few of the interviewees dealt with this issue by taking responsibility for their own learning by teaching themselves from course textbooks.

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Retention – Freshmen

The seven freshmen interviewees attributed their retention behaviors to the following satisfactions/dissatisfactions, in order of frequency:

- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships (2/7 interviewees)
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Location (2/7 interviewees)

Additionally, one of the seven interviewees did not give a reason for his/her desire to persist but expressed a Satisfaction with Relationships during the interview.

Interviewee Retention Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Location

One theme that appeared for freshmen that was not a major theme amongst all interviewees was a link between Satisfaction with Location and persistence.

Freshmen interviewees who were satisfied with Cohort University's location shared that they really enjoyed living in a beach community:

(First-Year Interviewee 2) Yeah I've been happy. I like being by the ocean and the beach.

Some students had moved from Northern California or from out-of-state to Southern California to enjoy the sunny temperate weather during their college years. After living in Southern California for a year, these interviewees relished the idea of remaining here, perhaps even after graduation, rather than returning to the colder, rainier climate of Northern California. None of the freshmen interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with Cohort University's location, so this was not related to students' desire to transfer.

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Retention – Seniors

The seven senior interviewees attributed their retention behaviors to the following satisfactions/dissatisfactions, in order of frequency:

- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships (2/7 interviewees)
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major (2/7 interviewees)

Additionally, six of the seven interviewees did not give reasons for persisting but had expressed the following satisfactions during the interview: Satisfaction with Value of Education, Satisfaction with Relationships, and Satisfaction with Classes/Major.

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Retention – Alumni

The seven alumni interviewees attributed their retention behaviors to the following satisfactions/dissatisfactions, in order of frequency:

- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major (2/7 interviewees)
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships (2/7 interviewees)

Also, three of the seven interviewees did not give reasons for transferring but had expressed the following dissatisfactions during the interview: Dissatisfaction with Relationships and Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major.

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Retention – First Generation Students

Sixteen of the 21 interviewees were first generation university students. Of the 17 satisfactions/dissatisfactions that the researcher coded for in the transcripts, the first-generation interviewees attributed their retention behaviors most frequently to these satisfactions/dissatisfactions listed here (for a complete listing, refer to Appendix E):

- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships (5/16 interviewees)
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major (5/16 interviewees)

The retention themes associated with the two most common satisfactions/dissatisfactions will now be discussed in greater depth.

Interviewee Retention Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships

First generation interviewees frequently mentioned that their desire either to persist or transfer out was attributable to their ability to develop significant and meaningful relationships with their fellow students (and sometimes with university faculty and staff). One satisfied interviewee described the friends she had made in the dorms in familial terms:

(First-Year Interviewee 6) I really find it satisfying to feel like your suitemates are a family. It's ten girls and we all know each other...and we all hang out with each other and we are all right next to each other. There are so many people you can go to...people that you can never get bored of talking to and that will challenge you intellectually as well...help you pursue your goals.

Interviewee Retention Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major

Satisfaction/dissatisfaction with course offerings or with major requirements was frequently influential in first-generation interviewees' retention behavior.

Satisfied freshmen interviewees remarked that they cared about having the freedom to pursue their academic interests, so the availability of diverse course offerings added to their satisfaction. Similarly, dissatisfied first generation interviewees complained that if their major did not suit their interests, they had little ability to alter their major requirements to match them:

(First-Year Interviewee 6) The least satisfying would probably be the lack of flexibility within the colleges academically. It really is just so frustrating you have to transfer completely out of a college instead of working with your major to see what would suit you better.

A few first generation interviewees mentioned that some of their most satisfying academic experiences took place during participation in co-curricular programs, such as study-abroad and undergraduate research programs.

Blog Trends Regarding Satisfaction and Retention

The trends regarding satisfaction and retention that emerged from the blogs will now be examined. The blogs of 204 students currently attending or had attended one of eight university campuses within the Cohort system were coded for 17 satisfactions/dissatisfactions that they expressed about their university experience (refer to Tables 7, 8, and 9).

The following Satisfactions/Dissatisfactions are the reasons most frequently given by the bloggers for their desire to transfer or persist:

-Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships

- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Community/Campus Life
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Instructors

Bloggers' retention behaviors tended to be influenced by more than one of these satisfactions/dissatisfactions. Following are some examples from the blogs:

I look forward to transferring as soon as I can. It's a nice enough place and the people are cool enough, but the lack of serious social life, lackluster academics and narrow-minded faculty and student body make it difficult to enjoy the experience.

The engineering and computer science programs are way too small for [Cohort University System] standards, and lack the prestige of bigger schools. But the academic programs didn't bother me as much as the living situations. The lack of on-campus activities, poor sports (Div III), and hard to drive around campus don't help it any.

The retention trends associated with the four most common satisfactions/dissatisfactions will now be discussed in greater depth.

Students' Retention Behavior was influenced by their Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships

Bloggers frequently mentioned that their desire either to persist or to transfer out was attributable to their ability to develop significant and meaningful relationships with their fellow students. The bloggers who transferred out or considered transferring out felt this way primarily because of their perceived lack of social life on campus, while bloggers who were satisfied with their social lives remarked they had taken initiative to get to know others.

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships was also related to bloggers' retention behaviors indirectly (i.e., bloggers did not attribute their retention behaviors to these satisfactions/dissatisfactions, but they expressed these sentiments in their blogs).

Satisfied bloggers praised how friendly their peers were, how many lasting friendships they had made during their experience, and how satisfied they were with the dating scenes on their campuses. Dissatisfied bloggers complained about how unfriendly their peers were, how uninterested their peers were in maintaining social lives, the superficial quality of their friendships and the poor dating scenes on their campuses:

(Freshman Blogger) People in general are superficially friendly, in my opinion it is very hard to make good friends [here], mainly because so many people spend so much time studying and worrying about their grades.

Students' Retention Behavior was influenced by their Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Community/Campus Life

The presence or absence of community, school spirit, and opportunities for involvement on campus were frequently influential with regard to bloggers' retention behaviors. The bloggers who had considered transferring out complained specifically about a lack of on-campus activities, while the bloggers who chose to stay attributed their persistence to involvement in extracurricular activities.

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Community/Campus Life was also indirectly related to bloggers' retention behaviors. Satisfied bloggers who persisted praised their universities for a plethora of on-campus activities in which to get involved, a strong sense of community on campus, infectious school spirit, a harmonious campus climate and an enjoyable general atmosphere. Dissatisfied bloggers who considered transferring remarked that their campuses lacked school spirit, had no sense of community and few students participated in extracurricular activities:

(Freshman Blogger) There is no school spirit. I walk on campus and I can't help but notice many sweatshirts that have different schools on them...I hate it. The student body has no pride in their school. They seem bitter that they didn't get into these schools....still. Get over it! I hate the fact that [our campus] is considered a "second choice" school. It's not that the school is bad, it is the student body who still remains without a football team, go home every weekend, and about 40 percent of them commute.

Students' Retention Behavior was influenced by their Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major

Bloggers frequently mentioned that their retention behaviors were attributable to their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with major offerings or the quality of their classes. The bloggers who considered transferring out attributed their desire to leave to lackluster academics and under-resourced science departments. There were no bloggers who attributed their desire to stay to Satisfaction with Classes/Major.

Frequently, Satisfaction with Classes/Major was indirectly related to bloggers' retention behaviors. Bloggers who persisted often remarked how satisfied they were with the diversity of courses offered, the challenging coursework, the small class sizes, the opportunities for research, and the personal attention they received from academic departments:

(Senior Blogger) I decided to declare Linguistics instead and I couldn't have been happier. The Linguistic department is a hidden campus gem. It is small. How small? So small that when you declare the major the Major Advisor takes a picture of you to go on the wall along with your fellow undergrads. Classes were easy to get into and the largest lectures contained no more than 60 students.

Some also remarked how the curriculum within their major not only increased their knowledge but also taught them how to think. Bloggers who considered transferring

attributed this to their dissatisfaction with large and impersonal classes and with coursework that was either too theoretical or not challenging enough.

Students' Retention Behavior was influenced by their Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Instructors

Bloggers' appreciation of their professors and teaching assistants was frequently influential in their retention behavior. The bloggers who considered transferring attributed this to having uncaring, ignorant, and narrow-minded faculty as teachers. There were no bloggers who explicitly attributed their desire to stay to Satisfaction with Instructors.

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Instructors was also indirectly related to bloggers' retention behaviors. Satisfied bloggers who persisted praised their professors for being knowledgeable about their subjects, accessible to students, and caring with regard to undergraduates' welfare:

(Alumni Blogger) UCR is a great place to nurture your hopes and dreams, and along the way, you are encouraged to reach them by your professors.

Some also praised their teaching assistants for being particularly helpful to them. Dissatisfied bloggers who considered transferring faulted their professors for their inability to teach and their tendency to make teaching graduate classes rather than undergraduate classes, in addition to conducting research, their highest priorities.

Comparison of Interviewee and Blogger Findings Regarding Satisfaction and Retention

The following table compares the most frequently mentioned reasons for retention behavior that interviewees provided, with those that bloggers provided:

Table 10: The Most Common Satisfaction and Dissatisfactions Influencing Retention Behavior: A Comparison of Cohort University Interviewee and Cohort University System Blogger Responses

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction	Interviewee Response	Blogger Response
Relationships	1 st most frequent	1 st most frequent
Classes/Major	2 nd most frequent	Tied for 3 rd most frequent
Instructors	3 rd most frequent	Tied for 3 rd most frequent
Community/Campus Life	(Not one of the 3 most frequent responses)	2 nd most frequent

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Loyalty – All Interviewees

The themes regarding satisfaction and loyalty that emerged from the interviewee transcripts will now be discussed. The transcripts were coded for six loyalty behaviors that students might have demonstrated toward Cohort University:

Table 11: Code Names for Cohort University System Students' Loyalty Behaviors toward their Campuses

Code name	Example of loyalty behavior
Feel Loyal toward University	"Loyalty-wise, I'm proud to say that I go here. It's definitely a good school. I'm loyal to it, I guess."
Applied/Considered Applying to Graduate School at University	"Yeah, I'm hoping to go to pharmacy school, and [Cohort University] has an extremely good pharmacy school that I would apply to as one of my first choices."
Involved in University Events/Programs/Activities	"I went to some meetings for some clubs, but not too much. "
Donated/Considered Donating Money to University	"I would be open to that but not immediately. I'm going straight back into school and I'll be in even more debt."
Encouraged Others to Apply to University	"I encourage people to come a lot. When my friend's cousin got in and she came here to visit for a day, I volunteered to drive her around. I want people to come. "
Volunteered/Considered Volunteering Time to University	"Yeah, I'll be happy to do that, but not on a weekend (laughing) but a few times a year...that would be great. "

Seventeen satisfactions/dissatisfactions that students might express about their experience at Cohort University were also coded in the interview transcripts (refer to Tables 7, 8, and 9). The following is an example of the process used for coding students' reasons for their loyalty behaviors.

When an interviewee was asked if he had ever considered donating money to his university, he responded that he would not do so:

(Senior Interviewee 4) I'm leaning towards not just because of all the tuition increases.

When analyzing the interviewee's transcript, the student's reason for not donating money was coded for Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Value of Education.

Interviewees did not always offer a reason for their loyalty behaviors.

The satisfactions/dissatisfactions to which 21 the interviewees most frequently attributed their loyalty behaviors were those listed in the following chart (for a complete listing, refer to Appendix F):

Table 12: Cohort University Interviewees' Satisfaction with their University Experiences and the Respective Loyalty Behaviors They Influenced

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction	Loyalty behavior
Classes/Major 4/21	Recommend university 3/21 Apply to grad school 1/21
University experience 3/21	Recommend university 1/21 Apply to grad school 1/21 Feel Loyal 1/21
Community/Campus 2/21	Donate money 1/21 Feel loyal 1/21
Location/Campus 2/21	Recommend university 2/21

Note. Listed next to each Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction above is the number of interviewees who expressed this Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction.

Note. Listed next to each Loyalty Behavior above is the number of interviewees who demonstrated this Loyalty Behavior.

The following are the top two loyalty themes that emerged from the transcripts:

Interviewee Loyalty Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major was the top theme amongst interviewees. Three interviewees attributed recommending or not recommending their universities to this satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The interviewees who encouraged

others to apply did so because they felt that Cohort University was strong in certain majors that were worth promoting:

(Senior Interviewee 6) Yeah I've encouraged everyone I know that are applying to schools. I think it's a good school, especially if they're in the sciences and engineering. I don't know much about the other programs...I don't know much about them. I always want more people to come.

Interviewees also admitted, however, that there were certain majors in which they felt Cohort University was weak, so they discouraged the prospective students who were interested in those majors from attending:

(Researcher) So it sounds like you're okay with encouraging people to go. You think it's a good college decision.

(Alumni Interviewee 2) Yeah. If what they're looking to major in is there and it's a good program, I would encourage them to go. CU isn't a school for everybody. If you want something more artsy... I think the art department exists there, but if you want to do drama, I think you should pick a different school. It depends on what you want to do. It's more science-oriented.

One interviewee attributed his/her interest in applying to Cohort University for graduate school to satisfaction with the quality of his/her academic program.

Interviewee Loyalty Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with University Experience

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with University Experience was related to three different loyalty behaviors. One interviewee attributed his/her endorsement of Cohort University to satisfaction with his/her overall university experience:

(Senior Interviewee 1) I think there's definitely been a couple of friends from younger classes who I advocated to go to CU just because of how great my experience has been.

Another interviewee claimed that satisfaction with his/her university

experience compelled him/her to apply to CU for graduate school:

(Researcher) When you do go on to pharmacy school, is CU one of the schools you may consider...that you might apply to alongside other schools?

(Senior Interviewee 4) That's the top school I'm applying to. I like it here. I've enjoyed it so far.

Lastly, an interviewee reported not having complete satisfaction with his/her experience, but felt loyal to CU because the university had done its best for him/her.

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Loyalty – Freshmen

Two of the seven freshmen interviewees attributed their loyalty behaviors to specific satisfactions/dissatisfactions. One of them attributed his/her desire to promote the university to a Satisfaction with Classes/Major, while the other attributed his/her desire to a Satisfaction with Location.

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Loyalty – Seniors

Three of the seven senior interviewees attributed their loyalty behaviors to a Satisfaction with University Experience. One of them was inspired to promote the university to others, while the second was compelled to apply to graduate school at CU. The third felt loyal to Cohort University.

Two of the seven senior interviewees attributed their loyalty behaviors to a Satisfaction with Community/Campus Life. One of them desired to donate money, while the other felt loyal to Cohort University.

One senior interviewee attributed feeling loyal because of a Satisfaction with Reputation, while another attributed his/her disinterest in donating money to a Dissatisfaction with Value of Education.

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Loyalty – Alumni

Two of the seven alumni interviewees attributed their loyalty behavior to a Satisfaction with Academics. One was inspired to promote the university to others, while the other was compelled to apply to graduate school at CU.

One alumni interviewee claimed he/she did not promote the university because of a Dissatisfaction with Location.

Interview Themes Regarding Satisfaction and Loyalty – First Generation Students

Sixteen of the 21 interviewees were first generation university students. Of the 17 satisfactions/dissatisfactions that were coded in the transcripts, the first-generation interviewees attributed their loyalty behaviors most frequently to the ones listed in the following chart (for a complete listing, refer to Appendix F):

Table 13: Cohort University First-Generation Interviewees' Satisfaction with their University Experiences and the Respective Loyalty Behaviors They Influenced

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction	Loyalty behavior
Classes/Major 4/21	Recommend university 3/21 Apply to grad school 1/21
Location 2/21	Recommend university 2/21
University Experience 2/21	Apply to grad school 1/21 Feel loyal 1/21

Note. Listed next to each Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction above is the number of interviewees who expressed this Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction.

Note. Listed next to each Loyalty Behavior above is the number of interviewees who expressed this Loyalty Behavior.

The loyalty themes associated with the three most common satisfactions/dissatisfactions of first-generation interviewees will now be discussed in greater depth.

Interviewee Loyalty Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major

Just as Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major was the top loyalty theme amongst all interviewees, it was also the top theme amongst first-generation interviewees. Interviewees who encouraged others to apply did so because they felt that Cohort University was strong in certain majors that were worth promoting:

(Senior Interviewee 6) Yeah I've encouraged everyone I know that are applying to schools. I think it's a good school, especially if they're in the sciences and engineering.

One interviewee attributed his/her desire to attend CU for graduate school to this satisfaction.

Interviewee Loyalty Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Location

Just as Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Location was a theme amongst all interviewers, it was also a theme amongst first-generation interviewees. One interviewee didn't recommend CU because of the area surrounding the university:

(Alumni Interviewee 3) I think my freshman year, I actually discouraged people. I wasn't that happy my freshman year. I think in general, I'm for the Cohort schools...I feel like there's advantages and disadvantages to every Cohort school. I feel like another Cohort school and Cohort University are both in really expensive areas.

Another interviewee recommended the university because he/she enjoyed the laid-back atmosphere on campus and the nice Southern California weather.

Interviewee Loyalty Behavior was influenced by Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with University Experience

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with University Experience was a loyalty theme amongst first-generation interviewees like it was with all interviewers. One

interviewee commented on how satisfaction with his/her university experience compelled him/her to apply to CU for graduate school:

(Senior Interviewee 4) That's the top school I'm applying to. I like it here. I've enjoyed it so far.

Another interviewee reported feeling loyal to CU because the university had done its best for him/her.

Blog Trends Regarding Satisfaction and Loyalty

The trends regarding satisfaction and loyalty that emerged from the blogs will now be examined. Seventeen satisfactions/dissatisfactions that students might express about their university experiences were coded in the blogs of 204 undergraduate students and alumni at eight campuses in the CU System (refer to Tables 7, 8, and 9).

The researcher also coded the blogs as indications of either loyal or disloyal behavior. Positive blogs were coded as an indication of loyalty behavior (because by writing this type of blog, the blogger was recommending the university to students), while negative blogs were coded as an indication of disloyal behavior (because by writing this type of blog, the blogger was discouraging students from applying to the university). Of the 204 blogs, 139 of them proved to be positive recommendations, while 65 of them were negative recommendations.

All of the satisfactions/dissatisfactions expressed in the blogs were compiled by cohort (freshmen, senior and alumni). Then, the three satisfactions and the three dissatisfactions that appeared most frequently for each cohort were isolated. Of these, the satisfactions/dissatisfactions appearing most often across all cohort lists were determined to be the most closely associated with the loyalty behavior of

encouraging/discouraging students from applying. They are listed here:

- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Instructors
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Community/Campus Life
- Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships

These four satisfactions/dissatisfactions that most strongly influenced bloggers' loyalty behavior will now be discussed in greater depth.

Students' Loyalty Behavior was influenced by their Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major

Most freshmen bloggers were satisfied with their coursework; for those that were satisfied, they recommended their university because of how happy they were with the personal attention they received from their academic departments:

(Freshman Blogger) I'm in a tiny, poor department, but my faculty and fellow students have been so dedicated and helpful that I would never change my major for lack of resources.

Other satisfied freshmen mentioned how challenging their courses were. For those that were not satisfied, there were a variety of reasons given for their dissatisfaction.

Most senior bloggers were satisfied with their coursework. Some applauded their universities for offering a diversity of courses:

(Senior Blogger) The diversity of course offerings allowed me to complete my major and a minor while having plenty of electives to take in fields such as film, psychology, and cultural studies.

Others seniors appreciated how challenging their courses were:

(Senior Blogger) Excellent education I received in my classes... they really teach you the fundamentals and the theory behind engineering concepts, and then they challenge you to put your knowledge into practice.

Lastly, seniors recommended their universities because of how satisfied they were with their university's small classes, opportunities for research, and effective teaching.

Most alumni bloggers praised their school's coursework and the quality of their education; of the alumni who did not, they didn't promote their universities because they claimed their courses were not helpful. Others complained about courses being too theoretical or too easy. Of the alumni who praised their university's courses, they mentioned that those courses were challenging and that they not only learned the course material but also learned how to think. Also, some of these alumni mentioned the many research opportunities available to undergraduates:

(Alumni Blogger) Probably the best thing about [my university] and especially about my program (molecular and cell biology) is the fantastic atmosphere of undergraduate involvement in research. My guess is that most undergraduates perform research in a lab at some point in their career here, and I feel very lucky to have been involved in research for the equivalent of nearly four years.

Students' Loyalty Behavior was influenced by their Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Instructors.

Most freshmen bloggers were satisfied with their instructors and recommended their universities as a result. Some praised their professors for being accessible and caring, while others praised them for being knowledgeable. Of the ones that were not satisfied and, as a result, discouraged others from attending, they complained mostly about how their professors put more effort into research than into teaching:

(Freshman Blogger) Some professors tend to be way too brilliant for the students; they explain everything the way they've derived it and we wonder if he's even speaking the same language to us anymore, because we're not understanding a thing.

Half of the senior bloggers were satisfied with their instructors, while the other half were not. Of the half that were not satisfied, they mostly complained about the unavailability of professors, who made research and graduate students a higher priority, although a few complained about being taught by TA's whom they felt were not as qualified to teach as professors. The half that was satisfied mostly praised professors for their considerable knowledge as well as the attention and care shown to them as undergraduates:

(Senior Blogger) I was blessed with having a faculty advisor that not only cared about my [university] career, but my entire future. I consider her a personal friend, and it was amazing to take classes from someone I admired so greatly.

A few satisfied students also praised their TA's for being helpful instructors.

Half of the alumni praised their instructors, while the other half despised them; the half that praised them mostly commented on how accessible and caring they were:

(Alumni Blogger) You'll find that [this campus] is an incredible place to learn. Faculty are welcoming and helpful (just go talk to them during office hours!)

The half that despised their instructors commented that they were poor TA's, uncaring professors, and professors that couldn't teach.

Students' Loyalty Behavior was influenced by their Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Community/Campus Life

Most freshmen bloggers expressed satisfaction with campus life and recommended their universities to others as a result. Those who were satisfied mostly mentioned a plethora of campus activities in which to get involved:

(Freshman Blogger) Getting involved on campus is as easy as walking through our (main plaza). Groups table and hand out flyers there every day of the week. Just sign up and you're in. Or you can easily check

online for anything you're interested in. If you don't find anything you like, just start your own group; you only need four people to do so.

Other satisfied freshmen mentioned a strong school spirit/sense of community on campus, a harmonious campus climate, and an interesting and friendly student body.

Those that were not satisfied complained about students' lack of participation in activities on campus and a general lack of school spirit/sense of community:

(Freshman Blogger) Almost every, not all, students come to CU because they did not get into the much more prestigious [campuses in the Cohort System], including myself. CU immediately becomes the 2nd choice school that no one really wants to go to. You can definitely tell that most people don't really want to be at CU, but it was the best academic school available.

Most senior bloggers were satisfied with campus life at their universities. The vast majority of them attributed their satisfaction with campus life to the wealth of opportunities for involvement available:

(Senior Blogger) If clubs and organizations are what you are looking for, then go to the [student association] website. There you will find the listings for over 450 clubs and other types of organizations. If we don't have something, then start your own club! I did it three years ago with some of my friends and it was such an easy process. [Our campus] has so many opportunities to get involved and make friends, but you do have to be willing to put forth the effort.

Almost all the alumni bloggers recommended their universities and praised them for their campus communities, primarily because of school spirit and an enjoyable atmosphere. Some alumni also praised their universities for offering many opportunities for involvement.

Students' Loyalty Behavior was influenced by their Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships

Half of the freshmen bloggers were satisfied with their relationships with their peers, while the other half were not. Of the half that was satisfied, many mentioned how friendly their peers were and some mentioned how attractive they were:

(Freshman Blogger) People are friendly and beautiful, perhaps because they're so approachable and laid-back.

Of the half that was not satisfied, many mentioned how unfriendly their peers were and some mentioned how unattractive they were.

Most senior bloggers were not satisfied with their peers and the quality of those relationships - many of them complained about the lack of good-looking students to date, and a few of them mentioned that their peers had no interest in having a social life:

(Senior Blogger) Some of the students are so geeky that they don't care about social life.

Those seniors who were satisfied with their peers mentioned how friendly the student body was and how many lasting friendships they had made during their experiences.

Most alumni bloggers recommended that prospective students apply to their universities because of how satisfied they were with the friendships they had made on campus. Many alumni also mentioned how satisfied they were with the dating scenes on their campuses.

Comparison of Interviewee and Blogger Findings Regarding Satisfaction and Loyalty

The following table compares the most frequently mentioned reasons for loyalty behavior that interviewees provided with those that bloggers provided:

Table 14: The Most Common Satisfaction and Dissatisfactions Influencing Loyalty Behavior: A Comparison of Cohort University Interviewee and Cohort University System Blogger Responses

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction	Interviewee Response	Blogger Response
Classes/Major	1 st most frequent	1 st most frequent
Instructors	2 nd most frequent	(Not one of the 3 most frequent responses)
Community/Campus life	Tied for 3 rd most frequent	Tied for 3 rd most frequent
Relationships	Tied for 3 rd most frequent	(Not one of the 3 most frequent responses)
University experience	(Not one of the 3 most frequent responses)	2 nd most frequent
Location/Campus	(Not one of the 3 most frequent responses)	Tied for 3 rd most frequent

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations of the University Experience – All Interviewees

During the interview, interviewees were asked several questions regarding their expectations of university life. For the purposes of this study, an *expectation of the university experience* was defined as “a desire the student had for his/her university experience prior to matriculation.”

Specifically, they were asked the following questions about the nature of their expectations when they were high school seniors:

- How would you have described the ideal university experience as a high school senior?
- When making your university choice as a high school senior, what you were looking for in a university?
- Why did you finally decide to attend Cohort University?
- To the best of your recollection, what were you expecting academic life to be like when you entered Cohort University?

-As an entering student, what were you expecting social life to be like at Cohort University?

Interviewees were also asked the following question in order to learn whether or not their expectations were shaped by their parents' university experiences:

-If your parents went to college, what were their experiences like?

Lastly, interviewees were asked the following questions regarding whether or not their expectations of their university experience changed at all during the time they were students at CU:

-Have/Did your expectations of your university experience change(d) during your time spent at Cohort University? If so, how?

-How would you describe the ideal university experience now?

When analyzing the interviewees' transcripts, expectation codes were used to code the interviewees' responses to these questions. Specifically, the following codes were used to analyze interviewees' responses to questions related to the nature of their expectations:

Table 15: Code Names and Descriptions for Cohort University Students' Initial Expectations of the University Experience (as pre-matriculants)

Code name	Code description	Example
Ideal University Experience as a High School Student	Not anticipation of actual experience, but vision of the perfect experience	“What being in college represented to me was being on my own. I looked forward to decide when I leave my room and when I could go out...the freedom aspects...being able to do things when I wanted to if I wanted to. “
Initial Expectation of Academic Life	(Self-explanatory)	“I thought students would go to lectures and then at night I didn't know there'd be a lot of intense reading. I thought that after the school day students would be doing a lot of organization and extracurricular activities, going to concerts...Something like that...”
Initial Expectation of Social Life	(Self-explanatory)	“What I expected was, let's go out partying every weekend...let's go get drunk...let's go have fun...”
Expectation of Location	Expectations regarding city and county in which the university is located	“I wanted it to be close enough to home that I could go home every so often, but not so close that my parents would still have a decent hold on me.”
Expectation of Reputation	Expectation that university will live up to its ranking/reputation	“What became really important to me was that it was a good school. I didn't want to go to some second-rate school, not with the grades I had worked all through high school...all my life for.”
Expectation of University Experience (Other)	Expectation of the university experience not already assigned a code	“Between [Cohort University] and [other universities], [CU] was the most affordable.”

In order to analyze interviewees' responses to the question about their parents' university experiences (and the subsequent question about who else shared their

university experiences with them if their parents did not share), the following expectation codes were employed:

Table 16: Code Names for Sources of Cohort University Students' Expectations of the University Experience

Code name	Example
Expectation based upon Parent's experience	"My father went to Denison Ohio University. He finished in three years. He told me all about the college experience. My dad said to have a well-rounded college experience - a nice balance between academics and social life."
Expectation based upon a Family member's experience (not parents)	"My brother started before me... For him he wasn't that social with his floormates. That kind of dampened my expectations for college, because he roomed with someone he already knew. It was a little dissolutioning."
Expectation based upon Other's experience (not family member)	"One thing a friend told me about was how to study...once you are in college, it really is up to you...no one is forcing you to study...when you get your first F...it's all your fault...there really is no one else to blame. The responsibility is all on me."
Expectation based upon Student Reviews (blogs read online)	"I also looked at rankings of student experiences... they have websites of student reviews so I looked up their experiences at colleges and whether they liked it or not."

The following codes were used to analyze interviewees' responses to the questions regarding whether or not their expectations of university life changed at all while attending CU:

Table 17: Code Names and Descriptions for Cohort University Students' Changed Expectations of the University Experience (as post-matriculants)

Code name	Code description	Example
Changed Expectation of Academic Life	(Self-explanatory)	"Academically, I am keeping up, but it's a lot more than I expected. I realized that it would be a lot more independent study...we would only have classes 2-3 times a week...there would be a lot more on my shoulders as the student than all the teachers..."
Changed Expectation of Social Life	(Self-explanatory)	"I think that there is a lot of stuff to do...UCSD provides a lot of stuff that are academic, social and what-have-you, but going out and finding it is the tricky part. Making that a bigger priority would be helpful..."
Ideal University Experience Now	Not actual experience, but vision of the perfect experience	"Just find a couple of activities you are good at...just a couple...you'll find the people that get you. So, it's a matter of getting involved...It's a chain reaction. It snowballs to something good."

The coded transcripts were then analyzed for themes. Interviewees' expectations of their university experiences generally proved realistic. However, their

expectation that they would benefit from these experiences by only expending minimal effort was unrealistic.

Interviewees didn't really know what to expect because their parents didn't tell them about their university experiences

When asked what their parents' university experiences were like, most of the interviewees responded that their parents had not shared their experiences with them. Sixteen of them shared that their parents had not graduated with a bachelor's degree from a college or university in the United States; so, even if they had shared their experiences, it wouldn't have proven very helpful to them. Some of their parents had completed university work overseas, while other parents had completed only a few university courses or had obtained an associate's degree at a community college:

(Senior Interviewee 7) My parents didn't really go to a formal college. Well my mom studied her bachelors, I mean, associate degree online from a university. She doesn't really know anything about living at college. Also about SATs and stuff she doesn't know anything about it. My dad didn't really go to a formal university. It's basically me trying to find out what college is about.

Of the five interviewees who stated that their parents had graduated with a bachelor's degree from an American college or university, only three had parents who chose to share anything with them about their experiences in college. With so few of the interviewees having any input from their parents about what to expect in college, a common response to questions about what they expected university life to be like was that they didn't really know what to expect.

If interviewees responded that they did not hear anything from their parents about their experiences, they were asked if anyone else had shared their university experiences with them. A few interviewees replied that other family members had

told them about their experiences. Some examples included a cousin who didn't enjoy attending college and an older brother who spent all of his time studying. One interviewee also mentioned that she learned what to expect by occasionally visiting her older sister on campus.

Interviewees also replied that their friends, teachers or counselors had sometimes shared their experiences and had given them advice on how to approach their freshman year of college. The typical advice received was to exercise their freedom to try new things (but not go overboard), to keep themselves accountable with regard to studying, and to choose a good circle of friends.

Interviewees expected academics to be more challenging than in high school (but didn't expect to have to study more than in high school)

When interviewees were asked what they expected academic life to be like at Cohort University, most all of them responded by discussing how challenging they thought it would be compared to high school. In general, interviewees viewed the prospect of an academic challenge as desirable. The majority of interviewees anticipated that college academics would be more challenging than high school academics, primarily because of things they had heard from others; this included the reality of having to study on one's own in college in addition to a more challenging curriculum:

(First-Year Interviewee 6) I definitely knew that the courses were going to be significantly more difficult. I was actually pretty worried. Most people from my small town who went to college either end up coming back and re-enrolling at the community college or just talking about their plummeting grades. I was definitely worried about that because I knew that our school wasn't exactly known for preparing kids to excel in higher universities.

One interviewee shared that she had taken a summer bridge course at Cohort University as a high school senior and had struggled in it, so she knew her freshman year would be tougher than high school.

Not all interviewees, though, anticipated that academic life would be more challenging than in high school, though. Those who had attended college preparatory schools expected academic life to be the same as or easier than it had been for them in high school.

Ironically, despite having the expectation that academics would be more challenging in college, interviewees admitted to being surprised by how hard they had to work to get good grades at Cohort University. Many of them struggled their freshman year, either because no one kept them accountable to study or because they were under the impression that they would not be expected to study outside of the time they spent in class:

(First-Year Interviewee 7) I thought students would go to lectures and then at night I didn't know there'd be a lot of intense reading. I thought that after the school day students would be doing a lot of organization and extracurricular activities.

(Researcher) Academics during the day, social life at night was what you were anticipating.

(First-Year Interviewee 7) Uh-huh. And that's what I've also heard from my friends. I didn't know about the reading until I got here.

Since attending CU, some interviewees mentioned how their academic expectations had changed from expecting to handle the challenge of university coursework, to expecting to handle the challenge provided they balanced their social life with studying.

Interviewees expected more academic and social freedom than in high school/living at home

A major theme regarding interviewees' expectations of their university experiences was the anticipation of enjoying greater freedom than they did in high school. This theme surfaced most often when interviewees were asked the question, "How would you have described your ideal university experience as a high school senior?":

(First-Year Interviewee 2) What being in college represented to me was being on my own. I looked forward to decide when I leave my room and when I could go out...the freedom aspects...being able to do things when I wanted to if I wanted to.

This theme also surfaced frequently when interviewees spoke of their expectations regarding the location of CU. A common answer was that they wanted to go to college far enough away from their parents to be able to establish their independence.

Interviewees spoke of freedom not only in social terms but also in academic terms. When asked about their expectations of academic life in college, some responded that they were looking forward to leaving high school where they were forced to study what the school wanted them to learn instead of what interested them:

(First-Year Interviewee 2) I was looking for...the ability to create my own college experience. That doesn't happen to you in high school.

(Researcher) That's where you have electives to choose from and you get to pick a major. I really appreciated that about college - having all that additional academic freedom.

(First-Year Interviewee 2) ...Like a choice of several professors for one class.

Interviewees shared that their expectations of social and academic freedom were derived from what others had told them that they would experience in college.

Friends, family, and teachers had told them that they would have greater freedom to try new things, study when they felt like studying, and choose their own friends.

Interviewees expected to be provided with a lot of academic and social opportunities (but didn't expect to have to get involved to benefit from them)

Another major theme regarding interviewees' expectations of their university experience was the anticipation of having more academic and social opportunities available to them than they did in high school. This theme surfaced most frequently in the interviewees' responses to the questions, "How would you have described your ideal university experience as a high school senior?" and "How would you describe your ideal university experience now?":

(Alumni Interviewee 5) I wanted there to be a lot of different opportunities available to me as a student, whether that was academic opportunities, research positions, and things like that, or resources to help me with my academics, to a broader range of activities, participating with different clubs and organizations to get involved with.

Many interviewees admitted becoming dissatisfied with their experiences when they realized they were not as involved on campus as they had anticipated. They shared that one of their changed expectations was that college is indeed a time of opportunity provided that one takes initiative to get involved:

(Senior Interviewee 1) I think that there is a lot of stuff to do...CU provides a lot of stuff that are academic, social and what-have-you, but going out and finding it is the tricky part. Making that a bigger priority would be helpful, or making things more available.

Interviewees who made this realization partway through their experience began making an effort to join student groups and go to campus events. Usually, their satisfaction with social life on campus improved considerably once they did:

(Alumni Interviewee 1) Eventually, I joined a business fraternity because that is what I am interested in. I realized that if you aren't proactive about going out and trying to get involved, no one is going to ask you to join.

Similarly, interviewees who experimented with taking courses outside the standard curriculum for their majors found these class experiences very rewarding; their satisfaction with academic life on campus improved as a result. In short, once students started taking responsibility for getting involved, they were able to take advantage of the many opportunities available on their campuses.

Interviewees expected to make meaningful friendships (but didn't expect to have to initiate these relationships with peers)

Another major theme regarding interviewees' expectations of university life was the anticipation of forging significant and lasting friendships with their peers, and to a lesser extent, their instructors. This theme surfaced most frequently in interviewees' responses to the questions, "How would you have described your ideal university experience as a high school senior?"

(Freshman Interviewee 1) All I really wanted out of college was not to just pass and get my degree, but to make lasting relationships and to meet new people and to build those connections.

This theme also appeared when interviewees responded to the question about what they expected social life to be like at CU. They expected that the friendships they would make during college would blossom into lifelong friendships. Some of them believed this because others had shared their experiences with them and told them to expect this from their university experience.

Interviewees were clear in their responses they that were not interested in merely establishing a wide circle of acquaintances on campus. Several of them shared

that they had experienced this in high school and that they now desired to develop more meaningful relationships with their peers, where they could share their lives on a deeper and more personal level. Many of them looked forward to bonding with their peers by living with them in the dormitories.

Some interviewees admitted that their social expectations were not met their first year or two at CU because they were expecting their peers would reach out to them. When this did not occur, they found this very frustrating. Their friendships stubbornly remained at the surface level of acquaintanceships until they began taking initiative to reach out to their peers. Once they did, deeper friendships finally started taking root. They mentioned this as a changed expectation: before entering CU, they expected to make lasting friendships, but after attending CU for a year or two, they only expected to make lasting friendships if they took responsibility for initiating relationships.

To illustrate this phenomenon, the following vignette illustrates how a senior interviewee didn't have his initial social expectations met until he stopped expecting the university to meet them and starting taking initiative to meet them himself:

Table 18: Vignette Demonstrating that Students who Change their Initial Expectations and Take Partial Responsibility for Meeting them Tend to Report their Expectations were Met

At the start of the interview, the senior interviewee shared with the researcher that one of his initial expectations of social life in college was that there would be a lot of partying:

- “I expected it [social life] to be a lot more vibrant, to say the least. A lot more craziness...”
- “I think it involves a lot more of my conception with the classic college party movies.”
- “My dad would tell me a lot about his frat party kind of stuff. It had some kind of effect, I guess.”

When the researcher asked the interviewee later in the interview whether his social expectations had been met, he responded that they had not been met his freshmen year, and that he had considered transferring out:

- “I think the first year was the trickiest part. I think it was a lot and it just had to do with the fact that I wasn't adjusted to it...I hadn't made all the friends and this disparity between what I had figured it would be like coming in versus what it was actually like.”
- “I think I was a little bit let down, maybe not let down by CU, but it [social life] wasn't what I expected.”
- “It [social life] wasn't terrible, but it wasn't exactly what I had pictured.”

The interviewee then shared that he made the decision after his freshman year to join a fraternity so he could seek out the party scene he desired. He also shared that his expectation of social life in college had changed from assuming the university was going to provide him a fun social life to merely expecting the university to provide him opportunities for a social life. He now understood that it was his responsibility to take advantage of these opportunities:

- “After a little while, I figured it [social life] out as well and joined a fraternity, which definitely helped with that. I think there is a lot of stigma with CU's social life, but being involved can be pretty helpful, to say the least.”
- “All in all, I definitely would say that the stigma against CU is something to be worked against, because...especially in social contexts...I figured it out and I had a really great time, and for the students who aren't doing so, it's definitely a shame, because there are things out there to do.”
- “I joined a fraternity to get that [my social life] going.”
- “I think that there is a lot of stuff to do...CU provides a lot of stuff that are academic, social and what-have-you, but going out and finding it is the tricky part. Making that a bigger priority would be helpful.”

At the end of the interview, the interviewee shared that his expectations of social life in college had ultimately been met. He also expressed great satisfaction with his university experience and even shared that he had recommended Cohort University to his friends as a result:

- “Yeah, I think it [CU] did [meet my social expectations], for the most part...I met a lot of really impressive people. The fraternity stuff is a big part of that.
- “Ever since then [joining a fraternity], it's just been nothing but great.”
- “I think there's definitely been a couple of friends from younger classes who I advocated to go to CU just because of how great my experience has been.”

Note. Excerpts taken from transcript of Senior Interviewee 1

Secondary Interview Themes Regarding Expectations of the University Experience

Freshman interviewee expectations were partly based on student reviews they had read online

When asked who had shared their university experiences with them when they were high school seniors, 2 of the 21 interviewees claimed they had partly based their expectations of the Cohort University experience on reviews of CU that students had posted online. Both of these interviewees were freshmen. One of the interviewees commented:

(Freshman Interviewee 1) I looked them up on the college review sites and the biggest thing I was looking for was the community. Partly I wanted to go away...I don't really remember the categories...I remember I wasn't too concerned about academically-rigorous courses.

(Researcher) You said you used college review sites to figure that out.

(Freshman Interviewee 1) Yes. I think it was called collegereview.com or something like that.

(Researcher) Who gives reviews of the colleges?

(Freshman Interviewee 1) Other students review the colleges.

The other interviewee similarly shared:

(First-Year Interviewee 7) I also looked at rankings of student experiences...they have websites of student reviews so I looked up their experiences at colleges and whether they liked it or not.

Freshman and Senior Interviewees expected a party scene on campus as they had seen in movies

When asked about their social expectations for university life, a number of freshmen and seniors replied their expectations had been partly shaped by the media – specifically, by movies:

(Senior Interviewee 1) I think it involves a lot more of my conception with the classic college party movies, and in that respect, I think I was a

little bit let down, maybe not let down by Cohort University, but it wasn't what I expected.

Interviewees described the party scene they expected to encounter on campus as “wild” and likely to involve a lot of alcohol and recreational drug usage as depicted in movies such as *Animal House*. Interestingly, even though interviewees anticipated this type of party scene, not all of them desired this sort of social life. Interviewees were polarized - - half wanted the experience depicted in the classic party movies, while the other half were anxious to avoid this lifestyle on campus and feared that because they didn’t want to live like this they might not fit in with their peers.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations of the University Experience – First Generation Students

Sixteen of the 21 interviewees were first-generation university students. Their coded transcripts reflected four of the five themes found in the general interviewee population. The only theme not reflected was:

-Expected to be provided a lot of academic and social opportunities

Primary Interview Theme: Students didn’t really know what to expect because their parents didn’t attend a university

While interviewees who were non first-generation didn’t always benefit from knowledge of their parents’ university experiences (because their parents didn’t communicate about their experiences), first-generation students couldn’t benefit from that type of knowledge because their parents didn’t attend a university. Most parents of this latter group of students had no post-secondary education. Parents who had completed some college work had done so at a two-year community college. They had typically commuted from home and not lived in a dormitory; as a result, they

could not tell their sons and daughters what to expect from dormitory life. The few parents who had attended a university had done so overseas. Consequently, first-generation students felt uninformed about what to expect from their university experience:

(First-Year Interviewee 4) I was doing all of this blind because I am the first person in my family to go to college.

The following are pieces of advice (paraphrased) that the five non first-generation university student interviewees reported receiving from their parents:

- Be smart in how you study and how you apply yourself in school because you only have a limited amount of time.
- Focus on academics. There are a lot of distractions in college, so never ditch class.
- Have a well-rounded college experience - a nice balance between academics and social life.
- Join a fraternity and enjoy the parties.
- Engage in social activities and join clubs and try new things.

Although first-generation students may get these types of helpful messages from other people in their lives, they do not get them from their parents.

When first-generation interviewees responded that their parents did not attend a university, they were then asked if anyone else had shared their university experiences with them. The most common responses were older siblings (three interviewees), friends (three interviewees), and high school teachers (three interviewees). Some mentioned that although no one had shared their university experiences with them, they were still able to learn something about university life from reading books and perusing websites.

Secondary Interview Themes: Students Expected More Challenging Academics, More Freedom, and More Meaningful Friendships than in High School

First-generation students' responses reflected three other themes found in the

general interviewee population. They expected academics to be more challenging than they were in high school:

(First-Year Interviewee 2) I expected college to be harder, but it was not incredibly harder... There wasn't a lot more work...not your freshman year. There's work, but you have to make sure to do it on your own.

Like the general interviewee population, they expected more freedom than when they were in high school:

(First-Year Interviewee 5) I would have wanted more freedom...more independence...live on my own and just grow as a person.

Lastly, many expected to make meaningful friendships with their peers:

(Alumni Interviewee 6) I guess I based it on the movies you see...like where you find a group of people...you live life and learn and study together on campus in the dorms and go on trips on the weekends, grow personally, but also expand your horizons.

Like all interviewees, first-generation university students had the same unrealistic expectation that their expectations of university life would be fulfilled without requiring them to take initiative.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Retention – All Interviewees

The interviewee transcripts were coded not only for students' expectations, but also for whether or not their expectations were fulfilled. The interview transcripts were coded for three types of met expectations and three types of unmet expectations that students expressed about their experience at CU:

Table 19: Code Names for Cohort University Students' Met and Unmet Expectations of the University Experience

Code name for met expectation	Code name for unmet expectation
Academic expectation met	Academic expectation unmet
Social expectation met	Social expectation unmet
Other expectation met (not academic or social)	Other expectation unmet (not academic or social)

For the purposes of this study, a *met/unmet expectation* was defined as “the fulfillment/non-fulfillment of a desire the student had for his/her university experience prior to matriculation.” So, any satisfactions with university life that students expressed that fulfilled desires they had held prior to matriculation were coded as met expectations. Likewise, any dissatisfactions with university life that students expressed that failed to fulfill desires they had held prior to matriculation were coded as unmet expectations.

During the interviews, interviewees were asked whether they had ever considered transferring out of Cohort University. If the interviewee responded that he had never considered doing so, he was asked why this was the case. The interviewee then shared a reason for persisting. During transcript analysis, each reason was coded either as a type of met expectation, if it fulfilled an expectation expressed earlier in the interview, or as a type of satisfaction, if the interviewee had expressed this as a satisfaction earlier in the interview.

If the interviewee responded that he had considered transferring out, he was asked why this was the case. The interviewee then shared a reason or reasons for considering transferring. During transcript analysis, each reason was coded either as a type of unmet expectation, if it failed to fulfill an expectation expressed earlier in the interview, or as a type of dissatisfaction, if the interviewee had expressed this as a dissatisfaction earlier in the interview.

Seldom did an interviewee express a reason for his retention behavior that did not correspond with an expectation or satisfaction/dissatisfaction expressed earlier in the interview. In these rare instances, it was noted that the reason given was altogether unrelated.

The study found that almost half of the interviewees attributed their retention behavior to expectations. Specifically, 10 of the 21 interviewees either attributed a) their desire to transfer out to unmet expectations or b) their desire to persist to met expectations. Furthermore, of the remaining 11 interviewees, 2 of them attributed their retention behavior partly to expectations and partly to satisfactions/dissatisfactions.

The following table lists the unmet expectations which influenced interviewees to desire to transfer and the met expectations which influenced them to persist:

Table 20: Cohort University Interviewees' Unmet and Met Expectations of their University Experiences which Influenced their Retention Behavior

Unmet expectations responsible for desiring to transfer		Met expectations responsible for persisting		
Unmet academic	Unmet social	Met academic	Met social	Met other
Poor quality/choice of majors	Inability to make meaningful friendships	Coursework the desired level of challenge	Ability to make meaningful friendships	Idyllic university setting
Coursework too challenging	Lack of community	University lived up to its ranking/reputation	Lot of campus activities	
Classes too large/impersonal	Boring party scene	Good connections for jobs/research		
Poor instructors				
Uncaring instructors				
No connections for jobs/research				

The following are the top two themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviewee transcripts:

-Interviewees were most likely to persist when their social expectation of developing meaningful friendships was met.

-Interviewees were most likely to consider transferring out when their academic expectations for their major were unmet.

A few transcripts even revealed an interplay between these two themes. For example, an interviewee may initially have been tempted to transfer out because of an unmet expectation regarding her major, but ultimately persisted because her expectation of developing meaningful friendships was met. The following are excerpts from one such transcript:

(Senior Interviewee 7) I really wanted to get in University A for business administration. I've always wanted to study business. That didn't happen. I didn't get into University B either, so I went to Cohort University.

...

(Researcher) How did your experience at Cohort University live up to your academic expectations? Were you happy with what you got?

(Senior Interviewee 7) I think my education at Cohort University was more theoretical than I thought it would be.

(Researcher]: "So not as practical as you were hoping?

(Senior Interviewee 7) I wish there could be more about practical stuff about the real world that I can just come out and apply them because now I am looking for jobs. I don't have that skill. You've got all this theory in your head but you have to know how to apply it in a work setting.

...

(Researcher) How has your experience turned out in terms of your social expectations...your social life, relationships and all that?

(Senior Interviewee 7) I have a pretty good social life. I'm more outgoing now. For a Chinese family, parents will encourage you not to say anything about your family. Being quiet is a good quality. But in college, you can't just sit there and be quiet in a corner.

(Researcher) Not in college, not so much... Your dorm experience...was that positive? Did it help you reach out?

(Senior Interviewee 7) Yeah, my best friend my freshman year. ..she was really outgoing and she really changed me and shaped me a little bit, so that was a really good experience.

...

(Researcher) Was there any point in time when you were a student at Cohort University and you ever thought of leaving or seriously thought of leaving...like, maybe this is not the school for me. Maybe I'll just transfer out. I'm done with it here. Have you always felt like staying?

(Senior Interviewee 7) When I first came here, I'm going to work really hard for two years and then I'll transfer to University A or University B.

(Researcher) So you were still interested in trying to get there.

(Senior Interviewee 7) But not really because of the fame anymore but because I want to learn more about what I'm interested in. When it came to my second year, I was happy with my social life, so I just stayed.

(Researcher) Just so I'm clear you are thinking of maybe transferring because University A or University B would have better business programs.

(Senior Interviewee 7) Yes. University A has a business economics program.

Of the nine remaining interviewees who did not attribute their retention behavior to expectations, seven of them gave no reasons for their behavior. In all seven cases, however, expectations were indirectly linked with their behavior; these interviewees had either a) desired to transfer out and had expressed unmet expectations earlier in the interview, or b) persisted and had expressed met expectations earlier in the interview.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Retention – Freshmen

The study found that almost half of the freshmen interviewees (3 of the 7) attributed their retention behaviors to expectations. Furthermore, of the remaining four interviewees, one of them attributed his/her retention behavior partly to expectations while also attributing part to satisfactions/dissatisfactions.

The following are examples of met/unmet expectations that emerged from the researcher's review of the transcripts:

-Met Social Expectation: Ability to develop meaningful friendships

(First-Year Interviewee 3) I'd have a close group of friends.

...

(Researcher) Have you ever considered leaving Cohort University?...it's sounds like overall, you've had a really positive experience, but I don't know if being away from home if there were ever certain weekends where you thought, I don't know....maybe I'll just go home or transfer to a school closer to home.

(First-Year Interviewee 3) No. I think I'll be here for the rest of the four years.

(Researcher) You feel at home here and you've made friends.

(First-Year Interviewee 3) Right.

-Met Academic Expectation: University lived up to its ranking/reputation

-Met Academic Expectation: Good connections for jobs/research

(Researcher) The first question would be: how might you have described your ideal university experience? How about academics?

(First-Year Interviewee 5) I would have wanted to do more research with professors and make connections for jobs.

(Researcher) A year ago, you were trying to decide which college to attend...What were you looking for in a university at that time?

(First-Year Interviewee 5) I wanted a university with a solid biology program with good connections.

...

(First-Year Interviewee 5) I chose Cohort University because it was the best of all the schools that I got into.

(Researcher) You mean reputation-wise?

(First-Year Interviewee 5) Yes.

...

(First-Year Interviewee 5) It's been hard, but I think Cohort University is a good enough school that I wouldn't leave it.

(Researcher) So you think sticking it out is worth it in the long run?

(First-Year Interviewee 5) In the long run, I think it is worth it, because Cohort University is a highly-ranked school and it has really good connections with research. For my future, I think it would be worth it.

Of the three remaining interviewees who did not attribute their retention behaviors to expectations, two of them gave no reason for their behaviors. In both cases, though, expectations were indirectly linked with their behaviors.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Retention – Seniors

The study found that almost half of the senior interviewees (3 of the 7) attributed their retention behaviors to expectations. Furthermore, of the remaining four interviewees, one of them attributed his/her retention behaviors partly to expectations and partly to satisfactions/dissatisfactions.

The following is an example of a met/unmet expectation that emerged from the researcher's analysis of the senior interviewee transcripts:

-Unmet Academic Expectation: Uncaring professors

(Senior Interviewee 5) I thought it would be like high school in the sense that you're doing something every day and they would still keep an eye on you in the first semesters...would be like your high school teachers watching over you.

...

(Researcher) It sounds like overall you've had a really positive experience. Has there ever been a point in time in the four years where you considered leaving or transferring out of Cohort University where you thought, this place is not for me?

(Senior Interviewee 5) I actually did in my freshman year, because some of the professors weren't exactly the nicest people. They were very much into their research and they didn't care about students - they only did because they have to.

The three remaining interviewees who did not attribute their retention behaviors to expectations gave no reason for those behaviors. In all three cases, however, expectations were indirectly linked with their behaviors.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Retention – Alumni

The study found that just over half of the alumni interviewees attributed their retention behaviors to expectations. Specifically, four of the seven interviewees either attributed a) their desire to transfer out to unmet expectations or b) their desire to persist to met expectations.

The following is an example of met/unmet expectations that emerged from the review of the alumni interviewee transcripts:

- Unmet Social Expectation: Lack of Community
- Met Social Expectation: Presence of Community

(Researcher) What were you expecting social life to be like?

(Alumni Interviewee 4) More friends...more people with more common interests. A larger pool of people that I could choose from as friends. Reconnect with my really close friends...we all went to Cohort University.

...

(Researcher) Was there any point in time where you considered leaving Cohort University...transferring out?

(Alumni Interviewee 4) I did...I seriously considered applying to be a transfer student somewhere else.

(Researcher) What played into that? Why did you think someplace might be a better experience?

(Alumni Interviewee 4) Because I didn't have a community here. I didn't have a lot of people to connect with. I wanted to apply to a smaller institution.

(Researcher) But, as it turns out, you stayed.

(Alumni Interviewee 4) Because it's not easy to apply...to transfer out...so I think that's why.

(Researcher) So, just all the paperwork...

(Alumni Interviewee 4) Yeah. I would have to re-write my application. I didn't even try, although I thought about it. Then I got busy because I got into the 'Student Scholars' Program...that's three quarters of research.

(Researcher) Did the 'Student Scholars' program also help you connect with other students...did that improve things?

(Alumni Interviewee 4) Yeah. The staff were really helpful. We had a place...we could always go to the office and see other students.

Two of the three remaining interviewees who did not attribute their retention behaviors to expectations gave no reason for those behaviors. In both cases, however, expectations were indirectly linked with their behaviors.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Retention – First Generation Students

The top two themes that emerged from the analysis of the first-generation interviewee transcripts were identical to the top two themes found within all interviewee transcripts:

- First-generation interviewees were most likely to persist when their social expectation of developing meaningful friendships was met.

- First generation interviewees were most likely to consider transferring out when their academic expectations for their major were unmet.

One transcript even revealed an interplay between these two themes - - an interviewee was tempted to transfer because of an unmet expectation regarding her major but persisted because her expectation regarding friendships was met. The following are excerpts from her transcript:

- Unmet Academic Expectation: Poor Quality/Choice of Majors
- Unmet Academic Expectation: No connections for jobs/research
- Met Social Expectation: Ability to develop meaningful friendships

(First-Year Interviewee 6) I was looking for a school that offered zoology as a major, which actually isn't here at Cohort University

(laughing), and I was also looking for a place that had good connections to work with wildlife, wildlife sanctuaries or zoos.

...

(First-Year Interviewee 6) It's just so hard being in a place when I know what I want to study, but it's not quite here, but I've become so loyal to the people and to the morale of the school that's it just really hard to imagine leaving. I've actually debated this a few times...I know for sure that I want to stay next year, but I've debated transferring out my third year to go to college that actually has animal behavior studies as well as zoology and photography.

The following is another example of a met/unmet expectation that emerged from the analysis of the first-generation interviewee transcripts:

-Met Social Expectation: Ability to Develop Meaningful Friendships

(First-Year Interviewee 3) I'd have a close group of friends.

...

(Researcher) Have you ever considered leaving Cohort University?...it's sounds like overall, you've had a really positive experience, but I don't know if being away from home if there were ever certain weekends where you thought, I don't know...maybe I'll just go home or transfer to a school closer to home.

(First-Year Interviewee 3) No. I think I'll be here for the rest of the four years."

(Researcher) You feel at home here and you've made friends.

(First-Year Interviewee 3) Right.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Loyalty – All Interviewees

The interview transcripts were coded for six loyalty behaviors that students demonstrated toward Cohort University (refer to Table 7). During transcript analysis, any time an interviewee gave a reason for either engaging in or not engaging in one of these behaviors, it was noted whether or not the reason was related to an expectation or a satisfaction/dissatisfaction expressed earlier in the interview.

The study found that two-thirds of the interviewees attributed their loyalty behaviors primarily to expectations. Specifically, 14 of the 21 interviewees either attributed a) their loyalty behaviors primarily to met expectations or b) their lack of loyalty behaviors primarily to unmet expectations.

The following two tables list the met expectations which influenced interviewees to behave loyally and the unmet expectations which influenced them not to behave loyally, respectively:

Table 21: Cohort University Interviewees' Met Expectations of their University Experiences which Influenced their Loyalty Behavior

Type of met expectation	Expectation met	Type of loyalty behavior
Social expectation	Presence of community	Recommend university 1/21
	Ability to make meaningful friendships	Feel loyal 3/21, Recommend university 1/21
	Lot of campus activities	Feel loyal 1/21
Academic expectation	Good quality/choice of majors	Apply to grad school 5/21, Recommend university 4/21
	University lived up to its ranking/reputation	Feel loyal 5/21, Recommend university 1/21
	Coursework the desired level of challenge	Feel loyal 1/21
	Opportunities to conduct research	Recommend university 1/21
	Education worth the money	Feel loyal 2/21, Recommend university 2/21
Other expectation	Comfortable campus atmosphere	Apply to grad school 1/21
	Desirable university setting	Apply to grad school 1/21, Feel loyal 1/21, Recommend university 1/21

Note. Listed next to each type of loyalty behavior above is the number of interviewees who expressed this loyalty behavior.

Table 22: Cohort University Interviewees' Unmet Expectations of their University Experiences which Influenced their Loyalty Behavior

Type of unmet expectation	Expectation unmet	Type of loyalty behavior
Social expectation	Lack of community	Do not feel loyal 2/21
Academic expectation	Poor quality /choice of majors	Do not apply to grad school 1/21
	University did not live up to its ranking/reputation	Do not apply to grad school 1/21
	Classes too large / impersonal	Do not apply to grad school 1/21
	Education not practical	Do not apply to grad school 1/21

Note. Listed next to each type of loyalty behavior above is the number of interviewees who expressed this loyalty behavior.

The following are examples of met/unmet expectations that emerged from the analysis of the interviewee transcripts:

-Met Academic Expectation: Good Quality/Choice of Majors

(Researcher) How did you arrive upon Cohort University as the one?

(Senior Interviewee 3) I applied to a few other [campuses within the Cohort system]. They had a better computer science department and a better ranking than some of the other ones.

...

(Researcher) If you go on to graduate school, do you think Cohort University will be one of the schools you would consider applying to?

(Senior Interviewee 3) Yeah, I think I would.

(Researcher) Is that because you're pretty happy with the computer science department?

(Senior Interviewee 3) Yeah.

-Met Other Expectation: Education worth the money

(First-Year Interviewee 4) When I first started thinking about college, something that was really important to me was that it was out of state, and that changed for me pretty quickly because of how much it costs to go out of state.

...

(Researcher) How loyal do you feel to Cohort University? How much school spirit do you have? Do you wear a Cohort University sweatshirt all the time?

(First-Year Interviewee 4) When I am with my friends who did go to UCLA or Berkeley or Yale, Stanford, wherever, I do defend it pretty protectively. I will stand up and say, "This is a really good school, you can't slam it. I'm paying a lot less than you guys are at your private schools and I'm probably getting the same education you are, so the joke's on you."

Of the seven interviewees who did not attribute their loyalty behaviors to expectations, one gave no reason for his/her behavior. Expectations were indirectly linked, however, with his/her behaviors.

One study finding was that interviewees' expectations of their university experiences were often shaped by experiences others had shared with them. Consequently, a more thorough analysis of the Encouraged/Discouraged Others to Apply code was conducted to determine how significantly expectations might influence this particular loyalty behavior. It was discovered that 18 of the 21 interviewees had mentioned either encouraging or discouraging others to apply to Cohort University. Of these 18 interviewees, 6 had either attributed either their a) positive recommendations of Cohort University primarily to met expectations, or their b) negative recommendations of the university primarily to unmet expectations. The

following excerpts are from a transcript of one of the six interviewees:

(Researcher) What were you expecting academic life to be like?

(Alumni Interviewee 4) I had done pretty well in high school. I was an honors student in high school, so I expected it to continue to be like that. At Cohort University, I would continue to learn a lot and succeed.
...

(Alumni Interviewee 4) I definitely have encouraged students to apply...because I had a lot of advantages...I didn't have to pay too much. I told kids that they will be very academically successful at Cohort University.

Of the 12 remaining interviewees, 10 of them did not give a reason for their positive/negative recommendations, but met/unmet expectations were indirectly linked with their loyalty behavior.

Also, the study found that the met expectations that influenced the six interviewees who recommended CU to prospective students were all, with one exception, in keeping with the broader initial expectation themes discovered from research question 3:

Table 23: Correspondence of Met Expectations that Influenced Cohort University Interviewees to Recommend their University to Others with Initial Expectation Themes

Initial expectation theme	Met expectation that influenced interviewee to recommend Cohort University
Expected academics to be more challenging than in high school	University lived up to its strong academic reputation
Expected more academic freedom than in high school	Good quality/choice of majors
Expected to be provided a lot of academic opportunities	Opportunity to conduct research
Expected to make meaningful friendships	Ability to develop meaningful friendships, Presence of community

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Loyalty – Freshmen

The study found that three of the seven freshman interviewees attributed their loyalty behaviors primarily to expectations. Furthermore, one of the seven interviewees attributed his/her loyalty behaviors partly to expectations and partly to satisfactions/dissatisfactions.

The following are examples of met/unmet expectations that emerged from the analysis of the freshman interviewee transcripts:

-Met Social Expectation: Ability to develop meaningful friendships

(Freshman Interviewee 1) All I really wanted out of college was not just pass and get my degree, but to make lasting relationships and to meet new people and to build those connections. So there was not something specific that I wanted from every school, but something I could find anywhere.

(Researcher) So, lasting relationships with students...and professors as well, I imagine?

(Freshman Interviewee 1) Yeah, everybody.

...

(Researcher) How loyal do you feel toward Cohort University?

(Freshman Interviewee 1) I love my college and I feel like I love it because of the people there.

-Met Academic Expectation: University lived up to its ranking/reputation

(Researcher) When you were making your choice as a high school senior, what were you looking for in a university?

(First-Year Interviewee 2) When I was applying?

(Researcher) Yes.

(First-Year Interviewee 2) Honestly, there were a couple I picked because of name, so really good schools like private schools, and others.

...

(First-Year Interviewee 2) Loyalty-wise, I'm proud to say that I go here. It's definitely a good school. I'm loyal to it, I guess.

The three freshman interviewees who did not attribute their loyalty behavior to expectations gave no reason for the behavior, but expectations were indirectly linked.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Loyalty – Seniors

The study found that three of the seven senior interviewees primarily attributed their loyalty behaviors to expectations. Furthermore, one of the seven interviewees attributed his/her loyalty behaviors partly to expectations and partly to satisfactions/dissatisfactions.

The following are examples of met/unmet expectations that emerged from the analysis of the senior interviewee transcripts:

-Met Social Expectation: Ability to develop meaningful friendships

(Researcher) Think back several years to when you were a high school senior. How might you have described your ideal university experience?

(Senior Interviewee 4) I would make a lot of friends.
...

(Senior Interviewee 4) I feel pretty loyal to Cohort University. I like the college a lot. I love the weather. I like the friends I've made here.

-Other Met Expectation: Desirable University Setting

(Researcher) You decided upon Cohort University as opposed to other [campuses within the Cohort System] for what reason?

(Senior Interviewee 6) Close to the beach.
...

(Senior Interviewee 6) Yes, I'm pretty loyal, I guess. I'm proud of the school, especially for what I'm in. Good school. Pretty school.

The three senior interviewees who did not attribute their loyalty behaviors to expectations gave no reason for those behaviors, but expectations were indirectly linked.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Loyalty – Alumni

The study found that three of the seven alumni interviewees attributed their loyalty behaviors primarily to expectations. Furthermore, one of the seven interviewees attributed his/her loyalty behaviors partly to expectations and partly to satisfactions/dissatisfactions.

The following are examples of met/unmet expectations that emerged from the analysis of the alumni interviewee transcripts:

-Met Academic Expectation: Education worth the money

(Alumni Interviewee 4) Cost-wise, I chose Cohort University.

...

(Alumni Interviewee 4) I definitely have encouraged students to apply...because I had a lot of advantages...I didn't have to pay too much.

-Unmet Academic Expectation: University didn't live up to its ranking/reputation

(Alumni Interviewee 1) Academically, I would want to be part of a prestigious university so I could get a job afterwards.

...

(Researcher) You said you were contemplating an MBA. Would you ever consider Cohort University for graduate school?

(Alumni Interviewee 1) I would not because their MBA school is not prestigious enough.

The three alumni interviewees who did not attribute their loyalty behaviors to expectations gave no reason for those loyalty behaviors, but expectations were indirectly linked.

Interview Themes Regarding Expectations and Loyalty – First Generation Students

The following table lists the unmet expectations that influenced first-generation interviewees not to behave loyally and the met expectations that influenced them to behave loyally. There were no unmet social expectations responsible for interviewees' lack of loyalty behaviors.

Table 24: Cohort University First-Generation Interviewees' Unmet and Met Expectations of their University Experiences which Influenced their Loyalty Behavior

Type of unmet expectation responsible for lack of loyalty	Type of met expectation responsible for loyalty		
	Met social expectation	Met academic expectation	Met other expectation
Unmet academic expectation			
Poor quality/choice of majors	Ability to make meaningful friendships	Good quality/choice of majors	Comfortable campus atmosphere
Classes too large/impersonal	Presence of community	University lived up to its ranking/reputation	Desirable university setting
Education not practical		Education worth the money	
		Coursework the desired level of challenge	
		Opportunities to conduct research	

Note. There were no unmet social expectations or unmet other expectations responsible for interviewees' lack of loyalty behaviors.

Summary of Findings

Findings Regarding Relationship of Satisfaction to Retention

Of the 17 Satisfaction for which the interview transcripts were coded, the study found that Satisfaction with Relationships, Satisfaction with Classes/Major and Satisfaction with Instructors had the most impact on students' retention behavior. Likewise, these three satisfactions were amongst the most frequently expressed satisfactions that had the most impact on retention behavior coded in the blogs (they were the first, second and fourth most frequently expressed).

Findings Regarding Relationship of Satisfaction to Loyalty

Of the 17 Satisfaction for which the interview transcripts were coded, the study found that Satisfaction with Classes/Major and Satisfaction with University Experience had the most impact on students' loyalty behavior. Likewise, these two satisfactions were amongst the most frequently expressed satisfactions that had the most impact on loyalty behavior coded in the blogs (first and fifth).

Findings Regarding Expectations of the University Experience

The study found that most of the interviewees (16 of 21) were the first in their families to attend colleges or universities. One of the most common responses from these interviewees when they were asked what they expected university life to be like was that they didn't know what to expect.

The most common expectations that interviewees expressed were a) academics would be more challenging than they were in high school; b) there would be more academic and social freedom than they experienced in high school; c) there would be an abundance of academic and social opportunities available to them; d) they would be able to develop meaningful friendships with fellow students.

The most common unrealistic expectations that interviewees expressed were a) although they anticipated that academics would be more challenging, they would not have to study more than they did in high school; b) although they anticipated an abundance of opportunities would be available to them, they wouldn't have to get involved to benefit from them; c) although they anticipated being able to develop more meaningful friendships than they did in high school, they wouldn't have to take the initiative to establish these friendships.

Findings Regarding Relationship of Expectations to Retention

The study found that interviewees' expectations were much more strongly linked to their retention behavior than their satisfactions/dissatisfactions. All interviewees who had considered transferring out had either attributed this primarily to unmet expectations or had expressed unmet expectations earlier in their interviews. Likewise, all interviewees who had persisted had either mainly attributed this to met expectations or had expressed met expectations earlier in the interview. There were no instances where an interviewee's retention behavior was attributed solely to satisfactions/dissatisfactions.

The most common themes found in the interviewee transcripts were that a) interviewees were most likely to persist when their social expectation of developing meaningful friendships was met, and b) interviewees were most likely to consider transferring out when their academic expectations for their major were unmet.

Findings Regarding Relationship of Expectations to Loyalty

The study found that interviewees' expectations were much more strongly linked to their loyalty behavior than their satisfactions/dissatisfactions. Three-quarters of the interviewees (15 of 21) either attributed their loyalty behavior primarily to met/unmet expectations, or at least expressed met/unmet expectations that aligned with their retention behaviors, as they described them during their interviews. There were only three instances where an interviewee's loyalty behavior was attributed solely to satisfactions/ dissatisfactions.

The most common met expectations which impacted interviewees' loyalty behavior that the researcher found were a) Good Quality/Choice of Majors prompted

students to Apply to Grad School and Promote University; b) University Lived up to its Ranking/Reputation prompted students to Feel Loyal and Promote University; c) Education Worth the Money prompted students to Feel Loyal and Promote University; and d) Ability to Develop Meaningful Friendships prompted students to Feel Loyal and Promote University.

Also, the study found that 16 of the 18 interviewees who had mentioned either encouraging or discouraging others to apply to Cohort University had either attributed their endorsement of Cohort University to met/unmet expectations, or at least expressed met/unmet expectations that aligned with their retention behaviors, as they described them during their interviews. None of the interviewees attributed their endorsements primarily to satisfaction/dissatisfactions.

The next chapter will discuss the significance of the study findings discovered from the collection and analysis of the data. It will also explain how those findings contribute to the existing body of research on university enrollment management. Finally, the chapter will offer implications for university practice and recommendations for university policy that follow from the study findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Historically, university leaders have relied upon data collected from student satisfaction surveys to predict students' retention behavior. They also use these findings to make improvements to educational and extracurricular services in order to retain students. They have done so because it is widely accepted amongst service industries that satisfaction and retention are strongly linked. However, despite decades of effort to improve retention rates in this manner, only about 50% of university students persist until graduation.

Increasingly, for-profit service industries are learning that a better way to retain customers and secure their loyalties is not only to satisfy them but also to meet their expectations. The purpose of this study was to examine whether university leaders might be equally successful in retaining students and securing their loyalties if they were to similarly focus on meeting their expectations.

To ascertain this, undergraduate first-year students, seniors, and alumni of a large public research university were interviewed about their satisfactions and dissatisfactions with university life as well as the fulfillment of their university expectations. Interviewees were also asked about their retention and loyalty behaviors to see whether these were related. Additionally, blogs written by undergraduate first-year students, seniors, and alumni of the same university system were analyzed for their satisfactions and dissatisfactions in addition to their retention and loyalty behaviors.

The study found that interviewees' and bloggers' satisfactions/dissatisfactions were related to their retention and loyalty behaviors. Additionally, the study found

that interviewees' met/unmet expectations were also linked to these behaviors. An analysis of the interviewees revealed, that in almost all cases, their met/unmet expectations were much more strongly linked to their retention and loyalty behaviors than to their satisfactions/dissatisfactions.

In this chapter, the significance of these findings is placed within the context of retention and relationship-marketing literature, and their contributions to higher education research will be discussed. Then, a discussion of the contributions these findings make to enrollment management theory and practice follows. The chapter finishes with an acknowledgment of the study's limitations and recommendations for further research.

Significance of Findings / Relevance and Contribution to the Literature

Research Question 1: How does undergraduate students' satisfaction with their university experiences relate to their retention?

Interviewees and bloggers frequently shared that satisfaction/dissatisfaction with relationships, instructors, and majors influenced their retention behaviors. Whereas the interviewees were all selected from the same public research university in California, the bloggers represented students and alumni from eight campuses within that university's system. The fact that both populations were so consistent in frequently sharing the same top satisfactions/ dissatisfactions in relation to their retention behaviors is significant because it suggests these findings are not unique to any one campus culture.

Another reason these findings are significant is because university leaders have traditionally assumed that student satisfaction is linked with retention and these

findings support that belief. Universities have increasingly limited resources in this tough economic climate, and knowing that students who transferred out or considered transferring out did so because they were dissatisfied with their instructors enables them to channel their resources in this direction to improve retention rates.

relationships with peers were key to students' persistence. The satisfaction/dissatisfaction that had the greatest impact on the retention behavior of interviewees and bloggers was the ability to develop relationships on campus. Specifically, this typically was mentioned in reference to forging friendships with fellow students. This satisfaction/dissatisfaction was the only one that appeared as a major theme across all types of interviewee groups - - freshmen, seniors, alumni and first-generation students.

Interviewees and bloggers took care to explain that their satisfaction with establishing relationships on campus had more to do with the quality than the quantity of the relationships. Friendships with instructors and fellow students had to be close relationships, not mere acquaintanceships. Several interviewees and bloggers had established a wide circle of friends on campus, but they had considered transferring because they had not really bonded with anyone in their dormitories or their classrooms in a meaningful way. Interviewees and bloggers were anxious to get to know their professors outside the classroom on a more personal level, especially if it meant working side-by-side with them on a research project. Students who had had these satisfying experiences working alongside faculty tended to be the ones who persisted.

One of the study's most significant findings was that Satisfaction with

Relationships proved to be the most powerful force for retaining students. In the findings, this was evident in the findings in two ways. First, when interviewees were asked to share the most satisfying aspect of their university experiences, several of them identified this to be the meaningful and lasting friendships they had made with their roommates and suitemates. Second, even when interviewees shared that they had considered transferring out because of various dissatisfactions with their experiences, the reason they gave most often (for why they didn't go through with it) was that they couldn't bear to leave their friends from campus.

The strong emotional attachment these interviewees felt for their friends sounds similar to what Hennig-Thurau and Hansen (2000) described in their study on the determinants of customer loyalty. They found that developing commitment and trust is key to retaining customers. They defined commitment as the customer's emotional bond with the company and conviction that remaining in the business relationship would yield greater benefits than leaving it. In this study's findings, interviewees were so committed to their friends that they concluded that it was not worth leaving the university if it meant losing their friendships. It is worth noting that interviewees did not mention having an emotional commitment to the university itself. This suggests that an institutional commitment may not be prerequisite to student loyalty - a personal commitment can suffice.

Oftentimes, an important difference was noticed between those who were satisfied and those who were dissatisfied with their relationships on campus. Those who were dissatisfied tended to blame their peers for being anti-social or the university for not encouraging participation in student activities. By contrast, those

who were satisfied shared that once they reached out to their peers or chose to get involved in campus organizations, they were able to forge meaningful friendships. This theme of accepting partial responsibility for one's university experiences surfaced repeatedly throughout the study.

Vincent Tinto's student retention theories are frequently cited in higher education literature. His major claim is that the more students become academically and socially engaged in various aspects of campus life, the greater their commitment becomes to the university and to the goal of college completion (Tinto, 2006-2007). His studies have shown that because half of all students who will drop out do so their freshman year, engagement is especially critical in the first year of college (Tinto, 2001). Findings from the Cohort University study complement Tinto's findings - - interviewees who chose to get more involved in campus life after a dissatisfying freshman year tended to persist, while those who chose not to get more involved oftentimes considered transferring.

The study was designed to include first-generation university students as a study population because the retention literature shows that they are especially at-risk for dropping out. Lehmann (2007) found that they oftentimes drop out because they don't fit in socially with other members of the campus community. It is significant that this study's findings support this conclusion. Five of the 16 first-generation interviewees shared that Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships was the satisfaction/dissatisfaction that was most influential in their retention behaviors (tied with Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major).

The study was designed to analyze not only interview transcripts but also

student blogs because it was anticipated that students might only feel comfortable sharing certain topics anonymously with students online rather than in person with an interviewer. One such topic turned out to be students' satisfaction with their dating relationships on campus. Bloggers cared about their dating prospects and shared how easy or difficult it was to find fellow students who had qualities they were looking for in a potential mate. Although no bloggers attributed their desire to transfer out or to persist solely to the quality of their dating life, for some it was a contributing factor.

dissatisfaction with major was frequently responsible for students transferring.

Another satisfaction/dissatisfaction that had an impact on the retention behavior of interviewees and bloggers was students' level of satisfaction with major offerings and the quality of their classes. This satisfaction/dissatisfaction appeared as a major theme across all types of interviewee groups, except freshmen.

It is significant that interviewees and bloggers judged satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their majors and classes using the same criteria that interviewees did with their met/unmet expectations elsewhere in the study. Consistently, students judged their majors and classes based upon how challenging they were, how much academic freedom they allowed, what opportunities they provided (such as research projects and study-abroad programs), and whether or not they gave them the ability to interact personally with faculty and staff. These themes of challenging coursework, academic freedom, academic opportunities, and meaningful relationships all appeared as expectations which interviewees shared they had regarding their university experience as high school seniors.

Whereas Satisfaction with Relationships proved to be the most powerful force

contributing to students' retention, Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major proved to be the most powerful force influencing students' decision to transfer out. An interviewee or blogger who discovered his/her university did not offer the major he/she was interested in studying was prone to shopping around locally for other universities that offered this major. Similarly, an interviewee or blogger who heard another local university had a stronger academic program in his/her field of interest usually considered whether his/her academic performance to date was strong enough to be accepted as a transfer student to that other university.

In instances such as this, just the fact that an interviewee or blogger persisted at his/her university should not be interpreted as an indication that the university was satisfying to him/her academically. Persistence was sometimes attributable to the fact that the student's academic performance was not strong enough to be admitted elsewhere. In other instances, students shared that they looked into the transfer process but were intimidated by the considerable paperwork involved. Also, some upperclassmen admitted that by the time they realized their major department was not meeting their educational interests or needs, they were too close to graduation to make it worth switching universities.

These types of student behaviors resemble the customer behaviors described in Henry's study on customer retention (2000). He points out that customers are sometimes retained even when they don't feel loyal toward a business. For example, this can occur when a customer is dissatisfied with a business but cannot afford to switch to another service provider. So then, university leaders need to realize that not all students who persist can be assumed to feel satisfied with their experiences. If they

remain dissatisfied and the right opportunity comes along, they may transfer.

It is significant that Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Major/Classes did not appear as a major theme for freshmen. It is plausible that freshmen aren't tempted to transfer out for this reason because they are still exploring their academic interests and haven't fully committed to majors of study yet. Seniors and alumni, however, have selected majors based upon their interests and career goals; thus, they are understandably more critical of their academic experiences when they don't measure up to these things. The study was designed to analyze the entire student life cycle because it was anticipated that analyzing only freshmen, as most other retention researchers have done, might limit a fuller understanding of how students' satisfaction/dissatisfactions relate to their retention behavior. As this study's findings reveal, the retention behavior of upperclassmen is strongly influenced by their level of satisfaction with their majors.

students' level of satisfaction with their instructors influenced their retention behavior. Another satisfaction/dissatisfaction that had an impact on the retention behavior of interviewees and bloggers was students' level of satisfaction with their instructors. Typically, these comments were made about faculty, but sometimes they were made in reference to graduate teaching assistants. Interviewees and bloggers who were satisfied with their instructors typically based their satisfaction on how knowledgeable and respected they were in their disciplines. Interviewees and bloggers who were dissatisfied tended to base their dissatisfaction on how uncaring and inaccessible professors and TA's were and how poorly they taught.

It seems obvious that students taught by instructors who don't care about them

or teach well are apt to consider leaving the university for these reasons. Much of this, however, seemed to be related to students' perceptions of their instructors. Faculty who were described as "uncaring" were labeled as such because they appeared to make research and graduate students they taught greater priorities than the undergraduate students in their classes. They were also accused of being uncaring because they did not take personal time with students during class. Yet, some bloggers and interviewees shared that their instructors consistently took an interest in them if they visited them during scheduled office hours. So, the underlying retention issue may not necessarily be one of uncaring instructors but rather of students' perceptions of their professors as not caring about them.

Similarly, instructors were accused of being "poor teachers," despite being considered as knowledgeable in their fields, because they weren't always able to articulate their knowledge in ways that students could understand. When interviewees and bloggers elaborated what they meant by this, however, they clarified that they expected their instructors to communicate the subject matter to them in ways that suited their personal learning styles. So, an accomplished lecturer addressing a class of several hundred students might still be judged a poor teacher if she presented the material only one way. Consequently, the underlying retention issue may not necessarily be one of poor teachers, but rather of students' perceptions of their professors teaching poorly.

Research Question 2: How does undergraduate students' satisfaction with their university experiences relate to their loyalty?

Marketing professionals in for-profit service industries claim that developing

customers' loyalties is a matter of keeping them satisfied. This study's findings are significant because they suggest that a similar relationship exists between students' loyalties and students' satisfaction.

Both interviewees and bloggers frequently shared that their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their overall University Experience and Classes/Major influenced their loyalty behaviors (bloggers' remarks were analyzed for only one expression of loyalty, Encouraging/Discouraging Others from Applying, while interviewees' remarks revealed this expression of loyalty in addition to Apply to Grad School and Feel Loyal). Whereas the interviewees were all selected from the same public research university in California, the bloggers represented students and alumni from eight campuses within that public research university's system. The fact that both populations were so consistent in frequently sharing the same top satisfactions/dissatisfactions in relation to their loyalty behavior is significant because it suggests these findings are not unique to any one campus culture.

The most common expression of loyalty shown by both interviewees and bloggers was Encouraging/Discouraging Others to Apply. When it comes to the loyalty construct commonly used in higher education literature, some researchers have suggested breaking it into two separate constructs, one for *loyalty: patronage* and one for *loyalty: recommend* (Rowley, 2003; Helgesen, 2008). The findings of this study support doing this in recognition of the fact that the primary way students express their institutional loyalty, aside from persisting, is by recommending their universities to others.

students behave loyally when they are satisfied with their overall university

experience. Interviewees who claimed they felt loyal to their universities or desired to apply there for graduate school often attributed these loyalty behaviors to their overall positive experiences. When it came to the type of recommendations they gave others about their universities, both bloggers and interviewees typically based those recommendations on satisfaction with their university experiences overall rather than with any particular aspect of those experiences. Most remarkably, 18 of the 21 interviewees shared that they had either encouraged or discouraged prospective students from applying to their universities based upon whether or not they had had positive experiences themselves. This finding is significant because it reveals that it is commonplace for current students and alumni to share their university experiences with prospective students.

students encouraged or discouraged others from applying to their universities based upon how satisfied they were with their majors. One aspect of the university experience that most strongly influenced interviewees and bloggers to encourage or discourage others from applying to their universities was their level of satisfaction with their majors and classes. Interviewees and bloggers who recommended their universities because of satisfying academic experiences were careful to explain, though, that they only recommended students apply if they wanted to pursue academic programs in which their universities were strong. If universities were weak in those programs in which students were interested, they discouraged them from applying. This finding suggests that even if students are satisfied with their own majors, this doesn't necessarily mean they will recommend their universities to others.

The study found that whereas freshmen and seniors typically recommended

their universities based upon criteria such as challenging courses, personal attention from professors, good teaching, and research opportunities, alumni had very different criteria for judging their academic satisfaction. For example, alumni were oftentimes critical of their undergraduate academic experiences because they had since entered their career fields where they found that their educations did not adequately prepare them for success. Typically, they claimed that their coursework had been too theoretical and did not focus enough on practical job skills. Moreover, alumni who recommended their universities to others sometimes based their positive endorsements on the fact that they had not only mastered course content, but also learned critical thinking skills which had proven helpful in life. Deciding to include alumni in the study made it possible to learn that students' satisfaction with their academic experiences can wax or wane even after graduation based upon how their education serves them over time. This, in turn, can affect whether alumni choose to start or stop recommending their universities.

indirect finding: students encouraged or discouraged others from applying to their universities based upon whether they felt their university experiences had been worth the money. With a few exceptions, interviewees did not attribute their positive or negative recommendations to whether or not they felt the education they received was worth the money spent on it. The study findings did, however, reveal that almost all of the interviewees who recommended their universities had mentioned elsewhere in their interviews that they felt their experiences were worth the money. Likewise, interviewees who discouraged others from applying to their universities had mentioned elsewhere that they felt their experiences were not worth the money.

Consequently, it can be surmised that students' perceptions of the return on their educational investment is likely an important contributing factor in whether or not students choose to recommend their universities.

Research Question 3: What are undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences?

When interviewees were asked what they expected university life to be like, they were asked not only how they would describe their ideal university experience, but also what their academic and social expectations were for life at Cohort University. This was done because Licata and Maxham (1999) had found that college-bound students have two distinct levels of expectations with regard to the university experience, a lower level of realistic expectations of what *will* happen and a higher, more ideal level of what *should* happen. Although some interviewees gave an identical response to both questions, most students provided a different response, which suggests that students do indeed maintain two levels of expectations.

students didn't really know what to expect because parents didn't tell them about their university experiences. When interviewees were asked what their academic and social expectations were for university life at Cohort University, their most common reply was that they didn't really know what to expect. This was because the interviewees' parents had not attended universities, so those students felt they had not received reliable information on which to base their expectations.

students expected to benefit from more challenging academics, more freedom, and more meaningful friendships in college without taking more initiative. When interviewees were asked to describe the ideal university experience, however, they

articulated that they looked forward to more challenging academics, academic and social opportunities, freedom, and meaningful friendships than they had experienced in high school. These expectations that interviewees shared were remarkably realistic.

Interviewees' expectations proved to be unrealistic, however, in one important respect: many of the interviewees assumed they could take a passive role in their university experiences and just rely on the university to meet their expectations. Whereas they looked forward to academics being more challenging, they didn't expect that they would need to study any harder than they did in high school. Likewise, they anticipated benefiting from more opportunities without making the effort to join student clubs or organizations. Lastly, they expected to be able to forge deep friendships with their classmates without having to reach out to them and introduce themselves.

These findings mirror what Kuh (2007) discovered about undergraduate students' expectations of university life. Using data collected from the BCSSE (Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement), Kuh learned that disparities exist between entering students' expectations and their level of engagement in the first year of college. He found that although students looked forward to college coursework being more challenging than in high school, they failed to put in the additional study time necessary to meet the increased challenge. This suggests that students are not taking enough responsibility for their own university experiences to ensure that their expectations will be met.

Similarly, Kuh discovered that students expect their universities to provide them with support for non-academic activities and social interactions. While this

finding does not necessarily indicate that students expect their universities to provide them with social lives with no effort required on their part, it does seem to suggest that students place most of the burden on the university rather than on themselves. Since the Cohort University study showed that interviewees who didn't have their social expectations met often blamed the university for this state of affairs, there may be reason to believe that students feel their universities *owe* them a social life.

students who took an active role in meeting their expectations reported that their expectations were met. When asked if any of their academic or social expectations had changed during their university experiences, several of the interviewees replied that they did. Specifically, they came to realize that it was unrealistic to think their expectations would be met if they did not take an active role in their experiences. So they realized, for example, that just as they could not have benefited from research opportunities if the university had provided none on campus, they also could not benefit from available ones if they did not bother applying for them.

The interviewees that came to the realization they needed to start taking an active role in fulfilling their expectations tended to report that their own expectations were eventually met. Alternately, the interviewees who never came to this realization tended to report that their expectations were never met. This finding is significant because it indicates that students must learn they share responsibility with the university for the fulfillment of their expectations.

Other higher education studies point to the complementary finding that many students eventually learn to lower their expectations. USA Group Foundation (Lana

Low, 2000) conducted a national survey of over 420,000 college and university students and reported that freshmen and sophomores have higher expectations than juniors and seniors. This could suggest that students entering university life with the unrealistic expectation that they do not need to be fully engaged reach a critical decision point their junior or senior year. For some, it may become a turning point where they realize they must not only lower their initial expectations but also get more involved academically and socially, making it possible for these new, more realistic expectations to be met. For others, this may be a confirmation that the university failed to meet their expectations; thus, they transfer out or start to discourage others from applying.

others' university experiences gave students more realistic expectations of university life than the media did. One hypothesis tested in the Cohort University study was whether first-generation interviewees possessed more unrealistic expectations of the university experience than their peers whose parents had attended universities. The findings did not support this conclusion. The study found first-generation *and* non-first generation students who felt they didn't need to take an active role in fulfilling their university expectations.

The assumption behind the research hypothesis was that students whose parents attended college are learning from their parents sharing about their experiences what is realistic to expect from university life and what is not. This overlooks the fact that some college-educated parents don't bother sharing about their experiences with their children. A few interviewees acknowledged that this was true of their parents. This hypothesis also overlooks the fact that children sometimes do not care to hear

about their parents' university experiences even if their parents do try to share with them. A few interviewees admitted they only cared to learn about university life from their friends.

Finally, this hypothesis fails to recognize that parents are not the only source of information pertaining to university life. Interviewees whose parents did not attend college were asked to identify others in their lives who had about shared their university experiences with them. Interviewees gave a wide range of responses which included siblings, cousins, friends, teachers, high school counselors, admission recruiters, and current university students. The most frequent responses included friends, older siblings, and teachers. This finding suggests that it may be more important for their retention that high school students have the opportunity to hear about others' experiences before entering college than whether or not their parents attended college.

As further evidence that hearing about university experiences from any alumni is helpful, two of the interviewees mentioned that the way they learned about university life was from reading the blogs of current students who posted their experiences online. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that prospective students can have their expectations shaped not only through having conversations with others but also through reading what others write online, such as the types of blogs analyzed in this study. It is important to realize that this generation of college-bound students is increasingly relying on what current students have to say over the Internet as a readily available source of information about university life.

So, what did students who had the benefit of hearing or reading about others'

experiences learn that might have given them more realistic expectations than students who did not? The typical advice interviewees claimed they received from either their parents or others was to a) exercise freedom in trying new things but not go overboard, b) choose a good circle of friends, and c) keep oneself accountable when it comes to studying. It is significant that people in their lives did not just share about their experiences but also gave advice on how to negotiate university life. Additionally, these pieces of advice all focused on the importance of students taking responsibility for their university experiences. Based on this, the Cohort University study hypothesized that students who receive this type of advice from others enter university life with more realistic expectations than students who do not receive such advice.

The study findings also showed that movies about college life can influence students to develop unrealistic expectations of their university experiences. Interviewees reported watching “classic” college movies, such as *Animal House*, had led them to the expectation that social life on a university campus would consist largely of wild, outrageous parties. Most of the “tamer” sorts of student involvements which are typically found on university campuses, such as student clubs, student government, and intermural sports, are not portrayed as often in movies about college life; as a result, so interviewees were not as aware of their existence. This finding suggests that prospective students are more apt to develop realistic expectations if they learn of university life from someone’s actual experiences rather than from a fictional portrayal of them in the media.

Research Question 4: How does the fulfillment of undergraduate students’ expectations of their university experiences relate to their retention?

students persisted when their expectations were met and transferred when their expectations were not met. The study found that the fulfillment of interviewees' expectations was strongly linked to their persistence. In fact, all interviewees attributed their retention behaviors primarily to met/unmet expectations, or at least expressed met/unmet expectations that aligned with their retention behaviors, as they described them during their interviews.

Marketing professionals in for-profit service industries claim that retaining customers is more a matter of meeting all of their expectations than of satisfying all of their desires. This study's finding that interviewees never attributed their retention behavior primarily to satisfactions/dissatisfactions is significant because it supports this claim.

Undergraduate students enter university life with certain expectations. Universities that are able to meet students' expectations are more likely to retain them, regardless of whether or not they satisfy students in all aspects of their experiences. In the publication, *Are college students satisfied? A national analysis of changing expectations*, Low (2000) claims that student satisfaction should be viewed within the context of student expectations in order to determine which satisfactions are the most important. Findings from the Cohort University study substantiate this claim - - interviewees were willing to overlook many types of dissatisfactions with their experiences and remain enrolled, provided that their universities at least met their expectations.

When judging a student's likelihood of persisting, it is certainly important to learn how satisfied the student is with all aspects of her experience; however, one

should pay more attention to the particular expectations with which the student entered. Universities can provide many satisfying experiences for students on campus, but in order to retain them they need to ensure that these are the experiences which matter most to students. Simply put, the expectations students bring with them to campus are retention “deal-makers” or “deal-breakers.”

interviewees were most likely to consider transferring out when their academic expectations for their major were unmet. Students typically enter university life expecting to experience greater academic freedom. In high school the curriculum is proscribed, so students do not expect course content to necessarily align with their interests. In college, however, students are free to select a major based upon their career goals. No matter how competently courses were taught, if their majors end up preventing them from exploring their interests or preparing them for their particular career fields, they have failed to meet those students’ academic expectations.

interviewees were most likely to persist when their social expectation of developing meaningful friendships was met. Vincent Tinto states:

It is one thing to understand why students leave; it is another to know what institutions can do to help students stay and succeed. Leaving is not the mirror image of staying. Knowing why students leave does not tell us, at least not directly, why students persist. (Tinto, 2006-2007, p.6)

Although there are certainly actions universities can take to help ensure that students experience more academic freedom when pursuing their majors, the study found that the most effective thing universities can do to retain students is to help them develop meaningful friendships.

In the for-profit sector, much of relationship-marketing theory is based upon

the idea of businesses developing lifelong relationships with customers in order to retain them. In a higher education setting, universities might discover that an equally effective retention strategy could be to encourage students to form lasting relationships with one another. The study finding that interviewees had trouble forming close friendships with their peers shows that there may be room for improvement in this area.

Along these same lines, some retention studies have shown that students, especially first-generation students, drop out because they are unable to fit in socially on campus. Because of these findings, one of the initial codes created for use in blog and interview analysis was Satisfaction with Belonging. Although the code was used infrequently, there were occasions when students expressed they felt like they didn't belong on campus. Some of the first-generation interviewees even shared that they had expected to become members of a tight-knit campus community and when that did not happen, they considered transferring. This finding, along with the finding that students struggle to forge close friendships, underscores the importance of relationship-building as a potent retention strategy.

One final indication from the study that relationship-building could prove an effective method for retaining students is that some interviewees felt they did not matter in the classroom. Satisfaction with Mattering was an initial code which was not used very often, yet it was used in instances where bloggers and interviewees shared that their classes were too impersonal and/or their professors did not care about them. Some interviewees even complained that taking courses from uncaring professors had caused them to consider transferring. This finding, along with the finding that

bloggers and interviewees expressed a desire to spend time with their instructors outside of class, suggests that universities should nurture lasting relationships between students and their professors.

Another study finding was that most interviewees expected Cohort University to live up to its strong academic reputation. When the university did, interviewees were more likely to persist because their expectation was met. Ironically, though, even when interviewees concluded CU did not live up to its reputation, that alone did not persuade them to transfer. Interviewees shared they were hesitant to transfer out because having the CU name on their resumes could land them good jobs after graduation. This finding is significant because it suggests that if a university can develop a strong name for itself, students who attend will be more likely to persist so that they can benefit from their association with the university after graduation.

Another study finding was that interviewees either persisted or considered transferring based upon how the challenge level of their courses lived up to their expectations. Most interviewees had entered university life expecting a greater academic challenge than they experienced in high school (with the exception of students from college preparatory schools who expected university academics to be no more challenging than high school academics). When students discovered that university academics were more challenging, as they expected, this met expectation typically influenced them to persist. This finding is significant because it suggests that an effective retention strategy for universities is to calibrate the challenge level of academics so that it remains consistently challenging to students while not becoming overwhelming to them.

Research Question 5: How does the fulfillment of undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences relate to their loyalty?

students behaved loyally when their expectations were met but did not behave loyally when their expectations were not met. The study found that the fulfillment of interviewees' expectations was strongly linked to their loyalty. Three-quarters of the interviewees attributed their loyalty behaviors primarily to met/unmet expectations, or at least expressed met/unmet expectations that aligned with their retention behaviors, as they described them during their interviews.

Marketing professionals in for-profit service industries claim that securing customers' loyalties is more a matter of meeting all their expectations than of satisfying all their desires. This study's finding that interviewees rarely attributed their loyalty behaviors primarily to satisfactions/dissatisfactions (only 3 of 21 interviewees) is significant because it supports this claim.

In a few rare instances, interviewees' satisfactions/dissatisfactions acted as a mediating variable between met/unmet expectations and loyalty. For example, Senior Interviewee 2 claimed that none of her academic or social expectations were met, and yet she still behaved loyally (Felt Loyal, Involved in Campus Life, Encouraged Others to Apply, Would Donate Money, Would Apply to Grad School). She gave no reasons for her loyalty; however, she mentioned a number of satisfactions with her experience, such as appreciating her instructors, enjoying her job on campus, and having many rewarding involvements on campus. So, it is possible for students to have such satisfying experiences that these satisfactions override their unmet expectations and influence them to act loyally.

The Cohort University study examined six loyalty behaviors that interviewees, who had their expectations met, might have engaged in. Of the six behaviors, arguably the most significant one, when viewed from a relationship-marketing perspective, is Encouraging Others to Apply. This may be because the interviewees who encouraged prospective students to apply to CU shaped the expectations of the next generation of CU students; some of the interviewees shared that these students did actually apply and become CU students. As discussed earlier, high school students who have opportunities to learn of others' university experiences are more likely to enter with realistic expectations than those who do not have these opportunities. The more realistic students' expectations are, the greater the likelihood they will have their expectations met, persist, and encourage others to apply.

Relationship-marketing theory encourages service industries to understand customer retention and loyalty as two sides of the same coin - - customers whose expectations are met not only persist but also typically demonstrate their loyalty by encouraging others to become customers. Therefore, by meeting students' expectations, universities can not only retain students but also anticipate future students entering with more realistic expectations, and those students should be easier to retain.

meeting students' most common expectations resulted in students behaving loyally. The study found the met expectations that influenced interviewees to recommend CU to prospective students were, with one exception, all in keeping with the broader initial expectation themes discovered from research question 3.

This finding is significant because it specifically reveals how university leaders can meet students' general expectations of university life. For instance, one way university leaders can ensure that students experience greater academic freedom is to provide them with a broader array of major offerings. Or, another example of how university leaders can provide the academic opportunities that students expect is to allow undergraduates to assist professors with research projects. This study's findings should assure university leaders that providing students with these things should increase the likelihood that they will recommend their universities to prospective students.

The only met expectation that did not match an expectation theme was Education Worth the Money. The study found that interviewees tended to recommend CU to prospective students when they believed they were getting good educational value for the amount they had spent on tuition. These interviewees had typically chosen to attend CU because they expected to pay less in tuition than at a private college. This finding is significant because university leaders need to realize that students enter their universities with an idea of the amount they will reasonably be expected to pay. If, during their experience, they end up paying about what they expected and receive an education close to the quality they expected, they oftentimes will encourage others to apply.

Although interviewees' engagement in other loyalty behaviors might not have been as significant to the retention of current and future CU students, they may still potentially contribute to or hinder Cohort University's enrollment efforts in other ways. For instance, the study found that some interviewees who were not inclined to

Attend Graduate School at CU claimed the reason for their disinterest was because the university had not met their academic expectations. This finding should remind university leaders that meeting undergraduate students' expectations can contribute not only to undergraduate enrollment efforts but to graduate enrollment efforts as well.

The study also found that interviewees who were inclined to Donate Money to CU claimed the primary reason for this was a feeling of gratitude toward the university. One relationship-marketing study conducted in the for-profit sector found that gratitude is as influential in creating customer loyalty as commitment and trust (Palmatier, Jarvis, Bechkoff and Kardes, 2009). The researchers claimed that investment in relationship marketing can generate short-term feelings of gratitude within customers which can prompt them to reciprocate with loyalty behaviors.

Although it did not make sense to code this reason as a met/unmet expectation or a satisfaction/dissatisfaction during data analysis, it nonetheless still demonstrated that one way in which universities can motivate alumni to give money to their alma maters is by providing them with more university experiences that inspire gratitude. Part of the proceeds from these donations could even be allocated toward funding the university's ongoing enrollment efforts.

Interviewees who were inclined to Donate Time to CU also claimed that gratitude was their primary motivation. Interestingly, interviewees who were inclined to Donate Money but claimed they could not afford to do so were especially inclined to donate their time in order to compensate for this. The lesson that universities can learn from this finding is that alumni who turn down their requests for donations may

be eager to donate their time instead, provided that the university did a good job of meeting their expectations when they were students.

In chapter 2, Rowley's (2003) five stages of the student-university relationship were discussed. These stages will now be revisited in light of the Cohort University findings in order to provide additional insights about how student loyalty is developed throughout the student life cycle:

Stage 1: Choosing a Partner (Introduction) – Rowley describes the pre-matriculation stage as a time when prospective students gather information about universities in order to make their college choice. She comments how universities communicate with students largely through their admission and marketing departments.

The CU study found that students also base their college choice partly on what others share with them about their university experiences. Prospective students are now even learning of other students' experiences via the Internet. Rowley does not acknowledge that universities are increasingly losing control over the communications that get out to prospective students which shape their expectations of university life, expectations which can ultimately determine their retention and loyalty behavior.

Stage 2: Structuring the Relationship (Experimentation) – Rowley describes the matriculation stage as a time when incoming students learn about the nature of the relationship with the university and their role as students. She claims that orientation and students' interactions with faculty and student services staff during their first quarter are pivotal in their retention.

Rowley is correct that orientation can be a perfect opportunity for university staff to shape incoming students' expectations so that they are realistic. For example, they can emphasize the importance of getting involved in campus life. Also, this study determined that most students enter university life expecting greater freedom, more opportunities, and academic challenges; therefore, it is critical that universities provide them with these things so that they do not become dissatisfied. In order to persist, students also need to develop strong bonds with others on campus, not only with faculty and staff, but also with peers.

Stage 3: Devoting Time to Developing the Relationship (Identification) – Rowley describes the freshman and sophomore years as a time when universities must provide students with quality service that meets their expectations. Also, students must embrace university values or they may withdraw from the university.

Similarly, the CU study's findings showed that interviewees were consistently retained when the university met their academic and social expectations. It is critical that universities first learn students' expectations and then endeavor to meet them. None of the interviewees mentioned that they were contemplating transferring because of the university's value system.

Stage 4: Maintaining Lines of Communication (Continuous Renewal) – Rowley describes the junior and senior years as a time when students have settled into the campus community and are committed to programs of study. They have relationships with faculty, staff, and other students. They are less likely to withdraw because they have invested a considerable amount of time and energy into these relationships.

Rowley is correct that the deep relationships upperclassmen have with others on campus (especially with their peers) are likely to cause them to persist, even if some of their expectations have not been met. In addition, this study found that the closer upperclassmen progressed toward graduation, the less likely they were to consider transferring out and starting over at another university. Rowley does not mention, however, that universities need to pay special attention to meeting certain expectations that upperclassmen care about pertaining to major or they may not be retained (major offerings, quality of majors, and relevance of major to career goals).

Stage 5: Parting on good terms (Dissolution) – Rowley describes this final stage as the time when students are preparing for graduation. Universities can add value to their education by assisting them with their career preparations and job searches. It is important that students part with fond memories so that they want to recommend their universities to others or continue their own relationship with the university as graduate students.

The CU study found that some interviewees were quite dissatisfied with their university's efforts to help them prepare for their job searches, so this is already a possible area of concern for universities. University alumni associations could take this even one step further and provide continuing professional development to alumni, which could help secure their loyalties for life. Rowley rightly acknowledges the importance of developing student loyalty beyond just the immediate goal of retaining students – she recognizes that satisfied graduates typically share their positive experiences with others and may even return for graduate school.

Contribution to Enrollment Management Policy and Practice

Lessons to be Learned from this Study

As the field of enrollment management continues to evolve in response to emerging trends within higher education, enrollment managers need to adapt their approaches to continue successfully meeting university enrollment goals. If they remain oblivious to increased competition over prospective students, dwindling financial resources, and stagnant retention numbers, they may fail to significantly improve retention rates or bring in sufficient tuition revenue to cover university operating costs. Enrollment managers and university leadership can learn the following lessons from this study that should help them in their efforts.

Students are customers and higher education is a service industry. Despite how uncomfortable some faculty members are with recognizing students as customers, this study's findings demonstrate that universities can retain students by managing service relationships with them in the same way businesses manage service relationships with their customers. Certainly, there are fundamental differences in the nature of the student-university relationship and the customer-company relationship; however, *insofar as enrollment efforts are concerned*, there are important similarities university leaders should not ignore.

In order to remain profitable, businesses must strive to meet customers' expectations so that customers continue to pay for their services. Most universities are not driven primarily by a profit motive; nevertheless, they still nevertheless must find cost-effective ways to provide their educational services. So, university leaders should appreciate that meeting student expectations keeps students enrolled and paying

tuition through graduation (and potentially after, if they return for graduate degrees). In the long run, this enrollment strategy is more cost-effective than spending additional marketing dollars on recruiting new students to replace dissatisfied students who have transferred out. Meeting student expectations can even inspire students, for example, to donate money out of gratitude in the future when they are alumni.

In order to grow their businesses, companies also strive to meet customers' expectations so that customers recommend their services to future customers. Likewise, most universities have an interest in growing their enrollment numbers, so they should appreciate that meeting students' expectations might result in students recommending their universities to future students. This type of word-of-mouth advertising is becoming an increasingly effective recruitment strategy now that students are sharing their experiences online with prospective students worldwide.

The challenge for enrollment managers who choose to adopt a relationship-marketing strategy to secure students' loyalties will be to successfully manage student expectations. This approach transcends the current method of learning, via surveys, what services on campus are dissatisfying to students and then improving them. Successfully managing expectations consists of continuously engaging in the three related activities of learning, shaping, and meeting student expectations.

Recommendations for Managing Students' Expectations

learning students' expectations. Enrollment managers cannot meet students' expectations if they do not know what they are. Relationship marketing is founded upon the premise of learning everything relevant about the customer and then using that information to serve them (Ackerman and Schibrowsky, 2007). Consequently,

enrollment managers need to take the time to familiarize themselves with the more common expectations that entering students have. The CU study revealed that some of these include expecting to have more freedom, more opportunities, more challenging academics, and more meaningful friendships than in high school.

Just as businesses regularly survey customers in order to learn whether or not the products and services provided are living up to their expectations, enrollment managers need to survey students in a similar manner. In doing so, they will learn what aspects of the university experience matter to students the most. It is important that not only freshmen but also upperclassmen and even alumni are surveyed about their expectations because, as this study discovered, students' expectations can change over time.

One example of a popular quantitative tool universities can use for surveying students is the College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ). The CSXQ is designed to assess new student expectations, which provide clues about how students will interact with peers and faculty members, behaviors that directly affect achievement and satisfaction with college. Results can even be compared with data from the CSEQ (College Student Experiences Questionnaire) completed by the same students later in the college experience to assess the degree to which student expectations are met.

shaping students' expectations. Once enrollment managers become aware of what students' expectations are, they can make an assessment about how realistic they are and then attempt to shape unrealistic expectations into more realistic ones. This should make it easier to meet their expectations in the future.

This study found that the most common unrealistic expectation students had was the idea that they did not need to take responsibility for their university experiences to have their expectations met. It also found that students were more likely to take responsibility for their experiences if, based on their own college days, someone had shared with them that doing so made a difference. To help matters, enrollment managers could work with their alumni associations to connect prospective students with alumni who could share this with them.

Enrollment managers and others responsible for marketing the university should take care to foster expectations within prospective students that can realistically be met by the service efforts of university staff and faculty. Tinto concurs:

Since it is the case that dropout is highest in the first year of college and often involves students who discover that their expectations about the academic and social life of the institution were quite unrealistic, there is much to be gained from having institutions present or market themselves in more realistic and accurate ways. (Tinto, 1982, p.698)

If feedback from student surveys reveals that unrealistic expectations stemmed from certain promises made in admission brochures or presentations, then enrollment managers ought to change the university's marketing messages to better align with campus realities.

Students' unrealistic expectations of the university experience also seem to originate from movies and possibly television shows. This study found that students who had watched classic college movies, such as *Animal House*, were expecting wilder social scenes on campus than they actually encountered. It is also possible that watching reality shows filmed on college campuses might be contributing to this notion as well, although interviewees and bloggers did not mention it. Enrollment

managers would be wise to counter these exaggerated portrayals of campus life with their own more accurate depictions. University admission offices could have student workers post blogs for prospective students to read in order to gain a better understanding of what life on their campuses is really like.

Although universities may learn students' expectations, this does not mean that they are always in a position to fulfill them; therefore, sometimes shaping students' expectations is a more viable solution. Prospective chemistry majors, for example, may be expecting to have access to expensive laboratory equipment that the university does not have the funds to provide. In this case, enrollment managers could work with the Chemistry department staff to ensure that, during freshman orientation, the opportunity for internships with major research laboratories is highlighted.

meeting students' expectations. As enrollment managers and other university leaders shape students' expectations in an effort to make them as realistic as possible, they then need to follow through with meeting these expectations. Admittedly, many universities likely feel that they already do a good job of meeting certain common expectations, such as providing students with many academic and social opportunities and offering tutorial services to help them tackle the additional challenge of college-level coursework. Nonetheless, it is advisable that university leadership investigates how successful these campus programs are in actually involving students.

They may also feel that other common expectations, such as students making meaningful friendships with fellow students, are not the responsibility of the university. Given how important this met expectation, however, can be for student retention, it behooves university leaders to create or maintain environments where

students can develop deep relationships. The CU study found that students formed the strongest bonds with peers who were their suitemates, so encouraging students to live on campus could be one way to accomplish this.

One common student expectation that universities may not be fulfilling is the desire to experience more academic and social freedom. It is imperative that universities give students more freedom to explore their academic interests. This can be accomplished by providing them with a wide variety of majors from which to choose, including interdisciplinary majors. Students should be permitted some freedom to take elective courses outside of their majors that apply toward their degree requirements. They should also be permitted to participate in co-curricular programs, such as studying abroad or internships, and have these learning experiences count toward meeting their degree requirements.

Likewise, students should be granted some freedom to manage their own social lives while living on campus. It is important that residential life staff strike a good balance between regulating students' conduct in the dormitories while, at the same time, allowing them to learn how to conduct daily life apart from their parents. It is also important that universities grant increasingly more freedom to students as they progress from freshman to upperclassman status as they mature.

Recommendations for Developing Students' Loyalties

The ultimate goal of a relationship-marketing approach to enrollment management is to develop student loyalty to the university. Although universities primarily accomplish this through meeting students' expectations, this can also be achieved in other ways. Enrollment management efforts can occur during all stages of

the student life cycle, not just during the recruitment and retention stages. Because the loyalty concept has attitudinal as well as behavioral aspects to it, enrollment managers can even instill feelings of loyalty in students before recruiting them or after retaining them. Doing so improves the likelihood that students will ultimately act on their loyalties in ways benefiting the university.

For instance, enrollment managers can encourage admission counselors to develop relationships with prospective students - - those who might be a good fit for the university - - before they even apply. With the help of the alumni office, counselors could identify junior high students, who are the children of alumni, and establish casual relationships with them, by inviting them to a university sports event, for example. Ideally, when the students reach high school, they might already feel connected to the university and have an interest in applying there for admission.

Historically, enrollment managers have given little consideration to maintaining the loyalties of students once they graduate. As they come to realize the importance of fostering continued loyalty, it makes sense for them to begin working more closely with their alumni associations. If universities can maintain the loyalties of alumni, they can be inspired to not only donate money but also to recommend their alma mater to future generations of students; this would aid the university in its recruitment efforts. One way enrollment managers can strengthen relationships with alumni is to contribute to their career success. Universities could have faculty from academic departments teach continuing education workshops online to alumni who are looking to upgrade their marketable skills.

Study Limitations

While this study makes contributions to enrollment management literature and practices, it has certain limitations the reader should consider when weighing the significance of the findings. First, there is a limitation concerning the nature of the problem studied. The complex problem of university student retention has been shown to have literally dozens of influencers (for example, students sometimes drop out because of an unforeseen financial crisis or a sudden death in the family), so the possibility of intervening variables must be acknowledged. Whereas students' retention and loyalty behaviors are certainly not attributable solely to the fulfillment of their expectations, this study has shown that student expectations are an often-overlooked influencer which ought to receive more attention than it has thus far in the retention literature.

Second, there is a limitation related to the study's design. Although there is a need in the retention literature for more longitudinal studies, the interviewees and bloggers in this study were studied at three points in time rather than tracking one cohort through their entire university experience. This three-point-in-time multiple cohort study contributes to the retention literature because prior studies have predominantly provided data on only one point in time in the student life cycle - the freshman year.

Third, there is a limit pertaining to generalizability of the study's findings. The interviewee findings have limited generalizability because they pertain only to students at one public university, so they are not necessarily representative of students at other college and university campuses. The blog findings are somewhat more

generalizable because they are representative of students attending eight campuses, although they are limited to current students and alumni within that one public university system.

Lastly, because 16 of the 21 interviewees turned out to be first-generation university students, the interviewee findings have limited generalizability to non-first-generation university students. Given the statistics regarding first-generation and non-first-generation students - - namely, that Cohort University typically enrolls 34% first-generation and 66% non-first-generation students - - this outcome was unforeseeable at the time of the study's design. If it had been possible to foresee that so many first-generation students would sign up for the study, stratified sampling would have been utilized to select participants rather than using a process of self-selection. Thankfully, because 76% of the interviewees turned out to be first-generation, the study produced strong findings regarding this at-risk population that should better enable university leaders to retain these students in the future.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study found that students who took partial responsibility for their university experiences were most likely to not only persist but also recommend their universities to others. Some students already had this mindset upon entering college because university graduates had advised them to take ownership of their experiences. Other students came to this realization on their own, partway through college, when their respective universities failed to meet their expectations. Undoubtedly, enrollment managers want more students to adopt the mindset of taking responsibility for their own experiences. Further research should be conducted to learn which

academic and social expectations students may assume the university is responsible for meeting and which they may feel responsible for meeting themselves. This could ensure that students and universities are in agreement about what their responsibilities might be.

Learning the extent to which universities can meet students' expectations is another area where further research is needed. Certainly, universities are equipped to fulfill the more common expectations students have, but whether or not they have the resources to satisfy students' individual expectations is in question. Although it may now seem too resource-intensive to be feasible, perhaps universities could achieve pleasing individual students in the future by using Customer Relationship Management systems to track the fulfillment of their expectations. In this pursuit, research could be conducted on how CRM databases might be used for maintaining data collected from surveys on student expectations.

This research found students that entered university life with the most realistic expectations were those who had spoken with university graduates about what to expect. Students who had learned about university life from watching movies or reading brochures tended to have less realistic expectations. This explains why first-generation university students tended to have unrealistic expectations; their parents had not graduated from college, so they had no experiences to share with them. Some fortunate first-generation interviewees explained that instead other significant people in their lives, such as teachers, older siblings and friends, had shared their college experiences with them; therefore, they had known what to expect. Knowing this,

universities should investigate more formalized ways to connect incoming first-generation students with alumni upon entrance to college.

Conclusion

Although it has been a persistent problem for close to a century, university student retention is a serious educational issue that has only been widely acknowledged in the United States for the last few decades. While it is reassuring that university leaders have been stepping up their efforts to retain students, it is disconcerting that this regrettable situation has lasted for so long.

Since retention has only become a key institutional concern in the last few decades, studies centering on retention were sparse before that point. Paralleling university leaders' retention efforts, researchers have attempted to investigate the topic further as it has proven to be more crucial than once realized. The Cohort University study contributes to the growing body of enrollment management literature and the ongoing efforts of university leaders to improve daily practice.

While university leaders' efforts are primarily driven by educational motivations, economic factors are fast becoming similarly powerful forces. A university can only continue to exist if enough students continue to choose that university and then persist. Therefore, ever since the economy began to deteriorate, not only recruitment but also retention efforts have intensified. Before this, universities could afford to lose students, yet now every student's continuing enrollment counts if they are going to stay within budget.

It is not merely university leaders who are concerned with college student retention. In fact, a national spotlight was recently placed on the issue when President

Obama announced his American Graduation Initiative in 2009. He declared that the United States must restore its lost status as the nation graduating the highest percentage of 25- to 35-year-olds in the world if we are to remain competitive in the global economy. Already concerned about the issue, university leaders have redoubled their retention efforts in response to this call to action.

While national recognition or a threat to the livelihood of our universities are most certainly reasons that the issue of retention should be moved to the forefront, the educational goal of retaining students should be deserving of as much attention when money and students are plentiful as when they are scarce. In the end, retaining students benefits our universities and our nation in general. Furthermore, reasons that merely benefit the student, either directly or indirectly, should alone be sufficient.

As educators, we meet the expectations of students not only because doing so might secure their loyalties but also because we desire for them to experience the quality of university life they anticipated as high school seniors. We also wish to spend less money on marketing in order to invest more of those dollars in financial aid to help students. Finally, we wish to provide them the continuity of relationships, education, and experiences that remaining at one university can provide. After all, every time a student drops out of college, it represents a failed attempt at reaching his or her educational goals; our mission, however, is to partner with that student to help him or her succeed.

Unlike past enrollment management strategies, a relationship management approach pays greater respect to current students because it does not treat them as easily replaceable. Rather, it places a higher priority on meeting their educational

expectations than on continually attracting new students to take their place. The fact that this relational approach offers both a more cost-effective way to manage enrollment while simultaneously increasing the university's educational commitment to its students should make it particularly attractive to university leaders.

Appendices

Appendix A: Student Recruitment Handout

Invitation to Participate in a Cohort University Research Study

Benjamin Shaver, a graduate student in the joint Ed.D. Educational Leadership program at UC San Diego / Cal State San Marcos University, is conducting a research study to find out more about how undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences affect their university loyalties. By conducting this study, the investigator hopes to learn ways in which university faculty and staff can better meet the expectations of university students, which could aid in their retention.

If you are an undergraduate student attending the Cohort University, you may be interested in participating. Only first-year students at least 18 years of age and senior students who are not transfer students will be selected to participate in the study.

If you agree to participate, Benjamin Shaver will arrange a date and time to interview you over the phone at a time that is convenient for you. The telephone conversation will be audio-taped. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes.

You may be assured your interview responses will be kept confidential and reported anonymously.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no negative repercussions should you decline to participate.

In compensation for your time, you will receive a five-dollar Amazon electronic gift card.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please email Benjamin Shaver at bshaver@ucsd.edu.

Appendix B: Alumni Recruitment Email

Invitation to Participate in a Cohort University Research Study

Benjamin Shaver, a graduate student in the joint Ed.D. Educational Leadership program at UC San Diego / Cal State San Marcos University, is conducting a research study to find out more about how undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences affect their university loyalties. By conducting this study, the investigator hopes to learn ways in which university faculty and staff can better meet the expectations of university students, which could aid in their retention.

If you were an undergraduate student who graduated from Cohort University, you may be interested in participating. Only alumni who were not transfer students will be selected to participate in the study.

If you agree to participate, Benjamin Shaver will arrange a date and time to interview you over the phone at a time that is convenient for you. The telephone conversation will be audio-taped. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes.

You may be assured your interview responses will be kept confidential and reported anonymously.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no negative repercussions should you decline to participate.

In compensation for your time, you will receive a five-dollar Amazon electronic gift card.

If you are interested in learning more about this study, please email Benjamin Shaver at bshaver@ucsd.edu.

Appendix C: Study Information Sheet

Cohort University
Research Study Information Sheet for Participants

Meeting Undergraduate Students' Expectations of the University Experience: How
Enrollment Managers Can Secure Students' Loyalties

Benjamin Shaver, a graduate student in the joint Ed.D. Educational Leadership program at UC San Diego / Cal State San Marcos University, is conducting a research study to find out more about how undergraduate students' expectations of their university experiences affect their university loyalties. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are or were an undergraduate student attending Cohort University. Only first-year students at least 18 years of age, and seniors and alumni who were not transfer students are being selected for this study.

If you agree to be in this study, you can expect the following to take place:

Benjamin Shaver will arrange a date and time to interview you over the phone at a time that is convenient for you. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be semi-structured, meaning that all participants will be asked certain standard questions, but you may also be asked follow-up questions particular to your university experience based upon your responses. The interview session will be audio-recorded and saved for later transcription. During transcription, the investigator may contact you again by email or telephone to clarify an answer you gave during the interview or to ask you a follow-up question. It is anticipated that any follow-up time spent with participants will not exceed thirty minutes.

Participation in this study may involve some added risks or discomforts. These include:

1. If are a current student of Cohort University, you may be concerned that voicing your opinions (about whether your expectations of your university experience were met by Cohort University) might potentially damage your reputation with the university; however, you can be assured your interview responses will be reported anonymously to others, including Cohort University faculty and staff. Any personally identifiable information you share during the interview will be kept confidential so that others will not be able to determine your identity from your responses. Research records may be reviewed by the Cohort University Institutional Review Board.
2. Although the investigator ensures that research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law, there is always the potential for the loss of confidentiality. Your interview recording as well as the transcription of your

interview will be password-protected. In addition, the files will be kept on the investigator's personal laptop computer under password protection at all times. No one other than the investigator will possess the password. At the conclusion of the study, your interview recording and transcription will be erased. In addition, absolutely all of your e-mail records will be destroyed, including your e-mail address and all sent and received e-mail messages.

It is unlikely participation in this study will directly benefit you. The investigator, however, may learn ways in which university faculty and staff can better meet the expectations of university students, which could aid in their retention.

Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw or refuse to answer specific questions in an interview at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide that you no longer wish to continue in this study, you will be required to contact Benjamin Shaver via email at bshaver@ucsd.edu.

By the same token, the investigator may remove you from the study, if deemed necessary, to maintain a rigorous study. This would only be under the following condition: if you agree to participate in this study, you need to make yourself available to be interviewed over the phone. If, however, you do not make yourself available to be interviewed over the phone, the investigator reserves the right to remove you from the study.

In compensation for your time, you will receive a five dollar Amazon electronic gift card for participating in this research. The investigator will email you this card the week following the conclusion of the interview. If you elect to withdraw partway through the interview, the amount of your gift card will be prorated according to the number of minutes you spent interviewing.

There will be no costs to you for participating in this study.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age and that you are/were not a transfer student to Cohort University.

Benjamin Shaver has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems, you may email him at bshaver@ucsd.edu. You may call the Human Research Protections Program Office at (858) 455-5050 to inquire about your rights as a research participant or to report research-related problems.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

- What year did you enter Cohort University?
- What major are/were you?
- How would you have described the ideal university experience as a high school senior?
- When making your university choice as a high school senior, tell me what you were looking for in a university.
- If your parents went to college, what were their experiences like?
- Tell me why you finally decided to attend Cohort University.
- To the best of your recollection, what were you expecting academic life to be like when you entered Cohort University?
- As an entering student, what were you expecting social life to be like at Cohort University?
- Have/did your expectations of your university experience change(d) during your time spent at Cohort University? If so, how?
- How would you describe the ideal university experience now?
- Describe how your Cohort University experience did or did not live up to your academic expectations.
- Describe how your Cohort University experience did or did not live up to your social expectations.
- What was most satisfying about your Cohort University experience?
- What was least satisfying about your Cohort University experience?
- Do you feel your Cohort University education has been/was worth the money you have paid/paid for it? Why?
- How loyal do you feel toward Cohort University?
- How involved are you currently with Cohort University?

-Have/did you ever consider(ed) leaving Cohort University? If so, why? Why have/did you stay(ed)?

-Have you ever encouraged or discouraged prospective students from applying to Cohort University? If so, why were you motivated to do so?

-Have you donated any money to Cohort University? If so, why were you motivated to do so? If you have not, could you ever see yourself doing so in the future?

-Have you donated your time to Cohort University? If so, why were you motivated to do so? If you have not, could you ever see yourself doing so in the future?

-Would you/did you consider attending Cohort University for graduate school? If so, why? If you are attending or attended graduate school elsewhere, why did you choose not to attend Cohort University?

Appendix E: Tables Listing Cohort University Interviewees' Satisfaction with their University Experiences which Influenced their Retention Behavior

Table E1: Cohort University Interviewees' Satisfaction with their University Experiences which Influenced their Retention Behavior

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships 6/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major 5/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Instructors 3/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Location 2/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Community/Campus Life 1/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Reputation 1/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Sports 1/21

Note. Listed next to each Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction above is the number of interviewees who expressed this Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction.

Table E2: Cohort University First-Generation Interviewees' Satisfaction with their University Experiences which Influenced their Retention Behavior

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Relationships 5/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Classes/Major 5/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Location 2/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Academics - Instructors 1/21
 Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction with Sports 1/21

Note. Listed next to each Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction above is the number of interviewees who expressed this Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction.

Appendix F: Tables Listing Cohort University Interviewees' Satisfaction with their University Experiences which Influenced their Loyalty Behavior

Table F1: Cohort University Interviewees' Satisfaction with their University Experiences and the Loyalty Behaviors They Influenced

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction	Loyalty behavior
Classes/Major 4/21	Recommend university 3/21 Apply to grad school 1/21
University experience 3/21	Recommend university 1/21 Apply to grad school 1/21 Feel Loyal 1/21
Community/Campus 2/21	Donate money 1/21 Feel loyal 1/21
Location/Campus 2/21	Recommend university 2/21
Reputation 1/21	Feel loyal 1/21
Value 1/21	Donate money 1/21

Note. Listed next to each Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction above is the number of interviewees who expressed this Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction.

Note. Listed next to each Loyalty Behavior above is the number of interviewees who demonstrated this Loyalty Behavior.

Table F2: Cohort University First-Generation Interviewees' Satisfaction with their University Experiences and the Loyalty Behaviors They Influenced

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction	Loyalty behavior
Classes/Major 4/21	Recommend university 3/21 Apply to grad school 1/21
Location 2/21	Recommend university 2/21
University Experience 2/21	Apply to grad school 1/21 Feel loyal 1/21
Reputation 1/21	Feel loyal 1/21
Value of Education 1/21	Donate money 1/21

Note. Listed next to each Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction above is the number of interviewees who expressed this Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction.

Note. Listed next to each Loyalty Behavior above is the number of interviewees who expressed this Loyalty Behavior.

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